

# BIBLICAL ETHICS

## WEEK 4: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE II

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- The challenge which is placed upon every Christian is to live as Christ in every area of their life during every moment of their life.
- **1 Peter 1:14-16** “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, **be holy yourselves also in all your behavior**; because it is written, ‘you shall be holy, for I am holy.’”
- The purpose of this six-week class is to not only define ethics and the importance of finding our ethics from the Bible, but also how Christians should be thinking and acting in this age.
- Our world is a marketplace of ideas. And whether the ideas we face are religious, political, economic, or social, decisions about those ideas are unavoidable. We have to make choices. When it comes to making choices, we have entered the realm of “ethics.”<sup>1</sup>
- We are all ethicists. Each day of our lives we face decisions about how we should live. As we do, we realize that many of the choices we make are not devoid of significance. Rather, we know that somehow and in some way they do matter. In short, we are continually making decisions that are ethical in nature.<sup>2</sup>
- Since we do make decisions on a regular and continual basis, we must have a fundamental understanding of what biblical ethics are and how we can rightly apply them.
- **2 Peter 3:17** “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, **be on your guard** so that you are not carried away by the error of *unprincipled men* and fall from your own steadfastness.”
  - Notice how Peter gives the command to *be on your guard*. The purpose of this command is so that we would not be passively *carried away*.
  - Our minds are constantly being fought over by the world for control. We must be able to sift out what does not need to be there and hold fast to what is good.

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<sup>1</sup> David Burggraff

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## WAR AND THE CHRISTIAN<sup>3</sup>

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- In World War I, thirty-nine million people (thirty million of them civilians) died. World War II killed fifty-one million (including thirty-four million civilians). Since the end of World War II, approximately 150 wars have killed an estimated seventeen million people. And the threat of terrorism is always before us today, killing on the basis of (faulty) religious belief.
- **What is the place of the Christian faith in all this?** How should Christians pray for their leaders? How can Christians evaluate whether any proposed troop commitment is justified? How can the killing of human beings be squared with the Christian faith? What choices does the Christian have?

### **A brief history of war in the Early Church<sup>4</sup>**

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- Early Christian church fathers, speaking in behalf of a minority often persecuted for their faith, **were substantially of one mind in their rejection of violence in general**, and of military service for believers.
- Tertullian (ca. 155-240) was quite adamant in his advocacy of pacifism, claiming force was entirely out of place for the Christian. He stated that not only was **violence at odds with the Christian faith**, but that **idolatry and emperor sacrifice required of the Roman military made army service doubly prohibitive for the Christian.**<sup>5</sup> Later church fathers were not so sure.
- Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-397), the spiritual mentor of Augustine, argued that a **secure peace may be won by a just war**; and he insisted that the Christian faith should act to bring justice and compassion to the conduct of war.<sup>6</sup>
- Augustine (354-430), wondered why, if rejection of military force was so crucial to one's faith in God, such men as David, the Centurion in the Gospels (Luke 7), Cornelius (Acts 10), and the soldiers who came to John the Baptist (Luke 3) were not told to renounce their occupation, and in several cases were held out as examples of faith.
- **Augustine saw that Christianity was not incompatible with war, but was to influence it toward the proper methods and ends:** "Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity."<sup>7</sup> *Violence may be necessary in our fallen world to protect the innocent and to fulfill the command to love one's neighbor.*
- *War, Augustine claimed, should be fought to restore peace and to obtain justice.* It must always be under the direction of the **legitimate ruler and be motivated by Christian love.**<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David Burggraff

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See Arthur F. Holmes, ed., *War and Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 37-47.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrose's Letter 51, trans. H. De Romestin, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (2nd series) 10.

<sup>7</sup> From Augustine's letter *Reply to Faustus the Manichean* 22, trans. R. Stothert, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (1st series) 4.

<sup>8</sup> D. Burggraff

- **War in the Middle Ages:**<sup>9</sup>
  - The most famous examples of the new warlike outlook were the Crusades – a merger of violence and holiness. Violence was now made sacred: the enemy was believed to be diabolical. Thus, the Muslims were looked on as the opponents of the kingdom of God, a fulfillment of the forces of the Antichrist as seen in the book of Revelation.
- **15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries**<sup>10</sup>
  - The advent of gunpowder and changes in weaponry affected Christian attitudes toward war during the Renaissance period. The new style of warfare met with opposition from leading humanists such as Thomas More and Erasmus. These individuals rediscovered the relevance of the New Testament and were led to condemn war. The Protestant leaders – Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli – accepted the use of violence and warfare as advocates of a just war theory. Luther taught that without arms, peace could not be kept. He thought that sometimes wars had to be waged to repel injustice and establish a firm peace.
- **The Anabaptists**<sup>11</sup>
  - However, the Anabaptists did not accept the use of violence. They differed widely among themselves but rejected the state church. Beginning about 1560 they espoused *pacifism* because they felt Christ had initiated a new order of love and meekness in which there should be no constraint. The Christian must imitate Christ and *not resist (nonresistance)* when mistreated.

#### 4 BASIC VIEWS ABOUT WAR<sup>12</sup>

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- We need to know if every declaration of war is morally wrong.
- Also, can a Christian fight in a war, kill others and not be guilty of sinning?

##### **Activism**

- ***Activism holds that Christians are to support a military effort whenever their country declares war.***

Governments are ordained by God. The Bible tells us to submit to our political rulers (Rom. 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-14). Typically, we do not have access to the classified information available to our military leaders. For these reasons, we must trust their judgment that a war is necessary. While few Christians will admit to holding the view in theory, a great many believers tend to follow it in practice. Since they have a deep sense of patriotism and since their government always presents some justification for every war, they actually support all of their country's wars.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

- **Objections to activism:**
- One major objection to activism is that two nations about to go to war with one another can (and usually do) each claim moral justification for the war. **Yet, logically, at most one side is justified in fighting.** In every war, some soldiers fight an unjust war.
- **Arguments for activism:**
- Activists reply that even if this is the case, blame for an unjust fight rests with the government, not with individual soldiers. *The soldier's duty is to obey.* Furthermore, disobedience to government leads to anarchy – a condition that might even be worse than war.

## **Just War Tradition**

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- The just war position (sometimes called selectivism) gives the Christian an intellectual and theological matrix through which to evaluate potential and actual conflicts, as well as guidelines for how wars ought to be fought. JWT is a broad consensus, not a settled doctrine. It was developed over centuries by theologians and jurists *who desired to apply Scripture and moral wisdom even to the most brutal of human enterprises, and who wanted to bring Christian charity and justice even to warfare.* *The tradition does not claim to remove all difficulties.* Its broad consensus does, however, allow thoughtful people to bring their faith to bear on difficult issues in the ethical arena. *Just war theorists distinguish between the conditions necessary for declaring war in the first place (jus ad bellum) and the guidelines to be followed once war is underway (jus in bello).*

## **Jus ad bellum:**

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- JWT has developed five criteria which ought to be satisfied before troops are sent into an arena of potential conflict. Called the jus ad bellum (justice for war), these criteria serve to frame the discussion surrounding any potential war.
- **Just Cause.** Wars designed for aggression against a neighbor, or those designed simply to increase a country's wealth or prestige cannot be justified. A just cause may be to intervene on behalf of an innocent third party, to punish an evil or aggressor nation, or to defend one's own nation against aggression or overthrow. Thus, when an enemy nation is clearly preparing to attack our own, we may launch a preventive war; or, when conditions within another nation are intolerably evil, even though that nation is not aggressive toward us, we may launch a crusade against it.
- **Right Authority.** This category is to ensure that the proper authorities are calling for the war. Just wars are not private revolutions. In the U.S., the Congress has the power to declare war, thereby helping to ensure that there will be vigorous debate before the wholesale commitment of American ground forces.

- **Just Intention – the Goal of Peace.** This criterion requires that just wars be fought with the final, realizable goal of peace in mind. Not only should there be a strategy to win; there should be a peace that can be achieved. Those going to war must pursue only peace, not revenge, territorial conquest, or ideological supremacy. It was this element that disturbed many Americans about the committing of U.S. ground troops to the conflicts in Bosnia, then later to the Middle East. They wondered if any “simple” one-year commitment of U.S. troops could do anything to bring a lasting peace to a conflict that had lasted centuries.
- **Proportionality.** Any potential conflict must be evaluated as to the cost and benefits. Are the potential gains worth the possible costs and sacrifice – both with regard to finances and human lives? Will the destructiveness of the proposed conflict outweigh any enhancement of other human values? Will victory outweigh the total evil and suffering the war will cause? Clearly, this category requires foresight; the difficulties involved do not absolve a country from this responsibility. No one should prescribe a cure that is worse than the disease.
- **War as the Last Resort.** Nonviolent means of persuasion should always be attempted for a reasonable amount of time before resorting to war. In the modern political climate, there are numerous means that can serve to achieve the desired end of peace: diplomacy, economic boycotts, and other tactics that have all worked to achieve just ends. But, there are times when diplomacy fails. The “last resort” implies that the use of force may be legitimate.

### **Jus in bello:**

- Once a decision has been reached that war is unavoidable, how should a nation conduct itself in warfare? Keeping in mind that wars are always “neater” on paper than in the field, JWT nevertheless has two important criteria that keep the violence from escalating into total mindless savagery. ***These criteria for jus in bello (justice in battle) are proportionality and noncombat immunity.***
- **Proportionality.** This principle limits the use of force and violence to genuine necessity. A just government ensures that the means of war are proportionate to the tasks of war.
  - For example, in various campaigns in World War II, Japanese-held islands were often bypassed and left to “wither on the vine” rather than be invaded. The cost in human lives was simply not worth any potential benefits. This was an example of proportionality in action. Modern-day “smart weapons” are a huge advance over the weapons of fifty years ago, and can help in keeping violence proportional. As the Gulf War demonstrated, it is often possible to destroy a military target with a comparatively small load of explosives because of the pinpoint accuracy of the weapon. Not only does this advance in accuracy meet proportional goals, but it also provides better protection for civilians.

- **Noncombatant Immunity**. This criterion requires that civilians not be directly and intentionally targeted. While it is true that wars inevitably kill some civilians, such killing must be an unintended and indirect product of attacks on the military.
  - Modern-day terrorists and guerilla fighters pose grave threats to the doctrine of noncombatant immunity. Intentionally locating their command headquarters or military targets within civilian areas, these groups use civilians as human shields for their acts of terror. Ironically, when they hide behind civilians in this way, terrorists are paying those nations that adhere to JWT a compliment, acknowledging that such nations do not make it a practice to kill civilians intentionally.

## **BIBLICAL VIEW ON WAR<sup>13</sup>**

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- *Governments are responsible to defend their nations against attacks by other nations.*
- “Three things to note: **First**, military weapons for governments are God-ordained and are not then themselves the cause of evil. **Second**, it must be clear that no nation has the right to ever use military power simply to conquer other nations or impose their ideas of social good on another nation. **Third**, there are still evil rulers who would use military force to invade and conquer another nation if they thought they could succeed. Countries need to have a strong enough military force to defend against them.”<sup>14</sup>
- One of the most basic responsibilities of government is to restrain evil and punish those who do evil.
- When a government does this, it defends the weak and defenseless, and deters further wrongdoing.
- The apostle Peter says the civil government is intended “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Pet. 2:14).
- Paul says that the government is authorized by God to “bear the sword” (Rom. 13:4) against evildoers so that it can be “a terror” to bad conduct (v. 3).
- It also “carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (v. 4).
- According to Paul, when the ruler uses superior force—even deadly force—against evil, he is “God’s servant for your good” (v.4).
  - If a government is commanded by God to protect its citizens from a robber or thief who comes from within a country, then certainly it also has an obligation to protect its citizens against thousands of murderers or thieves who come as an army from somewhere outside of the nation. Therefore, a nation has a moral obligation to defend itself against foreign attackers who would come to kill and subjugate the people in that nation.

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<sup>13</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 527.

<sup>14</sup> David Burggraaf

## CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF WAR<sup>15</sup>

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- There are some contemporary issues pose special problems for Just War Theory.

### **Terrorism and Guerilla Warfare**

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- The likelihood is that terrorists and guerrillas will continue to press the limits of noncombatant immunity, threatening to bring as many people as possible in the circle of war in order to achieve their end. **Any country that desires to adhere to JWT must not return terror for terror.** Instead, despite temptations to the contrary, it must strive as much as possible to adhere to the jus in bello criterion of noncombatant immunity.
- While terrorists do attack the innocent, they are not to be stopped “by any means necessary.”
- **The principles of just war teach us that wars of aggression and aggrandizement are never acceptable.** Wars may not legitimately be fought for national glory, to avenge past wrongs, for territorial gain, or for any other non-defensive purpose. The primary moral justification for war then comes down to protecting the innocent from certain harm.
- The stirring philosophy behind terrorist and radical Islamicist movements, is in its contempt for human life, and by viewing the world as a life-and-death struggle between believers of Islam and unbelievers, clearly denies the equal dignity of all persons, and, in doing so, betrays religion and rejects the very foundation of civilized life and the possibility of peace among nations.

### **Use of Nuclear Weapons**

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- Two main issues are seen by some to overturn the concept of Just War altogether: *the enormous power of nuclear weapons* and *the strategies employed by the nuclear powers to prevent war* (deterrence).
- The question argued still is whether nuclear weapons do deter. Some argue that nuclear weapons are so destructive that even their nonuse is immoral. Such thinkers are convinced that their awful destructive capacity, combined with the immoral nuclear deterrent doctrine of “mutually assured destruction,” implies that even the threat to use such weapons is wrong.
- Nuclear weapons destroy everything in a large radius (depending upon the size of the bomb).

### **Women in combat<sup>16</sup>**

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- Historically the position of the United States has been that women should never be sent into combat. Women could serve in other capacities in the armed forces, but not in roles where they were likely to engage in combat. However, that policy has undergone significant change in the past 40 years.

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<sup>15</sup> Dave Burggraff

<sup>16</sup> Grudem, 543-544.

- The first woman who joined the Navy specifically to be a pilot did so in 1981.
- The first female fighter pilots were employed in Kosovo in 1993.
- In December 2015, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced that all combat positions will be open to women, opening up more than 220,000 positions.
- Carter said at a news conference: "There will be no exceptions. They'll be allowed to drive tanks, fire mortars and lead infantry troops into combat. They'll be able to serve as Army Rangers and Green Berets, Navy SEALs, Marine Corp Infantry...and everything else that was previously open only to men."
- According to Grudem "I believe that the historical position of the U.S. was correct and that it is wrong to send women into combat. The biblical argument for this position is expressed well in the *ESV Study Bible* article 'War':
  - Most nations throughout history, and most Christians in every age, have held that fighting in combat is a responsibility that should fall only to men, and that it is contrary to the very idea of womanhood, and shameful for a nation, to have women risk their lives as combatants in a war. The assumption that only men and not women will fight in battle is also a frequent pattern in the historical narratives and is affirmed by leaders and prophets in the OT.
  - Numbers 1:2-3; Deut. 3:18-19; Deut. 20:7; Deut. 24:5; Josh 1:14; Neh. 4:13-14.
- Some may object that these examples are from ancient history, when women were not physically as able to fight as men were. But that is not a persuasive objection because the Israelites, both men and women, were hard-working people who spent much of their lives outdoors. While women may not have been physically able to fight quite as effectively as men, they certainly could have contributed something to a battle effort, if it had been appropriate for them to do so. **But God's Word continually shows that it was considered shameful for men to depend upon women to protect the nation in war. That is a task that was consistently entrusted to men.**