

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

What does the Bible say about war? Is there ever a just reason for it?

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:4-6, James 3:8-10, Matthew 10:29-31, Genesis 9:5-6, 1 Peter 2:13-14

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Since September 11, talk of war and eliminating terrorism has dominated our lives. The atrocities committed against many unsuspecting civilians appear so obviously unjust that many of us have likely supported the war in Afghanistan without asking if we have biblical grounds to do so.

Through the centuries, three main viewpoints have emerged from within the church in response to the question of war:

Some believe no war is justifiable (a position called pacifism). Others believe Christians must submit to their government and agree to fight in any war it engages in (a viewpoint known as activism). But the majority of Christians hold the view that believers may support or join in defensive wars against evil aggressors--a position known as the just war theory.

We identify ourselves with the third approach--the just war theory. Here are three reasons why we believe just wars are permissible and at times, necessary.

God Considers Human Life Precious

At first glance, that statement may seem to exclude all wars, but it is a vital truth that supports the principles that follow.

From the outset, the Bible affirms the exclusive place humanity holds in creation. God created us with the unique privilege of bearing His image (Genesis 1:26-27): He made us moral beings responsible to Him, endued us with creative abilities like His, and set us in dominion over the earth and its occupants (cf. Psalm 8).

As bearers of His image, we are designed to reflect God's ruling, creative, and moral nature and character. Adam's fall seriously marred mankind's likeness to God and sin sours every expression of it, but vestiges of it remain. And it is that image of God in mankind that makes all human life precious. Here are some verses affirming the special value of human life:

- What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet. (Psalm 8:4-6)
- Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31)
- How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. (Matthew 12:12)

-But no one can tame the tongue ... With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. (James 3:8-10)

God Commands Protection of Human Life

Because life is precious, God decreed its preservation and protection by calling for the punishment of anyone who murders a bearer of His image. He issued this command when Noah left the ark to begin a fresh start on dry land:

Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man. (Genesis 9:5-6)

One of the first things God imprinted on Noah's mind after the Flood was a renewed appreciation for human life. Life is so precious, in fact, that it must be protected--God commands the death of those who murderously shed another's blood. The execution of murderers highlights the sanctity of human life and the seriousness of harming those created in God's image.

God Commissioned Government to Punish Evildoers

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul declares that God empowers governments to punish those who do evil. Civil officials are told to bear the sword as avengers and execute wrath on those who practice wickedness:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:1-7)

First Peter 2:13-14 is in agreement--God ordained government to ensure order in society by punishing evildoers:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Those verses indicate that God gives governments the responsibility of carrying out punishment on those who commit deadly atrocities--like those perpetrated on September 11. And that responsibility includes waging war when necessary against nations or groups that carry out such actions.

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