

**Text: Rm 13.1-7**

To begin, I realize that the question about Israel in its current conflict stirs up powerful emotions. Some events we hear about are incredibly sad and tragic. The way these events are reported to us affects how we think about everyone involved.

I am speaking on this over a year after the latest conflict began.

- A lot of events since then
- Emotional reactions on all sides

Because of this, we run a great risk in addressing the question now. We probably have varied opinions among us.

- We need to remember our purpose as a church
- We need to remember that our spiritual union is more important than earthly politics
- We need to be committed to the work of evangelizing our community and making disciples ... that is our mission

Nonetheless, several have asked me questions about it and I have promised to give my answers to them.

The next thing I want to call to your attention is our message from last Sunday. Let's sum up the point of last Sunday's message:

- We dare not relax God's word in any respect.

That was the real problem of the scribes and Pharisees. They had a reputation for legal scrupulosity, but it was selective: They used legal means to establish their own righteousness and to escape the "weightier matters of the law."

In effect, they dismissed the real meaning of the law.

For us, we now live in the age of grace, the law does not apply (though it does inform). The gospel rests on the foundation of the law, so grace does not mean lawlessness, but it does mean using the law correctly.

My plan for this morning is to introduce the question, then address it by teaching what is known as "just war theory." We will conclude by asking questions about the current situation considering the Christian view of war.

The question as I see it is this: "What should Christians think of Israel in 2024?"

We aren't asking "should Israel have done this or that action" or "should Israel have taken no action in this conflict."

- We don't have enough information about most of these events to answer these last questions
- We know that in any conflict, both sides are selective in the information they give out, and sometimes they lie.
- We also know that the media is not to be trusted — the media is *extremely secular*, both on the right and the left, and they lie.

Since we can't know all the reasons for any action in the conflict, or the truth about what has happened in individual events of the conflict, it is impossible to give a Christian position on every aspect of the conflict.

We can give an answer, however, to the question:

What should Christians think of Israel in 2024?

Now we need to set the question aside and talk about "just war theory." Our opening text is a foundational passage for this: **Romans 13.1-7 (esp. v. 4)**

**Proposition:** Just war theory gives us a standard to evaluate conflicts in the world.

One more thing before we begin. I've put two links in the bulletin to podcasts I did with two FrontLine authors. One was on pacifism, with David Saxon, a professor at Maranatha Baptist University. The other was on just war theory with Gary Fisher, one of our FBFi chaplains. You should go to those sessions and listen to them after our message today.

## I. History Lesson: Christians and War

### A. The first three hundred years

#### 1. Christian opposition to gladiatorial games

- a. In the first c., during Paul's missionary journeys, 93 days of gladiatorial games in Rome (and elsewhere in the empire)
- b. By the fourth c., "no fewer than 175"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, "How the Early Church Responded to Social Problems," *Christianity Today*, November 24, 1972, 188.

- c. Trajan devoted four months of games with 10,000 gladiators to celebrate his military victories (early 2<sup>nd</sup> c.)
- d. Christian writers universally condemned this violence

“They finally ended in A.D. 404 when the monk Honorius rushed into the arena to stop the games and was killed in the process.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Christian resistance (or opposition) to military service

- a. Soldiers were among the converts during this period
- b. Yet early church generally pacifist

Tertullian: “For albeit soldiers had come unto John, and had received the formula of their rule; albeit, likewise, a centurion had believed; *still* the Lord afterward, in disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier.”<sup>3</sup>

- c. David Saxon suggests that this may be due to the requirement that soldiers be involved in idolatry, though there were Christian soldiers during this period<sup>4</sup>

## B. The post-Constantine period

- 1. When Constantine legalized Christianity, Christians began to instruct magistrates (rulers)

“Of course, they included ideas on resorting to military force to govern their Empire, though the wars were, for so large an empire, largely internal. War had become mainly a policing action, to ‘keep the peace’ of the Empire.”<sup>5</sup>

- 2. The leading figures in developing just war theory
  - a. Ambrose of Milan

<sup>2</sup> Yamauchi, 188.

<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, On Idolatry, 19, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, electronic ed. (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> David Saxon, “Pacifism vs. Violence Which Is the Way of Christ?,” August 2024, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Robert D. Culver, “Justice Is Something Worth Fighting For,” *Christianity Today*, November 7, 1980, 1304.

- b. Augustine of Hippo
- c. Much later, Thomas Aquinas (middle ages)

Augustine, for example, didn't offer a systematic work, but commented on the idea in pieces through his writing. "He was a man of a transitional period."<sup>6</sup>

- 3. In sum, the early opposition to war gave way to a doctrine of just (righteous) war that took shape over time
  - a. War is inevitable in a fallen world
  - b. In a fallen world, there is a way for men to conduct war righteously

## II. Theology Lesson: Just War Theory

### A. The biblical foundation

- 1. God-ordained authority beards the sword for a reason (Rm 13.4)
- 2. God calls men to pray that kings provide for civic order [peaceable lives] (1 Tim 1.1-4)
- 3. Principles of justice: evil must be punished (Ex 22.2)
- 4. But tempered by restraint
  - a. No personal vengeance (Pr 25.21-22; Rm 12.19-21)
  - b. Love your enemies (Mt 5.44)

### B. The main principles

- 1. Two main concepts
  - a. Jus ad bellum (the justice of going to war)
  - b. Jus in bello (the justice of conducting war)
- 2. The justice of going to war (Aquinas)
  - a. Only under the authority of a lawful sovereign

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<sup>6</sup> Culver, 1304.

“For it is not the business of a private individual to declare war, because he can seek for redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior.”<sup>7</sup>

- b. Only for a just cause
    - 1) Avenging wrong (pursuing justice)
    - 2) Repudiating invasion (self-defense)
  - c. Only for a rightful purpose
    - 1) Securing peace
    - 2) Punishing evil-doers
    - 3) Uplifting [protecting] the good
3. The justice of conducting war
- a. War directed at enemy combatants (*i.e.* not towards non-combatants [civilians])

Includes not attacking civilian areas with no legitimate military targets
  - b. War conducted according to proportionality

“It requires that the means used in war be proportional to the ends desired. ... To ensure that a response is proportionate, we are encouraged to exercise prudence and seek wise counsel before resorting to warfare. This may result in the establishment of restrictive ‘rules of engagement’ with the enemy, which are strategic and demonstrate justice and compassion in warfare.”<sup>8</sup>
  - c. War conducted according to military necessity: the target must lead to the objective of ending the war
  - d. Fair treatment of prisoners of war: no longer combatants

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 9 (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, n.d.), 501.

<sup>8</sup> Gary Fisher, “War and the Just War: A Christian Perspective,” August 2024, 20.

### III. Application: Israel in the light of the Bible and just war theory

#### A. Israel is under the blessing of God

Gn 12.1-3 ¶ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; <sup>2</sup> And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; <sup>3</sup> **And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse.** And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

1. God never revoked this blessing and cursing
2. God has and does punish Israel for its sins
3. God nevertheless has set Israel apart since the days of Abraham

Remember last week’s message. Would you relax this commandment?

#### B. Contemporary Israel under attack

1. The October 7 attack (as per the Associated Press)<sup>9</sup>
  - a. Approximately 1200 people killed (civilians, including women and children)
  - b. Hostages taken to Gaza: 251
  - c. Crimes committed during the attack: rape, desecration of dead bodies
2. Numbers of deaths in the response — impossible to determine at this point, Associated Press and others report Hamas statistics, not Israeli

Hamas is not trustworthy — that is not to say Israeli statistics are 100% accurate, but worldwide press *only* emphasizes Hamas statistics.

<sup>9</sup> “The Israel-Hamas War’s Devastating Toll, by the Numbers,” AP News, October 7, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-anniversary-statistics-e61765035c725b3c8d4840e2bab565cd>.

### 3. Rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel prior to Oct 7<sup>10</sup>

- a. 68 in April 2023
- b. 1,574 in May 2023

No data in Wikipedia concerning attacks between May and October 2023.

Since Oct 7, thousands (well over 10,000) rockets have been launched at Israel in the months following.

### C. Questions for Christians to consider concerning the justice of Israel's cause (or not)

1. Did the attacks of Hamas (both rockets and Oct 7) have a just cause?
2. When a nation is under attack, is a response just?
3. When attackers are persistent in their aggression and violence, as Hamas has been, is destruction of Hamas a just objective for Israel?
4. When militants hide their military installations in civilian locations, as Hamas does, is destruction of civilian infrastructure just?
5. Reportedly, Israel announces to civilians that they must avoid specific areas before Israel attacks them. Is this consistent with *jus in bello*, just conduct, as trying to avoid civilian casualties?
6. Released hostages report abuse at the hands of Hamas captors, while Hamas prisoners are held in Israeli prisons with regular meals and even medical care (cancer treatment for former Hamas leader) — which group is following just conduct principles?

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** Just war theory gives us a standard to evaluate conflicts in the world.

Now, the death of any person is a tragedy. It is the consequence of the fall of Adam. No one should rejoice in war for war's sake.

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<sup>10</sup> "List of Palestinian Rocket Attacks on Israel in 2023," in *Wikipedia*, October 16, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List\\_of\\_Palestinian\\_rocket\\_attacks\\_on\\_Israel\\_in\\_2023&oldid=1251529238](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_Palestinian_rocket_attacks_on_Israel_in_2023&oldid=1251529238).

Modern Israel isn't faithful Israel, but according to principles of just war, their conduct is far more honorable than their opponents, even in what we know drawn from anti-Israel press reports.

Since the Israeli's are descendants of Abraham, they are set apart in the nations for blessing by God. If we will be faithful to God, we must bless them.

And we must pray for the peace of Jerusalem — when that day comes, our Lord will have come, and He will have put right every wrong done on earth (including any wrongs modern Israel has done).

We are not parties to the conflict. We should pray that it ends, and let the judgement be in the hands of God. We should pray for those unbelieving Jews we might know, and urge them to turn to Christ.