

Bible Study and Discussion Questions

1. Read and discuss the following Old Testament passages relating to war: Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 31:3-7; Deuteronomy 20:1-4; Judges 3:10; Isaiah 45:1; Ecclesiastes 3:8.

2. Compare these to the following: Deuteronomy 2:4-5, 9, 19; Daniel 1:1-2; Isaiah:2:2-4.

3. Now consider these New Testament passages relating to war: Matthew 5:39; Luke 6:29; Matthew 26:51-53; Romans 12:17-21.

4. Does the New Testament rule out Christian involvement in war? Luke 3:14; 7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13; Acts 10:1-8; 22; Mark 13:7; Matthew 24:6; Luke 14:31-32; 21:9, Romans 13:1-4.

5. What are the responsibilities of leaders as they make decisions about war? What, in turn, is the responsibility of Christians as we speak to our leaders and community?

6. Taking into account these passages and the concept of just war outlined in this paper, how should Christians respond to the prospect of war in Iraq and indeed war in general?

his character would be an impatient overreaction. The offence, in this case, is the possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by an untrustworthy, violent leader. But is war a proportionate response to the suspicion that Saddam is attempting to manufacture WMD? Or do ongoing effective inspections remain the more proportionate response? The question cannot easily be settled until the destructive potential of whatever arms exist, is better known. (Satellite photos of suspicious truck movements were central to Colin Powell's evidence of clandestine WMD manufacture. But Hans Blix respectfully notes that the truck movements took place at a site known to be free from WMD, and that the analysis of these photographs is flawed.) Open warfare might be necessary to set the conditions under which disarmament can proceed, but it remains to be shown why warfare must suddenly happen now, when current methods have kept Saddam effectively contained for twelve years.

7. Will casualties be kept low, particularly among those who cannot or

do not bear arms? Thankfully, western militaries are improving in their attempts to respect this facet of justice; but in order to remain accountable here, free access must be given to journalists to inspect battle scenes in the immediate aftermath. Neither should we be romantic as to the effectiveness of technology to contain war. War will definitely kill many who do not bear arms.

8. Is there a reasonable hope of success? On the basis of Western success in the Gulf War, it would seem that there is; however again, the answer to this question is contingent upon the clarity of the goals that are set for the war.

Unless these questions can be satisfactorily answered, then at the time of writing, just war theory does not seem to endorse invasion of Iraq as a just war. Indeed, just war theory has a bad reputation, since it has a tendency to justify wars later proven to be unjust. What then are we to make of this war, if not even just war theory can endorse it?

Internet resources

To download this paper from the web go to:

<http://sie.moore.edu.au>

Other sites of interest include:

- www.un.org (United Nations)
- www.whitehouse.gov (News from the United States)
- www.amnesty.org (Amnesty International)

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time for war?

A SOCIAL ISSUES
EXECUTIVE
discussion paper:
*just war theory
and the war against Iraq*

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Thousands of people gathered at recent peace rallies around Australia to express their concern about pending war against Iraq.

The Bible states in Ecclesiastes that there is a time for war. But as Christians how are we to discern when it is time for war or when it is time for peace?

In this paper Andrew Cameron, deputy chairman of the Social Issues Executive and ethics lecturer at Moore Theological College, takes the theory of just war and applies it to the present situation in Iraq.

... how do we know when it's time?

It is hard to form a Christian position on war, because what the Bible has to say about the matter is complex indeed. It is even harder to make a pronouncement about the possible war with Iraq, since we know few of the facts, and they keep changing daily. What follows is offered to assist Christians to think theologically about the matter.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

In any discussion of war, it is unlikely that 'the Church' (i.e. the mass of Christians) will speak with 'one voice' on the matter. That is because of two complementary aspects of the Bible's teaching. On the one hand, the Bible teaches that people powerfully pursue their own goals at the expense of others—they 'sin' against each other—and such a world requires rulers who sometimes enforce peace by means of coercion (while resisting the temptation also to sin). Yet on the other hand, God intends for human societies to live in peace, without death and bloodshed, and redeems people for himself who are committed to this peaceful life, now and in future.

Therefore Christians condone some forms of coercion, but are pacifist to the core; and these two impulses will be spoken by different Christians at different times in the debate.

The Old Testament records many wars, some of which God commanded or assisted (e.g. Ex. 17:8-16; Num. 31:3-7; Deut. 20:1-4; Joshua; Judges 3:10; Isaiah. 45:1; etc). But God specifically forbids some wars (Deut. 2:4-5,9,19), and there comes a time when God's Kingdom is no longer expanded by 'holy war', with God even allowing his own people to be taken captive in war (e.g. Daniel 1:1-2). There is a 'time' for war (Eccl. 3:8); yet God's ultimate goal is for a world of peace (e.g. Isa. 2:2-4), and much bloodthirsty warfare is condemned (e.g. Isa. 33:1). This complexity has to do with the history of God's salvation of planet earth, which you could discover more about by joining the Moore College correspondence course *Introduction to the Bible* (ph. 9577-9911).

According to some Christians, both Jesus and Paul forbade all violence, and therefore all war (Mt. 5:39 & Lk. 6:29; Mt. 26:51-53; Rom. 12:17-21). One early thinker (Tertullian) goes so far as to say that although God previously allowed some warfare, Jesus "unbelted every soldier". Tertullian therefore demanded the "immediate abandonment" of military service by Christians.

But neither John the Baptist, Jesus, nor the early Christians forbade soldiering (Lk. 3:14, 7:1-10; Matt. 8:5-13; Acts 10:1-8,22), and for Jesus, war is just a part of how things are (Mk 13:7; Matt 24:6; Lk 14:31-32, 21:9). Paul, in his letter to the Romans says that God uses rulers to punish evil by use of 'the sword' (Rom. 13:1-4). Elsewhere, God commands rulers to rescue the weak and needy (Ps. 82:2-4). The care of a people is committed to those in authority, and their business is to watch over the common good of the people entrusted to them. In a sinful, fallen world, sometimes they must sadly use force to protect people.

Pondering all this, other Christians (e.g. Augustine, Aquinas, Vitoria, Suarez and Grotius) came to the conclusion that rulers must sometimes go

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to war, as a terrible duty, for "the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and of uplifting the good" (Augustine). Their collected thoughts have come to be known as 'just war' theory. It is a set of questions to be answered about any war (see box).

Of course humanity has an insatiable lust for conflict, and war is more a disease to be cured than a remedy to be administered. War results from human sin, and is a venue for more and greater sin. Until God brings his new heavens and earth, we live in a world that is under the judgment of God, and God will demand an accounting for the conduct of all war. But 'just war' theory attempts to *limit, restrain* and *quickly finish* the melancholy task of war. It does so *because* war is horrible, and not to justify more war. Just war theory condemns leaders who use war to enhance their glory or to extend their empire. "The passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an unpacific and relentless spirit, the fever of revolt, the lust of power, and such like things, all these are rightly condemned in war." (Augustine, *Contra Faust*. xxii, 74)

CHRISTIANS AND OUR LEADERS

Therefore we need to hold leaders responsible for decisions made in our name. Some Christians to the 'right' resent opinions spoken against the government, while some Christians to the 'left' are entirely suspicious of government. But a truly Biblical position is more careful than both of these extremes.

Christians always speak as 'friends' of government and are even *optimistic* about government, since the Lord Jesus Christ—who is known and trusted by us—stands behind all government (Rom 13). We therefore acknowledge that rulers have authority to keep the peace, sometimes by using force. Their difficult task requires our prayer and support (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

But just as a friend might sometimes tell us what we don't want to hear, so also must Christians sometimes remind rulers that their own rule must keep step with the just rule of the Lord Christ. Hence Christians will sometimes probe and question rulers about the *justice* of their various decisions.

The 'bottom line' though, is that it is given to rulers to rule. Christians can exercise their free speech, but within the acknowledgement (a) that it is finally for the ruler, not the church leader, to commit the state to the use of force; and (b) that it is almost impossible to imagine a just basis for any open revolt against the government. These acknowledgements are the basis of free speech, even if we probe and question very forcefully.

However, we would *certainly not ever* be this forceful with **military personnel**. We only enjoy Western democracy because soldiers do what they are told. We can't have our cake and eat it: if soldiers decide to disobey a lawful command to go to war, then soldiers, not parliament, would effectively be ruling us.

Therefore if Christians oppose this

war, they are not at liberty to condemn the soldiers who fight it. (Remember the NT attitude to soldiers.) Indeed we should honour those who 'wield the sword'; and if that sounds weird, perhaps we need to consider that such honour will help soldiers to think and act more responsibly than will suspicion and condemnation. Of course, we continue to urge soldiers to use an economy of force in each tactical situation, to keep casualties as low as possible, and to protect civilians. It goes without saying that where more soldiers in a given unit personally follow the Lord Jesus, the more likely it becomes for the unit to retain its moral compass in the heat of battle.

But it is not given to soldiers to direct the strategic goals or morality of a war. Their commanders, like us, do well to keep beseeching their political masters for clear, just, and achievable outcomes.

IS THE PROPOSED WAR AGAINST IRAQ A JUST WAR?

Our rulers are the custodians of sensitive and technical information. Decisions for war are based on which such information might emerge in future. Nevertheless, it is valid to ask our leaders to outline an ethical case for any decision to go to war on the basis of evidence available publicly. Applying just war theory to war with Iraq raises questions for our leaders:

1. *Is the cause just?* For a just defensive war, it must be shown that Saddam is violently aggressive; but he is not at present instigating war, and no serious links to Al Qaeda are evident. An offensive war can proceed to enforce Iraqi disarmament, but in two inspection reports by U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix, evidence for the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is almost non-existent, even if suspicions run deep. A case for war might be made to remove his government in light of human rights abuses, but so far no one is attempting to justify this as a war of 'regime change'.

2. *Is the intention to restore justice?* Leaders must ensure that the restoration of justice is their *only* intention. Are our leaders assured that the war is *not* stemming from Augustine's "passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an un-peaceful and relentless spirit" and "the lust of power"? It is hard for us to imagine the pres-

WHAT IS 'JUST WAR'?

1. **Is the cause just?** (The only just cause is to stop an unjust leader, or to defend against violent aggression.)
2. **Is the intention to restore justice between friend and foe?** (Some wars do irreparable and lasting damage to the prospect of just relationships.)
3. **Is the action a last resort?** (Every negotiation and other resort must have been properly tried and failed.)
4. **Is action instigated by the highest governmental authority?** (In our situation, this is the nation-state, not the UN; but the UN symbolises the greater rule that national rulers are under.)
5. **Are the goals limited?** (Leaders must clearly state what outcomes are required. This enables an enemy to comply, or an army to secure those outcomes. Otherwise, wars degenerate into a passion for inflicting harm, a cruel thirst for vengeance, a lust of power, etc.)
6. **Is the action proportional to the offence?** (The methods employed in open warfare must not exceed the initial problem.)
7. **Will casualties be kept low, particularly among those who cannot or do not bear arms?**
8. **When contemplating an offensive war, is there a reasonable hope of success?** (This prevents some wars of principle, where an attack is against hopeless odds. A seemingly 'hopeless' defensive action might still be 'just', though.)

"We do not seek peace in order to be at war, but we go to war that we may have peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those whom you war against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace." Augustine (Ep. ad Bonif. clxxxix)

ures upon U.S. citizens after September 11. Nevertheless, to lead the world properly, the U.S. *especially* must refrain from wars of vengeance. The strength of our alliance gives our Prime Minister a unique position of trust from which to urge the U.S. President not to make war for vengeance or glory. Is our Prime Minister pressing the President on this? History will remember a great President who responds to September 11 with justice, not vengeance.

3. *Is the action a last resort?* U.S. and U.K. leaders argue that negotiations and U.N. disarmament have failed; however U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix, in both of his reports to the U.N., remains confident in the inspection procedure. Can our leaders outline what makes war necessary as a *last resort*, when sanctions have effectively constrained Iraq and prevented a weapons build-up, and while the weapons inspectors remain reasonably confident in their work?

4. *Is the action instigated by the highest governmental authority?* The U.N. is not so much a government over governments as an expression of the

truth that rulers are under the greater rule of 'international law', which had its origins in Christian thought, and which is finally found in the rule of the Lord Christ. The U.S., U.K. and Australia are governed by a justice greater than their own, so although the U.N. is flawed, its arguments must be weighed very heavily in determining what is just. Several member-states of the U.N., some of whom participated in the Gulf War, argue strongly against this war. Can our leaders explain what invalidates their arguments?

5. *Are the goals limited?* The stated intention of this war has been to disarm Saddam Hussein. It is a technical question, certainly beyond our expertise, as to whether this is an achievable goal for the military. But before going to war, political leaders must be assured that this goal is indeed achievable. If the true goal is regime change, leaders must be assured that they can in fact effect such a change.

6. *Is the action proportional to the offence?* Saddam is certainly a difficult and deceptive leader, but that is not the 'offence' in this case, and war against