

Loving Enemies in Time of War

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It is clear from Matthew 24:6 that until the end of the age will be “wars and rumors of wars.” Believing the words of Jesus in this section of Scripture, the question to be answered by his followers is not whether or not war should occur, but what should be their actions in light of it and their potential involvement in it. Though the United States is at war at the current time, as Christians, we should not base our worldview on current events or patriotic rhetoric, but instead entirely on the teachings of the one we have confessed as Lord as well as the reality of GOD’s soon coming, literal and political Kingdom.

Norman Geisler suggests three ethical positions on war that have been adopted by Christians. “First there is *activism*, which holds that Christian ought to participate in any war engaged in by his government because government is ordained by God. Second there is *pacifism*, which contends that Christians should never participate in war to the point of killing others because God has commanded men never to take the lives of others. Finally, there is *selectivism*, which argues that Christians should participate in some wars – the just ones. To do otherwise is to refuse to follow the just course commanded by God¹.” These views tend to summarize the opinions of churchgoers today, however, there seem to be flaws within two of them.

Activism bases its position on the idea of God ordaining the governments that involve their nations in war. Romans 13:1 tell us “every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which

¹ Geisler, Norman L. Christian Ethics – Opinions and Issues. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids. C. 2002 page 215.

exist are established by God.” This view however misunderstands the difference between GOD establishing the government and GOD endorsing the actions of that government. Does GOD agree with the San Francisco city government, which openly endorses and conducted homosexual marriage? Does GOD agree with the Islamic state government legislation in Sudan, which forbids Christianity? It is clear from the Scriptures that GOD has been involved in establishing as well as destroying kingdoms and nations throughout history, but what is even clearer is that GOD desires His people to obey His ordinances above the ordinances of man². Thus, simply because a government is at war, it does not mean that a Christian should join the fight.

Similarly, selectivism is also based on non-Biblical principles to support its position. During the early years of Christianity, Christians were heavily persecuted by the Jewish and Roman authorities but “in 312 AD, the Roman general Constantine conquered the city of Rome and claimed that the God of Christianity had given him the victory...Constantine declared an end to the persecution of Christians and even granted them a favored status within the Roman empire³.” As a result it was the same Roman army who persecuted Christians now being a Roman army only recruiting Christian soldiers. As time progressed and followers of Christ began to question this situation in light of Christ’s commands, Augustine developed the “Just War Theory.” Augustine’s theory was based on certain circumstances in which Christians could participate in war. For example, “Christians could participate in warfare “only if it had been declared by a proper and legitimate authority, only if there was a just cause, only if it was a last resort, with a clear sense of moderation, and soldiers should never kill non-combatants. Finally,

² See the records of Daniel’s prayers, and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah

Christians soldiers should kill their enemies with love in their hearts⁴.” Though there seems to be some practicality in this view, for Christ following disciples, it leaves some unfortunate dilemmas.

“From the perspective of the nation-state, every war in which it chooses to participate is just⁵.” Two nations fighting each other could realistically be both proscribing to this view. Which nation would be the one truly justified? Also, this would create the situation where Christians could be killed by other Christians! If two Christians ascribe to this view, they would feel justified in killing their enemies, which could be their brothers in Christ. “Inscribed on the belt buckles of the German soldiers in Hitler’s army were the words *Gott mi Uns* (God with us), a conviction shared with equal certainty by the Catholic and Protestant soldiers of the Allied forces as each fought to kill the other. Vast cemeteries in the United States and Europe are filled with the gravestones of Christians who were killed by their fellow believers, each claiming to be engaged in a war that somehow fit the criteria of the Just War theory⁶.” Also, even with the technological advancements of the last century, the challenge to not kill non-combatants remains. Most nations are unwilling to submit to the principles of this theory in actual practice. Finally, it is important for Christians to question the source of this theory. Roth suggests that “its strongest appeal is not to Scripture but to common sense – to an innate notion of just and the biological urge for self-preservation. We must allow Jesus’ words to dictate our views and thus our actions, not the words of emperors and empires.

³ Roth, John D. Choosing Against War – A Christian View. Good Books, Intercourse, PA. c. 2002. Page 45-46.

⁴ Ibid, page 47

⁵ Ibid, page 48

⁶ Ibid, page 48

Both of these views seem to have some Christian-like aspects but Christian-like and Christian are vastly different. Views such as these ignore the most important statement of Christ regarding how he desires us to deal with those who are our enemies – “I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you⁷.” Jesus asks his disciples to be “gentle, merciful, and makers of peace⁸.” Paul consents to the words of Christ when he writes to the Romans “never pay back evil for evil to anyone, never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good⁹.” These words are not ambiguous, nor vague, they leave no room for compromising.

Though war may abound in our world today, and will continue until the end of the age, the duty of a Christian during wartime is to follow the commands of their Lord as they would in times of peace as well. Loving ones enemies cannot include the thought of participating in the very event which calls one to do evil to them, and with this thought, to kill ones enemy, in any situation would be complete ignorance and disobedience to Jesus Christ’s words. As citizens of the Kingdom of GOD, we long for our Lord to return and take over the nations of the world. Though at the time of Jesus’ return there most certainly be resistance from the nations, he will quickly and swiftly put them under his authority. At that time, an age of unparalleled peace and justice will begin. Those who have faith in this Hope (as one can clearly see from our forefather’s of faith from

⁷ Luke 6:27-28, NASB, also see Matthew 5:44

⁸ Matthew 5:5, 7, 9, NASB

Hebrews 11), no longer consider themselves citizens of the nations which they live in, but rather, “strangers and pilgrims.” We can gladly proclaim that in the nation we long to reside in the nations “will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war¹⁰.” Where we come from, we learn the ways of war no more. As a result of this hope, our duty in time of war, as in time of peace, is to proclaim to the nations as Ambassador’s for the King the gospel of peace, and of reconciliation, making peace between God and man. We cannot disobey our Lord’s command to love our enemies. If someone attacks the nation in which a Christian lives, the relationship that that individual or nation now has with that Christian is that of an enemy. What then is the response of a Christian to that enemy? Jesus has much to say. Let us decide to listen to his words and uncompromisingly obey the command to love our enemies.

“Human beings were not meant to kill each other. But thus far, they always have, and indeed confessing Christians have constantly killed each other in time of war, thus denying the very sign by which Jesus said the true believers can be recognized – by the love they have for one another. Apparently churchgoers (and Augustine) are oblivious to that important distinguishing mark of the true faith. They continue apparently to be quite untroubled by a “church” which allows its members to kill, in time of war, brothers and sisters of ostensibly also belong to the body of Christ. Thus the church has continued to practice ‘suicide,’ the destruction of its own body. Until Christians take a stand against the use of lethal violence they will continue to kill both enemies and fellow believers in

⁹ Romans 12:17, 19-21, NASB

¹⁰ Isaiah 2:4, NASB

other lands¹¹.” This issue of living at peace with man and loving our enemies is not a small issue to be debated, but rather a command of our Lord which all those who are his must follow.

¹¹ Buzzard, Anthony. “Focus on the Kingdom” Volume 6, No. 8, May 2004.
<http://www.focusonthe kingdom.org/68.htm>