

The Bible Speaks on War & Peace

By the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission

During most of recorded human history there has been war in some part of the world. Our own generation has experienced the futility of war which neither settles international disputes nor relieves international tensions. We pay a frightful cost in human life, in money, in morals, and in spiritual values because we persist in avoiding “what makes for peace and for mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).

Christians cannot avoid being related to the issues of war and peace. What should be our attitude toward such things? What does the Bible say about war and peace?

I. We live in a fallen world.

1. It is a world of sinners.

“There is no one who is righteous, not even one; ... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:10, 23)

2. It is a world where selfishness and greed abound.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die — yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.” (Romans 1:28-32)

3. It is a world in which human lust and self-interest lead to conflict.

“Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?” (James 4:1)

4. It is a world which often rejects peace and chooses war.

*"Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.
I am for peace;
but when I speak,
they are for war." (Psalm 120:6-7)*

5. It is a world in which wars are a continuing consequence of sin.

"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places." (Matthew 24:6-7)

II. The Bible's ideal is a world at peace.

1. Some Bible passages are cited to approve war.

(1) God commanded Israel to wage offensive warfare.

"Then the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not fear or be dismayed; take all the fighting men with you, and go up now to Ai. See, I have handed over to you the king of Ai with his people, his city, and his land. You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king; only its spoil and its livestock you may take as booty for yourselves. Set an ambush against the city, behind it.'" (Joshua 8:1-2)

It should be noted, however, that this was an expression of God's judgment against godless nations (Leviticus 18:24-25). He was dispossessing people who would be a curse to mankind in order to give their lands to a people who would be a blessing to mankind. Later, God used warfare as a means of judgment against Israel (2 Kings 18:11-25; 24:1-4).

(2) Jesus used a display of physical force in the temple to drive out those who desecrated his holy place.

“Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer”; but you are making it a den of robbers.”’ (Matthew 21:12-13)

(3) Jesus once commanded his disciples to buy a sword.

“He said to them, ‘But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.’” (Luke 22:36)

The context indicates that He may have been speaking figuratively, however, in order to point up the danger his disciples were soon to face, for within only a few hours he rebuked Peter for using a sword (Matthew 26:52).

2. God is fundamentally committed to peace, not war, as is reflected in his rejection of David as the builder of the temple because David was “a warrior” who had “shed blood” (1 Chronicles 28:3).

3. The Old Testament prophets foresaw a golden age of peace.

*“He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:4)*

*“The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:6-9)*

*“For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)*

4. The New Testament writers proclaimed the ideal of peace.

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (Luke 2:14)*

*“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword
will perish by the sword.’” (Matthew 26:52)*

“Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual edification.” (Romans 14:19)

*“Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”
(Hebrews 12:14)*

III. Christians have a responsibility to work for peace in all the relationships of life.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

*“But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the
other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.”
(Matthew 5:39-40)*

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44)

“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” (Romans 12:18)

“Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”
(Hebrews 12:14)

“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.” (James 3:18)

IV. God’s peace reigning in our hearts is the beginning of all peace.

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.” (Colossians 3:15)

Conclusion

Let Christians everywhere pray faithfully for just and lasting peace.

“You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.” (James 4:2)

Let us diligently and sincerely give ourselves to the task of doing what “makes for peace and for mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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