

Series: **Aliens 3.0**

Today's Title: **"When Killing is Right"**

April 14, 2024 – *Selected passages*

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**Objective:** To help people realize that the image of God in us requires us to protect innocent human life from evil.

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*Opening prayer*

Last week we considered the value of human life.

We used **Genesis 1:27** as our primary text, which tells us that humanity was created in the "image of God".

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

We saw how the "image of God" in each person is what gives each of us infinite value.

This is where we get our value and conviction of the 'sanctity of human life'.

The sacred nature of human life – due to the image of God in each of us - is why one of the 10 commandments (#6) is:

**Exodus 20:13**

"You shall not murder."

I was hoping that last week's discussion laid a foundation – that we can build on this week.

Last week looked at 3 different views which support the sanctity of human life:

1. The Biblical and theological view...
2. The view from science and Natural Law...
3. The legal and governmental view.

This week we will look at 3 areas that God allows the taking of human life.

3 areas when killing is right.

It is the sacred nature of human life – the image of God in each person – that is the basis for God’s prohibition against murdering other people.

One clarification before we consider 3 areas that God allows / commands the taking of human life...

**The issue of a person’s innocence or guilt.**

A great distinction to keep in mind in our discussion today – is to distinguish between innocent people and guilty people.

I’m not using these terms in a spiritual context – because spiritually, none of us are innocent – all of us are guilty of sin before God.

I’m using these terms in light of civic laws – international laws – or moral law.

When I mention ‘guilt’, I’m referring to those who are guilty of capital offenses (not speeding tickets or lying, etc.).

Today, we will look at 3 different actions that God / Scripture affirms – where killing another human being is right.

**It’s not that these people are NOT image bearers.**

**It’s not that their life is NOT sacred.**

But their actions create the situation where they lose the protection and status that God gives to each innocent person. Another way to say it is: *Due to their actions against innocent people, they forfeit the protection God gives to people due to their creation in the image and likeness of God.*

**When killing is right in war.**

War is ugly – messy – and the loss of life is often staggering.

War also creates situations where civilians can get caught in the middle of the battle and be killed.

This happens in every war, and we saw this happen a few weeks ago when it seems some humanitarian workers in Gaza were killed by Israeli missiles.

War is not neat and tidy, and the reality is war is a result of living in a fallen, evil world.

The Bible actually has a lot to say about war, and there has been a great deal of thought put into this topic over the centuries.

First, we need to realize that God sanctioned war for Israel.

**Deuteronomy 20:1**

“When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

It is clear that God assumes / expects that Israel will “go out to war” and fight their “enemies”.

He then encourages them to “not be afraid...for the LORD your God is with you...”.

**Genesis 14:1-16** – In this passage a war breaks out in the region where Abraham and Lot were living.

Abraham’s nephew, Lot was taken as a prisoner – along with his family, many other people, and their possessions.

Abraham finds out about Lot’s capture, and he assembles a small army of men from his own household – 318 trained men – and they pursued those who took Lot prisoner – fought against them – and won.

He rescued Lot, Lot’s family and the other people, and their possessions, and brought them back to their homes.

*Nowhere are Abraham’s actions condemned.*

Instead, they are praised in the following verses, and God is given credit for the military victory.

**Genesis 14:20**

“...blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

A similar story of David using deadly force to rescue a city that is being attacked by an aggressive army is also found in **1 Samuel 23**.

Also, we have the example of Jesus, when He returns, He will go to war against the nations being led by the Antichrist (Rev. 19:11).

There are other passages where we see God's affirmation and blessing in wars fought for just causes.

**That is the key here... wars fought for just causes.**

War for the sake of conquering, proving military might, or improving a nation's standing, is not what God approves.

Some will point to Israel's conquest of Canaan as an example of war for conquest – for land acquisition. Even though that was a result of that war, Scripture is clear that the conquest of Canaan was God's judgment on their horrific sin and evil practices over 400+ year period of time (Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 9:4-5, 20:18).

So, it's clear when we look at Scripture, that God is not anti-war.

*But He's also not 'pro' every war.*

There are wars that are fought for the sake of justice – and those that are fought for evil motives.

So, we need to ask the question:

*How can we judge if a war is 'just' or 'evil'?*

The Christian view / theory of war has been formed over the centuries.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century by Augustine (354-430) started writing on this, and later in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274).

The Scriptural basis is found not only in the passages we already referenced, but also Paul's letter to the Roman church.

**Romans 13:3-4**

“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.”

These verses can be applied both in a civic sense within a culture or nation, and also on a national or international sense.

This has become known as ‘The Just War Theory’ – and it includes three main areas:

The moral requirement for going to war. (*jus ad bellum*)

Going to war must prevent more evil and suffering than it is expected to cause.

The moral requirements for how the war is fought. (*jus in bello*)

“This requires that the nature of one's coercive force should be proportional to any injury sustained or planned, and that at whatever minimal force can be used to do the job should be deployed.”

(From ethicist Jean Bethke Elshtain, quoted in a Gospel Coalition article: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/isis-just-warfare-30-percent-rule/>)

There are many follow-up questions to this point that we don't have time to mention today.

Just know that they do exist.

The moral requirement for the result of the war. (*jus post bellum*)

If at the end of the war, the state of peace and justice is no greater than before the conflict started, the conflict cannot be considered to have been worth the violence and death.

(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/isis-just-warfare-30-percent-rule/>)

These are not simple issues that can be answered and understood in a brief analysis and discussion.

After all, how can we know what the end result of a war will be? There are so many unknowns, the primary being: *Will the side of justice win the war?*

The state of post-war peace or justice is completely unknown until the war is fought – and there are no guarantees in war!

There is obviously more to say on this issue than we have time.

But the point for us today is this...

Big picture: Human life is sacred – of infinite value – due to the “image of God” in each person.

But...

God has affirmed that it is right to kill humans in war due to the evil they have committed / are committing.

**When killing is right by capital punishment.**

Let's move from the international picture to a national picture – or a state picture.

In a country – in the society that exists in that country, how is innocent human life protected?

In a perfect, ideal world, we don't have to ask this question.

In a perfect and ideal world there is no threat to people – and everyone is innocent.

But this is not the reality of our world.

We live in a fallen, evil world – where sin is rampant.

One of the worst sins is when a person takes the life of a person who is innocent.

The primary passage for God's command for capital punishment is found in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of **Genesis**.

**Genesis 9:6**

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image.”

This is pre-Mosaic Law.

God establishes this as a standard for all mankind.

But we also see this as part of the Mosaic Law – the Law for Israel.

**Exodus 21:12**



“Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.”

**Exodus 21:22-23**

“When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out...if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life...”

The principle is clear – that when a person kills another – and the person killed was not threatening or trying to do harm, the killer must pay with their own life.

**Notice:** God’s view here is toward punishment, not rehabilitation.

God’s concern is in part retribution – and protection of others – so nobody else will be murdered.

The retribution part is limited. It’s only the one who committed the murder – nobody beyond the murderer is punished.

By putting the murderer to death, this protects the rest of society from him murdering someone else.

Once again, we refer to Paul’s letter to the church in Rome which speaks to the God-given authority of the state – “the authorities” – to use lethal power to ‘terrorize those who are bad / evil.

**Romans 13:1-4**

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

3 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."

Look at that last part:

"...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."

The message here is clear.

God endorses capital punishment.

Once again, there are a lot of details here that are part of this conversation.

We're talking here about what we refer to as '1<sup>st</sup> Degree Murder' – 'Cold-blooded murder' – 'Murder with malice and forethought' – 'pre-meditated murder'.

Not 2<sup>nd</sup> degree murder / Involuntary Manslaughter, etc.

When a person murders someone, they are a danger to the rest of society.

God protects the sacred life of those in the society – by making sure the murderous person is not able to murder again.

## When killing is right in self-defense.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> area where killing is right – according to what we read in the Bible – is when we are defending innocent human life from a lethal threat.

This can be protecting yourself – or protecting someone else who is at risk of being violently attacked without just cause.

### **Exodus 22:2**

“If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him...”

This is describing someone defending themselves and their family in their own home when someone breaks in.

But, what about Jesus’ words in the sermon on the mount?

### **Matthew 5:38-39**

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

39 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.”

There are some cultural things at play here that we must understand, or we might misapply what Jesus says here.

Jesus begins (vs. 38) by quoting what would have been a very familiar O.T. practice that His audience knew.

Then, (vs. 39a) He elevates the command to a higher plane – a more challenging command.

Then (vs. 39b) He talks about something that was common / known in their culture, but not in ours.

Notice “slaps you on the right cheek”.

Most people are right-handed.

The Greek word here is accurately translated by the ESV – ‘slaps’ – it’s an open-handed slap – on “the right cheek”.

He’s describing someone who is right-handed – slapping you with the back of their hand on your right cheek – because that’s the only way a right-handed person can open-hand-slap you on your right cheek – is with the back of their hand.

This is not an assault in that culture – it’s an insult.

Jesus is saying don’t retaliate – don’t return insult-for-insult.

From Norm Geisler – a Christian theologian, ethicist:

“The Sermon on the Mount is not pacifistic; it is antiretaliatory. It does not commend a passive attitude, but rather condemns militant activity.”

(Christian Ethics, Options and Issues, by Norman L. Geisler, p. 230)

We can look at other things Jesus said to realize He did not prohibit self-defense – whether He was talking about physical danger or defending your reputation against false accusations.

**Luke 12:11-12**

“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

We can see Paul’s self-defense in **Acts 22:1** and **24:10**.

**Acts 22:1** – “Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.”

**Acts 24:10** – And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.”

Here is a passage where Jesus strongly cautions against advancing or defending the faith by use of force.

Matthew 26:52

Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”

In **Luke 22**, Jesus encourages His followers to go buy a sword for their self-defense.

**Luke 22:36, 38**

He (Jesus) said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.”

And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And He said to them, “It is enough.”

Once again... from Norm Geisler...

“While Jesus condemned the aggressive use of the sword, he commended its defensive use.

While he opposed the use of force on religious grounds, he proved it on social grounds to protect life.”

(Christian Ethics, Options and Issues, by Norman L. Geisler, p. 227)

In summary... from Geisler:

“In an evil world force will always be necessary to restrain evil persons.

It is not evil to resist evil; it is morally wrong not to defend the innocent.

To permit a murder when one could have prevented it is morally wrong.

To allow a rape when one could have hindered it is an evil.

To watch an act of cruelty toward children without trying to intervene is morally inexcusable.

**James 4:17**

“Anyone than who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.”

Any man who does not protect his wife and children against a violent intruder fails them morally. Likewise, any country that can defend its citizens against evil aggressors and does not do it is morally remiss.”

(Christian Ethics, Options and Issues, by Norman L. Geisler, p. 232)

### ***Apply it...***

All people carry the image of God.

This means that we value life – we view life as a sacred gift – and this demands that if we're ever in the position where killing is right, we need to be very careful and measured.

Killing is right in God's eyes when we are punishing evil and protecting the innocent.

God has affirmed situations that killing is right.

**War** – as long as it is a just war.

**Capital Punishment** – punishes the murderer and protects others from murder.

**Self-Defense** – Protects from lethal violence and potential death from the attacker.

We need to have a high view of life – the sacred nature of life – and a high view of justice – and protecting the innocent from harm.

These issues reveal the need for our forgiveness of sin – and the need for a new nature in each of us.

As I mentioned in the beginning, we have to deal with these issues due to sin – and because we live in a fallen, evil world.

There is only 1 remedy – not rehabilitation, but reconciliation to God through Christ.

**A**dmit your sins.

**B**elieve in Jesus as your Savior – for your forgiveness.

**C**ommit to living for Him each day – let Him transform your life – receive your new nature in Christ.

*Close in prayer*

**New Member Sunday**