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How Should a Christian Relate to War?

Isaiah 2:4: (NKJV) "He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

War. It is a fact of life. According to Dr. Terry Fields, in the last 3,421 years of recorded history, there have been only 268 years without war. This should tell us something significant about the fallen nature of man. What it doesn't tell us is how we as Christians should view war. Should we support it? Should we participate in it? Should we oppose it? Just as there are many denominations of Christians, there are many differing answers to this particular question of Christian Conscience.

Questions for consideration:

1. Why is the Old Testament so war oriented?
2. Why is the New Testament so opposite the Old?

Let's look at the original curse put on mankind after the original sin in the Garden of Eden: Genesis 3:16-19:

The elements of the Curse on man:

- ❑ *cursed is the ground because of you* - No longer is the ground blessed as a result of your choice
- ❑ *in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life* - your life now has a limit
- ❑ *thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you* - drawing the bounty of the earth is now work, it will now take effort and will not be easy
- ❑ *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground* - you will die!

Obviously after sin, life was going to be difficult. Mankind, because of Adam's choice, is now in the prison house of sin and death, doomed to a life of toil and difficulty. This was the result of sin - of disobeying the Creator and His guidelines. God would now deal with his creation in the context they chose, the context of sin and death. Adam chose to obey the serpent rather than God. This is a context of imperfection, inequity, greed and humiliation. Where these things rule, the domination over and the enslavement of others can't be far behind; and where domination and enslavement rule, war is inevitable.

It didn't take long for the first dramatic effects of the enslavement to sin to result: Genesis 4:1-12: Here we have the first rivalry, the first murder, the first breeding ground for revenge and the first recorded hint of the war-like tendency that sinful man was to have. Notice how God was willing to work Cain through his anger (verses 6-7), and how Cain's choice was to follow wrath rather than right.

Whose world is this? This text shows Satan's pride: Isaiah 4:13-14: Satan wanted what God had. These are words of war!

This world is indeed under the tyrannical rule of Satan: Matthew 4:8-11: Satan had the authority to give Jesus the kingdoms of this world. All Jesus would have to do is serve Satan. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4: The god of this world, Satan, blinded the minds of unbelievers. God permits it to temporarily be Satan's world. Remember, Adam CHOSE to follow Satan rather



than God, so now we are locked in this prison house of death. God is allowing Satan to have his way, temporarily.

If we were to outline the character of Satan, here are some of his characteristics:

**Deceptive, Ruthless, Greedy, Godless, Selfish,
Power hungry, Egotistical, Dominating**

These characteristics are the basis for our world, which is Satan's world! These characteristics work well in this world. It is run by his rules, his way. Once sin entered, the basis of operation changed. God now worked through the Law for the Jews as his method of guidance and through the spirit for Christians as his method of guidance.

Okay, so war exists. Why then, did God go so far as to order war for Israel and in some cases order the destruction of every man woman and child of an enemy? Why did he even order the destruction of the enemy's cattle? Is this a God of love? Couldn't there have been another way? Deuteronomy 20:16-18

Observations about God, war and the Old Testament so far:

- God allowed the general rules of the world to be sinful, under the jurisdiction of Satan.
- God introduced the Jewish Law as a first national step back to rules of God. This was a step for a nation to put God back into their lives.
- This Law was to operate in a sinful world, therefore had to address sin at every turn. It was established to be able to deal with sin.
- The "harshness" of God's judgments against enemies were to display the exceeding degradation of sin.
- This harshness seems terribly unfair *had it not been for the promise of resurrection and blessing*. This shows the ultimate mercy of God.
- God supported the wars of Israel to keep them alive and separate. Nations warred against each other-that was a fact of life.

This type of warfare wasn't something that God made up for the Jewish nation to do to other people. He gave them the ability to win over their enemies by the same ways wars were generally won. He didn't add a dimension, he used what already exists. But God had something much greater in store...

Some of the earliest promises of God towards the redemption of all mankind:

Genesis 3:15: So when sin is committed and the sentence for this is dolled out, God says He will put "enmity between your seed and her seed." The bruising of a serpent's head is death to that serpent (Satan). There is a war going on. But the seed of the woman is going to be victorious over sin and death and Satan's rule. Even in the very beginning, there was a picture of war between Jesus and Satan, and God telling us that His way will eventually be victorious.

So let's look at the bigger picture regarding the original promise of war against sin - sin entered because of the pride and deviousness of Satan. God allowed sin to rule, but gave this promise in the very beginning that this would only be temporary. That hope was magnified dramatically in the promise repeatedly given to Abraham.

Genesis 22:16-18: (NKJV) There is great power in these words. Because of Abraham's faithfulness, through his seed, his lineage, *all* the nations of the earth shall be blessed. This would include pagan, Muslim, Hindu, and so on. These nations are able to be blessed because



of Abraham's faithfulness. This is a promise of great hope given in the middle of a sinful world that was full of war.

As a Christian looking back over the Old Testament, we can see promises for blessing and commands for death and destruction, all from the same God. How are we to harmonize these things? What are we to learn about our dealing with those who are enemies? Our God is a "Big Picture God!!"

Isaiah 46:9-11: This is a story that is continually unfolding. This scripture tells us that God knows the beginning from the end, and what He has said, He will do. What is it He said He would do?

Isaiah 2:2-4: There will come to pass later ("in the latter days") - all nations will flow to God's house. This hasn't happened yet. In His allowance of war and all the atrocities that come with it, God promised a better day and it is going to happen.

If God is a Big Picture God, ought we not to be Big Picture People?

2. Why is the New Testament so opposite the Old?

Contrast Deuteronomy 21:1 with Mark 13:8-11: In the New Testament example, it is much more of a personal approach rather than a national approach. He is preparing them to fight a spiritual battle rather than a physical one.

Contrast Leviticus 24:19-22 with Matthew 5:38-45: There is a marked difference in behavioral expectations from the Old Testament to the New. Jesus himself is quoting from the Old Testament; he is saying to rise above that and set a new standard based on spirituality and mercy instead of physical revenge and justice.

Yet there are scriptures that seem to indicate that it is acceptable to participate:

Notice, John does not tell the (Jewish) soldiers to leave the Military!

Luke 3:7-14: (But remember this was before Jesus' baptism.)

Jesus here "fights" to sanctify the Temple: John 2:13-17

Jesus brings a sword! Mathew 10:32-38

Paul clearly admonishes obedience to the governing powers: Romans 13:1-7: Now, do all these things mean that we ought to be good citizens and do whatever we are told? Do these things mean that we should be armed and ready for a fight?

The answer is no...and...yes! There is a PROPER CONTEXT in which we should "fight." Paul talks about following the rules within a government situation that won't terrorize good conduct. By being a good citizen when ethical behavior is favored, you are living up to your conscience. There is a fight we are supposed to fight - but how is it defined?

Jesus here reveals the context in which a Christian should "fight:"

John 18:33-37: This helps put things into clear perspective. Jesus was on trial for his very life. Pilate had the power (with God's permission) to sentence Jesus to death or to free him. Being a king would be treason within the Roman Empire. Jesus is saying that if his kingdom were of this world, then his followers would fight to keep him from being handed over. But



they aren't fighting because his kingdom is someplace else. That's the principle we have to take into account. Jesus did *not* fight against the injustices done to him.

2 Corinthians 5:19-20: If we are Ambassadors for Christ, we can see that we are supposed to be representing a government not of this world. Therefore our behavior should reflect a primary allegiance to the government of God through Jesus.

Will this thought pass the test of other scriptures? Ephesians 6:13

Withstand: Strong's #436 anthistemi anth-is'-tay-mee:

1) to set one's self against, to withstand, resist, oppose 2) to set against

This sure sounds pretty military - armor, withstanding, doing all to stand! The real question here is - what are we standing for and what are we fighting for?

Here are some scriptures that use that same Greek word for "withstand," when the word "resist" is used: Matthew 5:39 and James 4:7: We are to arm ourselves for spiritual conflict, not national conflict, because we are supposed to be ambassadors for Christ.

So, our "standing against" is certainly regarding Satan and spiritual wickedness:

1 Peter 2:9-11: It is important to keep our spirituality intact. John 17:15-17

So, are we to do as Jesus did - didn't he "fight" to clear the temple?

John 2:13-17: Note the lack of physical destruction caused by Jesus' actions - he simply stops the unfair money changers from gouging the people - he takes nothing of theirs and he allows them to recover what was upset. Jesus didn't do harm to them. His motivation was to stop the corruption, not to do damage. This is an important principle.

Jesus chastises the use of the sword and does not even call upon angels for protection!

Matthew 26:51-54

A "spiritual sword" is a weapon of division: Hebrews 4:12

We are to walk just as Jesus walked! 1 John 2:2-6

Our weapons are not carnal! 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Finally, "Vengeance" is God's: Romans 12:14-21

*So how should a Christian relate to war?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*