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## How Can a Soldier Reconcile Killing His Enemies with God's Command to Love?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how a soldier in combat can reconcile killing his enemy with God's command to love our enemies and whether or not it's okay to pray for angels to be with and protect people.

- \* How ought a soldier in combat to conduct himself in order to reconcile the directive to kill his enemy with God's commandment to love and do good to those who hurt him?
- \* What do you think about praying for angels to be with and protect people?

### Transcript

[Music] [Bell] I'm Amy Hall and welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. Greg! Amy! I'm ready to answer some questions! Good morning! Yeah, the answer is yes. Okay, great.

Let's start with a question from Caleb. How ought a soldier in combat conduct himself in order to reconcile the directive to kill his enemy and God's commandment to love and do good to those who hurt them? Well, this is a very good question and it's a little bit difficult to answer because what we're talking about here is a moral dilemma. We have a moral dilemma which is you are faced with one of two options or maybe three, usually it's two, that's why I call it a dilemma.

And each of the options in isolation from the other is morally obligatory to two, but the circumstance is such that both are confronted at the same time. And they are contrary to each other. Now we have an obligation to love our enemy, but there is another obligation and that has to do with appropriate self-defense.

And this, by the way, this concept is exemplified everywhere in Scripture, everywhere, not just the Old Testament. God sent Israel into war. God directed Israel to do battle against their enemies.

God arranged specific battle plans for specific battles. And just as an aside, what's interesting is that God in many cases said, you go into battle and I will give you victory. But then either God gave battle plans or the commander in question, maybe David, arranged certain military circumstances to be effective.

So there was no inconsistency between God guaranteeing an end and humans taking responsibility, taking responsible action to see that that end is accomplished. The broad principle here though is that here is God commanding military action, which means there is an appropriate place for not only pre-emptive action, but also defensive action. Or I should put it in the other way because defensive seems more obvious.

On the defense and also preemptively acting first in certain circumstances, now when you decide when one decides to do that, it's not always easy. And there are a lot of other contingencies that are involved, but let me just lay down the fact that Scripture is clear on this. And this is especially the case when authorized government agencies are involved.

When I say authorized, I mean authorized by God because it is clear that Scripture ordains the purpose of government, foundationally the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right. Okay, that is the foundational concern, not redistribution of wealth, not helping people out, get better things in life, etc, etc, etc, etc. But this basic thing, consequently, that's what God has ordained.

And of course there's a lot of elements in government, now it's not that way, where it's the punishment of good, those who do good, and the praise of those who do wrong. But again, that's another issue, but I just wanted to bring it in because this is all part of the interplay of factors that we have to keep in mind when we make decisions like this. So the question then needs to be for any individual, do they think the actions, okay, let me back up another step.

So therefore, the use of lethal force by an appropriately designated government agency is in principle, not only morally acceptable, but morally required. Okay, it's part of submitting. Okay, now of course that has limitations, and even our laws acknowledge that.

So you fight in a battle, but you don't shoot prisoners, for example, because that's not a justified use of lethal force. The police force can exercise violent action towards other individuals, and even use lethal force. But those things are all managed so that the circumstances justify the proper use of that force.

And when that's exceeded, then there's legal action, all right? So this is all just to establish that these, the police and military are appropriate expressions of government punishing evil doers and praising those who do good. And of course, I guess implicitly also looking after the flock, so to speak, that has been entrusted to them. Okay, and this

is why we are to submit to the authorities above us.

Lots of New Testament stuff on that. And incidentally, Jesus never overturned that by saying turn the other cheek. This is not what Jesus was talking about and just making an observation.

When you could turn to John chapter 18, I think it is, when Jesus was on trial and he was slapped, he did not turn the other cheek. He said, if I have done some wrong, then bear witness to the wrong, but if I did know wrong, then why did you slap me? In other words, he was holding the authorities to account for their actions. All right, he didn't simply turn the other cheek.

What that actually meant in Matthew, the servant of the mountain, it's another issue, but it certainly wasn't public appropriate public use of force, which is what we're talking about. So this all just kind of laying a conceptual foundation for answering this question. Incidentally, Paul himself said, if I am, I think it's, Paul or Peter wrote that Caesar does not bear the sword for nothing affirming the use of lethal power by the government as legitimate principle.

Paul also said, if I have done anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die or whatever. I'll submit to that, but I haven't done anything worthy of death. That's his point.

Okay, all this to say, laying that foundation, a soldier operating in general in a war and a battle is not in violation of the individual commandment to love one's enemy, which is an interpersonal kind of thing. And though it may influence the manner in which he carries out his responsibilities as a soldier, and there are also going to be limitations in the way he uses lethal force out in battle. Okay.

By the way, those limitations are very hard to figure out. The whole idea, I'm a student of warfare to some degree, especially the Second World War, the whole idea of strategic bombing was controversial and we, that is you bomb cities, not just military targets. But what it did is it brought a swifter into the war and especially in the case of Japan.

So sometimes very, very gruesome things that would in isolation not be justified can be morally justified and even be argued as morally obligatory when you look at the bigger picture of the greater harm principle. Now, there are people who disagree with that. I understand and this is why these kinds of things have to adjudicate on individual bases.

But a soldier, I think, fighting in a conflict that appears from his perspective and his own judgment to be a legitimate conflict. That would be especially a defensive conflict like the Ukrainians are fighting now as opposed to an offensive conflict like the Russians are fighting right now. A legitimate conflict, there is no, in my view, there is no problem with a person taking part in that.

And sometimes the confusion has to do with the commandment. The confusion is people have misunderstood the commandment. It does not say they'll not kill.

It says they'll not murder. And there is a distinction in meaning between killing and murder in Hebrew just as there is in English. And the command there in the 10 commandments is not to take life in an unjustified way.

It is not an absolute prohibition of taking human life. If that were the case, then the entire Old Testament would be a huge contradiction to that commandment. Curiously, the command about capital punishment comes in Genesis chapter 9 verse 6. I mean, very, very early.

If man sheds man blood, then by man his blood shall be shed for in the image of God, God created man. So there's a rationale where the image bearers, you take the life of an image bearer, you sacrifice your own. It's an egregious offense.

Anyway, I've said a lot to kind of lay a broad foundation there, Amy. I'm sure you have things to add. Well, I just wanted to... Well, first thing I wanted to point out is if anyone is interested in finding that chapter, because I do think this is the key, it's Romans 13 that talks about the government bearing the sword for a purpose as a minister of God, as an institution ordained by God for that purpose of keeping order and protecting its citizens.

So that's in Romans 13. And I think this really is the key to everything, because if you are an individual running around as a vigilante, there's a reason why that is frowned upon. That's wrong, because you do not have the authority to do that.

It's the government who has the authority to do that, and that's what changes everything. I can't imprison someone, but the government can rightly put someone in jail. The difference is you're part of the institution that was created by God for that purpose.

So how do you reconcile the directive to kill the enemy and God's commandment to love and do good? Well, that's actually brought to mind. I was just listening to Screwtay Bladders. And one of the things that Screwtay says in there is he's all upset because... Explain the background for people who may not understand this is a C.S. Lewis piece.

Very cleverly written Amy's chuckling because of the foil that is used to make Lewis use us to make his theological points. So the Screwtay Bladders is supposedly written from a demon's point of view who's trying to tempt someone, and he's giving advice to the tempter of this man. It's devil's discipleship.

Yes. It's such a great book. But anyway, at one point in there, he was upset because he says the English will fight against the Germans, and then they'll turn right around and they'll give tea and crumpets to the first prisoner of war that they come across.

So as individuals, they were taking care of the prisoners of war while at the same time they were fighting the war as part of the larger institution of the government. So I think there are ways to work that out as your individual actions caring for people as you can and fulfilling this purpose of bearing the sword in the way that you can. Which by the way, it was not the case with the Third Reich.

They had a very different way of dealing with prisoners, although the military prisoners fared much better than political prisoners. But anyway. So that's a perfect example.

Your Christianity needs to come out in both of those ways, in justice and also in mercy and in appropriate ways. There's an interesting movie made quite a while where Tom Hanks is called the Green Mile. And the character Hanks plays as a prison guard.

And part of the idea that is developed there is the treatment that prisoners should receive while they're incarcerated. Incarceration is the punishment. But that doesn't mean that one can take it a step further and the guards in charge then treat that person in an inhumane way.

And Tom Hanks is the character who treats the prisoners in a humane way. And you see that contrast that's being developed. There's some weird things about that movie.

There's a supernatural element. But in any event, that issue is, I think, nicely contrasted there. The other thing I want to mention is sometimes people will say vengeance is mine.

It's not yours. It's mine. Sayeth the Lord kind of thing.

Well, that's true. In other words, the basis for executing justice is God. Now, how does God do that? Does He do it immediately or immediately? Does He do it Himself or does He have someone else do it? Well, the answer is both.

In the long term, it's immediate. That's Revelation's chapter 20. That's the final judgment.

I'm sorry, it's immediate. In the long term, it's immediate. God does it Himself.

But until then, in the context of human civilization, God accomplishes His vengeance, justice in a immediate way that is through agencies that He has ordained to accomplish that end. And this is what Amy is talking about in Romans chapter 13. 13.

But actually, Greg, the passage you just mentioned where Paul quotes the idea that vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord, that's actually immediately before the passage on the government bearing the sword. Oh, interesting. So what he says is that do not take your own revenge.

Do not act as an individual to take your revenge because God will bring about justice and then He moves right into the government hearing up that justice. The immediate means,

right? So you see both of those things right there in chapters 12 and 13. You know, I'm glad we got to talk about this because there's a broader principle here, and that is rightly dividing the truth.

And sometimes people will zero in on a line or two. And then, in a certain sense, absolutize that line in disregard for everything else. And maybe in disregard for everything else because they don't know everything else.

So vengeance is mine. And then they make this radical, pacifistic application of it without further reading, for example, in Romans 13 that God has ordained institutions to accomplish his appropriate vengeance in the temporal world. Or they'll misread Exodus chapter 20, where it talks about the commandments won against murder and read it as kill.

I've seen this in so many movies. It just blows my mind. And I don't know where people get this idea that that's what it says because it doesn't even say that.

But it shows the importance of always being consistently fed in a thorough way by scripture. So you have a balanced understanding of the full council of God on these kinds of things. Let's go into a question from Mattless M. What do you think about praying for angels to be with and protect people? And then he puts in parentheses, guardian angels.

Well, I don't have any problem with it. I mean, right off the top of my head. And in fact, I've prayed that in a more general sense.

Scripture does, first of all, angels are real. And I'm just as an aside, I didn't say we believe that angels are real. I said angels are real.

In other words, this is a conviction I have about the nature of reality. I am not qualifying it by saying according to Christianity or my particular belief is because what that is doing is subtly relativizing the claim I'm making. Well, this is the claim that is part of the Christian worldview.

And of course, it is part of the Christian worldview, but the Christian worldview is the view I hold. And so do many of you. That's true.

In the factual sense of the word, as I like to add true in the way gravity is true. Okay. And so therefore, I don't want to somehow take the stuffing out of my own point here by identifying it as a personal belief.

It is a belief I have, but the belief I have is that it's so and the belief could be mistaken. But I think choice of words in our culture right now on this kind of thing is important. Okay.

So the supernatural world, the non physical world exists. There are personal entities that

occupy that world. And some of them are called angels.

And angels are angolos in the Greek. These are messengers. They function to do particular tasks for God.

And one of those tasks is protection. And we see this in the Old Testament and we also see this less reference in the New Testament. One of the book of Hebrews, I think is where we see this reference to the children having angels that guard over them.

Now, there's no development of that theology at all. It's just an acknowledgement of that. And there's another mention, and I'm not sure exactly which ones in Hebrews, but the other mention of angels in the New Testament, where it's referring to the role of angels is that we should exercise hospitality because sometimes we entertain angels on a where.

So we don't realize that they're angels because they appear as human. And in the book of Acts, there are a number of times where angels were employed to accomplish some task on behalf of the Christians and rescue them, for example, from jail or deliver a message. And so this isn't the nudge nudge hint hint kind of message.

These are actual supernatural manifestations of angelic beings that are communicating something to the disciples in those cases where that's the circumstance. So there angels are real and they have a protective role. Now, if this is what they do, I don't see why there's any reason we can't ask for God to aid us in that way.

Now, again, God is our protector, but God acts immediately most of the time. I was thinking about this driving into the show this morning and I'm praying about it because there are concerns in my own life of how is it that God meets our needs immediately and how do they meet our does he meet our needs immediately. And as a good example, when the Jews were hungry in the wanderings, God gave them food directly from him.

That's manna. That was an immediate provision. It fell from the sky.

But when we're hungry, that isn't the way it works out. When we're hungry, God provides in this, not that God can't do that anymore, but in our circumstances, God provides immediately through others usually. There can be exceptions, obviously, and I'm sure there are.

But most of the time God answers our prayers through the agency of others. And therefore, though God is our protector, the question then is how does he protect us? And one of the ways that God protects his people is by using angels as warriors of protection. Daniel 9 has manifestations of this with Michael on behalf of Israel.

And so once again, I don't see any reason not to do that, not to make that request. And in fact, I have made the request to myself. And I have, to be specific, I pray that God

would surround my home with his angels.

That he would protect us from the powers of darkness. And every Christian family that is walking with Christ, whose purpose, parental purpose is to have that family make a difference for the kingdom, is going to be a subject of spiritual attack. And that takes many forms.

But in light of the fact that we are targets as followers of Christ, and the more visibility and more effectiveness that one has in the kingdom, the bigger a target they are, by the way, because we're targets, we're going to be targeted. And this is why we pray for protection. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil, literally.

It isn't just evil. It's from the evil. What's the evil? Well, it's the evil one, probably.

When I pray it, I pray it all around. I say, from the evil Lord, protect us from the evil, from the evil one, from any evil that would come to us. I try to cover all the possibilities.

But one means I pray that God would protect us from the evil, is through angelic beings that could provide protection. Here's a verse in Hebrews 114, Greg, that describes the work the angels do for us. It just says, are they not all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? So they are sent out to serve us and protect us.

So I agree with you, Greg. I have prayed the same thing. The one thing I would say, though, is do not pray to the angels.

That's when you start to cross a line. Yeah, that's right. God is the sender.

They are sent out as messengers. God is the one who is at the switchboard. So that's a very good distinction, Amy.

Thank you. And as long as you keep that distinction in mind, I don't think there's any problem. By the way, but if you cross that line, that is a very dangerous one.

That is a, I'm so glad you mentioned, didn't even occur to me, but I just want to reemphasize this, that you do not talk to, to you do not pursue conversations with any spiritual being. Okay, that would include angels or demons or dead people. All right.

All right. This is like the, and this was a commandment given very early in the law. Okay, it's called necromancy.

You don't call on the dead. This is bad because it's dangerous. Anyway, enough said on that, maybe.

And God is great. I mean, that's the whole point of this beginning of Hebrews, right? Jesus is better than all of these other things. So why would you waste your time? I mean,



beyond it just being bad and wrong, you worship God and we speak to God.

So, yeah. Which by the way is a, is a, um, implicit evidence for the deity of Christ because we are not to, to pray to these others, but prayer is given an honor and, oh, be since worship given to Jesus himself as God. Well, thank you for your questions.

Please keep sending those questions on Twitter with the hashtag SCR ask. This is Amy Hall and Greg Kogel for Stand to Reason.

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