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War - A Christian Perspective (Part 1)



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In this discussion on the Christian perspective on war, Steve Gregg acknowledges that not all Christians will agree on the topic, but stresses the importance of thinking about what God does rather than solely having personal perspectives. He explains that there have been four distinct eras in Christian history regarding views on war, and that early church fathers believed that violence, including self-defense and for the state, was against biblical teachings. Gregg emphasizes that though the Old Testament provides instructions for conducting wars, wars can be sinfully motivated and God's ultimate intention is to promote peace.

Transcript

Tonight I'm going to be talking about a Christian perspective on the topic of warfare. And in saying that I'm giving a Christian perspective, I am a Christian and I have a perspective and I hope that the perspective I have is representative of what a Christian's perspective ought to be. But there are other views that Christians have held than the one that I hold.

And I don't think your truth is your truth and my truth is mine. I don't think it's a matter of relativity. On the other hand, I do believe that the data of Scripture in some cases is ambiguous enough that where Christians don't agree with each other, although they can't all be right, they may all have a right heart.

No Christian is required to see the subject the way I do. But we're all required to see it the way God does and so I'm going to give you my take, my understanding of what I think God sees it as with the full recognition that there are Christians perhaps better than myself, certainly many wiser and more scholarly and more probably who know the Bible better, who for reasons of their own have concluded differently than I have. In raising this controversial subject, I want to do it as much as possible in a non-controversialist spirit.

I think that where there are controversies in Christian theology, they should not be avoided. I think that Christians who feel one way shouldn't just all run off into a little

cloister and avoid the Christians who disagree with them. I think that Christian growth, the whole body of Christ grows better as we speak the truth in love and there's open dialogue and we can hear what each other are saying and see the scriptural evidence and assess it and see if someone's seen something wrong or someone's seen something right.

Whatever position I would take on this, there are Christians who held a different position. Some of them may be here and therefore insofar as we look at this emotionally, it would be impossible for me to avoid offending somebody simply by taking any position because there's always another position and hardly anyone looks at this without emotion. War is a hard subject to be dispassionate about, partly because we are very much aware of the horrible atrocities that have occurred in war and some of the horrible atrocities that have occurred that we feel have justified our involvement in wars.

Certainly when you hear of atrocities done by terrorists or by dictators and innocent people being massacred or otherwise abused, people of good heart can hardly just sit back and say, well I don't want to do anything about it. We want to do something about it and sometimes the only thing we know to do would be just take up arms and go and overpower the bad guys and restore justice and peace that way. This certainly has motivated many Christians in modern times and especially in the past century during the two world wars.

In many cases Christians fought in those wars thinking that there's nothing else as Christians could do that would be honoring to God. That to cease to do so would be to just turn over the world to the devil. I remember very well my grandmother and I having a discussion during the Vietnam War back when I was a teenager.

I was a conscientious objector and my grandmother and I didn't have the same view of the situation. I remember saying that I didn't believe that it was my business as a Christian to go over and to kill communists. She, taking the position probably of many Christians of her generation, said, well the Bible says resist the devil.

This I'm sure is the way that many Christians feel about it. Saddam Hussein is the devil. Hitler is the devil.

These dictators give every appearance of being maybe demon possessed people, but resistance of the devil, at least as James advocates it, is resistance of the devil himself, not necessarily of his agents. After all, Jesus said do not resist the evil man. That if any man would strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

So you've got on the one hand an obligation on the part of Christians to resist Satan, but also commands about not resisting the evil man who may be instrumental in the purposes of Satan. And this is a difficult thing. How do we resist the devil in a situation where there's international conflict and clearly the devil is killing a lot of people? I fully

understand and sympathize with those who feel like we can't just sit back and watch the bad guys win.

We have to take up arms if we don't do so, we're remiss. How can we be said to be loving our neighbor if we won't come to their rescue in time of crisis and so forth. On the other hand, there are Christians who've said, you know, there is a distinctive role for the Christian in the world in general, especially vis-a-vis some horrendous situation like warfare.

That is where we need to examine and see is that true. Is there a distinctive Christian position? Is it different than that of other good citizens? There's a difference between a good citizen, simply as a generic class, and a Christian. A Christian is more specifically got a vocation defined in scripture and defined by Jesus Christ.

So, we need to really study the scriptures and see what the answer is. I want to make it clear, I'm not coming at this with any kind of political agenda at all. When I was a conscientious objector in the 60s and 70s, it had nothing to do with my political views about Vietnam.

Many conscientious objectors were only conscientious objectors to that war. I'm not coming from there. I'm just here saying I want to follow Jesus, whether I'm thinking about war or any other subject.

I just want to know, did Jesus say something? Is there any light from God? Is there any kind of instruction I'm supposed to follow? I want to look at the scriptures and just see what about this subject of war. It's been with mankind from the earliest times. As long as there have been nations, there's been greed and lust and violence and aggression and then there's been defense, self-defense against aggression and these things always materialize in some form of war.

I thought I might begin by surveying the view that the Christian church has held at different times in history on this subject. Now, this first part will take us a little while, but it's very interesting. As I go through, I'm going to try to tell you how Christians in each era justified the position they took.

I don't want you to think that by me presenting their position or showing how they justified it, I'm necessarily in the camp of every group of Christians that's had an opinion. But there are essentially four periods of Christian history where the views of the church on war had distinctive features. One would be the early church before the time of Constantine and then from Constantine on, especially about 50 years after Constantine's conversion with the writings of Saint Augustine, there was a change.

And then in the time of the Crusades, about the 11th century, the church took an entirely different position about war than either of the previous two times. And then in the

modern era of nationalism and political ideologies at war, Christians have taken a somewhat moderated position from that of the Crusade time. But those are the four eras, before Constantine and then after Constantine until the Middle Ages and then the Crusade era and then the modern era.

Starting with the early Christians from the apostles on to roughly until the time of Constantine, there is really no serious reason to dispute that the early Christians not only believed but they said very strongly that Christians do not have any place in the wars of man. In fact, they took a strong position against Christians being involved in government at all. The Christian theologians who wrote and whose writings have survived did not really believe that Christians should fight in wars but they didn't believe they should serve as magistrates, judges, policemen, any of that.

They felt that there is two kingdoms, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God and that Christians belong to the kingdom of God. Everything else was the kingdom of darkness. And that warfare and the administration of human governments was really the devil's sphere and it should be left to the devil's people to do it.

That was pretty easy to believe at a time when the governments were feeding Christians to lions and burning them and persecuting them which was the character of the relations between church and state through much of the first three centuries. It's much easier to see the government is demonic, the kingdom of darkness, if the government has made laws that say that if you're a Christian you're going to be fed to a lion. You say well that's the devil for sure.

After Constantine's time, Constantine was the emperor and he became a professed Christian. Eventually he made Christianity the official recognized religion of the empire. Then of course the wars of Rome were viewed as the wars of a Christian empire.

The church and state issue was definitely blurred. When Rome was no longer persecuting Christians, it wasn't so easy to see the secular government as the bad guy. As a matter of fact, the secular government was not really very secular at all.

It was sponsoring the church and building cathedrals and sponsoring ecumenical councils for the church to hammer out the theology. Times like that, Christians began to definitely soften on their earlier position that the state is the bad guy, is the devil. It certainly seemed that the opposite was true now.

Let me read to you some quotes of the early fathers since I want to take these periods chronologically. The early period is about the first three to four hundred years of the church. I'm going to read in chronological order some of the leading voices of Christianity speaking on this subject in those years.

One of the earliest, after the time of the apostles, was Justin Martyr. Justin Martyr lived

from 114 to 168 AD, so he's just a couple generations after the apostles. He was a Christian apologist whose writings are often consulted as the pretty much standard Christian beliefs of his time.

He was orthodox. He was not some kind of a guy on the fringe who had some strange ideas that most people would renounce. He and the other people I'm reading are the mainstream church fathers of the period.

Justin Martyr said, We who were filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness have each throughout the whole earth changed our weapons of war, our swords into plowshares and our spears into implements of tillage. And we cultivate piety, righteousness, philanthropy, faith and hope, which we have from the Father himself through him who was crucified. He's obviously alluding to Isaiah chapter two, where it says they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, a passage that popularly today would be applied to a future millennial kingdom of Christ after a second coming.

Although Justin Martyr was a premillennialist, he believed that these scriptures in Isaiah applied to the church age and that by becoming a Christian and joining the kingdom of Christ, we are those who beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks. We no longer carry implements of war. Instead, we're interested in peaceable implements of tillage and cultivation of righteousness and piety and philanthropy and so forth.

So, he saw that Christians, by becoming Christians, have exchanged their vocation from those who war to those who plant and sow and cultivate the fruit of righteousness. The same man, Justin Martyr, said in another place, we refrain from making war on our enemies and we cannot bear to see a man killed, even if killed justly. I'm not sure that a case against capital punishment can be sustained in the Old or New Testaments, but the early Christians were uniformly non-violent in their thinking.

They did not believe in fighting in war and they did not believe in capital punishment. Or at least, if they believed that the state at times would be justified in executing a criminal, they didn't want to watch and they didn't want anything to do with it. They didn't want to approve of it.

They said, we cannot bear to see a man killed, even if killed justly. The statement recognized that some people are killed justly. When a person has done something worthy of death and the statement is that that's a just thing, he's killed justly.

But Christians, in those days, did not even want to bear watching it. How contrary to the mood of Christians today who either watch movies or play video games that are characterized by nothing but human bloodshed and they do it for entertainment. We say, well, no one's really getting killed there.

No, but what's the entertainment in watching a graphic depiction of that which, if it was really happening before us, we'd call it an abomination. We don't think that things that are immoral and an abomination to God should be enjoyed even when they're being simulated. And yet, Christians have lost this sensitivity, this detestation of violence and killing that characterized the early Christians.

Tertullian lived only a little later than just a martyr. Tertullian lived from 155 to 240. And in his treatise called *The Crown*, in chapter 11, he said, Can it be lawful to make an occupation of the sword when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword? And shall the son of peace take part in battle when it does not become him even to sue at law? Shall he apply the chain, the prison, the torture and the punishment when he is not even the avenger of his own wrongs? In another place, in his treatise on idolatry, Tertullian also said this.

He said, But how will a Christian man war? Nay, how will he serve the military even in peace without a sword which the Lord has taken away? For even if soldiers came to John and received advice on how to act, and even if a centurion became a believer, the Lord in subsequently disarming Peter disarmed every soldier. You may not agree with his way of interpreting the passages, but there's no question to where he stood, he and the church that he was a part of in the early days. And this continued for centuries.

Clement of Alexandria, writing in 217 AD, wrote, He who holds the sword must cast it away, and that if one of the faithful becomes a soldier, he must be rejected by the church, for he has scorned God. That was the position. If a Christian becomes a soldier, he's excommunicated.

Origen, who lived from 185 to 254 AD, said this against Celsus, Nowhere does he teach that it is right for his own disciples to offer violence to anyone, however wicked. For he deemed the killing of any individual to be against his laws, which were divine in origin. If Christians had owed their origins to rebellion, they would not have adopted laws so exceedingly mild of character.

These laws do not even allow them on any occasion to resist their persecutors, even when they are called to be slaughtered as sheep." That certainly sounds like the same attitude the apostles had. In James chapter 5 and verse 6, James is rebuking the rich man, saying, You have condemned, you've killed the righteous, and he doesn't resist you. That is, in the days of James, righteous Christians were being condemned and killed, apparently as a result of wrongful cases brought against them in court, and it says they don't resist, even when they're being killed.

They don't resist. So, what James said was true in the first century was still true in the time of Origen. He said that we are not even allowed on any occasion to resist our persecutors, even when we are called to be slaughtered as sheep.

Arnobius, who was a third century Christian apologist, in his book *Against the Heathen*, said this, We have learned from his teaching and his laws that evil should not be repaid with evil, that it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it, and that our own blood should be shed rather than to stain our hands and our conscience with that of another. Lactantius, who was a Christian instructor from 250 to 330 AD, in his book *Institutes*, wrote these words, When God forbids us to kill, he not only prohibits the violence that is condemned by public laws, but he also forbids the violence that is deemed lawful by men. Thus, it is unlawful for a just man to engage in warfare, since his warfare is justice itself.

That is, the promotion of justice in Christian manner is the warfare of the Christian, is what Lactantius is saying. In the *Canons of Discipline*, written by Hippolytus in the third century, he said that a Christian soldier should not be taught to kill, and they must refuse to kill, even upon command by their officers. To do otherwise would bring Church discipline upon them.

One more quote. This is from Martin of Tours, who lived from 316 to 397. He said, I'm a soldier of Christ.

To fight is not permissible for me. Explaining why he wouldn't go to war, wouldn't join the military. This view was apparently the universal view of the thinking Christians of the time.

Now, after about the third century, even when some of these guys were writing, there is record that there were Christians in the military, either because soldiers who were already in the military became Christians, at a time when Christianity was spreading more rapidly, some soldiers became Christians, and apparently didn't immediately leave the military. I don't know any other reasons. Maybe Christians were sometimes under pressure to join the military, and so they did.

But to say that we can find Christians who were in the military in some of these later centuries of the early period doesn't mean that they represented the view of the Church. There's a lot of things Christians can be seen to do today that don't reflect the views of the Churches they belong to. What's clear is these Church leaders, these bishops and Church spokesmen, indicated that in their view, for a Christian to fight in a war was a Church discipline offense.

They could be kicked out of the Church. They had scorned Christ, they said. At the time of Augustine, which is after Constantine had Christianized the empire, it was harder, as I said, to see the government as evil and satanic when it was sponsoring the Church and its activities and paying salaries to the ministers and so forth.

Since Rome had become a Christian empire, the enemies of Rome, the barbarians who sometimes would threaten Rome's existence, they were seen as the devil. But Roman

authorities, the Roman armies, were seen as God's armies. And so, you know, when that goes on for very long, a generation or two living under that kind of situation begins to feel like, well, why shouldn't we should fight against the enemies of God? And, you know, these Rome's armies, we need armies to fight off the heathen and all the people in Rome are Christian, officially.

So, of course, Christians need to join the army. Nonetheless, Christians were not unaware that many atrocities offensive to God are committed by soldiers and in war. So they needed a distinctive Christian philosophy of war.

Pagan warfare was an ugly, ugly thing. Any warfare is, but pagans would torture, you know, noncombatants and disembowel women and do all kinds of things just to be cruel to their enemies. And even when the Christians began to justify going into the service after Constantine's time, they knew that they can't just do everything that soldiers do.

They have to be Christian about it. And so they needed a distinctly Christian philosophy of warfare. And Augustine is the one who gave that to the church, at least what he called distinctively Christian.

Actually, there was nothing distinctively Christian about it. He got it from Plato and Cicero, earlier pagan philosophers who had come up with what we call the just war theory. Plato, who is by no means a Christian.

And Cicero, who is by no means a Christian, had in their own day had some of the same objections to atrocities in war. And as philosophers had come up with guidelines to define the kind of war that a good man could approve of and the kind of war that a good man could not approve of. And so the theory of the just war came along.

And the idea was that a good man could participate in a war if his side, if it was a just war, was conducted like a just war. But if it was not conducted like a just war, it'd be just evil and no good man should participate. Augustine picked up these ideas and Christianized them for the church.

Later, they were worked on in later centuries by Grotius and by Thomas Aquinas, and they became the official view of the church for many centuries until about the Crusades. Augustine's view was that a war, if it is a just war, is one that a Christian should be willing to fight in. But a just war is very different than most wars.

A just war has to be entirely defensive. There are very strict guidelines put on the definition of what makes a just war or makes a war just. One, it has to have a just cause.

You can't just be aggressive, wanting to take someone else's land. You can't just be angry at your enemy or have a difference of opinion. It has to have a just cause.

And that was normally considered to be you're under attack. Your enemy is attacking

you and you're doing nothing but defending yourself against an aggressor. Just as if you were in your home and someone broke into your home to kill you and your family and you resisted them.

Very few people would say that would be an unjust act on your part. And so also, if a nation is attacked by a hostile nation and defends themselves, if it's entirely defensive, that's a just cause for war, according to Augustine. Also, he said the war had to be declared by legitimate authority.

Now, I'm not sure how a Christian could come up with this. Basically, the idea is that you can't just have a guerrilla war. You can't have some kind of revolution.

You have to have a war that's duly declared by the authorities of the state. And anything else is not a just war. The reason I said I have a hard time knowing how a Christian could take this position is that most of the wars of the Jews were never declared by government authority.

Certainly in the book of Judges, all the judges that fought wars basically were just running revolutions against oppressors. They weren't government officials who ran these wars or declared them. Certainly the Maccabean War wasn't declared by any just authority, but most Christians would say that was just.

So I'm not really sure where Augustine, apart from Plato and Cicero, would have gotten, certainly not from the Bible, anything about the need for legitimate authority to declare the war. Another thing is that you could only use proportionate force. That is, you couldn't use overwhelming force against your enemy, just enough to repel the aggression.

Now to my mind, this is a commendable goal. Human nature is to get provoked when someone attacks you for nothing. It's unprovoked and they come against you and they try to kill you.

Well, your natural instinct is not only to defend yourself, but to make them hurt for it. And yet this is supposed to keep that from happening. Just because you're under attack and can defend yourself, the nation that's defending itself should not use any more force than is necessary to repel the aggression.

They can't just go and punish the aggressor. In fact, they said that a just war can't even be fought to recover lost territory. Even if the lost territory was unjustly taken from them, if it's been taken and the war is over, you're not defending yourself anymore and you can't go and instigate a new war to take the territory back.

The just war theory taught that war has to be the last resort, which means you've exhausted all hopes of negotiation and diplomacy, as they now call it. And you're simply not going to be able to stop this aggressor any other way than taking up arms against

them. War has to be the last resort after everything else has been tried.

One of the most important things about the just war theory is that it has to guarantee noncombatant immunity. That is, at least your soldiers will not harm the noncombatants on the other side. Obviously, when you're talking about just war, you're not talking about how the other side is going to behave toward you.

You can only control how your side behaves toward them. Your civilians may be being wiped out, but if you're fighting as an agent of a just war in an army, of course you don't retaliate in that way. You don't kill their civilians.

If someone's not a soldier armed trying to kill you, you can't kill them. So again, it's very much approximate to an actual case where someone's breaking in, someone's trying to kill you, and you kill them in self-defense. It's unlike most wars, certainly unlike any war we've ever fought.

Any war we've ever fought overseas certainly was never a just war. It might have been a war that we felt was justified, but it was not what is called a just war. None of the wars we've fought overseas guaranteed noncombatant immunity.

The firebombing of Dresden did not prevent civilians from being wiped out in that inferno. Certainly, Hiroshima did not in any sense guarantee noncombatant immunity. We violated the just war guidelines, and if Christians believed in just war in World War II, they shouldn't have participated in that war because it wasn't one.

It's hard to say things like that without getting blood to boil in people, because frankly, a lot of our relatives and loved ones did heroic things. Some of them were killed. Some of them lost legs.

Some of them, it was just out of love for their families, and in some cases, their idea of what God wanted them to do. They went over there, and they put their life on the line, and who am I, who's never seen a day of warfare, standing here in comfort and security, benefiting from the freedoms that they preserved by their bloodshed, who am I to say they shouldn't have gone? Well, that's exactly the kind of problem we have when we address this. It's hard to be dispassionate.

Some controversies you can be dispassionate about. War isn't one of them, because if you're saying we shouldn't participate in war, you're going to have to say that against all of the urges of human nature, and if you say we should be in war, you're going to have to find ways to make the atrocities of war somehow not really be that atrocious. It's not a simple matter, as many people would like to make it.

There's some other guidelines, but these are the, you can get the idea of the kind of attempt that's being made here to define only a narrow kind of range of warfare and a certain narrow range of activity in warfare that a Christian, even at a time when the

church was deciding, okay, it's okay for us to be soldiers now, but we have to make sure we're only soldiers in this kind of situation. The main debate in Christians today is still between those who take a non-resistance position, or a non-participation of the church in the military position, on the one hand, and those who take a just war position on the other. But the church went beyond that.

In the time of the Crusades, the church decided they needed to rescue the Holy Land from the occupation of the Saracens, the Arabic Muslims who had conquered that region and were controlling it. And also, the Saracens were making incursions up into Europe and attacking Christian nations. And so, about this time, since Christians had already been fighting in war, the idea of fighting against the heathen in this way, and not only defending the empire against them, but also freeing the Holy Land from the defilement of the heathen control, it appealed to Christian people.

Now, we have to remember, when we're talking about the 11th century, when we say Christian people, we're talking about a different breed than what we normally, as evangelicals, think of as Christian people. We're talking about people who have no Bibles. The Bible was not in print yet.

It existed in the churches. They had a copy chained to the pulpit. But there were no printing presses printing Bibles, so no one had one at home.

No one could read one. These people were 100% dependent for their knowledge of the Word of God on what the priest told them every Sunday morning. And that was probably very little.

And what they did get was colored by whatever the priest wanted to color it with. And people who were Christians, who may have even loved the Lord in some cases, were extremely poorly disciplined. They were very illiterate in the Bible.

Some of them were just illiterate, period. There was illiteracy was the norm in Europe in the Middle Ages. So, there's a sense in which we've got to give these people a little bit of slack if we don't agree with some of the things they did.

The clergy doesn't deserve any slack, but the rank and file of the Christians who fought in these Crusades, they were just doing what the clergy told them God wants them to do. And they thought they were doing God a service. The Crusades brought a new era of the noble, gallant, Christian knight.

The knight who leads the pilgrims on their pilgrimages to keep them safe. In Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the Christian knight is the epitome of virtue and the epitome of all that is good. And the churches in Europe were stirring up the congregations to go out and kill the Muslims.

And to reclaim the Holy Land and so forth. And they did. And just so you might know the

kind of things that went on during the Crusades, an anonymous observer who observed the conquest of Jerusalem by the Christian knights in 1097 wrote this description of how Jerusalem was conquered by the knights from the Saracens, who were the Arabs.

This is an actual eyewitness account recorded uncritically. Entering by the city, our pilgrims pursued and killed Saracens up to the Temple of Solomon, in which they had assembled and where they gave battle to us furiously for the whole day so that their blood flowed throughout the whole temple. Finally, having overcome the pagans, our knights seized a great number of men and women and they killed whom they wished and whom they wished they let live.

Soon the Crusaders ran throughout the city, seizing gold, silver, horses, mules and houses full of all kinds of goods. Then rejoicing and weeping from the extreme joy, our men went to worship at the sepulcher of our Holy Savior Jesus and thus fulfilled their pledge to Him. So there's this bloodbath at the Temple of Solomon.

And after they've gained mastery over the resistance, then they just grab citizens, men and women at random, either kill them or not as they want to just for blood sport or just to teach them a lesson. You can see that the ideals of the just war were not at all really being observed at this time. Augustine's views were promoted in the late 300s or early 400s AD.

We're now talking about 600 years later. And with the provocation of the rise of Islam and so forth at the time, it got Christians not to think very clearly. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? We live now at a time where that very same force, Islam, is one of the scariest forces out there.

And it's a militant force. Christians definitely are vulnerable to being confused about ethical issues of warfare simply because the enemy seems so diabolical. And it's actually the same one, the same enemy, essentially, that the Crusades were fought against.

The exploits of the Crusaders and the Knights were often gruesome, but they were uncritically accepted as acts done for God. Bohemond of Antioch sent a cargo of noses and thumbs that he cut off of Saracens as a gift to the Greek emperor from the Crusades. This is something that was not criticized.

This was a heroic thing for a Christian knight to do. After the Crusade era in the 16th and 17th centuries, Europe began to change its political complexion. The empire had broken down.

Constantinople had fallen and so forth. And now Europe was dividing into dynastic states run by dynastic kings. The main powers in Europe in the 16th, 17th centuries were Henry VIII in England, Charles V, who ruled Germany and Spain, Francis I of France.

And these were like rival powers in Europe. And all of them were so-called Christian. I

mean, they're all Catholic.

And as the land, greed, and so forth of these different dynastic kings began to be in conflict with each other, instead of fighting the heathen, Christians began fighting Christians. The French king actually teamed up with the Turks, the Muslims, to fight against Charles V in Germany. And so we have Christians fighting alongside non-Christians.

I'm using the word Christian simply as a concession. I'm not sure how many of these people were what I would call a Christian. But people who thought they were Christians, they were members in good standing of the church and doing what the church agreed with, they're standing shoulder to shoulder with non-Christians fighting against other Christians.

To me, that sounds very, very strange. But it's really not any different than what happens in modern wars. At least, for example, if we were at war against some Eastern European country or some Asian country, there's a chances are there'd be a lot of Christians on the other side.

Because there's as many Christians in China as there are here, probably, maybe more. There's as many Christians in Russia as there are in America. In any war that we would have with Russia or with China, let us say, we'd be fighting against armies that had a lot of Christians in them.

And then we have this strange thing like began to happen after the Crusades, where Christian nations, so-called, or at least nations that have a large percentage of their population Christians, fighting against other nations have a large percentage of the population of Christians. And if Christians are indeed fighting in the military, Christians are fighting each other. And this, to my mind, can only occur when there's been some confusion as to the nature of Christian loyalty.

When Christians forget that they're loyal to the kingdom of God and its citizens, primarily, only when they forget that, could they possibly fight against other citizens of the kingdom of God on the side of pagan soldiers in the same foxholes with them. You know, here we got a mixed nation, America, with some Christians, some non-Christians. And our solidarity, we're identifying as American.

And if our enemy, let us say, is Russian, which maybe it doesn't seem very likely at this point in time, but at one time that was the way it was viewed. Could be China or who knows, eventually. If there's Christians there, then it's like we're standing on the side of Christians and non-Christians as a solidarity against someone, and the person I'm sure of, might be my brother in Christ.

I don't know. He might not be, but he could be as much as I could be in a foxhole as a

Christian. And it really raises questions as to whether there's any place for Christians in this kind of confusion.

This began after the Crusades in the days when wars began to be about nationalism and political ideologies. After the French Revolution, Napoleon changed the goals of the revolution to be the conquest of Europe. He didn't succeed.

He didn't conquer all of Europe. But that was certainly a new thing for a Christian army to do, to just go and try to conquer other Christian lands and take them over. World Wars I and II in our modern era were wars of nationalism and ideology.

World War II is probably more about ideology than anything else. We wanted to save the world for democracy. And it wasn't so much just nationalism, but it was like we felt like fascism that we're fighting against is the devil's own philosophy.

And I think American Christians tend to think that democracy is God's ideology. So it's right to go and kill the fascists in order to promote democracy. Actually, it seems to me the war on terror over in Iraq and elsewhere seems also to be a war of ideology.

It seems to me that the reason that we're in Iraq, and I'm not here to criticize our being there or not. I, again, I want to keep as non-political as possible. And I honestly don't have a well-thought-out analysis of what's going on in Iraq.

I don't feel like I have enough information to say much about it. But what it does appear to me, at least on this side of the ocean, as we think about it, I think most Christians see the war in Iraq is about planting a democracy in the Middle East. Another one besides Israel.

In fact, we'd like to see democracy spread from there to all the Arab nations. Then we have a better world. At least this is what I hear most often mentioned as justifying our being in Iraq.

God didn't originate democracy. He might be able to operate within it. But I've never yet heard of a political system that God couldn't operate through.

I mean, the church grew rapidly under communism in China. And I certainly don't want to live under communism. But I'm saying that no one can really say that communism kept the church from flourishing.

The church grew faster in China under communism than the church has ever grown anywhere in all history in a similar period of time. So if we're fighting wars to promote democracy, this is fighting over ideology. It's not even anymore the heathen versus the Christians.

Although, of course, in Iraq, we think the Muslims are the heathen. But if it was not Iraq,

if it was against Russia or China, of course, many of those people are Christians. But that's not the issue with us.

It's democracy. We don't want communism. I don't like communism.

It's a bad thing. Communism is an oppressive, evil system. But I don't know why Christians have come to a place where they feel that fighting wars over ideologies, even when they might be shooting at some Christian brothers, is somehow the right thing to do.

Now, of course, what we'll always be told, if anyone raises questions about the legitimacy of this, is, well, if we didn't fight Hitler, we'd all be goose-stepping right now. We'd all be wearing swastikas. There wouldn't be any Jews alive in the world.

If we didn't fight Russia, or at least if we weren't prepared to fight Russia, we didn't end up having to do so, fortunately, we'd all be communists. Well, maybe we would. I hope not.

I don't want to be under Hitler, and I don't want to be under Stalin. I don't want to live under those systems. What I want most of all is to be in the will of God, so that whether I'm under a political system that's favorable or unfavorable to my convictions, at least God's pleased with me.

We live in one of the freest countries in the world, as far as I can tell. I don't know about every country, but I think this is one of the freest in the world. And yet, the government I live under is increasingly anti-Christian.

I know there's some good Christians in it, and they're trying to stem the tide. I'm not so sure that democracy is a government system that promotes the kingdom of God any more than any other one does. The kingdom of God is not promoted by secular government systems.

It's promoted in spite of them. The kings of the earth conspire against the Lord and against his anointed, and they say, let's break his chains off us, and let's cast his cords from us. They don't want to be under God.

It doesn't matter whether they're in a democratic republic or whether they're in a totalitarian regime. Rulers want to rule. They don't want to be ruled.

That's just kind of a thing that's in human nature. I don't know if there's ever been a country yet where that wasn't predominantly the case with their rulers. Some countries have some good rulers who are a little more modest in their expectations, but those guys don't last long, and then they're replaced by the guys who are more normal, who just want to run everything and control everything.

I guess if we're going to say, ordinarily, it's wrong for me to pillage and kill and take property from people, but I would do it if the not doing so is going to make me have to live under communism. That's not the way a Christian rationale should work, I don't think. It seems to me that Christians did real well in the Roman Empire.

I mean, they got slaughtered a lot, but Christianity grew fastest in the Roman Empire, certainly faster than it's grown in the last 100 years in this country, during times of persecution. It is believed by some historians that during the times of the most intense persecution, about half the population of Rome became converted, and that when Christians were fed to the lions in the arenas, more people were converted in the stands watching one martyr die than were killed. So, the death of a Christian meant the expansion of the church.

I'm not making an appeal for changing the government over to persecute Christians so that it would be more pure or so the church would grow better. I'm simply saying that if we're deciding what issues are worth breaking our normal moral standards to defend, I don't know if that's one of the ones I'd sin for. You see, if it's wrong to kill somebody when I'm not a soldier, but I am a soldier, I kill the same person, why isn't that as wrong? Well, we say because it's an act of war, you're doing it as an agent of the state and so forth.

Well, if the state kills an innocent party, we bomb a city and innocent people get killed, we destroy their property, we ruin their lives, we kill their children. If I did that as a civilian, everyone would say I was a monster. If I do it as an American hero in the Air Force dropping bombs, I come back with honors and my church applauds my return.

Now, if it's wrong to kill civilians, it's wrong for them to be killed by armies as much as it's wrong for them to be killed by private citizens. And yet, Christians as well as non-Christians have really gotten in a fog as far as understanding the issues of war as they relate to Christian duty. Now, let me teach you what the Bible says about war in general.

What I'm about to say isn't about Christians and war. This is more of the biblical theology about war. What is war about? What does the Bible say about war? And then after we've taken a break, I can come back and talk about what I think the Bible says about Christians and war.

There are several propositions that we could make about war that the Bible teaches. One is that God uses warfare to punish sinful nations. There's no question that the Bible teaches this.

God uses wars to punish sinful nations. In Exodus 17, verses 14 through 17, the Lord said to Moses, write this as for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar and called it, The Lord is my banner.

For he said, because the Lord has sworn, the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. Now, it was this oath that God would have war against Amalek that caused God to tell King Saul to go out and wipe out every last Amalekite. Saul did wage war against the Amalekites.

And he got scolded afterwards for his conduct, not because he neglected the just war guidelines, but because God said, wipe out every man, woman and child and animal. And Saul thought, well, I should spare some of these things alive that have value. He kept the king and some of the livestock and he hadn't obeyed God.

The war against Amalek was God's judgment on the Amalekites. And Saul didn't have the right to conduct it as an ordinary war because he and the armies of Israel were the agents of God's judgment. That's what the Bible teaches.

In Isaiah 41 too, it talks about Cyrus coming to conquer Babylon. And it says, who raised up one from the east? Meaning Cyrus, the Persian leader. Who in righteousness called him to his feet? Who gave the nations before him and made him rule over kings? Who gave them as the dust of his sword, as driven stubble to his bow? The answer is God did.

And in Isaiah 46, 11, on the same subject of Cyrus, it says, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes my counsel, God says, from a far country. Indeed, I have spoken it. I will also bring it to pass.

I have purposed it. I also will do it. Now, it says when Cyrus came as the leader of the Persian armies and conquered the Babylonian empire, he was coming as a bird of prey that God had summoned to come.

And he was performing what God told him to do. Why? Because God had promised that he would not only punish Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon, but that he would eventually punish Babylon also. And Cyrus was the agent of that judgment.

And the armies of Persia were God's judgment upon Babylon. In Psalm 76, 10, it says, Surely the wrath of man shall praise you. And war is the wrath of man.

But God can use the wrath of man to bring about his purposes. The wrath of man can be made to praise him in the sovereign disposition of God. Jesus indicated that the Roman armies that came and destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70 were God's armies.

In a story he told in Matthew 22, about a king who invited his friends to his son's wedding and they refused to come. It says he was angry. He sent his armies and burned up their city.

It's a clear reference to the Jews being invited to come into the gospel, into Christ. And their refusal was rejected in the burning down of their city in AD 70. That was done by the Romans.

In the parable, he said the king, who is God, sent his armies and burned down their city. The Roman armies, therefore, are represented as the king's armies. And the king is God.

It's a judgment from God that is there described. That is a rather unambiguous doctrine of Scripture. God uses war.

Now, here's another proposition that Scripture uses about war. Because Israel was unique, a unique theocratic kingdom, the wars of Israel were unique in that they were carried out at the command of God and they were acts of divine retribution. They did not conform to the just war guidelines.

I'd like you to turn to Deuteronomy chapter 20. Deuteronomy chapter 20 is where God gives instructions to the Jews in the law as to how to conduct their wars. And one thing is very obvious.

The way he told them to conduct their wars had nothing to do with the just war guidelines. If anything, they violated every one of them. They killed civilians.

They were wars of aggression rather than of defense in many cases. God did not in any way sponsor what we call the just war theory. It's a theory that came from Plato and other pagan authors and was adopted by Augustine.

But in Deuteronomy chapter 20, beginning at verse 10, God said, when you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you and serve you. Now, if the city will not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it.

And when the Lord your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself. And you shall eat of the enemy's plunder, which the Lord your God gives you.

Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not cities of these nations, being not the Canaanites, but the cities of these peoples, which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive. So their wars with the Canaanites were to be wars of extermination. Other wars with other nations around them, they couldn't exterminate them.

They couldn't kill the children and the women, but they had to kill every male if the city resisted them. Now, that's not just war theory. But again, the Bible makes it very clear, Israel is not an ordinary nation.

And Israel's wars, when they were done at the command of God, were for specific divine purposes of judgment. There is no nation on the planet today that has a corresponding

status. Even the nation of Israel today is not God's theocratic kingdom, nor is America or England or any of our allies.

There's no theocratic kingdom of God today in any government. And therefore, there's no war today that corresponds in kind or in principle with the wars that we read of in the Old Testament. That is our second proposition.

The first is that God uses wars to punish nations that are wicked. The second is that because Israel was a unique theocratic kingdom, the wars of Israel were unique in that they were carried out at the command of God and were acts of divine retribution. They don't conform to just war guidelines.

A third proposition is that wars of man are sinfully motivated. So even though it is true that God uses war, the Bible indicates that the motives of the men who fight in war are not good motives. And God doesn't approve of the motives in the hearts of men who actually are the agents of these aggressive wars that he is actually using.

In Isaiah 10, he's talking about how he's going to bring Assyria, the nation of Assyria, to come judge the northern kingdom of Israel, which he did in 722 BC. He says, I will send him against an ungodly nation and against the people of my wrath, I will give him a charge to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire in the streets. Yet he, that is Assyria, does not mean so, nor does his heart think so, but it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off not a few nations.

That's in Isaiah 10, verses 6 and 7. And then in the same chapter, in verses 12 through 15, it says, Therefore, it shall come to pass when the Lord has performed all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that he will say, I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the glory of his haughty looks. For he, that is Assyria, says, By the strength of my hand, I have done it and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. Also, I have removed the boundaries of the peoples and have robbed their treasuries.

So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people. And as one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth.

And there was not one who moved his wing, nor opened his mouth, or even gave a peep. Then God says, Shall the axe boast against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up itself as if it were not wood. Now, what he's saying is Assyria was the agent and the tool of God that God used to punish Israel.

And that punishment was war and conquest. But the motivations of Assyria were not good. They weren't saying, We're serving Yahweh.

We don't like this war business, but we just need to do what God says. He wants us to be agents of judgment. That's what we're going to do.

No, Assyria had all the evil motives that any aggressor has. Just wants to conquer and destroy and rip up women and lead people away into captivity by hooks in their noses. You know, that's what the Assyrians did.

Skinned people alive, flayed them, did horrible things. Impaled them on posts. Just horrible, horrible things.

Now, God used that war to punish Israel, but He didn't like what was in the heart of Assyria. And so He said, I'm going to punish them too. They act like they've done this at their own strength.

He says, They're just tools in my hands. Shall they boast? I'm going to judge them. In James 4, verses 1 through 4, it says, Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have.

You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war, yet you have not because you ask not. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself the enemy of God. This is where wars come from. From people lusting and craving what isn't theirs and killing to get it.

He says, That's not good. Wars come from lusts that are at war in your members. Old and New Testament both indicate that those who are the agents that God even uses in warfare are not godly people and are not doing things that God, they don't have motives that he appreciates.

And therefore, they come under God's judgment too. Zechariah 1, verse 15, God said, I'm exceedingly angry with the nations of these. For I was a little angry and they helped, but with evil intent.

He's talking about how the Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem and so forth and been the agents of God's judgment against Judah. He says, I was angry at Judah a little bit and the Babylonians helped punish them, but they did it with evil intent. He says, I'm angry at them.

I'm angry at those nations that did that. James said in James 1, 20, The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. And here we have an interesting tension between two statements about the wrath of man.

In the Psalms, it says, the wrath of man shall praise him. But James says, the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. Now, the context of James is, let every

man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.

As Christians, we're commanded to not give in to wrath because doing so is not the way that God's righteousness is brought out, not by us yielding to wrath and acting in wrath. But in God's sovereign overrule of all circumstances, even the wrath of man, which is not his preferred way of being praised, even that is going to praise him. Even man's evil warfare can be used by God, whose ingenuity allows him to take any rotten thing and turn it around for good.

But the rotten thing is still rotten and God does not approve of the people and their motives for doing it. Okay, there's a couple other points. One is that the Bible teaches that the cruelty and atrocities of warfare are offensive to God.

Even though God uses war, he's offended at the atrocities and the cruelty of acts that are done by some of the armies in battle. In Amos 1.13, it says, for three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their territory. This is just love for violence and hatred that is being expressed and God hates that kind of cruelty.

One other thing is that God's ultimate intention is to eliminate war. Now, we've said that God uses warfare, but that's only because he uses everything. Everything works together.

God can make all things work together for good, to fulfill his purpose. That doesn't mean he likes war. He uses it.

He used Judas betraying Jesus to the Sanhedrin. He used the Sanhedrin doing their evil courtroom charade, where they condemned Jesus. He used Pilate.

But was he happy with any of these people? Not at all. They were all sinning. They were all doing horrible things for which they'll be judged.

But God used it. He'll use anything. He uses war, but he is not pleased with the motives of the people who go to war.

He is offended by the cruelty and atrocities of war. And his ultimate intention is for wars to end. And on that, of course, we have Isaiah chapter 2, which was alluded to by Justin Martyr.

Isaiah 2, verses 2 through 4. He shall confess in that last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and be exalted above the hills and all the nations will flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. And he will

teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations and shall rebuke many people. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nations shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore. Now, this is one of the controversial passages that some people would apply to conditions after Jesus comes back in a future millennium.

And other people, like Justin Martyr, applied it to the church age now. Whether this is talking about a future millennium or not, it expresses God's ideal. When all things are as they should be, is that when people learn the ways of God and walk in his ways, they beat their swords into plowshares and they turn their spears into pruning hooks and they don't learn to fight in war anymore.

They don't lift up sword against nation anymore. While we might say, well, this can't really be realized universally until Jesus comes back. And so the premillennialist says this must be after Jesus comes back.

That's not my eschatological position, but let me grant it. Suppose that is true. Suppose this is describing the millennium.

It nonetheless tells us that when people learn God's ways and walk in his paths, they don't learn war anymore. And therefore, even if universal peace will never be had until the millennium, we who are learning his ways and seek to walk his paths should be doing what people do who learn his ways and walk his path. So that while I actually believe this is talking about the age of the church, even if I'm wrong, and even if this is a future millennium, it is unambiguous that those who ascend Mount Zion and learn from Christ and walk in his paths are not going to be making war.

They're going to put away their swords and they're not going to learn war anymore. That is how, as I said, Justin Martyr took it. And it's not necessary for us to believe that he was an inspired interpreter.

He could be wrong. But he was one of the earliest Christians who wrote anything on this subject. And it's clear that in the early days, the Christians thought this was about us now, not the world later on.

And while it's true that nations still lift up sword against nation, they do learn war. The suggestion is that those who ascend Mount Zion don't. Those who learn from him don't do that.

Those who don't ascend Mount Zion, they may still do that. But those who go to Mount Zion and learn his ways, these things are not their activities anymore. They have

something else.

What do they do? They exchange their swords for plowshares. Their spears for pruning hooks. In other words, they replace weapons of war with implements of tillage, as Justin Martyr said.

And what that really means is the kingdom of God that we are promoting is not in the same mode it was in in the days of David or Moses or Joshua, where it was promoted by swords and spears. With the coming of Christ, that kingdom has more of a spiritual character and it's promoted by sowing seeds, cultivation, farming. A sower went out to sow.

The kingdom of God is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. An enemy came and sowed tares. Jesus likened the kingdom of God and its promotion and its advance from his time on with a peaceable occupation of cultivation, sowing, cultivation, and so forth.

And that's how the early Christians understood it. Now, whether they were right or wrong, I don't believe everything just the way they did. I think for myself and I read the Bible for myself and I don't think they were entirely right.

But I think they were closer to being right than the Christians were during the crusades. And I even think they were closer to being right than they were after Constantine. I want to look at the exact things the Bible actually does say that are relevant to this.

We'll take a break at this point and we'll come back to it and do just that.