

WAR – TO THE GLORY OF GOD – Part 2 (March 2, 2003)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young Christian minister in Germany when Hitler rose to power. Hitler's Brown Shirts disgusted him. Bonhoeffer understood the immorality of the Nazi movement and was one of the few dissident voices raised against Hitler.

He publicly opposed Hitler's Aryan Clause and its anti-Semitic features. He opposed Hitler's control over the German churches and the way he appointed the head of the Lutheran church. He was so disgusted with his homeland that in 1933 he left Germany and found work as a pastor in England.

But, when he heard that Martin Niemöller and Karl Barth had formed the anti-Nazi *Confessional Church* he decided to return and join their struggle.

This organization soon had a membership of 21,000 pastors. Many of these pastors were later arrested by the Gestapo for working without the approval of the state.

As war loomed, Bonhoeffer was urged to leave Germany in early 1939. A safe place was found for him in the United States. But he declared that he could not abandon his countrymen in the face the oncoming slaughter of war. He returned to Berlin on the day that Hitler's army invaded Poland – September 1, 1939.

He refused to fight in the war, but he did attempt to enlist as a chaplain in an army hospital. He was rejected because he would not officially join the military. So he served as a pastor in the underground churches – those Christians who refused to accept Hitler's supremacy over them. Many of the pastors in these underground churches were hunted down and forced to join the army. Eighty out of 150 of seminary students Bonhoeffer was training were killed in action.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is often lauded for his courageous actions. His refusal to agree with the Nazi cause.

But, Bonhoeffer also did more than pray and protest.

In 1940 he was made a member of the military intelligence called Abwehr. He acted as a double agent and attended meetings in Switzerland on behalf the German opposition that wanted to overthrow Hitler.

He was also involved with a group that made several attempts to assassinate Hitler.

Eventually the Gestapo arrested Bonhoeffer after they found papers which showed his involvement in treason against Hitler. He was jailed in the Tegel Prison, where he spent the last two years of his life. As the allied forces approached the Gestapo hanged him on April 9, 1945 on direct orders from the top – Himmler or even Hitler himself.

Bonhoeffer knew the immorality of the Nazi cause. He refused to fight. He prayed. He demonstrated. He organised. He suffered. Most Christians would agree with these actions.

But what of his actions as a double agent and the attempts to assassinate Hitler?

It would have ended the war. It would have saved countless lives.

Does this make it right?

Let us assume that Saddam Hussein is as evil as some would have us believe. If you were in a position to assassinate him or to assassinate Osama Bin Laden – would you do it? Would it be ethical? Would this be to the glory of God?

Would it be ethical for George Bush to order the assassination of Hussein?

Many of the ethical decisions that Christians are faced with are flat out difficult. Do you oppose your own government if it is evil? How do you do so?

Last week we looked at war and governments. This week, I want to look at war and the individual believer.

But, before I do this – I want to make one point clear. Almost everything to do with war is complicated and difficult.

In 1939 when war was declared – a war against the evil of Hitler – godly Christians – men of the Word – courageous men – they disagreed as to exactly how individual believers could respond and should respond.

Some said it was our moral duty to fight, others said it was up to our conscience, others said we could enlist only in non-combatant roles and yet others insisted believers should be conscientious objectors.

This is a difficult subject. It divides nations, churches and friends.

So before I talk about how you should respond to war, I want to give you a short overview of Christian ethics and decision making.

I want you to understand a few of the factors involved.

Let me give you a non-war scenario that actually happened that will illustrate some of the difficulties.

Bernard Adeney – a professor of ethics at New College in Berkley California – told about a dilemma that confronted a student in his class.

The student was involved in a Christian organisation that provided medical assistance to third-world countries.

He had organised for a team of doctors and nurses and health professionals to donate their time and expertise to run a medical clinic in Haiti. They were going to perform procedures that would undoubtedly save lives – lives that would die without their expertise.

Non-refundable airline tickets had been purchased, holidays organised and all the medical equipment needed had been shipped months beforehand.

But just days before the team was due to leave, the pastor who was helping the mission on the Haitian end phoned with bad news.

The medical supplies had arrived but they were quarantined on the dock. The chief custom's officer knew they came from America and demanded a substantial bribe or he would tie things up and the team would not get the equipment.

The pastor had appealed to the courts, but now it was clear that the matter would not be heard until it was too late.

What would you do?

Christians over the centuries have approached ethical dilemmas like this in many ways.

But, four approaches with a few variations are the most common. And I suspect that if I surveyed you – your answers would probably fall into one of these four groups.

i. Obey or Letter of the Law.

You ask this question, “Does the Word of God speak directly to this situation?” – If so – then where it is clear – you must obey.

God's word clearly says that bribery is wrong – Psalm 26:10. To pay the bribe would violate the express command of God, it would foster a corrupt system and it would undermine the legitimate government.

So despite the cost and problems – reorganise the trip when the supplies are cleared. This would honour God more. Even if lives are lost – God is sovereign – trust that He knows what is best.

ii. Pray or Trust the Lord.

You ask this question, “What is the will of God in this situation?”

You admit that only the Lord knows the ins and outs of this situation. You pray very hard and ask the Lord to intervene and declare His will.

If it is the will of God He can move that corrupt official to release the goods.

But if God doesn't act – we must accept that this is also His hand. There must be a reason for this sovereign delay. Perhaps a coup is about to break out. Perhaps we have kingdom work that is more vital to do elsewhere at that time. Perhaps God wants to declare His power in another way.

We don't know – but God does. So, pray without ceasing. If God gets the supplies through – it is His will to go. If they stay on the dock – God doesn't want us there.

Trust Him to act.

iii. Make Way or Greatest Good.

You ask the question, “What decision leads to the greatest good?”

This approach would argue like this. Yes bribery is wrong. But, compared to the lives saved and the good done – what are a few dollars out of the pockets of some wealthy health professionals?

OK – so the corrupt official gets a windfall – but we know that God will take care of him one day.

We have lives to save today. If need be, compromise or make way so the greater good can be done. Pay the bribe and do the work.

iv. Weigh or Evaluate the Principles.

You ask this question, “What principles from the Word of God are involved and how should they be weighed?”

What seems the greatest good from a human perspective may not be from God's vantage point.

We need to find all the principles and guidance available from the Word.

On the one hand there are principles such as saving lives, helping the poor and being good stewards of the Lord's resources that have been committed already. But these must be weighed against principles such as not offering a bribe, not fostering corruption and obeying a legally instituted government official.

So, with the guidance of a heavy dose of prayer – you weigh up the principles and ask – what decision would give the most glory to God? And then you act.

So, what are you going to do?

- i. Letter of the Law.**
- ii. Trust the Lord.**
- iii. Greatest Good.**
- iv. Evaluate the Principles.**

I suspect that you felt some sympathy with most of the views. I suspect you are sitting there saying – I'm not really sure – so Craig, tell me what you think I should do.

Ethics, applying the Scriptures to life, discerning the will of God, living to the glory of Christ – when you leave the ivory tower of theory and enter the reality of medical supplies on a Haitian wharf – things get messy. So often it just isn't as clean and neat and clear-cut as we might wish.

And good, godly, deeply committed Christian men and women have disagreed on what to do in certain decisions that come along in the fabric of life.

I have to tell you, that not only does each view I outlined have some appeal, they **all** have potential problems.

If you follow the *Letter of the Law* principle – then you may run into the spectre of rigid legalism. This was the error of the Pharisees.

Another problem is what do you do if a situation puts two principles at odds with each other?

Does the saving of lives outweigh taking a bribe?

If you follow the *Trust the Lord* approach – the problem is that often we are the answer to our own prayers.

If Peter got appendicitis – I would pray – but I would also act.

I would not simply say – O Lord if it is your will let him live, if not let him die.

I would pray hard **and** take him to a surgeon to get the appendix out.

In conjunction with the leading of God and the word of God – we are to make decisions.

Just read about Paul's dealings with Corinth. As the situation changed there – so did his decisions. He left early. He delayed a promised visit. He moved with the situation.

Yes, pray hard – but also seek to make a decision about what to do about those medical supplies.

But, the other two approaches also have problems. When you seek the *Greatest Good* or to *Evaluate the Principles* – you introduce an element of the subjective.

I have to decide what is the greatest good. I have to decide what principles have the most weight.

And the result can be situational ethics that really becomes subjective ethics. And because we are fallen men with deceitful hearts – that can be a dangerous place to be.

Here is one I have heard.

I know murder is wrong – so I agree that abortion is wrong.

But, now my fourteen year old daughter is pregnant. I have to weigh the fact that abortion is wrong against other principles. The principle of caring for my family. The principle of not destroying my daughter's life because of one little mistake.

To me – in this case – abortion is the lesser of two evils.

I have actually heard that argued. You put the subjective into the mix and in our fallen nature we can lose sight of the forest for the trees.

We can end up arguing that the murder of an unborn child is better than allowing a fourteen year old to give birth and adopt the child out. And I can tell you, this does not glorify God.

So while we do have to weigh up the principles and the notion of greatest good – we have to take great care because in our sinful natures – we can make some serious mistakes here.

My point is that there are dangers in every approach – that there is no one size fits all. In exactly the same scenario, the Lord may desire a different outcome in each scenario.

He may desire to protect a servant of His from danger at one time. He may want to show His glory by moving the heart of an official at another time.

So we have to be careful about rigid methodology for decision making.

Having said all of this, we still have to decide. I personally come back to what is for me the touchstone of biblical decision making: **Make the Decision That You Believe Will Bring The Most Glory to God.**

1 Corinthians 10:31:

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Pray hard and ask what will glorify the Lord.

What would I do in the situation of the medical supplies on the wharf? My approach is to pray hard, to search the Word, to seek the hand of God and as well, part of my prayer is that my sinful heart not interfere with my decision making – and then I do weigh the principles and with all the humility I can muster I would decide.

What I would do may not be the only God-honouring decision and may well not be the decision that would bring God the most honour in your life. And I would not wish to criticise those who came to a different choice.

Now, we reach the end of what has been a very long and probably somewhat confusing introduction.

But, I have gone through this to show you – that ethical decisions can get very messy – and there is not necessarily a one size fits all answer.

And I have to tell you that war is one of the messiest and most difficult ethical decisions we can face.

Last week, I argued that at times our leaders – as fallen men – will enter a war which will violate every principle of justice and love for others.

But, I also argued based on Romans 13 that – *War Is Sometimes Necessary To Restrain The Innate Evil Of Man*. There are times when a good leader can and should lead his nation into battle.

But that was last week. The question I want to address this week is this – when nations do go to war – how should believers respond?

If John Howard announces tomorrow that Australia has joined a coalition of the willing and declared war on Iraq – how should we – as followers of Christ – respond?

Basically, I believe that our responsibilities fall into two groups.

1. Obligations that we **must** carry out *both* in times of war and in times of peace.
2. Freedoms that we **may** exercise *both* in times of war and in times of peace.

There are two obligations that that the child of God **must** carry out both in times of war and in times of peace. But, war brings them into very sharp focus.

They are:

- Prayer
- Evangelism

Brothers and sisters. We have an obligation to *pray*.

In times of war and rumours of war, we must pray for:

- The souls of men.
- The leading of God.
- The fate of nations.
- The guidance of leaders.
- Our individual responsibility.
- Christians and non-Christians who are affected by the war.
- For the will of God to be done.

I do not know how prayer affects the shape of global conflicts – but I do know that prayer does affect global conflicts.

I know prayer is more powerful than **any** nuclear or biological weapon.

I know that prayer matters. I know that prayer affects the fate of men and nations.

We are obligated to pray. Not just in times of war – but that obligation comes into stark focus in times of war.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-3 Paul makes our obligation plain:

I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.

As we discussed last week, Romans 13 indicates that civil rulers are a dispensation of mercy. A gift from God to restrain the innate evil of men. To provide a stability that enables us to lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

We have to entreat God and pray to God and offer petitions to God and give thanks unto God for our leaders.

We must beg the Lord that He would guide their hearts according to His will. We must ask that they would make wise decisions on behalf of the nation.

Here is a prayer of Clement who was a leader of the church in Corinth near the end of the first century. He prayed:

We render obedience to Your almighty and most excellent name, and to our earthly rulers and governors.

You, O Lord and Master, have given them the power of sovereignty through Your excellent and unspeakable might, that we, knowing the glory and honour which You have given them, may submit ourselves to them, in nothing resisting Your will. Grant them therefore, O Lord, health, peace, concord and stability, that they may without failure administer the government which You have committed to them. For You, O heavenly Master, King of the ages, do give to the sons of men glory and honour and power over all things that are in the earth. Do, O Lord, direct their counsel according to what is good and acceptable in Your sight, that they, administering in peace and gentleness with godliness with power which You have committed to them, may obtain favour.

We should *pray* consistently for our leaders.

There is a second obligation that we **must** carry out both in times of war and in times of peace – we must *evangelise*.

We should know that times of war are a divine opportunity to share Christ. The absolute depravity of man is on display for all to see. The reality of death is beamed into our homes live.

Men ask about God – and how He can allow this – and what happened to the soldiers and civilians who die – and who says the Muslims are wrong?

On Friday, Ian and Sue McIlvarey of the *Red Sea Mission Team* said that even in Muslim countries – war against a Muslim nation opens up many opportunities for missionaries to share the gospel.

Times like this open a thousand doors that we must use to share the gospel of Christ.

We must *pray* and we must *evangelise*.

But as well, there are freedoms that we **may** exercise in times of war and in times of peace.

1. If His Conscience Permits A Child of God *May* Serve in the Military or Judicial Arms of Government.

Notice the words *CONSCIENCE* and *MAY*. The point is not that we *have* to serve or should always serve – but under one circumstance – we may serve. If we believe it is to the glory of God.

Let me elaborate.

There are some who have argued that the New Testament injunctions against violence mean that a Christian could never serve as a soldier or a policeman.

Jesus' words such as – turn the other cheek or love your enemies mean we cannot serve in a capacity where we will be asked to violate these injunctions. We should not serve as soldiers or policemen.

Leave that to unbelievers.

It would take a whole sermon to fully explore this – but let me make these comments. All of these injunctions are personal – not corporate. They refer to us as individuals – not as nations. The Scriptures **do** distinguish between murder and killing – between attacking and self-defence – between aggression and stopping an aggressor.

And secondly, these are not absolutes. Scripture provides examples of times when self-defence is legitimate, even necessary. Exodus 22:2-3 describes a thief who breaks in at night. The homeowner defends his home and the thief dies. There is no blame attached in this situation. It is not murder.

This principle can be extrapolated. We see a man raping a girl – do we stand by and pray – or do we intervene?

So I don't believe that we should take these words of Jesus as forbidding a Christian from serving in the military or in the police.

Another indication that this is the Scriptural position is that serving as a soldier – is **not** seen by the Scriptures as inherently immoral.

The Lord Himself is described in both the Old and New Testaments as a warrior. Revelation 19:11:

And I saw ... a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

The Lord would never be described by a term that is inherently immoral. He would never be called a harlot or described as committing harlotry.

Prostitution is immoral. Prostitutes are commanded in Scripture to repent and leave that profession.

But, soldiers are not commanded to give up their profession.

Serving as a soldier is not seen as odious in Scripture.

Cornelius, the centurion – the commander of a hundred men in the armies of Rome – came to Christ and was not told to leave soldiering.

Paul's letter to the Philippians indicates that some of the praetorian guard in Caesar's household came to faith – but there is no condemnation of their profession.

There are several other such references – but the most significant is found in Luke 3:12-14. Here John the Baptist is addressing the crowds:

And some tax collectors also came to be baptised, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

There is a principle that recurs throughout Scripture that can be articulated like this.

Wherever the Lord has placed you – serve Him – *unless* you cannot glorify Him in that position.

The tax-gatherers and the soldiers were *not* told to leave their professions because they were immoral. Instead, they were told to **act morally** in that profession. To act as a Christian and give the glory to God.

The implication is that if you cannot act morally or to the glory of God – then get out – or if you can't – then suffer for the faith.

If the soldiers were commanded to take money by force or accuse others falsely – then they had an obligation to the Lord to refuse.

The implication then is that a Christian *may* serve in the military or police if you can do it morally to the glory of God.

If your actions and the actions of the army or police force fall within a moral framework.

A crucial text in this regard is Romans 14:22:

The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

If you can serve without violating your conscience, if you believe this is the best way to glorify God under the circumstances – you can serve.

And you say – but that is too subjective, too much wiggle room.

Here is where all of my introduction comes in.

Judging when a war is just or unjust. Judging whether it is waged justly. Weighing up being a servant of the Prince of Peace against going to war against human injustice. Deciding what will bring glory to God and will not condemn your conscience – this is not something that fits into a neat set of guidelines.

You have to pray hard. You have to search the word. Then you have to decide what you will do – to the glory of God.

And depending on the framework from which you make your ethical decisions – depending on what weight you give to various principles – your decision might vary from mine.

Let me run this through the four ways of making ethical decisions.

i. Letter of the Law.

Some have argued that in Romans 13, Paul commands us to be in subjection to our leaders and not to resist their authority.

They argue that if we are asked to fight – unless we are asked to do something absolutely odious – our obligation is to fight.

ii. Trust the Lord.

They argue that God will work things out. Let the unbelievers fight it out and God will raise up the side He desires to triumph. Our citizenship is heavenly, we should refuse to take part and just await the hand of God.

iii. Greatest Good.

This depends on what you determine to be the greatest good.

Some maintain that the greatest good is observing the sanctity of life – they won't fight. Others maintain it is restraining overt evil – they will fight.

iv. Evaluate the Principles.

You throw in principles of obeying governments, the sanctity of life, restraining evil, seeing the hand of God – and with much prayer – you decide. And some will fight and some will not.

Depending on the principles you start with and how you make decisions – good men may come to slightly different decisions.

Having said all of this – let me tell you the decisions I have come to. But I urge you to pray and study for yourself and not to see this as the only God-honouring approach.

My method of making decisions is close to the fourth method – weighing the principles. I pray for the leading of God. I ask Him to restrain the deception of my heart. I study the Word. And then with all the humility I can muster I decide.

Let me get specific.

I believe that if a man or woman is convinced that the war is justified to restrain evil – that going to war would bring more glory to God than not going to war – and that they are not being asked to do anything inherently immoral such as looting, killing civilians or the like – then a Christian *may* serve in the armed forces – and *may* even be involved in taking enemy lives.

While Christians are citizens of the heavenly kingdom – they still live in this world and have responsibilities to their earthly kingdom. Christians receive the benefits of the state – such as peace and safety. So it can be reasonable to serve the God-ordained authority of that state in restraining the evil of men.

BUT, I also believe they must not serve blindly. If the war is fought immorally, if the objectives become immoral, if the basis on which their decision was made changes – then they have a responsibility *not* to continue their service.

Related to this – many Christians would find actually serving as a soldier in a war would violate their conscience. They could not shoot another human being or take lives. They could not bear the thought of possibly killing a fellow believer or of sending an unbeliever to hell.

But, they might still see the war as justified and to the glory of God. While not serving as a soldier they might choose to contribute in a non-combatant role – medical, administrative or the like.

Others would see this as hypocritical. You either serve fully or not at all. To patch up a soldier and send him back to kill is just as wrong as killing yourself. They would choose to be a conscientious objector.

Personally, if I felt this were a just war and was compelled to serve – I would serve in a non-combatant role – medical or a chaplain or administrative. I personally would find it difficult to shoot someone.

But, I would praise God for Christians who after prayer and thought choose to serve as soldiers or to be conscientious objectors.

If I was told that I had to serve as a gun toting soldier – then my personal choice would be to join the ranks of conscientious objectors.

But that is me. You decide what God would have you do. I know some very godly men in this church who would make different choices – praise God for that.

I would never find fault with anyone who had honestly prayed and studied the Word and come to a different position to me.

That is why I do object to some Christian leaders saying that there is only **one** position that characterises a true Christian response.

Having outlined this position, I do have a word of caution. We are fallen men – and our fallen natures make our hearts incredibly deceptive. It is nearly impossible to weigh things objectively.

Patriotism, media, self-interest – they all play a part.

Think about the prophet Habakkuk. This prophet was commissioned to tell Judah that she was being punished for her sin – and that the way God would punish was by sending the Babylonians against her.

And Habakkuk was angry. He asked God a series of questions. But one of the key questions in chapter 1 was this – Yes, Judah has sinned, but Babylon is incredibly wicked. How could you use such a wicked people as your instrument of punishment?

And the Lord responds that the righteous will live by faith. Live godly. Trust God. The Lord will use Babylon for His purposes and the true child of God will trust Him.

The point is that sometimes even prophets have difficulty discerning the will of God in a war.

The people in Jerusalem had a very tough time. There were prophets saying – God is judging you for your sin. There were false prophets saying fight. The leaders said fight. Your heart says – they are a wicked nation and we are the chosen people of God.

It can get very difficult to see things objectively.

We need only look at how Iraqi Christians and American Christians view this impending war.

Iraq has a Christian heritage that reaches back to the first century.

Until the early part of the twentieth century, Christians constituted about 30% of the Iraqi population. Immigration and other demographic factors have reduced the numbers to less than 8%. For the most part they belong to various ethnic and linguistic branches of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. There are Chaldeans, Assyrians, Romans and Armenians in both groups. In addition, there is the ancient Nestorian Orthodox Church.

While most could not be characterised as evangelical, there are a number of strongly evangelical churches in Iraq. Reformed missionaries began proclaiming the Gospel there in 1836. Mission work in Iraq proved to be very effective from the start. Today there are solid evangelical congregations in many parts of Iraq.

The churches of Iraq have traditionally enjoyed much freedom. In fact the churches report that the Iraqi authorities have been quite helpful to all Christian churches. Saddam Hussein has personally authorised the supply of land and inexpensive building materials for churches. He has even donated pipe organs.

Christians enjoy a lot more religious freedom in Iraq than many other countries in the region, including Turkey, Israel and Kuwait.

Recently, an elder in a congregation in Baghdad said this: 'In Iraq you can legally and freely do anything religious as long as it does not mix with politics or endanger the social stability of the community.'

You could not point to the same tolerance in regard to America's allies in the first Gulf War such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. It is a crime to be a Christian in both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia – and so much so that U.S. military authorities prevented the public exercise of Christianity even among their own troops during the Gulf War.

But the toleration of Christianity in Iraq is increasingly fragile. The churches in Iraq report that it is at times of war with the west – that persecution comes. They are associated with the west. They are blamed for the sanctions and deprivations. They are seen as allied with the west.

The Christians in Iraq are repeatedly told that their country has no weapons of mass destruction and that Iraq did not support Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. They are told that this is a war because the US wants control of Iraqi oil.

They are told this is a religious war – Christian against Muslim and an economic war – for control of Iraqi oil. They know that this war will bring persecution on them.

From their viewpoint, they wonder how their Christian brothers and sisters in the west could do such a thing?

Unfortunately, it is not that simple.

Now, listen to how John MacArthur a prominent American Christian views the situation:

[This] is not a war America sought or started. The war began the moment the hijacked jets hit those buildings and killed thousands of people. That act was nothing less than a declaration of war. If our government does not respond with force, we will ultimately have no choice but to capitulate to the terrorists' demands, and that would spell the end of freedom in America.¹

¹ John MacArthur, *Terrorism, Jihad, and the Bible* (W. Publishing Group, 2001) pp. 87-88.

Unfortunately, it is not that simple either.

Neither side is totally objective – and neither are we. We must take care not to let our deceptive hearts skew our decisions.

The reality is that if this war goes ahead – you may have Christian fighting Christian – and *both* convinced they are fighting for a just cause.

2. There are Times the Child Of God *Must* Oppose the Decision of His Government.

In every war, even the most unjust, the leaders make a case that the war is a cause that must be fought for.

Hitler repeatedly pointed to the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles – and there were unjust sanctions imposed on Germany after the war. He painted his aggression as a war to liberate Germany from those sanctions.

Saddam Hussein told Iraq that Kuwait was historically a part of Iraq, that colonial Britain had excised it by an arbitrary stroke of the pen. The occupation of Kuwait was a war to reunite Iraq.

It is sometimes hard for believers to discern the truth – especially when you mix in some propaganda and nationalism.

What if you were a Christian living in Germany in 1939 and were conscripted to fight?

What if you were an Iraqi Christian in 1990 conscripted into the army for the invasion of Kuwait?

I realise that the propaganda machines were in full swing. Patriotism, a picture of injustices to be corrected and even church leaders saying this war was just – were evident.

And while I would be loath to condemn any believer who did fight, I would like to think that an honest appraisal of the facts would scream – this war is unjust – don't participate.

Romans 13:1 does say:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.

But this does not mean there is never a time to disobey the governing authorities.

Other passages in Scripture make it clear that we obey – **unless** the governing authorities ask us to disobey a clear command of God.

Remember the disciples before the Sanhedrin in Acts 5? The Sanhedrin had commanded them not to proclaim the gospel in Jerusalem. And in verse 29, Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

At the time that Moses was born, the pharaoh in Egypt had ordered that every Jewish midwife kill every Israelite male baby. But two of the midwives, Shiprah and Puah, knew what they had to do. They could not kill. Exodus 1:17 says this:

But the midwives feared God, and did **not** do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live.

And God was pleased with this. In verses 20 and 21 we are told that God was good to the midwives and established households for them.

If you lived in Nazi Germany when Hitler came to power, as a child of God you would have to pay your taxes and obey the government. But, if you were drafted into the army and sent to Auschwitz and told to take part in killing the Jews – you would have to refuse. To take another life for no crime other than being of a different race is manifestly wrong. If it meant you were jailed or killed so be it. But here you must draw the line.

The Nuremburg defence of – “My superior told me to do it, I was just obeying orders” – does not work where the order would cause you to violate the law of God. God’s law overrides the law of man.

So, if your government is corrupt, is unjust, is brutal – what can you do?

- **First, and foremost you must pray to Almighty God. Pray for divine intervention.**
- **Second, you can petition your leaders and if needs be demonstrate against their policies.**

In the days of Esther – Haman had organised for the King to sign a decree ordering the annihilation of every Jew.

At great personal risk, Esther had sought the King’s ear and petitioned the King that such a decree was manifestly immoral.

- **Thirdly, you can suffer for your faith.**

Daniel and his three friends found themselves serving in a government that at times asked them to act against the law of God. They never attempted to kill Nebuchadnezzar. They served him faithfully until they were asked to violate the law of God.

Then they refused and were ready to suffer unto death.

In Daniel chapter 3, an edict was proclaimed ordering all peoples, nations and men of every tongue to worship the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar. But this would cause

a Jew to violate the first and probably the second of the Ten Commandments. So, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refused to comply.

The king told them to comply or be thrown into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. They said this:

Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

We don't know if God will choose to save us or if we will die and go to glory. The only thing we do know is that we can't obey this command.

A similar thing happened in Daniel 6. Another edict was passed. No one could pray to any god except Nebuchadnezzar himself.

Daniel was a pious Jew. He prayed regularly three times a day. He would not cease praying simply because the government said so. And once again this stand looked like costing him his life. He was thrown into the lion's den.

Can you do more than pray, petition and suffer? Was Dietrich Bonhoeffer right to act as a double agent and attempt to assassinate Hitler?

Personally, I do not believe this is an area for Christians to be involved in. Governments possibly. Individual Christians or churches no – but others would disagree with me.

So there you have it. One man's flawed and imperfect view of how Christians should respond to war.

But, if I just ended here – how depressing.

I want to end with hope. But our hope is not in the UN or in George Bush or in the innate wisdom of man.

Our hope is in Christ.

This may be a time of wars and rumours of wars – but never forget that at Calvary – Christ set in motion the defeat of sin and its consequences – including war.

The Prince of Peace will one day usher in true peace. Let me end with the words of Isaiah 2:2-4:

Now it will come about that in the last days
... He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples;
And they will hammer their swords into ploughshares
And their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,

And never again will they learn war.
That is what we can tell the world.

Approaches To Ethical Dilemmas

- i. Obey or Letter of the Law.
- ii. Pray or Trust the Lord.
- iii. Make Way or Greatest Good.
- iv. Weigh or Evaluate the Principles.

1. Obligations that we must carry out *both* in times of war and in times of peace.

- Prayer
- Evangelism

2. Freedoms that we may exercise *both* in times of war and in times of peace.

- If His Conscience Permits A Child of God *May* Serve in the Military or Judicial Arms of Government.
- There are Times the Child Of God *Must* Oppose the Decision of His Government.
 - ❖ Pray For Divine Intervention
 - ❖ Petition And Demonstrate
 - ❖ Suffer For Your Faith.