

CHALLENGING QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

Lesson 7 w/Answers

Christians in Combat

We continue the study I've titled "Challenging Questions People Ask", and we'll consider a question people have been asking for hundreds of years: Should Christians go to war, i.e., does a Christian belong in combat?

You will discover that there are as many answers to this question as there are people studying it. I'll readily admit upfront that I fall into the camp that we, as followers of Christ, do belong in taking up the cause of peace and justice and are to be active in pursuit of both. I will also readily admit that as a Vietnam veteran, I thought on this question a lot before going into combat.

What I would like us to do for this lesson, as much as possible, is to try and put our current viewpoints slightly to the side so that we can objectively examine both sides of the question and consider what the Bible shows us. Clearly, the answers aren't black and white, or theologians and politicians would have agreed on the answer many centuries ago. Nevertheless, I think that it is a question that we should be well-informed on, and I believe that we should base our response on the Bible and not solely on man's thinking.

Let's begin our study by looking at the thinking that has occurred around this subject, and then we'll take a look at the Bible. Consider the following:

1. Research the meaning of the "Just War Theory" and summarize it below.
 - a. ANSWER 1: The basic theory is that war can be for a just cause but only under certain circumstances.
 - b. ANSWER 2: The holders of this theory believe that there are justifiable and unjustifiable reasons for going to war.
2. What do Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas share in common relative to the "Just War Theory"?
 - a. ANSWER: They both held to the theory and believed that there were times when war was justifiable for followers of Christ. Had they been alive in the 20th Century, they would have held that going to war against Hitler and his annihilation of the Jews was justifiable and represented a just cause.
3. What are some of the arguments against Christians going to war?
 - a. ANSWER 1: We are to trust in Christ our Lord to protect us.
 - b. ANSWER 2: We are to love our enemies.
 - c. ANSWER 3: We are to turn the other cheek.
 - d. ANSWER 4: One of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not kill."
4. Now let's examine some Biblical evidence that perhaps supports Christians going to war. First let's look at Matthew 5:9. Why would this verse apply to Christians in combat, or in a place of conflict?
 - a. ANSWER: Making peace requires an intentional effort to go into a place of conflict, to confront the cause of the conflict, and to bring about peace. You cannot bring about peace by humbly sitting on the sidelines, or by turning away from it.
5. Read Matthew 22:21. How might this verse relate to Christians serving in the military?
 - a. ANSWER 1: This and other verses in the Bible tell us that we have responsibilities to the ruling authorities who govern us—a national obligation if you will, and this also includes paying taxes, obeying the laws of the land and bearing arms; these are but a few of those responsibilities.
 - b. ANSWER 2: This does not in any way diminish the Christian's responsibility to be lawful and to make conscious decisions about the justification for war. I firmly believe that there are unjustifiable wars, as was the case for the soldiers who followed Hitler's orders to kill all those innocent people. In this case, they were not justified in their actions by saying that they had no choice because Hitler commanded them to do them.
6. Now read Hebrews 11:32-34. What do these verses tell us about a just war and our responsibility to stand in the face of danger with courage, knowing that Christ is on our side?
 - a. ANSWER: These verses illustrate that we are to be on the attack, and through faith to go out to conquer injustice. We are to be powerful in battle in spite of our weaknesses. Nothing in these verses implies a pacifist approach to our faith—nor advocating against taking a stand regarding what is right or wrong, what is righteous or unrighteous, or what represents justice or injustice.

7. Paul wrote about combat in Ephesians chapter 6. Read Ephesians 6:10-12. Do these verses sound like we are to be peacefully quiet and turn away from conflict, struggle, and strife?
 - a. ANSWER: We are to put on Christ and take a stand—a firm stand; realizing that the real source of conflict in the world is Satan and spiritual wickedness. We are to take it on, and not simply turn a blind eye.
8. Finally, read Matthew 16:18. What does it tell you about the Church and its role? Is it to be peacefully going about the Lord's work, not making waves, turning the other cheek, meekly and humbly always doing right and avoiding all the bad?
 - a. ANSWER: No. Clearly gates are a defensive measure; and the Church is to aggressively—and forcefully if necessary—crash the very gates of Hell itself to wrestle for the souls of the lost, to defeat Satan, and to rescue the dying before it is too late. There is nothing in this verse that says we are to stay on the sidelines, not make waves, or not take action when we see injustice. Quite to the contrary, we are to be on the attack and always moving forward against the enemy.

I probably have been as guilty as anyone of believing, as an early follower of Christ, that our calling was to meekly and humbly stay out of trouble's way, to not get involved, and to seek peace at all costs in order to avoid conflict, etc. However, I have come to realize over time that Christ calls us to be active in pursuing the Kingdom of God and in seeking the lost and dying. Ours is not a call to live a super righteous life; our call is to "go", to seek, to teach, to disciple, and to confront the evils of the world.

I remember as a young man hearing an expression that perhaps many of you have also heard: "God called Christians to fish in the ocean; He did not call them to clean up the ocean." And, of course you may also be familiar with the verse admonishing us to "be in the world and not of the world.". These and other verses surface as reasons why Christians should not serve in a combat role, nor should we be an "activist" when we see something unjust occurring. I believe the time is coming and will soon be upon us when Christians are going to have to face the evils of this world head-on in order to loudly proclaim that Christ is indeed coming again, and soon; and that He is the only way to God the Father. We cannot—and we should not—be sitting on the sidelines.

We talk about being "living witnesses"—that is, that our lifestyle should reflect our testimony about Christ. If so, then how can that lifestyle reflect Him if we idly stand by and see the poor go homeless, the hungry go unfed, the unjustly accused go without defense, entire nations obliterated through genocide, and so on? Do we really believe that if Christ physically walked the earth today he would turn a blind eye to any of that? Of course not, and neither should we.

From my perspective, whether it is in defense of the country that God gave me as my earthly home, or in defense of the defenseless widow, the homeless or hungry, the outcast alien or criminal; my Jesus teaches me to get involved, to take a stand, to push the kingdom of God forward for the cause of Christ. I can't do any of that just sitting humbly and meekly on the sidelines—at least that's my view.

Have a great week everyone and thanks for studying with us.

In Christ,

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