

## Should Christians Endorse the War?

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Aren't Christians supposed to turn the other cheek? Didn't Jesus say to love your enemies? So how can a Christian endorse war, even if it is against terrorists?

This is a fair question. Let me make it clear that I do not endorse war indiscriminately. Many wars have been wrong. Often there are multiple factors that make it difficult to sort out the moral issues involved. But in spite of wrong wars in the past, I do think that there is a Christian case for fighting just wars. And I believe that the current war against terrorism is both just and necessary if we desire to live securely in peace.

If an intruder broke into my home and threatened to rape my wife or daughters, I would be wrong not to come to their defense with whatever level of force it takes to stop him. If he threatened to come back and do it again, I would be negligent not to take adequate measures to prevent him from doing so.

If I can justify defending my family from an evil attacker, then I can justify a police force to defend law-abiding citizens. And if the police do that on a local level, it is right for the national government to defend its citizenry from aggressors who threaten from outside.

The Bible teaches that God ordains civil governments to promote peace through upholding justice in society. Of the civil ruler, the apostle Paul says, "He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13:4, New International Version). Obviously, the government must use some level of force to bring law-breakers to justice (they seldom turn themselves in willingly). This can even extend to the death penalty, according to the Bible (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:4, "sword"). If it takes force to apprehend a violent criminal on the local level, by extension it is necessary for a government to use force to stop violent groups or nations from attacking its citizens.

During a recent press conference, a reporter asked one of the top government officials, "You say that the United States wants justice, not revenge. What is the difference?" The difference is, vengeance carries with it the idea of evening the score. It means paying back an enemy in like kind for what he did to us. They came on our soil and killed thousands of our civilians; we will go on their soil and slaughter thousands of their civilians to get even. I must admit that when I see people cheering the attacks on America, trampling on our flag, and shouting, "Death to America," it makes me want vengeance. But vengeance is God's prerogative only: "'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

Justice, on the other hand, means bringing to trial those who have violated the law and imposing the appropriate sentences for their crimes. If it is not possible to capture them alive, they may need to be killed by police or military action. The objective is to make society safe for law-abiding people by bringing law-breakers to account. The penalties imposed must be severe enough to deter the law-breakers from repeat offenses and tempted lawbreakers from doing so. In the case of premeditated mass murder, death is the only appropriate penalty. The executed criminals will not repeat their offense. The death penalty sends the message to others that taking a life is such a serious offense (because innocent life is so sacred) that the offender will pay the ultimate penalty.

If my five-year-old doesn't like what I ask him to do and defiantly throws a brick through a picture window, and I let him get away with it without appropriate consequences, I'm raising a terrorist. There must be severe consequences for severely wrong behavior. If not, terrorists will rule by terror, and we all will live in fear.

So what about turning the other cheek and loving our enemies? Read the context (Matthew 5:38-47). Jesus is talking about the need to bear with personal offences without retaliation, not about civil or national defense. As Christians, we should pray for the people of Afghanistan. We should help them with relief as we are able. But we should also support our government in its attempt to bring the terrorists and those who harbor them to justice. This is God's ordained purpose for government. He is a God of love toward those who fear Him, but of justice toward those who do evil.