

War

May 30, 2021 am

HDBC

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in service of the United States. It was borne out of the Civil War and a desire to honor our dead. On May 5, 1868, General John Logan officially proclaimed it in his General Order No. 11.

In the order, the General proclaimed, *The 30th of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village and hamlet churchyard in the land.* Because the day wasn't the anniversary of any particular battle, the General called it, The Decoration Day.

On the first Decoration Day, 5,000 participants decorated the graves of 20,000 Union and Confederate soldiers buried at Arlington Cemetery.

New York was the first state to officially recognize the holiday in 1873. It was recognized by all northern states by 1890. The South refused to acknowledge the day and honored their dead on separate days. This went on until after World War I when the holiday changed from honoring just those who died fighting in the Civil War to honoring Americans who died fighting in any war.

With the Congressional passage of the National Holiday Act of 1971, it is now observed on the last Monday in May by almost every state.

For most of us, Memorial Day is a time for cookouts, swim parties and family gatherings. It is viewed as the unofficial start of summer. All that is good, but it is important that we not lose sight of the meaning of the holiday. On this holiday we want to remember those men and women who have given the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in service to our country. They are heroes, each one. They died in different ways, on different fields of battle, and with different uniforms. The one constant was the nation for whom they fought and died, the United States. So this weekend we honor our fallen heroes.

But this holiday raises some important questions for believers. What does the Bible say about war? Is it right for nations to go to war? If so, what are the guidelines? Is it right for a believer to go to war? What about killing, in war?

So, this morning I want to address the subject of war. The Baptist Faith and Message is a document that includes 18 statements on various subjects. This is the document that SBC churches have agreed upon that bind us together theologically. Statements about God, Sin, Man, Salvation, Jesus, the Bible, etc.

The 16th statement is on Peace and War

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war. The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.

With that as a general summary statement on what the Bible teaches about peace and war, I want to keep it simple by offering three statements of truth.

1. We are called to seek peace

The BFM statement says it well, *It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men.* We are called to be peace makers.

Rom 12:18: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*

Matthew 5:9: *Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called the sons of God.*

The Bible makes it clear that peace is the goal. This is true of individuals and nations. However in a broken world peace is not always possible. Conflict happens between nations, groups and individuals. What do we do when conflict comes to us? For the individual, Jesus has a clear statement.

Matthew 5:38-39: *You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

This is not a repudiation of defending one's self against an aggressor who is attacking, but is a call to resist retaliation & revenge. Some have interpreted this as a call for pacifism on personal level and extended it to nations.

Pacifism is a total rejection of all armed conflict. The brief commentary on the BFM notes that to be consistent, pacifists must oppose not only offensive war but any defensive use of force as well.

Al Mohler says,

Pacifists claim that war can never be justified, whatever the cause or conditions. But he adds that, The moral failure of pacifism is found in its deadly naiveté, not in its abhorrence of violence. In reality, the world is a violent place where humans with evil intent will make war on others. In such a world, respect for human life sometimes requires the taking of human life. That tragic fact is as clearly revealed in history as any other, and far more than most. Pacifism fails to keep the peace against those who would take it.

Pacifism, as a doctrine, does nothing to resist evil. It allows evil to go unchecked and unopposed, always to the detriment of the innocent

While pacifism can be seen as an extreme on one end of the spectrum, on the other end, seeking to justify war under the banner of Christ is even more insidious and devastating. The best example of this kind of thinking were **the crusades of the middle ages**, where, under the auspices of fighting a **Holy War**, the Pope called his subjects to take up arms and recapture the holy land in the name of Christ.

Countless atrocities were committed in the name of God. One example took place on July 14, 1099, when a Crusader army entered the city of Jerusalem and massacred every man, woman, boy and girl in the city.

According to one witness, *No one has ever seen or heard of such a slaughter of pagans for they were burned on pyres like pyramids and no one except God knows how many there were.* One historian notes *that when the butchery was done, by the late evening, the Temple area of the city was piled high with corpses and blood flowed like a river through the streets.*

While this history may be long forgotten by most of us in the west, it is very much alive in the minds of the militant Islamists who are at war with the U.S. To them the crusades are very much alive and the terrorism in which they are involved is intended to redress those wrongs of a thousand years ago, all of which speaks to the lasting effects of sin.

While many things can be said of the crusades, it can certainly be said that they were never sanctioned by heaven and they were in direct opposition to the teaching of scripture which calls us to peace, not to aggression.

So, where does that leave us in a broken world where evil is present and sometimes needs to be stopped? Brings us to the second statement of truth.

2. The government is authorized to keep peace (Romans 13:1-4)

The government is established by God to *bear the sword*. The word for *sword* was used to refer to a sword carried into battle, but also to the sword used by the executioner. Both are implied here. The government is commissioned by God to punish those individuals who violate the law, but also to send an army into battle against an evil foe.

We may be frustrated by our government and completely disagree with the decisions and policies it makes. And make no mistake, governments, including our own do not always make right decisions. The fact that the killing of unborn children in this nation is legal is a great and abhorrent atrocity. Just because the government sanctions an action does not mean that action is right.

However, the Bible is clear that when it comes to punishing the wicked when they violate the law the government has the right and authority to do so. When it comes to sending an army into war, the government is not only authorized by God to do so, but is commissioned to do so.

That leads to more questions. When should we go to war? How should war be waged? Are there guidelines that should govern war?

3. There is a time for war (Ecclesiastes 3:8)

There is a time for war and a time for peace. War is never universally condemned in the Bible. There are times when armies need to be sent into battle. But when are those times proper? When are they justified? The problem is that the Bible does not offer clear directives on when it is right to go to war. Therefore we have to look for principles in the Bible that offer guidance and apply them to the question of war.

One of the most profound thinkers the church would ever produce was Augustine. He lived in 4th and 5th centuries. He was the first to conceive

what we have come to know as the principles of **Just War**. As he thought through the teachings of scripture and considered the practical realities of living in a fallen world, he came up with a theory of just war. It says that war is acceptable under certain conditions. Three primary principles.

War must occur for a good & just purpose rather than self-gain or power.

War must be waged by a properly instituted authority, such as a state.

Love must be a central motive even in the midst of violence.

Over the centuries theologians have expanded his initial set of principles. If you Google Just War you can find a variety of lists. So, I'll offer my own. This is Johnny's list of principles that justify going to war.

1) Must be initiated by a proper authority

We have established that wars are only Just when authorized and declared by established governments. Individuals and groups are not authorized by the Bible to go to war on their own authority.

2) Must be fought for a just cause

To defend the innocent (stepping in to stop a genocide)

To repel evil (Germany, Italy and Japan)

To restore peace (chaos leading to loss of life or freedom)

3) Must be fought in the right way

Even in the midst of war the normal moral guidelines found in the Bible remain in place. The fruit of the Spirit is not left behind by the believer who goes into battle.

Innocent people be protected and never targeted.

Prisoners of war should be seen as people made in the image of God.

The use of force should not exceed that which is necessary for victory.

4) Must be the last resort

In obedience to Romans 12:8, every effort should be made to achieve peace before warfare is declare. This would include diplomacy, economic sanctions and other similar actions.

As Christians, our desire should never be to go to war. Our mission is to seek peace, so far as it depends upon us. Sometimes the only path to peace is across

the battlefield. As citizens of our nation, when our government deems it just and necessary to go to war, then individuals are justified in participating in that war. But we do so with the knowledge that we represent Christ and His kingdom first, and only then our government.

As a citizen of this nation, I am grateful for those who have given their lives to defend the innocent, to restore peace, to repel evil when it has reared its ugly head in attempts to destroy nations, kill people and suppress all that is good. I'm glad to honor you this weekend.

Most importantly, I am thankful for the warrior who died on a cross to rescue sinners, bring peace to hearts and not only repel but also defeat the great spiritual enemy of our souls. Thank you, Jesus.

The greatest peace can never be found among nations and kingdoms. The greatest peace can only be found in a human heart. It is that peace that comes between the person and the Creator. That only happens when the person in faith chooses to follow Christ, yielding to His lordship and receiving His forgiveness of sins. Only then can you know peace.

Jesus is called ***the prince of peace*** for a reason!