

War

By Bob Kline

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, students will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to Romans 13:1–2 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What are some instances at school, work, or home, where authority is delegated? Does the one delegating authority lose any of his own?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Romans 13:3–4 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: Is it ever OK to disobey the government's authority? Back up your answer with Scripture.

Assignment Three

Read the section **At Home: Nail It Down**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Why would a disciple view war as an unavoidable necessity? Does God ever use war to accomplish His purposes? How can disciples assist a nation in determining how war will be conducted?

Scripture to Memorize

“For it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.” Romans 13:4

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand that government authority is established by God and acts with His authority to restrain evil.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four domestic airliners and used them to attack America. Two slammed into the World Trade Center towers, causing their collapse. One struck the Pentagon building in Washington, causing significant damage. Passengers in the fourth plane heard news reports of what the other planes had done and valiantly rushed the hijackers. Their plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. The United States responded swiftly with military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, fighting a war on terror that continued for years.

But isn't killing wrong? What does the Bible say about war?

Bearing the Sword

Read Romans 13:1–4 out loud.

Studying the Passage, vv. 1–2

Verse 1. to be in subjection. While everyone is naturally subject to governing authorities, Paul expressed that our attitude should be one of willing submission, not grudging compliance. **governing authorities.** This phrase refers to those who are duly appointed to act on behalf of the entire community and for their benefit. They have responsibility for making decisions for the community and, in return, have the right to be supported by the community. This applies to any form of government the community adopts for itself. **authority.** This word speaks of the right to direct the actions of others. Authority and power are closely related and commonly used interchangeably, but they are, in fact, distinct.

Verse 1. from God. All authority belongs to God because of creation. All creators own and have authority over their creations. God created everything; therefore everything belongs to Him, and He has all authority over it. **those . . . established by God.** Authority can be delegated, or passed temporarily to others, just as business owners delegate authority to their managers and employees. God delegates authority to duly appointed representatives who then become governing authorities.

Verse 2. whoever . . . has opposed. Delegation of authority results in the one receiving authority acting in the place of the one delegating it. Therefore, the one who opposes the governing authority opposes God as well. This assumes, of course, that the governing authorities act according to God's law. Our supreme obedience is always to God alone (see Acts 5:29).

Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: What are some instances at school, work, or home, where authority is delegated? Does the one delegating authority lose any of his own?

Studying the Passage, Romans 13:3–4

Verse 3. not a cause . . . for evil. God delegates His authority to duly appointed rulers for the purpose of restraining evil in society. When those rulers follow God's law as intended, citizens can be confident that civil officials will at least try to act for the common good. When they disobey His law, however, civil officials can become cruel tyrants. Yet even tyrannical governments have at least some measure of law enforcement to keep order in society.

Verse 3. Do what is good. We were created to do good and live in harmonious society together. Our sinful desires lead to quarreling, conflict, and ultimately war (see James 4:1–2).

Verse 4. minister of God. In government a minister is one who acts on behalf of his superior for the purpose of good. Government acts as God's representative on earth, and its authority comes from Him. **for good.** The purpose of government is to provide an environment for the citizens to flourish by promoting and protecting what is good and by opposing and restraining what is evil.

Verse 4. does . . . sword. One of the attributes of authority is the right and the power to enforce compliance. This is done through the lawful and legitimate use of force. Government force can only be rightly used in the defense and promotion of good. **an avenger . . . practices evil.** When governments use force for evil means, such as the Nazis' attempted elimination of Jews in World War II, other governments have the right and even the duty to use force to oppose them.

Assignment Two Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share answers to the following question: Is it ever OK to disobey government's authority? Back up your answer with Scripture.

Discussion Question

If a government can use force legitimately to oppose evil, can it also use force to impose what is good? Why or why not?

Righteousness and Justice

Read Psalm 89:14 and 2 Chronicles 9:8 out loud.

Studying the Passage, Psalm 89:14

Verse 14. Righteousness and justice. These two words are used together so often in the Old Testament that they form a technical word pair. Seldom does one word appear without the other. The core idea of the word *righteous* is "according to the law" or "law-abiding." A righteous man is therefore one whose life is characterized by abiding by the law. *Justice* has to do with getting what one deserves. The Bible describes justice as "render[ing] to all what is due them" (Romans 13:7). The Bible often describes God as judging people and nations according to their deeds (see Job 34:11; Psalm 62:12; Ezekiel 18:30).

Verse 14. foundation . . . throne. This phrase means that righteousness and justice are fundamental attributes of God's character by which He governs the universe. Because they are foundational to God's governance, they are to be foundational to every government.

Studying the Passage, 2 Chronicles 9:8

Verse 8. setting . . . His throne. The queen of Sheba praised Solomon by declaring that God had set Solomon on His own throne as king over Israel. The throne of Israel belonged to God, meaning that God was Israel's ultimate authority. God delegated His authority to the one whom He chose to sit upon His throne, the symbol of God's authority. **to do . . . righteousness.** The purpose of political authority is to create and enforce just laws that promote what is good and restrain what is evil.

Assignment Three Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: Why would a disciple view war as an unavoidable necessity? Does God ever use war to accomplish His purposes? How can disciples assist a nation in determining how war will be conducted?

On Your Own

The next time our nation is considering going to war, how do you want to help influence that decision? The next time our nation is involved in a war, how do you want to help influence how that war is conducted? Write some of your thoughts in the space below.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to King Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

The subject of war is a difficult moral question. On one hand it faces the seemingly unjustifiable necessity of intentional killing. On the other hand it faces the equally unjustifiable alternative of allowing evil to spread unopposed. And unlike other moral questions, it's not the sort of thing that any reasonable person would describe as good, yet neither can the opposition of evil be described as evil. Perhaps the best answer we can give to the question is that war is sometimes an unavoidable necessity.

While the subject of war itself may be morally hazy, other moral questions related to war are not. For example, the purpose of war must be clearly morally justifiable before authorizing any use of force. As we have seen, the Bible makes clear that governments bear the sword solely to restrain evil. Disciples of Christ should be actively involved in the decisions a nation makes about war.

Likewise, every possible precaution should be taken to protect innocent lives. These are the sorts of moral constraints that make decisions in wartime so difficult. For instance, many war critics point to the tens of thousands of innocent lives lost by the use of the atomic bomb in World War II. Defenders respond that without the use of atomic weapons, an invasion would have cost ten times as many lives.

The Bible does not directly address the rightness or wrongness of war itself. God used the Israelites to judge the people of Canaan, effectively sanctioning war as an instrument of divine justice. At the same time He calls us to peace and promises us a day when there will be no more war. In the difficult decisions to be made in the midst of war, He gives us His Word and the moral principles found within to do good, to oppose evil, and to uphold righteousness and justice.

Parent Question

What are the two main things that government is to protect?

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