

**Text: Ex 20.13**

Our topic today is,

*What about War?*

The question came to me like this: “What about ‘thou shalt not kill’ and the justification of defending your family against violence or standing up to men like Hitler and other aggressors.”

Since the question came in, we heard the news of the terrible attacks in Israel, the subsequent wars and protests that followed.

Before that, we had the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

Some Christians (notably Mennonites) advocate for pacifism. They argue that we should never take up arms in war. I discovered I have a book by a Mennonite last night, but I didn’t have time to read it (or much desire to!).

On the other hand, quite clearly Christians have gone to war (and are going to war right now). Are they right or wrong to do so? How do we tell?

I found in my library a few documents that teach about Augustine’s concept of “Just War” — that is, “Just” as in “Righteous.”

Augustine thought there were righteous reasons to go to war, even though he decried the violence and militarism of the Roman Empire. He lived in the Empire, so it wasn’t an idle question.

I chose one of the Ten Commandments for our text, and I will add another from our Lord Jesus:

Ex 20.13 ¶ “You shall not murder.

Mt 5.9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

These passages and others like them cause Christians to pause, but I will not advocate for a pacifist stance in a fallen world. I think we can show that the Bible does not either.

**Proposition: While Jesus is for peace, there remains a Biblical case for righteous war.**

## I. The prohibition of the law (Ex 20.13)

### A. Two words in Hebrew

1. Essentially, “never murder” or “don’t kill”
2. The law is not temporary, it is permanent

### B. The meaning of “kill”

1. “putting to death improperly, for selfish reasons rather than with authorization (as killing in the administration of justice or killing in divinely ordained holy war would be)”<sup>1</sup>
2. “The verb, with the exception of **Nu 35**<sub>30</sub>, denotes illegal behaviour against the community which is always directed against an individual”<sup>2</sup>
3. “The word *ratzach* is never used in the legal system or in the military. There are other Hebrew words for the execution of a death sentence or for the kind of killing that a soldier does in mortal combat. Nor is the word *ratzach* ever used for hunting and killing animals.”<sup>3</sup>
4. One correction to the above
  - a. The term is used for manslaughter, for which the cities of refuge were created
  - b. Manslaughter (by definition) is accidental

Thus, I think we can say the unauthorized taking of a human life, whether premeditated, in a fit of passion, or by negligence, is prohibited.

---

<sup>1</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, v. 2 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 462.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew-Aramaic and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Abridged BDB-Gesenius Lexicon)* (Ontario, Canada: Online Bible Foundation, 1997), BibleWorks, v.8.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, ESV edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2015), 616.

### C. The implications of the commandment

1. If there is unlawful taking of human life, there is also lawful taking of human life
2. The question comes down to “what is lawful taking of human life?”

Before we answer that question, there is another emphasis we need to make.

## II. The priority of peace (Mt 5.9)

### A. Jesus said, “blessed are the peacemakers”

1. The early church took him literally

“We have learned not to return blow for blow nor to go to law with those who plunder and rob us. Instead, even to those who strike us on one side of the face, we offer the other side also.” *Athenagoras* (c. 175, E), 2.129

“I think we must inquire whether warfare is proper at all for Christians.” *Tertullian* (c. 211, W), 3.100.

2. Nevertheless, the early church also allowed converted soldiers to remain in the army (while standing against converts becoming soldiers)

### B. The Christian must cultivate the way of peace

1. As we consider the ethical teaching of the NT, we see these emphasized as spiritual qualities

the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5.22-23)

2. The works of the flesh include

the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: ... enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions (Gal 5.19-20)

Consequently, even if a Christian justifies war, he must in his spirit cultivate meekness, love, and peace.

### III. The possibility of righteous war

A. Philip Ryken lists several possible justifications for authorized taking of a life

1. Self-defense, “the protection of one’s self and one’s family from violent attack”<sup>4</sup>
2. In executing a death penalty by appropriate civic authorities
  - a. An individual is never authorized to be jury, judge, and executioner
  - b. Only after due process may state-authorized authorities carry out a sentence of death

Gn 9.5-6 “Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man. <sup>6</sup> “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

Rm 13.4 for it [government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

3. In prosecuting a righteous war
  - a. This is partly an extension of the principle of self-defense, though some wars may not be strictly self-defense

For example, when the USA went into WW2 against Germany, they were attacking an immoral regime (it was self-defense against Japan).

- b. Augustine and others laid down principles of righteous war
  - 1) final resort
  - 2) legitimate authorization
  - 3) just cause

---

<sup>4</sup> Ryken, 616.

- 4) right intention
- 5) balance of foreseen consequences
- 6) moderation of means<sup>5</sup>

c. Augustine, lamenting war, though it be just

“But, say they, the wise man will wage just wars. As if he would not all the rather lament the necessity of just wars, if he remembers that he is a man; for if they were not just he would not wage them, and would therefore be delivered from all wars. For it is the wrongdoing of the opposing party which compels the wise man to wage just wars; and this wrong-doing, even though it gave rise to no war, would still be matter of grief to man because it is man’s wrong-doing. Let every one, then, who thinks with pain on all these great evils, so horrible, so ruthless, acknowledge that this is misery.”<sup>6</sup>

d. And the object of war is peace

“For peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged in order that peace may be obtained.”<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion:

So we see that even in the prosecution of just war, the Christian default’s towards peace.

Well, I hope this helps. There are just causes for which a nation may go to war, and I believe that a Christian can join with the nation in such causes.

---

<sup>5</sup> “The Inadequacy of Just War Theory for the Nuclear Age” John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher’s Notebook: The Collected Quotes, Illustrations, and Prayers of John Stott*, ed. Mark Meynell (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 405.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. G. Cunningham, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 554.

The prosecution of war is a horrible thing, but sometimes the only way to punish evil men is to wage war. God gives the nations this authority, and in a fallen world such wars fulfill the will of God.

The death and destruction that accompanies war is one of the great costs of sin. Sometimes the innocent die along with the guilty. It is a terrible and tragic thing, but it must be done to achieve justice.

Nevertheless, no believer should wage war for the love of it. He should rather love peace.