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FOCUSED ON THE WORD

PART 2 OF 2

# The Bible on When War is Justifiable



*Washington Crossing the Delaware, Emanuel Leutze (1851)*

In Part 1 of this two-part series regarding a scriptural understanding of war, we examined whether the just war theory, i.e., the historic, determining guidelines used by American leaders to ascertain the use or non-use of war, are based in Scripture.

Indeed, that theory is firmly based on Scripture which raises an important question. As our culture quickly jettisons its Judeo-Christian foundation, will we contin-

*Continued next page*

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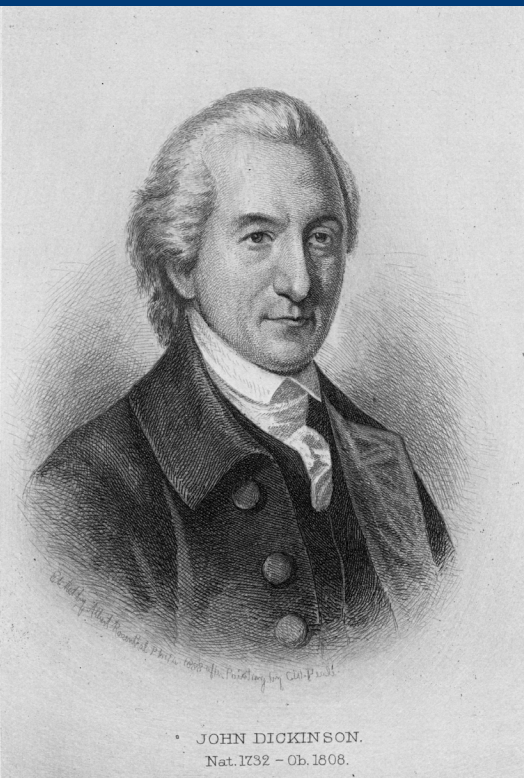
**Senate Members:** Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served

**House Members:** Thursdays 8am, AG Hearing Rm., Longworth 1302, hot breakfast served

*The views expressed in each Bible Study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study sponsor.*



John Dickinson



ue to be informed and guided by the just war theory and the four principles of fighting a war? You are leading the United States at a time when the world is filled with violence, aggression, and conflict, and some nations are even attacking their own innocent civilians. As you make decisions about when to engage in conflict or war, learning what Scripture has to say about the principles of war is critically important.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

“Rendering thanks to my Creator for my existence and station among His works, for my birth in a country enlightened by the Gospel and enjoying freedom, and for all His other kindnesses, to Him I resign myself, humbly confiding in His goodness and in His mercy through Jesus Christ for the events of eternity.”

— John Dickinson, signer of the U.S. Constitution, governor of Pennsylvania, governor of Delaware, general in the American Revolution.

From the *Last Will & Testament of John Dickinson*, attested March 25, 1808.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In part one of this two-part series, we gained an overall understanding of what the Bible has to say about war. We then elaborated on what the Bible says is the role of God’s institution of government. Importantly, we distinguished and contextualized the institutional role of government from passages that speak to individual responsibilities.

Third, in understanding this subject we examined whether there is a biblical basis for the historical, Christian-author-based, now internationally accepted *just war theory*. Eight principles comprise the *just war theory*, and part one investigated whether Scripture supported each of them. The passages of the Word from which each of the points spring forth were visited.

My intention was and remains to root your understanding of war in the Scriptures. As a federal public servant, it is critical that you be able to reason the use or non-use of war from a biblically informed conscience.

This study will examine the two leading camps opposed to the *just war theory*: the Christian pacifist and the noninterventionist positions, which are held by some Christians and non-Christians alike. How do advocates of these views attempt to underscore their beliefs? Are they biblically based?

Examining these subjects should aid the public servant in his or her clear thinking about and confidence in biblical principles, which lead to the proper formation of convictions regarding the just and ethical use of war.





**God is not necessarily opposed to war. Rather, the question that should be asked is when is war justified?**

The eight internationally accepted aspects of the *just war theory* represent the biblically and time-accepted criteria for answering the question: when is war morally and ethically justifiable? Supposing all the criteria are met, what then are the biblically based and time-accepted principles for fighting a just war? There are four to examine before studying the pacifist and nonconformist views and learning the scriptural basis for each.

## II. THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF FIGHTING A WAR

The Latin phrase for these principles is *jus in bello* meaning “the right conduct within war.” Advocates of the *just war theory* developed these four moral guidelines as to how a war should be fought. Those four principles follow with scriptural support.

### A. PROPORTIONALITY IN THE USE OF FORCE

This criterion differs from *Proportionality of Results* (as discussed in the first study on war), which relates to a nation’s consideration of going to war, wherein consideration is given to the cost of further damage in relation to the accomplishment of the objective prior to the decision to engage.

Rather, once a nation is engaged in fighting a war, there should be no greater use of force than is necessary to achieve the objectives. Deuteronomy

20:10–12 serves to illustrate this moral consideration when fighting a justifiable war. In the context of this passage, God is instructing Israel as the nation enters the Promised Land regarding how to wage war. In this case, God’s objective is to obliterate the many and varied detestable, staid purveyors of evil: the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (v. 17). Notice the passage:

*“When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you. However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it.”*

In this case, the war plan included a *siege*. The point is God desires a proportional use of force to accomplish the objectives of the war. Additional or misdirected force that does not serve to accomplish the actual objectives is unethical.

Notice further, and very importantly, in Deuteronomy 20:17 that God does not equivocate after instructing Israel to proffer a proposal of surrender; He doesn’t start a negotiation! He states very pointedly that if the offer is rejected:

*“But you shall utterly destroy them.”*

This directive might seem harsh—but not when viewed through the tightest context in which it is written. God informs Israel (and other nations throughout the coming centuries) of a necessary ingredient for successfully

## VERSE OF THE WEEK



### Matthew 5:43–44

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*

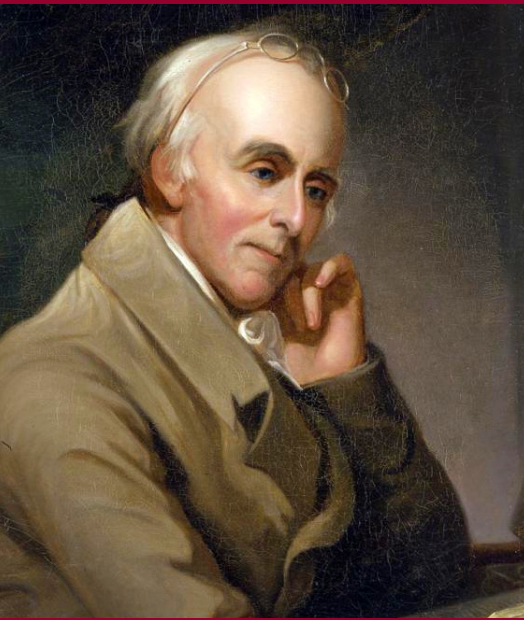


The motive of war should always be the desire for restoration.





Benjamin Rush



“[T]he greatest discoveries in science have been made by Christian philosophers and ... there is the most knowledge in those countries where there is the most Christianity.”

— Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration of Independence, Surgeon General of the Continental Army, ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, “Father of American Medicine,” Treasurer of the U.S. Mint, “Father of Public Schools Under the Constitution.”

Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), 84, “Thoughts upon Female Education.”

waging a war: there can be no vacillation once a nation has determined to go to war. A study of the whole of Deuteronomy 20 shows

**God’s instruction to Israel as they go to war differs vastly from some current approaches to warfare.**

Additional passages from God’s Word could be mentioned to further illustrate this principle of proportionality in the use of force, but for the sake of brevity, let’s discover the second principle of fighting a war.

### **B. DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN COMBATANTS AND NON-COMBATANTS**

In the pursuit of war, appropriate consideration and care of non-combatants need occur. Deuteronomy 20:13–14 speaks to this principle:

*“When the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword. Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the Lord your God has given you.”*

Often in war, the citizens of the country are innocent and not in concert with any evil deeds perpetrated by their leadership. This reality need always be considered and somehow remedied when waging a fight. Likened to children in a marriage divorce, innocent bystanders need to be treated with love and compassion, and as best possible, sheltered from the fight.

### **C. AVOIDANCE OF EVIL MEANS**

There are various evil means of fighting a war. I will develop only one here: during a war the captives of the other country need be cared for with respect. Quite often prisoners of war are relieved that they no longer must live with a conflicted soul—having been forced outwardly to go against their inner conscience by an evil ruler. Oftentimes they are victims of propaganda campaigns wherein their country’s leaders have not provided them with the whole truth of the story. Psalm 34:14 and a myriad of other passages might be explanatory of their hearts, and the passage should typify the hearts of their captors:

*Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

All captives should be treated with justice and righteousness. (The use of torture on a captured perpetrator of evil is an exception, and the topic of another Bible study that would consider the moral equation of the welfare of one evil person versus the good of many innocent people.) In a pragmatic sense, those captured have been successfully removed from the battle and, therefore, should be treated with respect; like captured pieces in a chess game, they are neutral agents no longer in play. (Keep in mind that Hitler lost WWII in large part due to an utter lack of manpower.)

### **D. GOOD FAITH**

This last of the four criteria for justly fighting a war is good faith. Informed by the biblical truth that all men are created in the image and likeness of





God (Genesis 1:26), a nation enters into a war with a genuine, sincere desire to restore peace and live in harmony with the other nation. In an ultimate sense, even though there has been wrongdoing, once it is punished and humbled, forgiveness can and should follow. The requisite of good faith is commensurate with personal and corporate maturity; when these ultimate motives are present during battle, they serve to govern and manifest the methods used in the battle. In Matthew 5:43–44 Jesus states the following in the Sermon on the Mount:

***“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”***

These passages and others provide a nation’s leadership with the right kind of attitude as it relates to the ultimate desired outcome of a war:

**The motive of war  
should always be the  
desire for restoration—  
not annihilation.**

This is similar in principle to what we as parents have in view when we punish our children—a frequent necessity in a fallen world.

In summary, these four biblically based inviolable and measured principles for fighting a war are at first justifiable. Fortunately and historically, America’s culture of war has largely been informed by these principles, and our nation has demonstrated these values in its use of force. However, we should

not assume that abiding by them will always be the case. As our culture is bent on jettisoning its Judeo-Christian bases, expecting that we will not continue to be informed and guided by the *just war theory* and the *four principles of fighting a war* is certainly reasonable. Ideology and outward actions are intrinsically intertwined; one follows the other. Accordingly, teaching what Scripture has to say about these principles to lawmakers is critically important.

### III. THE PACIFIST POSITION

A minority view opposed to the *just war theory* is *military pacifism*. This view believes using military force is always wrong, and that believers should claim a conscientious objection if drafted into the military. Pacifists believe that violence is always wrong.

The supposed biblical arguments for pacifism are as follows. I will attempt to argue against each of these respectively.

#### A. JESUS COMMANDED US TO TURN THE OTHER CHEEK

Contextually, this passage (Matthew 5:39), which is often misunderstood and misapplied, is talking about the believer’s being non-retaliatory, or *personally* vengeful in his *personal* nature and demeanor. The passage is not advocating that an offended party simply forget about injustice because of some sort of wrongdoing. Notice the same idea in Romans 12:19 that also includes a solution for injustice. The verse indicates the proper way in which justice is gained relative to a *personal* offense:

### George Washington



**“The blessing and protection of Heaven are at all times necessary but especially so in times of public distress and danger. The General hopes and trusts that every officer and man will endeavor to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier, defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country.”**

— George Washington, first President of the United States, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, member of the Continental Congress, President of the Constitutional Convention, “Father of His Country,” judge.

George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, John C. Fitzpatrick, editor (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), Vol. 5, 245, July 9, 1776 Order.



James McHenry



“[P]ublic utility pleads most forcibly for the general distribution of the Holy Scriptures. Without the Bible, in vain do we increase penal laws and draw entrenchments around our institutions.”

— James McHenry, American Revolutionary War officer, signer of the Constitution, ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, Secretary of War under Presidents George Washington and John Adams.

Bernard C. Steiner, *One Hundred and Ten Years of Bible Society Work in Maryland, 1810–1920* (Maryland Bible Society, 1921), 14.

*Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.*

Very importantly, several verses later God’s agent for justice is introduced: government. Keep in mind no verse numbers or chapter divisions were in the original autographa of Scripture. Those helps were added later by man, and sometimes, they were added in the wrong place as in the case of Romans 13:4. The Scripture states that God’s institution of government is His means of invoking justice, wherein it states, *it does not bear the sword for nothing*. Government exists to avenge God’s wrath on evildoers. What Scripture is teaching in Matthew 5:39 and Romans 12:18 is not *pacifism*. These verses are teaching *that individuals should not seek personal revenge*. We are not to take the law into our own hands; rather, we are to appeal to God’s means for achieving justice: the institution of government.

Further illustrating the point, it is interesting to note that in Luke 22:36 Jesus actually commanded His followers to carry a sword:

*“Whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one.”*

Not a pacifist Himself, Jesus was aware of the existence and remedy for sinful aggression in the world as this instruction indicates. But mind you, Jesus was not suggesting a self-styled vigilantism in or by this passage; the sword was to be used for self-defense and protection from thieves.

In summary, the idea of turning the other cheek in Matthew 5:39 is not

supportive of pacifism; rather, pacifism uses this passage improperly, out of its biblical and theological context to support an erroneous opinion.

### B. JESUS COMMANDED US TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS AS OURSELVES

While God does command us to love others, He simultaneously ordains government to protect man from evil-doers. Both truths are evident in Scripture. Proclaiming half of a truth to argue for pacifism is therefore a misuse, if not a disingenuous view, of this Scripture. It follows that if I personally love my neighbors as myself (Matthew 22:39), I will also be willing to protect them from all kinds of evil.

### C. THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE SHOWS A FAILURE TO TRUST IN GOD

Such a statement has the flavor of legalistic condescension—as if the person holding this position is more spiritual than one who does not. But the fact is, as seen previously, God specifically ordains the use of corporate force against evil in Romans 13:1–4 and 1 Peter 2:13–14. It is incongruous for someone to ask another to “trust in God” for things that are not compatible with what the Bible teaches. This is like saying you don’t have to work for a living, but you will “trust in God for your food” while Scripture is clear that we must work to eat. Considering the perspicuous teaching of Scripture on this subject, it is similarly inappropriate to say to someone that we should trust in God instead of using the military force of government which He put in place in order to protect us from harm.





#### D. VIOLENCE ALWAYS LEADS TO MORE VIOLENCE

This statement is not necessarily true. American military power kept Hitler from further violations and world conquest. The pacifist should instead consider the biblically informed slogan, “Superior force stops criminal violence.”

Violence does not necessarily lead to more violence. In summary, pacifism has no biblical justification and amounts only to wishful thinking in an evil, fallen world.

#### IV. THE NONINTERVENTIONIST POSITION

Advocates of noninterventionism believe in the principle that one nation should never interfere with the events of another in any way. The noninterventionist would say that if some nation invaded an innocent country, a nation like America coming to that innocent nation’s rescue is not justifiable. But such a view is not in keeping with the purposes of government as outlined previously in Romans 13:1–4. In fact, God rebuked Edom for not intervening and helping Israel in Obadiah 11:

*“On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem—you too were as one of them.”*

When the Babylonians invaded Israel, the neighboring country of Edom stood by and watched. God states in this passage that Edom was guilty for not helping its neighbor, pronouncing, “*you too were as one of them.*”

**When America is strong,  
and the threat of her  
intervening is ever-present,  
the world is a much safer  
place.**

There can be no doubt that America’s presence throughout the world and this nation’s just, historic presence outside its own boundaries—be it as a member of NATO, signing the Monroe Doctrine, establishing defense treaties with Taiwan and Israel, or its willing and welcomed presence to support military bases in the Philippines, Germany, Korea, and Japan, have all greatly aided in peacemaking and peacekeeping throughout the world. Peace is the fruit of biblically justified intervention! When America is strong, and the threat of her intervening is ever-present, the world is a much safer place. And the opposite is also apparent: when American intervention is less possible, unrest and evil aggression rise.

Noninterventionists must intentionally disregard the implications of the Fall in Genesis 3 as well as God’s revealed purpose for ordaining government in Romans 13:1–4 and 1 Peter 2:13–14. They are not aligned with a Christian worldview at this point. Rather, they are joining the pacifists in naive, wishful thinking. There can be no doubt:

**American’s historic  
understanding, willing  
obedience, and faithful  
application of these biblical  
truths has led to a much  
safer world as a result.**



NOW AVAILABLE

The book of Acts records how a small band of men—the apostles—in very short order **turned the world upside down** (Acts 17:6, KJV) during the first century in which they lived. This small team of uneducated, common men were not elite leaders, so how were they able to saturate the world with the gospel—changing lives, changing culture, and eventually changing the Roman Empire?

Scripture provides the answer: not only did they fulfill the Great Commission one soul at a time through a ministry of geometric evangelism and discipleship, but they succeeded *by concentrating on and impacting a particular element of society, specifically kings and all who are in authority* (1 Timothy 2:1–4).

*All in Authority: Reigniting the Bible’s Top-Down Missions Strategy* provides the biblical exegesis for this missional strategy that is found in both the Old and New Testaments. The book provides a clarion call for the Church to make political public servants a priority mission field in our nation today. Request your complimentary copy at [capmin.org](http://capmin.org).



Praise God we have gotten this right! May you as a public servant help curtail the unbiblical present secular trend toward pacifism and non-interventionism! Such will lead to increasing worldwide chaos.

### V. SUMMARY

Secular Humanists, who believe man is basically good, have a resulting ideological problem with war. They believe all problems can be solved intelligently by appealing to reason. The Christian worldview stands in sharp contradiction: man is fallen and has a propensity toward evil. It follows that war is necessary at times; God even sends His people to war in Scripture. If God advocates war at times, it follows that He insists on the guidelines outlined in this study for the justification of going to war and fighting a war. It follows too that the pacifist and noninterventionist viewpoints are biblically unfounded and portray a theological naivete relative to the grave and serious ongoing implications of the Fall.



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