



## *Just Wars*

“Then some soldiers asked him, ‘And what should we do?’ He replied, ‘Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay’” (Luke 3:14).

Working as a professional killer doesn’t seem like a very godly vocation to many people. Since the time of the early church, Christians have wrestled with the morality of war and military service.

Some hear Jesus say to us, “Love your enemies,” and “If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also” (Luke 6:27, 29) and assume that all use of force is wrong under all circumstances. How, then, could a soldier use his weapon to take another life in good conscience?

There is more to the Biblical record, however. Many heroes of the Bible distinguished themselves by their military record: Joshua, Gideon, David. When the soldiers in the passage at the top of this page asked John the Baptist how they should show their repentance, he did not tell them to resign their commission or go AWOL. He told them not to abuse their power for personal gain.

It is possible for a child of God to serve as a soldier as long as he understands that his purpose is the protection of others. It is possible for him to serve his neighbor even as a professional killer when his purpose is the defense of innocent life.

In doing so, he is serving as an arm of the government, and while God denies the individual the right to take a life on one’s own authority, he does say of the government: “He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Romans 13:4). Soldiers are an unfortunate necessity in a world where the powerful often refuse to submit to God’s will. Soldiers are there to bring God’s punishment on the wrongdoer.

Similar principles are at work when one considers the morality of some particular war or conflict. When the basis for a war is some leader’s greedy desire for something that does not belong to him, the soldier has the right to decline his support and service. However, he must also be ready to bear the inevitable consequences of such “conscientious objections.” Making the moral choice is not always met with acceptance.

On the other hand, wars fought in defense of our people or in defense of our allies are rightly dubbed, “just wars.” Then it is an honorable thing for a soldier to risk his own life and take the life of the enemy so that he can spare the lives and property of family, friends, or neighbors.



While the Biblical principles regarding just wars and military service are clear, applying them to specific situations is often difficult. Soldiers on both sides of a conflict may find it difficult to sift through what is fact and what is fiction in the propaganda produced by the countries they serve. Governments often possess information that they do not release to the general public, and in many cases rightly so. Sometimes determining who is the aggressor and who is the victim is more complicated than determining who fired the first shot.

Of course, all of this has application to the current tensions between the United States and Iraq. Protestors from around our nation have recently voiced their disapproval of our nation's preparations for a military campaign. At the same time, leaders of both political parties in our congress voice their support. To some, we look like the aggressor. To others, Iraq's flaunting of stipulations imposed upon it after its loss of the war in 1991 (a war in which it was clearly the aggressor), its support of terrorism, and its deception make it the aggressor nation.

The task for the concerned Christian remains the same: to understand the Biblical principles, and to evaluate the information he has available to him to the best of his ability. Sometimes, even people who are agreed on the principles will not come to the same conclusion.

In general, soldiers can serve their countries in good conscience and fight with the protection of their fellow citizens and those of our allies in mind. At the same time, Christian citizens will pray for their leaders and pray for peace (I Timothy 2:1-2), so that war does not get in the way of our work of spreading the good news about Jesus.

In Christ, Pastor Vieths