

Should We Fight?

The Battle #1 | Feb 4, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve H



Opening

Sermon Series Intro

Good morning. Last week we wrapped up our sermon series based on Psalm 46:10,

“Be still and know that I am God.”

We were all challenged (myself included!) to stop...to rest...to give things over to God and to trust Him with the results. I pray that we will continue to cultivate that mindset in our personal lives as well as in the life of our church!

Today, we are going to explore a different area of faith, one that feels like a big shift from “being still!” This new sermon series is called, “The Battle.” It is the series I intended to start in January, before I felt God’s call to “be still.” But I think now is a crucial time to make the change.

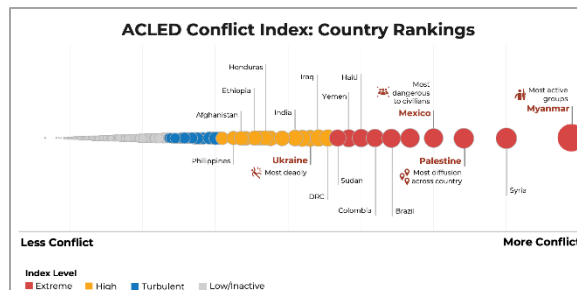
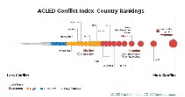


If you’ve paid attention to any news in the past year, it has been dominated by war.

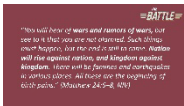
- **Russia and Ukraine** continue to fight over territory since Vladimir Putin chose to launch a full-scale invasion two years ago. Casualty figures are unclear, but many put the death toll between the two countries at over 200,000 troops and climbing.
- **Israel and Hamas (Gaza)** took over as the biggest war story last year after Hamas terrorists invaded Israel, killed over a thousand civilians, and took hundreds of hostages. Israel’s retaliation and attempts to dismantle Hamas have led to tens of thousands of casualties in battles that frequently make it difficult to distinguish between combatants and civilians.

While those two conflicts take up most of the headlines, look outside those areas and you’ll find clashes across the globe. Multiple militias are fighting the government in **Myanmar** after a coup in 2021.

Syria continues to face multiple, overlapping conflicts within its borders. **Mexico** continues to fight against drug cartels. And don’t forget **Yemen, Haiti, Sudan, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Honduras...** the list goes on and on and on!

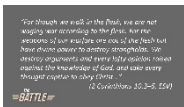


I guess we shouldn't be surprised. Jesus told us to expect this:



*“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. **Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.** There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.” (Matthew 24:6–8, NIV)*

War and conflict are inevitable. So, it is incumbent upon us in the church to view them properly. You and I have a responsibility as Christians to bring every thought captive and place them under the authority of Christ. We are responsible for developing a God-honoring view and having a Christ-focused response to the issues that surround us. We're told in 2 Corinthians 10...



“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,”
(2 Corinthians 10:3–5, ESV)

Have you taken your views on war captive and submitted them to God?

I don't know what your initial reactions are to the conflicts I mentioned earlier, but my guess is that they fall into one of the following categories:



1. **Shrug.** These wars involve someone else. Not my circus; not my monkeys.
2. **Study.** These wars are complex. I want to keep tabs on the map and the numbers.
3. **Cry.** These wars are sad. I don't like seeing violence and death.
4. **Root.** These wars involve villains to root against. I stand with _____.

If we're honest, most of the time these views are colored more by politics or personal preference than by the practice of your faith. Are you equipped to have a view based on the Bible? Are you willing to conform your own opinions to God's?

Living in the middle of the United States, most of us have had the luxury to develop our opinions about wars from a distance. Yet war and conflict have a way of making their way close to home anyway. And even if we don't find ourselves in the middle of a firefight here in Kansas, we are impacted by the decisions made by our **nation's leaders**. Even if we aren't threatened by physical warfare, we are in the crosshairs of a **spiritual battle**. Even if we never pick up a gun or drive a tank, we must be suited up with the **armor of God**.

We should face fighting with the right beliefs, and that's why I wanted to address this topic. We can't allow ourselves to shrug, study, cry, or root blindly. We need a **theology of warfare**. We need to know **when and how to wage a righteous war**. We should know **who to fight, and when to fight**.

The battle belongs to God. We just need to know if we've been drafted into it...and if we are, we need to know how to serve with honor. So, this month, we are going to explore some questions on this topic that we don't often explore. We're going to consider conflict from a Christian perspective...and (along the way) see how it applies to our lives.

Are you ready? (I was hoping for a “Sir, yes, sir!” but that’ll work)



Should We Fight?

Today’s question seems like one we should have an answer for, because it is a big one: “Should we fight?” In other words, what is the proper Christian approach to war?

This question is complicated and can get us into the weeds if we aren’t careful. It also can get really personal, really quick.

- ➔ **How many of you are serving in the military/reserves currently? Ever?**
- ➔ **How many of you have family members who are serving in the military? Ever?**
- ➔ **How many of you have kids or grandkids that might consider the military?**

See what I mean? That’s a lot of you!

By default (especially in red states like Kansas), we “support the troops.” It’s patriotic, and I appreciate the sacrifices our military folks have made! But, if we are trying to take captive our thoughts on war, we can’t rely on patriotism. Patriotism is not in the Bible! Instead, the Bible teaches that our allegiance is to God; our citizenship is in heaven (see Philippians 3:20). Our duty is to Him regardless of what our earthly country may or may not do.

So we can’t base our opinions just on our support for the military or those *in* the military. Each Christian must decide if joining or supporting our troops or our country in war is compatible with your devotion – not to Uncle Sam, but to God. And that decision is necessarily going to fall into one of three categories.



Category #1: Always! (Aggression)

Pros

Should we fight? One answer is, “Yes, please!”

Now, that might sound silly, but we must at least acknowledge this endpoint of **aggression** on the spectrum, even though the number of people who “delight in war” is thankfully small.



It might work for Mongols, Nazis...or maybe the Oakland Raiders back in the day...but no *Christian* holds to the position that we should drop the gloves whenever anyone threatens. Ongoing aggression is more of theoretical idea than a real position, but if we’re trying to identify the options, it exists.

Cons

Thankfully...scripturally...we can discount this position with one verse:



*"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."
(Romans 12:18, ESV)*

War is not peace. Ongoing, aggressive war doesn't fit well with "blessed are the peacemakers." Peace is a command; peace is a fruit of the Spirit. So, living in a state of constant warfare is clearly not acceptable. We'll have to move on to other options.

Category #2: Never! (Pacifism)



Pros

Should we fight? Another answer is, "Never!"

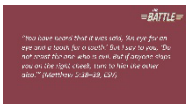
On the opposite side of the spectrum from aggression, we find the endpoint of **pacifism**, the side that says, "Christians must never participate in the battle."



This position is not as easily dismissed. Instead, pacifism is a position that has been endorsed and practiced by many Christians across the centuries. It's not a recent development. Let me read a few quotes from some early, influential Christians in the first centuries of church history:

- *"We refrain from making war on our enemies, and [we] cannot bear to see a man killed, even if killed justly." – Justin Martyr*
- *"A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and to refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath. If he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected for baptism." – Hippolytus (hih-PAHL-ih-tus) of Rome*
- *"For even if soldiers came to John and received advice on how to act, and even if a centurion became a believer, the Lord, in subsequently disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier" - Tertullian*

Why do these Christians stand so opposed to warfare? They believe it to be the position of the Bible...or at least the New Testament. It is an extension of Jesus' statements, like:



"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, 'Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'" (Matthew 5:38-39, ESV)

To the pacifist, war is **not loving**.



"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." (Luke 6:35, ESV)

To the pacifist, war is **not Christ-like**.



*“Therefore be **imitators** of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, **as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**”*
(Ephesians 5:1–2, ESV)

Those who hold to pacifism aren’t unreasonably optimistic. They don’t assume that bad people will just stop fighting or doing bad things. However, they hold a belief that opposition is wrong, and that God can stand against any enemy himself. They recognize that it doesn’t make sense from a human perspective, but they trust God to act when they cannot.



Listen to this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and theologian who faced persecution from the Nazis during WWII:

“To believe the promise of Jesus that his followers shall possess the earth, and at the same time to face our enemies unarmed and defenseless, preferring to incur injustice rather than to do wrong ourselves, is indeed a narrow way.”

This is the position of the pacifist.

Cons

However, while there may be a lot of good reasons to be a pacifist, it seems hard to argue that a pure, unqualified opposition to war and conflict is the *only* Biblical position.



Jesus may have preached peace and nonresistance regularly, but in *some* circumstances, he took a more aggressive stance (sinless, but aggressive). For example, Jesus engaged in violence at the temple when its sanctity was being abused.

“And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”” (John 2:15–17, ESV)

His actions muddy the peaceful waters if we are trying to imitate Him. More broadly, we can find other passages that imply times where peace is not a possibility. Take the flip side of Paul’s statement we looked at earlier:



*“**If possible**, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”*
(Romans 12:18, ESV)

The “if possible” implies that sometimes it *won’t* be possible, leaving open the possibility of engaging in conflict.

Pacifism seems neat and tidy, but when we start to look closer there seem to be some exceptions. So, that leaves us with category #3.

Should we fight? Not always...not never...but *sometimes*.



Category #3: Sometimes! (“Just War”)

Pros

This third category acknowledges that war is sometimes an option...if it is a *just* war. In other words, as long as it is a war which conforms to God’s principles.

War is still terrible. No one wants it. Yet there are circumstances when we must fight in the battle. Which ones? In general, wars that are fought to *confront* evil are permissible; wars that are *motivated* by evil are not.



Was it not our obligation to stand up against Hitler? To not stand up against evil that targets the weak and the powerless seems evil itself. World War II seems like a just war from this perspective. While there remained other motives for countries and while some soldiers did not act with honor, the overall war was necessary to prevent greater evil from spreading.



The “just war” position has been advocated throughout history by most Christian ethicists in all branches of the church. Based on the Bible, the “just war” position states that when wars are justified, in such circumstances Christians *may* and often *should* bear arms.

We can understand the idea on a personal level. If our neighbor was getting attacked by a robber or murderer, would we not “love our neighbor” by rushing over to defend him? A failure to act would be cowardly and sinful!

On a national level, the same idea applies. If our neighboring countries are attacked by forces that are targeting and slaughtering innocent civilians, there is an obligation for the state to pursue justice...hence the rationale for our country’s financial and military support of Ukraine and Israel.

Paul writes about this type of war in the book of Romans.



“Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.” (Romans 13:2–5, ESV)

The state “bears the sword,” ready to use it to fight against wrongdoers. It does so, not in vain, but as a servant (willing or unwilling) of God.

Cons

Sometimes people are hesitant about this position, because they remember other portions of God’s Word, namely:



"You shall not murder." (Exodus 20:13, ESV)

Is that not a call to stand down and avoid the inevitable killing that happens in wartime? Well, it is...only if "murder" applies to state actions. But state actions like capital punishment (found in the same Old Testament law that said "do not murder") were not considered *murder*. There was a distinction between murder and justice. In the same way, proponents of just war distinguish between personal actions and public actions.



I like how John Salvatore presents this:¹

As individuals, we are not to seek personal vengeance. We need to be willing to suffer injustice as Christians, and make an appeal to our God and to our State. We are to entrust ourselves to God.

But, as members of the State, we are to work for justice against evil, for the sake of others and of society.... We have a private responsibility and duty, and we have a public one.

He goes on to quote John Stott, talking about the tension between "turning the other cheek" and "doing justice."

"If my house is burglarized one night and I catch the thief, it may well be my duty to sit him down and give him something to eat and drink, while at the same time telephoning the police." – John Stott

Whether or not a conflict lives up to the standards of "justice" is a discussion for another sermon. But to answer the question, "Should we fight?" *Sometimes* seems like the most biblical position.

Did You Ask?

We've taken a short amount of time to talk this through, yet *"Should we fight?"* is a question that Christians have wrestled with for centuries. There are more arguments and more verses that apply. But there's a bigger question than *"Should we fight?"* that I want you to consider.

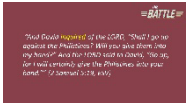


That question is: *"Did you ask?"*

I'm less concerned with the answer you arrive at, and more concerned with whether you asked the question in the first place.

A few weeks back we referenced a story with David as king of Israel. He is faced with an incursion by the Philistine army in 2 Samuel 5, to the point where the troops are within a mile of Jerusalem. Do you remember what David did?

¹ [WAR - What is the Christian perspective on war? - ChristianAnswers.Net](#)



“And David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?” And the LORD said to David, “Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.”” (2 Samuel 5:19, ESV)

If we were faced with the same situation, if Canada’s fighting forces swooped across the border into Minnesota and got a mile from Minneapolis, would there be any question at all? No! The instant reaction would be to defend ourselves!

But David *asked*. Not once, but twice (*it happens again in verse 23 – the second time God says no, aka “be still,” and then He took care of it*).



***** Did you ask? *****

- Before you joined the military, did you ask?
- Before you encouraged someone to enlist, did you ask?
- Before you pulled the trigger or loaded the artillery, did you ask?
- Before you shrugged and decided not to get involved, did you ask?
- Before you posted a Ukrainian flag on social media to show solidarity, did you ask?

Have you taken your views on war captive and submitted them to God?

We CANNOT obey God if we do not seek His will. You can’t get the answer to this question right if you never ask Him the question in the first place!

Too often, we develop these opinions on our own. We compile our reasons based on convenience, based on peer pressure, based on media opinions, based on personal preference. But as a Christian, our first step in any decision (or opinion, or theological position) should be to *ask*.

Ask for wisdom. Ask for guidance. Ask for direction. Ask for understanding.

And when you do...



“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7–8, ESV)



“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5, ESV)

Closing



*My **brother-in-law** works for the Department of Defense. For the last several years, he has been deployed to some of the most conflict-prone regions of the globe, living in harm’s way as he helps support US military operations. I’ve heard stories from him about what it’s like to be near the front lines, and I’ve heard some of the things that his job has required. He has faced choices that I would never want to face – heartbreaking choices that make me want to be a pacifist.*

My good friend's son recently joined the Coast Guard. He's stationed in the Gulf of Mexico, dealing with confrontations involving the drug cartels. I've heard a few stories from his dad, and Ethan gets to do things that I don't have a chance to do. I want to be supportive of what he does – patriotically endorsing his mission and his service.

But I don't get that luxury.

You don't get that luxury.

We aren't allowed to make decisions about how to follow God based on feelings. Instead, we must take our thoughts captive. We must look at them through the lens of Scripture, determining what path we should take.

We can't allow ourselves to shrug off, study about, cry through, root during, pray against or sign up for anything war-related without making sure that our decisions are based on a pursuit of God's principles.

I can't ever think, "God says this, but I'm gonna go a different direction." If God says to fight, should we out-think God? If God says to stand down, should we act anyway? The answer is no.

Before you fight, ask. And when He answers, obey!



Prayer

Invitation

Did you ask? That applies, of course, to more issues than war. It applies to any situation as we consider what we should do.

Asking might involve going to God in prayer about your life, your worries, your hopes, or your beliefs. And we don't want you to have to ask alone. So, I want to invite any of our elders or deacons to step up to the front or the sides and raise your hand.

If you would like prayer for an issue, you can share with them, and they can write it down and share with me...or they can pray with you right there.

Or if you would like to answer God's invitation to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, responding in baptism, you can come up to the front and have a seat so we can talk after the song.

The answers to our questions (about war, or whatever) always finds their firm foundation in Jesus. So, for our time of invitation, that's the song we are going to sing.

Stand, and join us as we sing.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

Matthew 24:6–8; 2 Corinthians 10:3–5

Should We Fight?

Category #1: Always! (Aggression)

Pros

Cons (*Romans 12:18*)

Category #2: Never! (Pacifism)

Pros (*Matthew 5:38–39; Luke 6:35; Ephesians 5:1–2*)

Cons (*John 2:15–17; Romans 12:18*)

Category #3: Sometimes! (“Just War”)

Pros (*Romans 13:2–5*)

Cons (*Exodus 20:13*)

Did You Ask?

(2 Samuel 5:19; Matthew 7:7–8; James 1:5)

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- Have you (or a close friend or family member) ever served in the military? How would you describe the experience?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Read Matthew 24:6–8. What “wars or rumors of wars” have you followed in the news lately? Is the battle a clear-cut case of good vs. evil? Why or why not?
- What is your typical response to war news? A) shrug, B) study, C) cry, or D) root. Explain your answer.
- Is your current response to war driven by a well-researched theology, or is it developed more organically? What other factors influence your response?
- Why is, “Always,” a wrong answer to the question of whether we should fight?
- Read Matthew 5:38–39. How well do you practice this on a personal level? Is this applicable on a national/state level?
- What Christian values are tested most in wartime?
- Read Romans 12:18 multiple time, emphasizing a different word each time (ex: “If possible...” “If POSSIBLE...”). What insights do you gain from a closer reading?
- List some examples of a “just” war (a war to *confront* evil, not a war *motivated* by evil). How do you determine if the motivation is correct?
- Have you taken your views on war captive and submitted them to God? In other words, are you trying to make sure *your view* derives from *His view*?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for those who are impacted by wars and conflicts across the globe. Look up the latest news from areas like Ukraine or Israel and pray for specific locations and situations...especially your brothers and sisters in Christ who may live there.
- Pray for God to grant you wisdom as you try to conform your views to His.