

## Chapter 11a – National Defense

Is use of the military by the government for national defense biblical? When, how, moral restrictions?

### 1. Biblical Teaching

a. *Governments are responsible to defend their nations from attacks by other nations.*

- Review, Ch. 3: *Peter* - civil government is intended “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Peter 2:14). *Paul* - the government is authorized by God to “bear the sword” (Rom. 13:4) so that it can be “a terror” to bad conduct (v. 3), and it also “carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (v. 4). When the ruler uses superior force—even deadly force—against evil, he is “God’s servant for your good” (v. 4).
  - i. A command to protect citizens against 1 villain from *within*, no doubt, obligates to protect against armies of villains from *without*.
  - ii. OT Narratives: Promise of God (Deut. 28) to bless Israel in defense of enemies when Israel is obedient. When disobedient, judgment came in the form of defeat (Judg. 2:13-15, 2:16–18; 1 Sam. 17; 2 Sam. 5:17–25; and numerous other examples).
  - iii. 10 Commandments, Ex. 20:13 – *rātsakh* / *murder*: the unlawful killing of another human being and also “causing human death through carelessness or negligence.” Never used of soldiers in war throughout the OT.
  - iv. In fact, in the OT, God Himself commands Israel to go to war on numerous occasions (ex. Deut. 20:1).
  - v. In the NT, soldiers are not condemned for being soldiers in the Roman army. John the Baptist tells them “Be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14), and Cornelius, a Roman centurion came to faith and was baptized as a believer in Jesus with no indication that there was anything morally wrong with being a soldier (see Acts 10:1, 44–48; see also Luke 14:31).

### 2. “Just War” Ethic

a. *Argues that a war is morally right (or “just”) when it meets certain criteria and is conducted within certain moral restrictions.*

-CRITERIA:

- i. *just cause* (is the reason for going to war a morally right cause, such as defense of a nation? cf. Rev. 19:11).
- ii. *competent authority* (has the war been declared not simply by a renegade band within a nation but by a recognized, competent authority within the nation? cf. Rom. 13:1)
- iii. *comparative justice* (it should be clear that the actions of the enemy are morally wrong, and the motives and actions of one’s own nation in going to war are, in comparison, morally right; cf. Rom. 13:3)
- iv. *right intention* (is the purpose of going to war to protect justice and righteousness rather than simply to rob and pillage and destroy another nation? cf. Prov. 21:2)
- v. *last resort* (have all other reasonable means of resolving the conflict been exhausted? cf. Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:18)
- vi. *probability of success* (is there a reasonable expectation that the war can be won? cf. Luke 14:31)
- vii. *proportionality of projected results* (will the good results that come from a victory in a war be significantly greater than the harm and loss that will inevitably come with pursuing the war? cf. Rom. 12:21 with 13:4)
- viii. *right spirit* (is the war undertaken with great reluctance and sorrow at the harm that will come rather than simply with a “delight in war,” as in Ps. 68:30?)

-MORAL RESTRICTIONS:

- i. *Proportionality in the use of force* (no greater destruction should be caused than is needed to win the war; cf. Deut. 20:10–12)
- ii. *discrimination between combatants and noncombatants* (insofar as it is feasible in the successful pursuit of a war, is adequate care being taken to prevent harm to noncombatants? cf. Deut. 20:13–14, 19–20)
- iii. *avoidance of evil means* (will captured or defeated enemies be treated with justice and compassion, and are one’s own soldiers being treated justly in captivity? cf. Ps. 34:14)
- iv. *good faith* (is there a genuine desire for restoration of peace and eventually living in harmony with the attacking nation? cf. Matt. 5:43–44; Rom. 12:18)

### 3. Pacifism (advocates: Jim Wallis, Shane Claiborne, Chris Haw, others)

a. *Holds that it is always wrong for Christians to use military force & thus it is wrong for Christians to participate in military combat. A yet stronger view is that it is morally wrong for anyone to participate in the military and that all such violence is always morally wrong.*

See some responses to this view in ch. 1 under the “All Government is Demonic” (advocate: Greg Boyd) section (pp. 36–44).

-Arguments commonly used to support pacifism:

- i. Jesus commanded us to turn the other cheek (in Matt. 5:39)
- ii. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39)
- iii. Engaging in military combat involves failure to trust God
- iv. The use of violence always begets further violence, and pacifism should be adopted to stop that vicious cycle.

-Responses to the above arguments (i responds i, ii to ii, etc.):

- i. Matt. 5:39 does not apply to civil gov't. Explicit teaching on civil gov't is in Romans & says that gov't should "bear the sword" to oppose evildoers and execute God's wrath on the wrongdoer (Rom. 13:4). Also, in Lk 22:36, Jesus actually commanded his followers to carry a sword (a weapon for defense).
- ii. If we truly love our neighbors then we will be willing even to go to war to protect them from evil aggressors who are attacking the nation. God commanded *both* love for one's neighbor and going to war. Jesus quotes "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" from Lev. 19:18 in the OT. Therefore, it must be consistent for God to command *both* things, and the one command should not be used to nullify the other. (see 2 Sam 18:1-33: David both loves and goes to war against Absalom, his son).
- iii. Christians have no right to tell others to "trust in God" for things that are different from what the Bible teaches. Rom. 13:1-4: God authorizes gov'ts to use deadly to oppose evil. Pacifist argument = disobey Rom. 13, seek God's protection anyway.
  - According to Jim Wallis: Military reliance is foreign policy based on fear. Military response to terrorists is based on anger and vengeance. Nations like the U.S. shouldn't act alone and use "unilateral action" to defend themselves, but should depend on a "world court to weigh facts and make judgments, with effective multi-national law enforcement," & depend on a much more powerful "international law" and "global police forces." (*Unless otherwise noted, all further points below are responses to this position:*)
  - A desire to depend on military action (under God's guidance) is not a wrongful attitude, God has authorized it (Rom 13)
  - Many Christian soldiers trust in God to give success *while obeying him* by using the military defense that he has appointed.
  - As to world courts & enforcement: Wishful thinking. No such governing authority has ever existed. Foolishness to depend on something that has never existed to save us from a terrorist threat that we are facing at this very minute.
  - Dependence on a world gov't to keep peace = *relinquishment of national sovereignty*, and *servitude & domination* from other leaders. Better to trust God and use the means that He designed (Rom 13) in the use of national military power.
  - "Violence always begets more violence" = *Untrue*. Deadly force used by police in restraining a murder brings that murderers violence to an end. As to military action: stopped Adolf Hitler, stopped the North Koreans from taking and harming S. Korea, stopped the Confederate armies of the American Civil War from establishing a separate state which would allow slavery.
  - The phrase "violence always begets more violence" is misleading. Uses the same word, "violence," to refer to two very different things—the morally good use of deadly force to stop evildoers and the morally wrong use of force to carry out attacks on innocent people. A better slogan: "Just governments should use superior force to stop criminal violence against innocent people." Or even shorter, "Superior force stops criminal violence."
  - Wallis argues: diplomatic pressure is the best weapon against terrorists & could have been used for regime change in Iraq.
  - Response to above: "*could have*" is not a valid argument. We "*could have*" waited for some future day when Int'l Police forces would be available, "*could have*" waited for the Iraqi people to rise and overthrow, on their own, a brutal dictator in charge of one of the largest armies in the world. The fact is: none of these "*could haves*" happened. What did happen was the superior military force of the U.S.
  - This kind of "history could have been different" argument is common in pacifist literature. It claims, "If the events of history had turned out differently, they would support my case." But that is simply saying, "If the facts were different, they would support my case." That is not a persuasive argument. It is merely wishful thinking.
- iv. The logic of pacifism leads ultimately to a total surrender to the most evil of governments, who will stop at nothing to use their power to oppress others.
- v. For all of the reasons stated above, pacifism is neither a logical nor a biblical position for Christians to adopt.

All of the class lessons and outlines are posted on the class website [www.christianessentialsbc.com](http://www.christianessentialsbc.com).

To order CDs, e-mail [tech@christianessentialsbc.com](mailto:tech@christianessentialsbc.com). Someone is also available in the sound booth before and after the class.