

Should Christians fight in wars? Jesus said there would be “wars”

(Matthew 24:6,7)



Should Christians fight in wars? What does the Bible say? Are there any alternatives?

“The weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ”—2 Corinthians 10:4,5 NRSV

According to the Bible, Christians are to engage in **“warfare,”** but not with “human” weapons.” They are fighting with “divine power” to “destroy arguments ” and ‘obstacles . . . against the knowledge of God,’ not people.

We are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age”—Ephesians 6:12 GNB

Christians must fight **“spiritual”** warfare against **“wicked spiritual forces,”** who live **“in the heavenly world.”** “Should Christians fight in wars.” Yes, they should, they should fight spiritual warfare.

Since the Bible says, **“We are not fighting against human beings,”** how about fighting in earthly wars, such those between nations here on earth? Didn’t Jesus predict that, **“Nation will go to war against nation” (Luke 21:10 NLT)?** Yes, he did, and history has proven this to be true, in that there are wars going on somewhere on earth all the time. Does Jesus’ prediction authorize Christians to fight in these wars? What if a war seems to be a “just war”? What if a Christian is drafted or conscripted by an authority to fight in a war? In such case, what if a Christian is threatened with punishment, such as prison, execution, etc., if he doesn’t comply? While there is no direct Scriptural commandment to the effect of, “Thou shalt not fight in any war,” Christians do have Bible principles to guide them in their decisions. What are they?

Who Should a Christian Obey Primarily?

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except what God has established”—Romans 13:1 NIV

Christians should live in harmony with the Bible principle to **“obey the government in power” (Romans 13:1 GWT).** Based on this, many have decided that they had no choice

but to fight wars when their government ordered them to. But, did they really have no other choice but to obey government orders to fight in war? Is this really what God wants Christians to do? Should Christians ever disobey government orders? Are there any exceptions to the principle at [Romans 13](#)? How might other Bible principles might be applicable?

“Caesar is not entitled to obedience when such obedience would nullify God’s prior claim to the believers’ moral decision” (NAB note on [Romans 13:1-7](#)). Almighty God has the first claim on believers’ moral decisions. What should believers do when there is a conflict between what God, in his Word the Bible, requires, and what the government or authority demands?

“So they brought them and presented them before the council (Sanhedrin, Jewish High Court)” ([Acts 5:27 Amplified Bible](#)). When the “Jewish High Court” ordered them to stop doing what God had commanded them to do, **“Peter and the other apostles replied, ‘We must obey God as ruler rather than human beings’” ([Acts 5:29 NIV](#))**

The above case in point provides a principle for Christians to consider. When there is a conflict between what God requires, and what human authorities require, a Christian is faced with a serious choice. The apostles chose to disobey human authority in this case, and instead, they chose to follow the Bible principle to **“obey God as ruler rather than human beings,”** even at the risk of severe punishment. What other Bible principles are there that can help a Christian to decide if fighting in war is what God wants them to do? We’ll see, but first we need to consider the consequences – as Jesus said, **“count the cost” ([Luke 14:28 ESV; NLT; NKJV](#)).**

The Consequences of Disobedience

“You will be handed over to the courts” ([Matthew 10:17 NLT](#)). Being hauled into court, with the potential for punishment is one possible consequence of disobeying government orders.

“The devil will put some of you in prison . . . Be faithful, even to the point of death” (Revelation 2:10 NIV). Being imprisoned, and/or execution, are other possibilities.

Is it worth it? That depends on where a person places their values. No one in their right mind wants to be persecuted, mistreated, imprisoned, or killed, of course. As the apostle Paul wrote, **“We live under constant danger of death, because we serve Jesus . . . Our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!” (2 Corinthians 4:11,17 NLT).** However, for one’s relationship with God, and the potential for eternal life, yes, it is worth it. The scriptures tell us that this life now is nothing in comparison to eternal life.

Bible Principles Applicable to the “Should Christians Fight in Wars” Issue

Jesus stated a number of principles in the gospels, which are technically prior to the official start of Christianity in Acts 2. However, he was preparing his disciples (and us, by extension) for what was to come after Christianity officially began.

“Do not resist and evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also . . . Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:39,44 NIV). This principle not to retaliate, even if attacked, certainly can be applied to the issue of whether a Christian should fight in a war or not.

“In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12 NIV). Do we want others to treat us nice and kindly? Do we want others to fight against us, and possibly hurt or kill us? Then we should act the same toward others.

“‘Put away your sword,’ Jesus told him. ‘Those who use the sword will die by the sword’” (Matthew 26:52 NLT). A principle can be drawn from Jesus’ statement to Peter that the use of weapons against humans is not appropriate for Christians.

“The commandments, ” . . . ‘You shall not murder’ . . . and whatever other command there may be are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:9,10 NIV). This is the essence of God’s law. But notice that, ‘love does no harm to a neighbor.’ One might ask, as “an expert in the law” once asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25,29) Jesus’ answer shows that we should treat everyone, regardless of whether they live near us, or not, as a neighbor (Luke 10:30-37). Therefore, the Bible principle, **“Love does no harm to a neighbor,”** applies in all areas of life, even in the matter of whether to fight in a war or not.

“Do all that you can to live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18 NLT). While a Christian can’t force others to be peaceable, a Christian, on their part, at least, can be peaceable “with everyone.”

“Never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God” (Romans 12:19 NLT). Sometimes nations retaliate against others for what they consider to be “wrongs.” However, a Christian, according to the scriptures, never should! This principle applies at all times, even if one is drafted to fight in a war.

“We should love one another. We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one, and killed his brother” (1 John 3:10.11 NLT). Christians should love all people, even our enemies, according to Jesus. Application of this principle means that Christians are not to kill anyone.

Change of Loyalty for Christians

“The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you” (John 15:19 NLT). True Christians were once part of the world, but they left it to come over to Jesus’ side.

“Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20 NIV). The apostle Paul was **“a Roman citizen” (Acts 22:23 NIV; 16:37)**, and he made use of his Roman citizenship. But he did not view his Roman citizenship as primary. He viewed his real **“citizenship”** as being in heaven. We should have the same viewpoint (**1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1**). The earthly nation that we are a citizen of may demand our unqualified allegiance, but what does the Bible say?

“They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus” (Acts 17:7 NLT). The early Christians were often misunderstood and misrepresented, because of their unqualified **“allegiance”** to Christ.

“Let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name” (Hebrews 13:15 NLT). Today, Christians should ‘proclaim their allegiance to God through Jesus.

“His command is that we should give our allegiance to his Son Jesus Christ and have love for one another, as Christ commanded us”—1 John 3:23 REB. Our allegiance to Jesus involves loving others.

“You have given your allegiance to the Son of God; this letter is to assure you that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Giving our unqualified allegiance to Jesus Christ, rather than to human governments, will help us to qualify for eternal life.

Ancient Israel Fought Wars- Why Shouldn’t Christians Fight in Wars?

“When Yahweh your God has brought you into the country which you are going to make your own, many nations will fall before you: Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than yourselves. Yahweh your God will put them at your mercy and you will conquer them. You must put them under the curse of destruction” (Deuteronomy

7:1-3 NJB). Ancient Israel was under **“the old covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:14 NIV)**, which authorized certain warfare. Notice that Yahweh God promised to fight for them, but, also notice, that **“He has not done that for any other nation” (Psalm 147:20 NIV).** Ancient Israel, under the Mosaic Law Covenant, was truly “one nation under God.” But no other nation has been since that time, despite their claims to be so.

“The old covenant” with Israel was **“canceled” (Colossians 3:14 NLT)**, and **“replaced” (2 Corinthians 3:11 NLT)** with the **“new covenant”** with **“Christ”** as **“mediator” (Hebrews 9:15 NIV)** for the Christian **“Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16 NIV).** Under this “new covenant” there is no provision for any kind of physical, fleshly war. **“The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly” (2 Corinthians 10:4 Berean Literal Bible).**

Some Early Christians Were Soldiers — Did Christians Fight in Wars?

Yes, that’s true. When **Romans 13:4** says **“the rulers . . . bear the sword” (NIV)**, “the sword” at that time was the Roman army with its soldiers, which served as the Empire’s de facto police force. When **“some soldiers asked”** John the Baptist, likely in connection with their request to be baptized, **“What should we do?” (Luke 3:14 NIV)**, he did not tell them they needed to leave their jobs as “soldiers.” It is likely that at least some of them became Christians. **“The centurion”** overseeing Jesus’ execution expressed faith that Jesus was **“the Son of God” (Mark 15:39 NIV)**, and likely became a Christian. **“Cornelius”** was **“a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment,”** and there was **“a devout soldier who was one of his attendants” (Acts 10:1,7 NIV).** Both of them were **“baptized”** by the apostle Peter as Christians **(Acts 10:47,48)** without being required to leave their jobs with the Roman army.

While some early Christians served in the Roman army as de facto policemen, there is no evidence that early Christians fought in wars, either. The principle, expressed by Jesus, **“Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9 NIV)**, does not harmonize with

fighting in wars. Christians are counseled **“to be peaceable” (Titus 3:2 NIV)**.

These Bible principles and examples give some guidance for Christians today in employment and military decisions.

Are There Any Other Alternatives?

Yes, Christians can still be **“at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18 NLT)**, and also perform many governmental services, such as noncombatant jobs. There is nothing wrong with working for the government in most capacities. The Syrian **“army commander”** Naaman continued in his government service after his conversion to the worship of Yahweh (**2 Kings 5:1,18**). Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego worked for the government of Babylon (**Daniel 2:48,49**). Nehemiah worked for the Medo-Persian government (**Nehemiah 2:1-8**). The Christian Erastus was **“the city treasurer”**, or **“the city’s director of public works”** of Corinth (**Romans 16:23 NAB: NIV**). As noted above, some early Christians were soldiers (**Luke 3:14; Mark 15:39; Acts 10:1,7,47,48**).

“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles” (Matthew 5:41 NIV). *“Roman garrisons in Palestine had the right to requisition the property and services of the native population” (NAB note on Matthew 5:41)*. Romans soldiers, according to Roman law, could demand that civilians carry a load for up to one mile. Jesus instructed his followers to comply with demands for government service, even to the point of ‘going an extra mile’ beyond what was required. Following this principle, Christians today can, and should, comply with demands for government service, as long as doing so would not be in violation of any of God’s commandments applicable to Christians.

“Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good” (Titus 3:1 NLT). *“This implies being good citizens” (NAB note on Titus 3:1)*. Christians should do everything they can to be good citizens. Performing some type of government service, as long as that doesn’t violate any of

God's commandments for Christians, is fine to do, even if the Christian doesn't really want to do it.

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to the governors . . . it is God’s will that by doing good you silence the ignorant talk of foolish people . . . Show proper respect to everyone . . . honor the emperor” (1 Peter 2:13-17 NIV). The same principle is again urged, that is, to comply with the government, its officials and its laws, as far as a Christian can, while still being obedient to God.

The Issue of Conscience

Christians should constantly try to mold their conscience after what God’s Word, the Bible explicitly states, as well as principles discerned from reading, studying and meditating on it. Some things, such as lying, immorality, idolatry, and murder are clearly stated to be wrong (**1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; 22:15**). There are, however, other areas or issues that are not explicitly stated to be wrong, and where a Christian’s conscience comes into play. For example:

“For instance, one person believes it’s all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think that every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable” (Romans 14:1,5 NLT). As these verses and the surrounding context show, the Bible clearly points out that all Christians will not think exactly alike on certain non-essential issues. Regarding this discussion about whether a Christian should fight in wars or not, some Christians may feel like they can conscientiously accept non-combat roles in a military force, and some Christians may conscientiously feel like they cannot perform any service that is related to a military force. Each person is accountable to God for their own actions. **“Each of us will give a personal account to God” (Romans 14:12**

NLT). Each Christian, according to the scriptures is God's servant, and in conscience matters, we're told, **"Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (Romans 14:4 NIV).**

"If No One Fights, the Country Will Be Taken Over by Hostile Forces"

First of all, if no one in the world fights, there will be no hostile forces to take over a country. Second of all, Jesus said that only a very **"few"** people will be genuine Christians (**Matthew 7:13,14; Luke 13:23,24**). In this world, there will always be plenty of **"spiritually dead"** people to handle the world's affairs (**Luke 9:59,60 NLT**). Additionally, God allowed **"the nations"** to develop, and **"decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries" (Acts 17:26 NLT)**. Since the nations rising and falling and their boundaries have been pre-determined by God, the issue of whether one fights or doesn't fight in wars, will make no difference.

Conclusion

Each Christian should, therefore, ask himself, basis of Bible principles, what would the **"Prince of Peace," (Isaiah 9:6)**, Jesus Christ, would do, or want us to do, if, and when, faced with the question, "Should Christians Fight In Wars?"