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Just War and Our Cultural Conflict

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

We're in a battle whether we like it or not, but how we fight matters.

In this episode, Kevin reads from the third of a series of articles for WORLD Opinions on how to think about Christianity and politics.

Transcript

[Music] Hello and welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. This is Kevin DeYoung. I'm reading today an article just posted on WORLD Opinion's page entitled Just War and Our Cultural Conflict.

You may remember that I'm doing a multi-part series addressing six questions related to Christianity and politics. In part one, I asked why is it so hard to talk about politics? In part two, I asked our Christians to focus on politics and this here is part three of six. And this question is, should Christians be engaged in the culture war? The answer to the question, should Christians be engaged in the culture war, is quite simple.

You are whether you mean to be or not. For starters, the Bible does not hesitate to describe the Christian life with warfare imagery. We do not wage war according to the flesh, but we are engaged in warfare, 2 Corinthians 10-3.

We destroy strongholds, verse 4, take prisoners, verse 5, punish rebels, verse 6. A reference, by the way, to discipline in the church, not churches wielding the sword. Christian discipleship is a battle. More specifically, there is no doubt that the American people and American institutions are engaged in deep disagreement about the fundamental realities of human nature, sexual differentiation, the definition of marriage, the definition of personhood, the purpose of government, the role of natural rights, and the conception of the good that's true and the beautiful.

Talk to parents with children in our public schools or talk to conservative Christians in academia or talk to faithful believers in many of our Fortune 500 companies and see if we aren't enmeshed in profound ideological conflict. James Davison Hunter was already

writing in 1992 about "Culture Wars" the title of his book and "The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America." And that was before Obergefell, transgender cabinet officials and the Global Ubiquity of Pride Month. Helms deep is under assault whether we care to man the ramparts or not.

I understand the aversion to the language of culture war, it has only negative connotations to most people. And yet the reality of the thing itself cannot be avoided. The Lord is a warrior, right? Exodus 15-3.

The opposite of culture war is not culture peace, but culture capitulation. There is a conflagration of competing visions in this country and, with apologies to Billy Joel, we didn't start the fire. The cultural upheaval of the last 50 years has not been led by conservative Christians intent on reshaping America.

So why is "culture warrior" an epithet only dished out to the right? When I was in college, I had to read Tom Sine's book "Seas Fire, Searching for Sanity in America's Culture War." It was a third-way approach that aimed its weapons mainly at the political right and ended up with solutions that were mainly aligned with the political left. Likewise, Jim Wallace's Bush era bestseller "God's Politics, Why the Right Gets It Wrong" and "The Left Doesn't Get It" was all about how conservatives hijack the language of faith and how a progressive social agenda mirrored the concerns of Jesus. I have no problem with Christians or anyone else for that matter, making the case for progressive political principles and policies.

But then let's be honest that we are against "culture war" only because we'd like to see the other side stop fighting. Of course, if Christians are to be engaged in the culture war, we must do so as Christians. The just war tradition has not only stipulated the reasons one may go to war, use Ed Bellum.

It is also stipulated how that war is to be fought, use in bellow. Even in a war, the ends do not justify every kind of means. There are a number of crucial commitments we must not forget.

Don't forget to make arguments. Elections matter, but the aim must never be merely political. We believe in the power of truth.

Paul's strategy was to destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and to take every thought captive to obey Christ 2 Corinthians 10-5. We must reason with our opponents even if no one else does. Don't forget to fight in the right way.

The principles of use in bellow remind us that our fighting must be proportional. We do not resort to scorched earth tactics. We must also distinguish between combatants and noncombatants.

We do not fire at someone just because he lives in the country of our enemy. Likewise, we should remember that a war has many parts and is fought in many ways. There are supply lines.

There is diplomacy. There are moments of rest when the troops eat ice cream in here from Bob Hope. Culture war does not mean non-stop shootout at the OK Corral.

And then finally, don't forget that the culture is not ultimate. The cosmic battles between the snake crusher and the serpent, Genesis 3.15, between the woman and the dragon, Revelation 12, we could win the culture war and still lose what really matters. Which is another way of saying, the church and its beatific message of Christ crucified and risen for sinners is ultimately more important than the culture.

The one is not irrelevant to the other or disinterested in the other, but only the church will last forever and only the church is promised to be built by Jesus himself. We cannot avoid cultural conflict to which we are called. Truths about creation are in the crosshairs.

Surrender and appeasement are not the way of Christian faithfulness. But neither is being a culture warrior if that means giving up on the centrality of Christ crucified or giving up on our own integrity. Fight the good fight and be sure to keep the faith.

That's just war in our cultural conflict from world opinions. Check it out online.

[Music]

(dramatic music)

[buzzing]