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War, Violence and The Christian

Selected Passages

Keywords: War, Violence, End Times, Israel, Prophecy, Sin

PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: In light of the massive amount of violence occurring in Israel and the Gaza Strip, we take time to consider the source and causes of war and how does a Christian begin to approach a very complicated subject. Many opinions flow on this subject but not a lot of biblical thinking. We seek to begin to remedy this.

I. Introduction.

- A. Open bible to Genesis 3.
- B. Just a few days ago a major attack in Israel occurred and was played out for all the world via the internet.
- C. Add to this whole thing is a sudden rise in what is starting to be formally called Christian Nationalism.
- D. Add to the mix that the way you view the Jew and the nation of Israel will greatly impact how you view the current fighting in Israel right now. The roots of it go deep into the heart of theology and as a result you have Christians who cheer either side as a result of convictions from their theology.
- E. So, what is a Christian to do or think?
- F. Some questions to start you thinking:
 1. What do you think should be the response of the USA toward the Russian invasion? How does that thought differ when you think about what is happening right now in Israel and the Gaza Strip?
 2. How often, as you have discussed/debated the war, did the gospel of Jesus Christ come into play?
 3. In any discussions on war did you find yourself describing your view of the war from a biblically informed perspective or was it more politically/ideologically motivated?

II. The reality of War:

War is violent and terrible. During the American Civil War in 1862, Confederate troops held a low ridge called Marye's Heights near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Union troops sent to assault

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Marye's Heights had to cross exposed ground. Wave after wave of Union troops charged but were cut down before they could reach the Confederate lines. Over 12,000 were slain. Watching the battle, Gen. Robert E. Lee turned to Gen. James Longstreet, whose men were holding Marye's Heights, "It is well that war is so terrible; else we would grow too fond of it" (Fadiman, ed., *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes* 348).

- A. I believe that most will agree that war is not desirable in the sense of the suffering and death that occurs.
- B. Yet, war, nonetheless exists. And as Christians we need to have a perspective on why it takes place and if a Christian should be involved in it. What if the fears of many about the type of people coming across our borders comes true? What if in that mass of humanity are terror cells?
- C. The point in all of this is that there is no consensus on war for those who love Jesus.
- D. So today I want us to consider the reasons that war exists and why it is not a "clean" issue.

III. Why War?

- A. Because of Sin.
 - 1. This is obvious, but so obvious that it is often forgotten, or downplayed by Christians.
 - 2. More importantly it is almost completely downplayed or misunderstood by non-Christians. If you want to do a deep dive spend several hours reading online various views of the cause and source of evil. It is the stuff philosophers love to talk endlessly about but usually without any real answers.
 - a. Christian Science's founder Mary Baker Eddy:
 - b. Jewish thought:

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c. Hinduism:

d. Nietzsche:

e. Manichaeism:

f. Modern theories:

3. Genesis 3:1-19 tells us the story of sin entering into humanity and creation.
 - a. Prior to that moment in time there was peace or to use a Hebrew term that is much richer, *shalom*, existed. The term itself is a freedom of disturbance both outside yourself in the environment and inside your soul.
 - b. After that moment, this all changed. Sin became a presence and power that pervades the whole of the universe.

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4. Genesis 4:3-10 has the murder of Abel by Cain.
5. In Genesis 4:23 an offspring of Cain (Lamech).
6. By Chapter 6 the description of the world of humanity was that “evil was great upon the earth.” The result was the Flood.

As one man said, “The one who takes original sin seriously knows that life is lived on a descending escalator and that it is a tough job even to stand still” (Wenham, *The Goodness of God*, p. 98).

7. After the Flood God gave Noah an interesting command in Genesis 9:6 and it is very important that you learn this.
 - a. Notice that there was an assumption made by God:
 - b. What was the response to blood being shed?
 - c. There is, according to this passage, a lawful and unlawful way to shed blood—or kill.
 - d. So we need to make sure that we keep that distinction in our minds. The most common argument against capital punishment is that it is still killing and all killing is evil.
8. Transition: Though we live in a world where war exists, it is a foreign entity that comes as a result of sin.
 - a. Romans 5:12, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.*”
 - b. But there is a secondary cause of war as well.

B. Selfishness.

1. James 3:2 -4:1-3.
2. This is why the bible says that “the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.” Words are a tool to manipulate and misdirected and foment hatred and anger against others.
3. The words of Jeremiah 9:8-9 define so much of what we witness today and in history, “*Their tongue is a deadly arrow; It speaks deceit; With his mouth one speaks peace to his neighbor, But inwardly he sets an ambush for him. Shall I not punish them for these things?*” declares the LORD. “*On a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself?*”

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4. Jeremiah 6:1-16 we see the way words and lies and true desires of the wicked heart bring about words of peace but actually bring about violence.

C. Summary and Transition.

1. War exists because sin exists.
2. War exists because nations seek to satisfy sinful desires.

-But-

3. Does that make any and all war inherently evil?
4. Hear that question carefully (repeat it).
5. Let me rephrase it, “All violence is the result of sin, but does that make all violence sinful?”

D. Keeping all of this in mind, what are some possible initial conclusions might a Christian begin to develop regarding war?

1. Some might say that all war, because it is the result of sin, ought to be avoided by Christians.
2. Others might say that though war is evil, it is a fruit of living in a fallen world and therefore it is to be resisted, even to the point of conducting war in response to it.
3. Regardless, the hard reality is that war does exist in its many forms and you must figure out what to think about it.

IV. How Christians approach the issue of war.

A. When you look at the various ways that Christians have approached war over the last 2000 years you will find two basic positions will arise: *Activist and Pacifist.*

B. The Activist Position:

1. This comes in various forms but two of the most common positions are the Just War and the Preventative War.
 - a. This position sees war are permissible for a Christian in a fallen world.
 - b. Another point made in this position would be that we are called as Christians to be in submission to our government. Therefore if the government sees the need for war, the Christian should obey
 - c. Let’s look briefly at both positions:

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2. Preventative War

- a. A preventative war argues that a nation does not need to wait to be shot at before they attack in defense.
- b. This position makes a lot of sense to many people simply on a logical level. But it is lacking almost any biblical support.

3. The more common position is what is known as Just War.

- a. This position is the most common in the United States.
- b. The purpose of this position is to clearly establish when it is right and necessary to go to war, thus preventing unnecessary bloodshed.
- c. It is not seeking to justify war as much as bring war under the control of justice. In an ideal world, if all nations practiced the principles of Just War there would be no war ever.
- d. There are two sets of criteria that are used in this position:

(1) **First the right to go to war.**

- 1. There must be a just cause. All aggression is condemned in Just War Theory. Participation in war must be prompted by a just cause or a defensive cause. No war of unprovoked aggression can ever be justified.

Preemptive war can be legitimate in some circumstances, according to Just War Theory, if it is known that a grave act of aggression is imminent. If a government knows that their nation or another is about to become a victim, it can act to prevent the injustice before it takes place.

- 2. Just intention. The war must have a right intention to secure a fair peace for all parties involved. One must have just motives for going into war.
- 3. It is a last resort. Other means of resolution such as diplomacy and economic pressure must have been reasonably exhausted before war.
- 4. Formal declaration. The war must be initiated with formal declaration by a properly constituted authority. Only governments can declare war, not individuals or militias or terrorist organizations -- only governments.
- 5. Limited objectives. Securing peace is the purpose and objective in going to war. War must be engaged in such a way that when peace is attained, hostilities cease.
- 6. Proportionate means. Combatant forces of the opposition may not be subjected to greater harm than is necessary to secure victory and peace.

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7. Noncombatant immunity. Military forces must respect individuals and groups not participating in the conflict and must abstain from attacking them.

(2) **Second, the proper conduct during the war.**

1. Distinction. The acts of war should be directed towards enemy combatants, and not towards non-combatants caught in circumstances they did not create. The prohibited acts include bombing civilian residential areas that include no military target and committing acts of terrorism or reprisal against ordinary civilians.
2. Proportionality. The force used must be proportional to the wrong endured, and to the possible good that may come. The more disproportional the number of collateral civilian deaths, the more suspect will be the sincerity of a belligerent nation's claim to justness of a war it fights.
3. Military necessity. Just war conduct should be governed by the principle of minimum force. An attack or action must be intended to help in the military defeat of the enemy, it must be an attack on a military objective, and the harm caused to civilians or civilian property must be proportional and not excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated. This principle is meant to limit excessive and unnecessary death and destruction.

C. Biblical Data:

1. Romans 12:17-21.
 - a. Within the activist position this passage would be understood to refer to individuals rather than the government.
 - b. There is also a need to distinguish between vengeance and justice.
 - c. In the Just war perspective this cannot refer to judicial/governmental vengeance because of what follows immediately in Romans 13 about them existing to avenge.
2. Romans 13:1-7.
3. 1 Peter 2:13-14.
 - a. Two purposes of government given here. Both of them speak of purpose. The king sends the governors to a place for two specific purposes.
 - (1) First is to punish evil doers.
 - (2) Second, is to praise/reward those who do good.
 - b. What are some ways the Just War might be worked out in punishing evil doers?

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- c. What possible extrapolations could we draw from the second point of proper conduct?

V. Conclusion.

- A. Next time we will consider this subject from a pacifist position and then I want to develop for you my position on war, violence and other related topics.
- B. This is an ever evolving position but not really an ever changing position.
- C. But let me leave us today with a reminder that war and violence is part of the very fabric of this age we live in.
 1. Sin brought it into existence and only one who can conquer sin will ultimately resolve it.
 2. Regardless how you understand the book of Revelation, one thing is very plain in it. War is part of this fallen world and it is pushed and prodded along through Satan and his fellow demons.
 3. Only through a holy war, which we are in even now, will this be ultimately abolished.
 - a. We battle not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of darkness. Our weapons ultimately are not physical but spiritual as we put on the armor of God and resist lies and tear down every stronghold by taking our hearts captive to the Word of God.
 - b. But we battle this because the power of sin is broken through Christ. And the presence of sin will be abolished for evermore in what the bible describes as the final war, where sin, death and Satan are cast away and all things become new.
 - c. We live in this age and we long and wait for the next. How we conduct ourselves now is the challenge. And it requires we think deep and on multiple levels.
 4. So as Christians let us be peace-makers. But also let us understand how peace is made and how it is kept. For in this age, violence is often the means to bring peace.

Benediction

May the Lord answer you in your day of trouble. May the name of YHWH set you in a secure place on high. May He remember your faithfulness and prayers and may He grant you the true desires of your heart. Amen