

Fred`s Thoughts

Can a Christian fight in a war?

It is interesting to reflect on how many times people purporting to be Christians go to war. We even have an example where Ukraine with a substantial Christian population is fighting and killing it`s enemy the Russian people (probably with Christians on the Russian side!). Christians fighting Christians and killing each other. How can God allow this? Did Jesus say whether this is right or could ever be right and where is there anything in the Bible to guide us in answering these difficult questions?

In his prophecies of the Last Things, Jesus spoke of the wars of the future. He said that nation would rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, that wars and rumors of wars would be heard of, that Judaea would be devastated, Jerusalem besieged and taken by the gentiles, and the Temple defiled and destroyed.

He obviously understood the horror of war, but did he instruct us to not fight? Did he tell us to turn away from killing our fellow man and to love our enemy?

The Crusades

The great series of western holy wars were the Crusades, which lasted from 1095 until 1291 CE. The Christians set out to recapture the sacred places in the Holy Land from the Muslims who lived there, so it was intended as a war to right wrongs done against Christianity. But some will say that the Muslims worship the same God as the Christians. Why therefore did they need to take these holy places from the Muslims?

The first Crusade was started by Pope Urban II in 1095. He raged at the capture of the holy places and the treatment given to Christians and ordered a war to restore Christianity. He said that the war would have the support of God: But did the Muslims also look to the same god to keep the `infidels` from their sacred places.

In

Ecclesiastes 3

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

What does the worker gain from his toil?

I have seen the burden God has laid on men.

But what does this mean. God speaking through his prophets and through his son acknowledges that there will be wars and that man will kill. But is he allowing this to happen? Is he saying that wars can be just?

Some people who follow the God who is father of our Christ believe there is such a thing as a just war. They believe that it is justified to kill those who do not believe in our God or who denigrate our God. In the past many Christians believed it was justifiable to kill those they saw as heretics or to wage war on those who believe that Jesus was a prophet and not the son of God as was the case in the Crusades. Many people throughout time have blood on their hands in the name of God and Jesus his son.

So, does the Bible give a clear answer to the question of our belief and the justification of war?

The words of Ecclesiastes (some of which are attributed to Solomon), are difficult to grasp and which I find confusing. Solomon ruled for many years and became exceedingly wealthy. Does absolute power corrupt absolutely? Are these words flavoured by his experiences and not necessarily easily understood by us poor mortals? In early times it was believed that Solomon wrote these words in his later life when he was growing old and weary. There is however some doubt over this as it appears Ecclesiastes was written or at least severely edited well over 300 years after Solomon died. How much of the dark inevitability of Ecclesiastes was a later addition?

It has been said by those with greater minds than mine

“The Bible does not give Christians a clear answer about whether war is permitted or not, but it has a lot to say about justice, the sanctity of life, the importance of resolving conflict and working for peace.”

But how is it that we are enjoined by our God to work for peace when we are often the architects of the war we are trying to stop?

I understand that God has given us a free will. We can do what we think is right. I believe that in all things we must love our neighbors and our enemy as ourselves. How therefore can we fight them? But God has charged us with the task of looking after his flock. If the flock is in jeopardy, are we not duty bound to protect them with all our God given power? Does that give justification to war? But is the flock of our enemy our flock as well?

I do not think that this is a question that we can solve on a global basis. I believe it is a personal issue. Each and everyone of us must ask the questions of ourselves and when the time comes take the decision whether to fight to protect our flock or throw our arms round our enemy and love them in God's name. Is this the message of the cross. After all Jesus asked his father to “forgive them for, they knew not what they did”. He opened his heart to the penitent sinner on the cross beside him. It is a brave man who can love his enemy as Jesus did on the cross. Can we and should we follow his lead?

Fred