



Part 1 of 5: Violence & Religion

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
~ Jesus (Matthew 5:9)

APPETIZER: The Jesusy Way of Peace

THE WAY OF PEACE: Violence is not the way of Jesus. Period. Peace is not a goal to be achieved by “whatever it takes” (e.g., The Avengers), but the means by which we live in this world and love our enemies. The violence of others gives Jesus-followers an opportunity to be examples of a different way of being human in this world. We do not fight fire with a flame thrower, but with the counter-cultural, counter-intuitive water of the Spirit.

THE JUST WAR ALLOWANCE: The belief that there are situations where justice allows for and even demands the use of violence, and in those situations, Christians may participate in that violence. This is especially true for State-sanctioned violence, like war.

Matthew 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-38 = Moments of creative disruption.

Meet their animosity with mildness, their high words with humility, and their abuse with your prayers. ... If they grow violent, be gentle instead of wanting to pay them back in their own coin.
~ Ignatius (Bishop of Antioch, c. 110)

The way of life is this: First, you shalt love the God who made thee, secondly, thy neighbor as thyself; and whatsoever thou wouldst not have done to thyself, do not thou to another.... Bless those that curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those that persecute you.
~ The Didache (Late 2nd Century)

A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and to refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath; if he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected. A military commander or civic magistrate that wears the purple must resign or be rejected. If a catechumen or a believer seeks to become a soldier, they must be rejected, for they have despised God.
~ The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome (170 – 235)

DINE IN: The Surprising New Covenant

Romans 12:1-2; 13:1-9

PAUL'S FLOW OF THOUGHT RE: JUSTIFIED VIOLENCE...

1. The Church must never participate in violence. We live what we proclaim – the way of peace, mercy, and enemy love.
2. This includes even *justified* violence (vengeance), which is up to God alone.
3. God will judge fully and finally on Judgement Day, but until then, God carries out justice in this world through the authority of the State.
4. The State bears the sword on behalf of God as his servant, an agent of wrath, and therefore can bring God-ordained justice/punishment/wrath through justified violence.
5. So how closely can the Church partner with the State in bringing about God's justice? A) Submit to authority. B) Pay your taxes.

A comparison of the Greek words of **12:19** and **13:14** demonstrate that the government does precisely the things that Paul has just commanded Christians never to do [revenge and wrath].
~ Ronald J. Sider (Speak Your Peace)

- **TRUTH #1 – MOTIVATED BY MERCY**
God's mercy is our motivation. (**Romans 2:4; Hebrews 12:24**)
- **TRUTH #2 – WHOLE LIFE WORSHIP**
What we do physically in this world around us, as we interact with other people and engage with their needs (our bodies) is where our “religion” is lived out. (**James 1:27; Hebrews 13:15-16**)
- **TRUTH #3 – LEAVE “THE WORLD” BEHIND**
Jesus-followers do not take our ethical cues from our culture (Lit, “age”; the spirit of our times), but from Christ. We should always live fully awake to the tension of this. Saying “yes” to Jesus entails saying “no” to every other “lord” of our lives.
- **TRUTH #4 – GOD'S WILL IS PLEASING**
Nothing will make us happier than doing the will of God. Do we really believe this?

TAKE OUT: Saying “No” to say “Yes” to God's Will

Are there patterns in your life that are outside of God's pleasing and perfect will?
A) Relationships, B) Speech, C) Thought, D) Entertainment, E) Hobbies, F) Finances, G) Career, H) Habits, I) Spiritual Life (Church, Scripture, Discipleship)

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK: Meditate on **Romans 12** every day this week. Zero in on a word or phrase each day that the Holy Spirit highlights for you and open your heart up to God's pleasing will. Talk about what you are learning from the Holy Spirit with your Home Church.

Home Church Questions

HANGOUT [Warming Up to the Topic – in one Large Group]

1. What has been your journey with peace theology (Christian pacifism)? When did you first learn it? What was your reaction? Where are you now on this issue?

Watch the home church hangout video.

HEAR [Listening to God through Scripture – in Discussion Groups]

2. Read **Romans 12:17-13:10**.
 - a. What stands out to you from this passage or Sunday's message?
 - b. Notice that Paul collapses the two most important commands that Jesus says in **Matthew 22:36-40** into just one. What are the implications of this for Christians/non-Christians?
 - c. THE GREAT DEBATE! Break into two teams. Team A: Just War. Team B: Peace Position. Using this passage (that's important – use the text!), have a debate defending your position and trying to show the inadequacy of the other team's position. Go for it!
 - d. After the debate, debrief. What arguments seems strongest/weakest? Are you seeing things differently for yourself in any way?
3. Read **Romans 12:1-2**.
 - a. What stands out to you from this passage or Sunday's message?
 - b. Is God's mercy and grace really enough of a motivator to live well? What about God's wrath? Where does that fit in?
 - c. We offer our "bodies" (plural) as a "living sacrifice" (singular). What are some implications of this? What are some ways the church *together* can be a living sacrifice in ways no individual Christian can be on our own? Brainstorm examples of what this "worship" might look like.
 - d. How would you respond to someone who said they have an important decision to make and need to know God's will for their life?

HUDDLE [Making It Personal and Praying Together – in Huddles]

4. Have you been keeping up with your homework this week? What has been your experience?
5. What else has God been convicting or encouraging you about through this week's teaching? How will you respond?