

When Does God Sanction War?

The great faith hall of fame, Hebrews 11, indicates that spiritual faith accomplishes incredible physical feats: from walls collapsing to waters parting, from conquering kingdoms to quenching fires and dodging swords—yes, even to the specific point of violent physical combat and becoming “mighty in war and putting foreign armies to flight” (see Heb. 11:34).

It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that spiritual warfare and physical combat are essentially two sides of the same coin. The physical is an expression of the spiritual. The material world, including combat, is an expression of the realities of the spiritual world. It seems that the heroes of our faith, this “great cloud of witnesses” surrounding us (Heb. 12:1), saw little difference between the two worlds and warfare. The unchanging principles of “justice and righteousness” rule over conflict in both the physical and spiritual realms.

Perhaps it is this singular reality—the blending of the two worlds—that is part of the reason God chose to describe the heart of one of the Bible’s greatest spiritual heroes and most physical warriors—King David—as having “a heart of integrity” (see Ps. 78:72). David’s heart is described as a singular whole. It was an integer, an undivided unit. For David, the world of swords, caves, blood and battles was one with his world of worship, fellowship with God, and spiritual health. Is this not why David exulted, “For by You I can run through a troop, and by my God I can leap a wall” (Ps. 18:29).

Perhaps a similar parallel is seen in 1 Chronicles 11 and 12, which list the unit rosters of Israel’s greatest warriors in David’s army. Certain phrases are repeated throughout these warrior-chapters. These phrases seem to bear an intimate relationship—“mighty men of valor” and “according to the word of the Lord” are two such phrases. Valor and God’s truth are

related. It seems a major point of the chapters is to indicate that “right makes might.”

The closing chapters of the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, suggests similar parallels in the worlds of spiritual warfare and physical combat. Revelation 19:11 reads: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and *in righteousness He judges and wages war*” (emphasis added). The immediate context is clearly one of extremely violent physical combat. But the larger context, the conclusion of all of Scripture, is clearly the conclusion of the entire spiritual history of Scripture. In the end, the King of heaven and Lord of lords brings earth history to a spiritual and physical conclusion in the same context of battle, both spiritual and physical.

Spiritual warfare in your life and mine is governed by the same principles that directed the lives of the heroes of the faith who have gone before us. Warfare, whether spiritual or physical, is to be waged in righteousness and justice.

Warfare is as old as the human race and will be a constant condition as long as men govern themselves. Given such a prevalence of war, one will find all sorts of views on warfare among the nations and societies on earth. Those views range from total pacifism to extreme and open aggressiveness.

Into this mix, philosophers for millennia have debated the concept known as *just war*—war that is considered morally justified. They’ve developed myriad matrices and identified various characteristics that supposedly identify and differentiate between just and unjust wars.

Despite their considerable pontification on the subject, philosophers aren’t necessarily the best judges of what makes a war just. Instead, the warrior who’s actually doing the fighting will often have the better perspective. The warrior

sees war with a proximity neither academics nor the media are regularly exposed to. The warrior has a unique perspective of the nature of warfare and can be a better judge of what makes war just.

The concept of war is clearly biblical, as there are many references to it in the Scriptures. Furthermore, as we read in the book of Exodus, "The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name" (Ex. 15:3). And Revelation 19 describes a scene where Jesus Himself returns to the earth as a warrior, leading a great army to finally destroy His enemies.

Until Christ returns to bring His peace to all mankind, nations will continue to experience or be threatened by warfare, just as they have been since the fall of humanity. So the issue continually confronts us: *When is war justified? When is it acceptable to engage in war, and when does God Himself sanction war?* It is a question that will never leave us, particularly in our day of global terror. And it is a question every Christian must ask in his or her own soul. *What will you do when war—spiritual or physical—comes to your home ... or your homeland?*

Politics and War

War carries connotations of politics, but combat is a primal struggle between individuals who are generally organized into some form of fighting units. Carl von Clausewitz, in his famous treatise *On War*, said, "War is politics by other means." But for the warrior who's fighting for his life and those of his fellow warriors, the connection between war and politics has little meaning in the heat of battle. Sometimes there are even instances of combat when there is no actual "war," declared or otherwise.

For the purpose of discussing the concept of just war, I've chosen to think of *war*, *warfare* and *combat* as conditions under which warriors are engaged in a life-and-death struggle for

reasons that *they* believe are just—and not simply because their governments have made that judgment. In this discussion, the words *war* and *combat* are used somewhat interchangeably, since the warrior is always at the cutting edge, and he finds little distinction between the two terms.

For Justice

In Micah 6:8, the prophet asks, “What does the Lord require of you?” The answer, he continues, is simply this: “To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” That phrase *to do justice* is sometimes translated as “to do justly.” In order to do justice or to act justly, one must first have a sense of justice.

The true warrior has a strong sense of justice that directs his actions. The warrior sees injustice as evil and believes that fighting against it is a noble cause, regardless of the assessments of the politicians, diplomats and pundits. The warrior respects the decisions of those in positions of authority but still maintains an independent sense of what is *just* in regards to warfare.

The true warrior cannot accept injustice when he perceives that he can reverse it, or at least believes that his actions have a chance to do so. The warrior is guided by his sense of justice, which causes him to stand apart from others in the way he thinks and the way he acts. The true warrior is motivated by the concept of *justice*.

Assessing Justice in America's Wars

It's important that we assess the concept of just war in the daily-life context experienced by each soldier (as well as that experienced by each civilian). The individual is constantly confronted with dilemmas, situations and circumstances that could be considered war or combat on a personal level.

Many conflicts between nations derive from a formal declaration of war, but most wars simply result from one nation invading or attacking another with no official or formal announcement. The United States Congress has declared a "state of war" only five times in U.S. history, the last time being World War II, even though U.S. forces have been involved in major conflicts throughout its history.

The conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, as well as the Gulf War of 1990–1991 and, a decade later, the military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, were not "declared" wars in the sense that World Wars I and II were, but they did have official support emanating from Congress.

America was drawn into World War II as a result of the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Few Americans questioned our nation's entry into the conflict; it was instantly deemed an issue of self-defense. The premise that we were entering a just war was easy to accept.

When the conflict in Korea began in 1950, it was clearly a just war for the South Koreans, who had been invaded by their Korean brothers to the north. But U.S. involvement was a different matter. Many Americans weren't easily convinced that sacrificing the lives of young Americans in a war for another nation's freedom was justifiable.

The same sentiments were expressed when the fighting in Vietnam escalated in the 1960s. Many Americans questioned the rationale for fighting to sustain a corrupt government in South Vietnam.

U.S. leaders had identified critical American interests before committing our forces to combat in both places. In the prevailing view, the possibility of communist expansion was a serious threat to the entire free world. Left unchecked, the communist objectives of global dominance and conquest would jeopardize America's future.

Coming ashore in Pusan, Korea, in June of 1950, U.S. soldiers saw the desperate plight of the Korean people who had been driven from their homes and villages by the murderous army from North Korea. Most realized right away that their presence and sacrifice there was justifiable, but for reasons that were different from those of the politicians.

In Vietnam, soldiers entering the hamlets and villages where the Viet Cong had brutalized the local inhabitants and robbed them of any hope for a future of self-determination knew that fighting for these people was justifiable. They were warriors with little regard for politics. Furthermore, they knew that the media and the academics had their own agenda, and that it wouldn't allow them to see the just side of the conflict.

Remembering the Biblical Picture

As stated earlier, war is a biblical concept. It began in the Garden of Eden when the serpent tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. That was the original example of the war between good and evil. It was spiritual warfare.

That war continues, and every warrior has a strong awareness of the realities of this underlying struggle.

Myriad wars are described in the Bible, many of which were initiated at God's direction to bring justice or to fulfill His promises to His people, the Jews. Stories of warriors and warfare are prominent in Scripture. And God routinely used warriors to do great things for His kingdom in addition to fighting wars.

God has called men to war repeatedly. Moses had to make war on the Amalekites at Rephidim as he led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt (Ex. 17). When Joshua stood on the banks of the Jordan River and looked into the Promised Land, he was assured by God of the victory over the enemy that was waiting for him. God exhorted him to "be strong and courageous" as he led the men of Israel into battle against the current

inhabitants of the land (see Josh. 1:1-9).

Later, Gideon was selected by God to lead 300 men in a preemptive strike against the Midianites (Judg. 7). Even later, the psalm-writing and mighty King David was a great warrior who fought many battles to protect his people and secure their borders. God showed him favor in war, and even called him a man after His own heart.

Those who choose to characterize Jesus as a pacifist are entitled to that view, but I for one see Jesus as the ultimate warrior who makes clear that we must fight for justice.

One especially revealing verse in this regard is Luke 22:36, in which Jesus directed His disciples to arm themselves in preparation for building His church. Bible scholars have tried for centuries to explain what Jesus really meant in this verse. Some insist that He was using a metaphor and didn't really mean "sell your cloak and buy a sword." But I believe He meant exactly what He said—*buy a sword*.

He wasn't directing them to build His church with the sword; He was simply communicating that in building the church, they could expect to encounter physical battles and would have to be prepared. Although their battle would be primarily spiritual, there would be times when their spiritual enemy would be manifest in a physical threat. Remember that all the disciples were eventually martyred for their faith and obedience.

Jesus was, is and will be a warrior, and He expects His followers to be the same. But His warriors must fight for justice and to overcome evil—and never for revenge or personal gain.

Make no mistake: I am not advocating that readers grab their AR-15s and join a militia that is bent on fighting a domestic insurgency. Our founders gave us what we need to peacefully change our culture, environment and government. The U.S.

Constitution allows us to elect our own leaders. It is called the "consent of the governed." When I talk about "fighting" for justice, I am referring to being willing to stand on principle. It means having the courage to stand publicly for what you believe.

How many leaders have you seen who compromise on their fundamental beliefs? Either they don't know what they believe or they lack the courage to stand for what they believe. Compromise on principles is not an option. Political correctness is the result of a lack of courage, plain and simple. So decide what you believe and how far you are willing to go to defend your beliefs. The Bible says, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all" (Isa. 7:9, NIV). Does your faith matter to you? Are you willing to stand firm and defend it?

Wounded

It's said that you never hear the bullet that hits you. Well, that could be true, but I wasn't so sure. I was in a UH-60 Black Hawk, and the noise from the rotor blades was drowning out the guns on the ground that were shooting at us. When the .50-caliber rounds slammed into my chest and shoulder, I knew I was hit pretty hard. Pain set in quickly after a brief period of numbness, and I began to lose a substantial amount of blood.

We were still in the air over the Caribbean island of Grenada, and the battle was raging down below us as U.S. forces invaded the island to rescue a group of American medical students and to liberate the small nation. The date was Oct. 24, 1983. The small island was in the hands of an illegitimate government as a result of a Cuban-sponsored coup d'état. The Cuban objective, acting as Soviet surrogates, was to build an airfield that would accommodate the largest Soviet bombers, thereby giving the Soviets a base from which they could strike

elsewhere in North and South America.

President Ronald Reagan, a staunch anti-communist, refused to allow the USSR to gain that kind of foothold in the Western Hemisphere. He ordered the U.S. Atlantic Command into action, with a directive to invade the island and return it to its rightful leaders, those who had been elected by the people of Grenada. U.S. special operations forces were to spearhead the operation.

So there I was in the lead Black Hawk, with two gaping holes in me, watching the battle unfold. I knew I might die before I could get to a safe location and receive medical treatment. A .50-caliber bullet makes a *big* hole—and I knew how serious my injury was.

My thoughts turned to a simple question: *“Is this worth it? If I die here, is it worth dying for? Are we doing the right thing by invading this postage-stamp piece of soil in the Caribbean?”* I needed to know that my life would be sacrificed for a just cause.

Then I considered the obvious. Ronald Reagan obviously thought that committing American lives to this fight was justifiable, and that was good enough for me. Reagan was an honorable patriot, and he believed in what we were doing. After all, he sent us here. The people in Grenada had been robbed of their freedom and were being brutalized by their occupiers. The American medical students there were confined to their campus with none of the basic freedoms of a democracy. The Soviets were a known threat. We would reduce that threat, restore those liberties through our sacrifices and free these people in a foreign land.

Yes, this was a just cause.

OK, that was resolved in my mind. Next question: *“How do I stay alive?”*

Miraculously, I survived and made it back to the army hospital at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. My recovery would be a slow process, with much time spent in the hospital.

Meanwhile, my conclusions about the just nature of the Grenada operation were confirmed as I lay in my hospital bed two days after being shot. I was watching the television news when a reporter thrust a microphone in front of an elderly lady in Grenada. She was one of those who had suffered greatly during the occupation by the Cubans and communists. Toothless and dressed in tattered clothing, the lady looked directly into the camera, and, with tears in her eyes, she said, "God bless Ronald Reagan, and God bless America!"

Yes, we were in a just war—and I was honored to be part of it. My injuries suddenly seemed insignificant.

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Watch author, pastor and former soldier Stu Weber identify how the "warrior's soul" relates to leadership at

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In their book *The Warrior's Soul*, Lt. Gen. William G. "Jerry" Boykin and Stu Weber raise the war cry for Christians to fight

for justice on behalf of Christ. They show that, whether physical or spiritual, all just battles require warriors who have courage and integrity. This book can be found at any store where Christian books are sold or at or .