CHRISTIANS AND GOVERNMENT
Sunday Morning Adult Bible Study • Fall 2026 • SVCC
October 25, 2026

IS WAR EVER ACCEPTABLE TO GOD? Should Christians Serve in the Military?

from class discussion

Position 1: What evidence in the Bible can you think of for the idea that God might permit Christians to fight in war?

Position 2: What evidence in the Bible can you think of for the idea that God would forbid Christians to fight in war?

Position 3: What evidence in the Bible can you think of for the idea that God might permit Christians to serve in the military or as a police officer (someone authorized to use lethal force)?

Position 4: What evidence in the Bible can you think of for the idea that God would forbid Christians to serve in the military or as a police officer (someone authorized to use lethal force)?

2 Most Common Positions

PACIFISM — the belief that the use of violent force is never justified

- famous advocates: Ghandi, Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King Jr.
- **Matthew 5:38-48** — What values does Jesus teach here that might move us toward Pacifism?

- **Romans 12:17-21** — What values does Paul emphasize here that might move us toward Pacifism?

- **Matthew 26:52** — What warning does Jesus give here to people who act with violent force?

- *Question: Does anyone hold to Pacifism so strongly that they would say communities should not have an armed police force?*

SELECTIVISM — the belief that under select conditions, the use of violent force may be justified

- "Just War Theory" — first developed by Augustine of Hippo around roughly 400 CE — posits that a nation going to war must…
  - …have a just cause (self-defense, protecting an innocent third party, etc.)
  - …have a right intention (seeking peace/reconciliation; not conquest or extermination)
  - …be a legitimate authority (a government, not an individual or a terrorist group)
  - …formally declare war (make it official)
  - …pursue armed conflict only as a last resort
  - …have a reasonable hope of success
  - …act only in proportion to the need (inflict as little suffering as possible)
  - …be as discriminate as possible (try not to harm civilians, damage hospitals, etc.)

- **Romans 13:1-5** — What does the power of the sword, which God has granted to governments, suggest about a Christian perspective on war, the use of force, etc.?

- **Acts 10** — Cornelius, a centurion, and his household became the first Christian Gentiles we know of. Did he have to give up his position in the military to follow Jesus?

- **Luke 3:14** — What instruction did John the Baptist give to soldiers? (Notice that he did not require them to stop serving as soldiers.)

BIBLICAL BELIEFS UNDERGIRDING JUST WAR THEORY *(from a sermon by Dr. Harold Shank, Highland Street Church of Christ, Memphis TN, August 15, 1999)*

1) All people belong to God.
2) Take the non-violent options first. (According to Peter, Noah preached before God sent the great flood—2 Peter 2:5.)
3) God's kingdom is over the state.
4) "Holy wars" are fought by God, not by the military.
5) Evil must be fought.

Whose Side Are We On?

Joshua 5:13-15 — When nations go to war, they typically claim that God is on their side. But the real question, as the Lord's commander points out here, is, *Are we on the Lord's side?* What are a few factors that might help us discern whether our nation is on the Lord's side when it goes to war?

Our Ultimate Battle

Ephesians 6:10-13 — Our struggle is not against _____ and _____, but against the _____, authorities, and _____ of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of _____ in the heavenly realms.