

## Is Jesus a Pacifist?

### Ephesians 6: 10 - 18

Today I'm going to preach on one of life's most difficult and controversial subjects: War.

This weekend many of us will go camping, go on a picnic, grill out, or watch the Indy 500 from the comfort of our living room. Some of us might even participate in a Memorial Day service.

So, as we relax and enjoy friends and family and an extra day off from work, I suppose each of us will, at least for a moment, reflect upon the meaning of Memorial Day – remembering and honoring those who paid such a high price to protect, secure, and advance the virtues, ideals, and principles that we hold so dearly, without which this great country would cease to exist.

I never served in the military, so I've never experienced the unimaginably harsh reality of war.

Today, each of us live in relative safety and comfort - the privilege secured by others who sacrificed their very lives to provide it. It is both humbling and inspiring, as we acknowledge that others valued something greater than their own lives.

This is how Christians should view their faith – as more valuable than their earthly lives. Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he taught his disciples in Matthew 10:39, *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."*

Truth be told, I don't want to preach on war, but I can't escape the topic. It's all over the pages of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, but also in the New. You can't read John's Revelation and avoid the topic of war.

War runs through the entire history of man and is as common in our world today as the changing of the seasons. Solomon reminds us in Ecclesiastes that there is a *"time for war and a time for peace."*

In a book I read some time ago, entitled One – A Face Behind the Numbers, one chapter was devoted to the topic of war. The author wrote that at any given time, one-third of the world's population is at war. That's a lot of people, and that's a lot of conflict, pain, suffering, and death.

So, let me pose a couple of questions to get you thinking about war – just what you wanted to do this morning, I'm sure!

What is war?

And will we ever realize a world without war?

And if we ever do see a world without war, would this equate to peace?

Is the God of the Old Testament pro-war while the God of the New Testament anti-war?

When I was in Alaska, I met a lot of interesting people. One was a fellow who was working as an electrician at the sea food processing plant. He told me that in his earlier life he was in the military's Special Operations Unit. They go on secret missions. He had been in places like Nicaragua and Grenada.

One day we got on the topic of politics, and he asked the question, "What is war?" (I guess he just wanted to see what I'd say.) I gave him some layman's answer like an unresolved disagreement between nations or a people group that leads to violence and bloodshed, but I admitted I really hadn't given it much thought.

He then rattled off his definition: A nation's advancement of a political agenda upon another nation when all other means of advancement had failed. (I could tell that he felt very proud in his ability to tell me what war is.)

To me, this sounded like a pretty cut and dried textbook definition of war. But who was I to argue? I grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm and missed Vietnam. What did I know about war?

My dad served as a military policeman in Korea for a couple of years in the late 50's in a peace-keeping capacity, and he rarely ever spoke of his time there. I did see a few slides of him visiting a Korean orphanage – he enjoyed helping children.

But it wasn't until 1999 that I came face to face with a family whose son had been a soldier for America's enemy. You may recall the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in the late 70's early 80's. Anyway, in 1999, I was visiting my sister, her husband and her children while they were on the mission field in Uzbekistan – a country that was formerly part of the USSR.

During my stay I had the opportunity to visit this man's humble home in a small village in the countryside. Hanging on the wall inside the main room was a large photograph of his brother in full military dress. He had died fighting for the Soviets against the Afghan Rebels (to whom the U.S. were supplying weapons).

Until that day *that* war had only been a topic in my social studies class. Now I was standing in the home of a family who lost a son in that war.

Later on, the sole-surviving son of that family took me to see a small plot of land where his family grew rice. All I could think was, "and these are the communists I grew up learning to hate?"

Interesting, how things change when you see the other side.

I know that in this day and age, many people claim to be pacifists – that is until they become victims of Road Rage- Frankly, I would love to be a pacifist if the Bible would let me.

But I can't be, because my spiritual leader, Jesus Christ, believe it or not, was *not* a pacifist. "What do you mean?!", some will protest. Didn't Jesus say,

"Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek  
turn to him the other also", and

"Love your enemies", and

"He who lives by the sword shall die by it"?

How can you say, then, that Jesus was *not* a pacifist?

I say this because of the simple fact that Jesus came to earth.

What was Jesus' reason for coming to earth? Jesus said he came "seek and save the lost", right?

But how was he going to go about "seeking and saving the lost"?

Only one way: by going to *war* and *destroying* his enemy.

It took courage for God, in human flesh, to do this.

I submit to you that having courage often has nothing to do with being mean or nice. It simply means doing the right thing for the greater good. God's courage and true love for humanity gave us Jesus, in human flesh, who fought for us – He courageously went to war to destroy our enemy in the name of love and to stand up for what is right.

A pacifist might stand by and not get involved. Not Jesus.

Christ voluntarily getting flogged and dying on the cross was an outrageous example of courageous fighting, a behavior modeled for us that He made sure we didn't miss.

Listen to the prophetic Psalm by David concerning Jesus. Psalm 110:1 reads in regard to defeating enemies:

“The Lord says to my Lord: sit at my right hand  
until I make *your* enemies a footstool for your feet.”

Later on in verse five David writes:

“The Lord is at your right hand;  
he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.”

True, Jesus came to earth as gentle as a lamb, meek and mild, being born a babe in a manger, but the Bible promises that Jesus' return will bring terror to all who fail to believe in Him, Luke 21:26-27:

“Men will *faint from terror*, apprehensive of what is *coming on the world*, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

And, though Jesus Christ came to the earth meek and mild, his *mission* has always been the same. The Apostle John writes about it in 1 John 3:8:

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to *destroy* the devil's work.”

This doesn't sound like a pacifying God to me.

What is the “Devil's work”?

Isn't it to deceive humanity,  
keeping humanity imprisoned in sin,

preventing us from believing in the one true God through His Son Jesus, therefore sealing our fate to Hell?

Like it or not, Jesus Christ is not a pacifist: He *came to wage war against Satan and to set us captives free!*

Like it or not, the truth is that if you are not yet a believer in Christ, you are still *under the influence of the one who wants to destroy your soul.*

Barring Christ's help, this is exactly what will happen to you.

In 1 Peter 5:8 Peter warns us,

*"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*

This is extremely bad news.

The good news: as a Christian, our enemy is God's enemy, and we can find safety and refuge in Christ's saving work on the cross and in His victory!

"Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him," Psalm 24:8.

Here is another teaching by Jesus that seems to argue against Jesus being a pacifist, as He put it in Matthew 10:34-36:

*"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."*

Obviously, I don't think Jesus was talking about a literal sword. But what he is saying is that the *inevitable result* of His coming to earth is *conflict*:

conflict between Christ and the Anti-Christ,

Light and Darkness,

God's children and the Devil's children.

The conflict can even occur between members of the same family...

Isn't this fundamentally how war begins? An unresolvable conflict between two parties?

To be a pacifist is to ...

-allow evil to have free reign on earth and win the conflict between good and evil.

-If Jesus were a pacifist, he would have never come to earth: he came to earth to take back, reclaim, *buy back* what was rightfully His in the first place.

That's why Paul can say, in Romans 8:21-23,

"Creation will be *liberated* from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious *freedom* of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Even we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for our *adoption* as sons, the *redemption* of our bodies."

To "redeem" means to "buy back".

Christ used his own blood to purchase our salvation. Christ went to war against the Evil One to rescue us!

We all must admit that Christ's waging of war for our spiritual lives was unorthodox, at least from a human perspective. Isaiah prophesied about Christ, saying,

*"He was led like a lamb to the slaughter," (Is.53:7).*

But it was war nonetheless, and from the cross he made it clear who won: with His last breath he proclaimed,

*"It is finished."*

Roughly translated, "the sins of the world have been paid for. My enemy's prisoners can go free."

Does this mean "no more war and true peace on earth"? Not until Jesus returns and makes everything new.

Christ still leaves us with free will, with a choice to make:

*"If we confess our sins,  
he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins  
and purify us from all unrighteousness," (1 John 1:9)*

When Christ returns and makes everything new,

Isaiah's vision will come true:

*"The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,  
and dust will be the serpent's food.  
They will neither harm nor destroy on all my  
holy mountain, says the Lord," Isaiah 65:25.*



We long for that day of true peace and harmony and justice, but until then, we must continue to pick up our God-given spiritual weapons and fight the good fight of faith with love and truth and courage knowing that the spoils of victory is eternal life with Our Captain and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

