



The Historic Just War Theory

Small Group Lesson Plan (*may be modified to suit the audience*)

INTRODUCTION (15 minutes)

1. Just War Theory is a body of political science, philosophy, theology, ethics and law related to ethical justifications of war in three phases: (1) going to war; (2) conduct in war; (3) ending a war. A war is “justified” to the extent it commences, is conducted, and terminates according to certain ethical criteria.
2. Just War Theory is a largely Christian tradition reconciling three things: (1) the gravity of taking life; (2) the state’s/nation’s duty to defend its citizens; (3) the need to use force to protect innocent human life.
3. Just War ideas come from Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin. They teach that the only just reason to go to war is the desire for peace. The nation/state (not individuals) has a duty to maintain peace and the right to wage war to maintain peace. War is only just if it is waged with the intention of doing good.
4. Just War Theory postulates that war, while terrible, is not always the worst option. Some issues may be so vital, atrocities so horrific, or outcomes so undesirable that war is justified. A war is only just if it is both justified and carried out in the right way and with right intentions. Wars fought just causes may be rendered unjust because of the manner or motives for which they were fought.
5. Just War could lead us to wrongly think that if a war is just that it’s actually a desired outcome. But, the underlying premise of Just War maintains war should be avoided and fought only as a last resort. The theory is not intended to promote wars, but to prevent them, by showing how war is wrong, except in certain conditions. Just War should motivate nations to find ways of resolving conflict, other than war.
6. While nations/states and militaries are concerned with winning wars, individuals are confronted with many personal ethical dilemmas on the path to victory. Just War Theory equips military Christians with an understanding of the biblical basis and Christian ethics concerning justified war, which enables them to serve with integrity and lead with conviction.
7. Military Christian fellowship leaders can apply Just War training and education in real time, yielding tangible results that lead to the greater cultural, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of combatants and civilians on both sides of conflict.

OBJECTIVE

By the end of this presentation, you should be able to do the following:

1. Define Just War Theory in your own words.
2. State the 3 phases of Just War.
3. State 7 Just War criteria (acronym: CARDSIP).
4. Explain the Christian ethics of Just War Theory.
5. Explain the biblical basis for Just War Theory.
6. State 3 Scriptures supporting the basis of Just War Theory.
7. Evaluate conflicts in view of Just War Theory.

PRESENTATION (60 minutes)

1. **Definition:** Just War Theory states that war is sometimes necessary in the defense of life and the pursuit of peace. War is always terrible, but some situations may be so vital, atrocities so horrific, or outcomes so undesirable that war is justified.

Read more: *Just War Theory* at <https://iep.utm.edu/justwar/>

2. **Three phases of war addressed by Just War Theory (Latin names):**
 - a. The justified right to go to war (*jus ad bellum*)
 - b. Just conduct in war (*jus in bello*)
 - c. Post-war justice (*jus post bellum*)
3. **Just War Theory establishes several criteria that establish a just war standard (acronym to remember it by: CARSDIP):**
 - a. Just cause: Innocent life must be in imminent danger. Intervention must be to protect life.
 - b. Competent authority: Initiated by a duly constituted political authority.
 - c. Last resort: Force used only after other alternatives tried and exhausted, if reasonably practical.
 - d. Probability of success: Arms should not be used in a futile cause.
 - e. Distinction: Acts of war directed at enemy combatants, not non-combatants.
 - f. Right intention: Force used in truly just cause, for specific purpose and set limits on war's extent.
 - g. Proportionality: Anticipated good benefits of war outweigh its expected tragic harm.
4. **Just War Theory is based on Christian ethics rooted in love of both neighbor and enemy.**

Just wars may be rightly waged in defense of the state/nation and protection of innocent life, always motivated by the ultimate goal of peace. Augustine quotes:

 - a. "The purpose of all wars is peace."
 - b. "War should be waged without love of violence, cruelty or enmity."

- c. “Even in waging war, cherish the spirit of peacemaker; that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace.”
- d. “True religion looks upon as peaceful those wars that are waged not for motives of aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace...”

5. Just War Theory finds a foundation in biblical principles:

- a. Just cause: Genesis 14:14-16 - Abram goes to war to rescue Lot and others.
- b. Competent authority: 1 Samuel 24 - David won't kill Saul
- c. Last resort: Exodus 7-12 - God's plagues on Pharaoh in Egypt
- d. Probability of success:
- e. Distinction: Genesis 18:22-26 - God won't kill the righteous with the wicked
- f. Right intention: Matthew 5:43-44 - Love your enemies.
- g. Proportionality: Genesis 34:27-31 - Jacob's sons slay all the Hivites

6. Scriptural support for Just War themes:

- a. God's requirements: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you - to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8
- b. God's desire: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Romans 12:18-19
- c. God's avenger: “For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” Romans 13:4

7. Case studies of Just War Theory

- a. Operation Valkyrie – During WW2 Nazi Germany (1944), an officer in Nazi Germany's army fought against the unjust war of his country.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/the-real-catholic-valkyrie> Synopsis: In *The New American* magazine, Selwyn Duke argues that the film doesn't do justice to the faith and character of the officer, Col. Claus von Stauffenberg. “Even more significantly, little is said about von Stauffenberg's deepest motivations. What brought a career army officer to the point at which he was willing to undertake such a radical act? What were his ethical conflicts and struggles with conscience? What was the evolution in his thinking?” It was von Stauffenberg's Christian faith that made him take leadership of the plot to assassinate Hitler. However, he wrestled with his conscience about whether it was his Christian duty to commit the act treason.

- b. Operation Red Wings -- USA @ AFG (2005) “Lone Survivor”

Decision-Making and the Darker Side of Leadership – A former Navy SEAL shares his thoughts on the courage required for impossible choices. <https://www.inc.com/brent-gleeson/lone-survivor-decision-making-and-the-darker-side-of-leadership.html> Synopsis: Leaders can make good decision that have a less than optimal outcomes. Good decisions don't always lead to victory.

Great leaders master emotional awareness which gives them the ability to avoid analysis paralysis and make decisions based on reason. Sometimes decisions need to be made quickly with the information available, and sometimes more data needs to be collected. Either way, great leaders minimize uncertainty and control as many elements of the outcome as possible. This leader decided to uphold the rules of engagement and not murder unarmed men. That decision cost them their lives and the lives of their other teammates. Effective decision making requires discipline, courage, and adaptability. A leader must manage anxiety and fear in order to think clearly.

c. Operation Centerboard -- WW2 USA @ JAPAN (1945)

Was the US justified in dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War? <https://www.historyextra.com/period/second-world-war/atomic-bomb-hiroshima-nagasaki-justified-us-debate-bombs-death-toll-japan-how-many-died-nuclear/>

“Yes. Truman had little choice...” – Antony Beevor

“No. It was immoral, and unnecessary...” – Richard Overly

“Yes. It was the least bad option...” – Robert James Maddox

“No. Japan would have surrendered anyway...” – M.J. Sherwin

“Yes. It saved millions of lives in Japan and Asia...” – Richard Frank

“No. Better options were discarded for political reasons...” – Tsuyoshi Hasegawa

d. Shifting opinions on the Hiroshima attack -

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/04/70-years-after-hiroshima-opinions-have-shifted-on-use-of-atomic-bomb/> Synopsis: America was the first nation to use a nuclear weapon, and that has been a controversial decision. Previously, Americans approved of the attack, saying it was justified, but now Americans are less supportive of that decision. The Japanese have remained opposed.

Additional Reference/Resource

Does the Bible Support a Just War? Dr. Norman Geisler <https://ses.edu/does-the-bible-support-a-just-war/>

While the Bible doesn't approve of war for every cause, and while it encourages peace with all persons (Romans 12:18), it nonetheless indicates that peace and justice sometimes require war (Matthew 24:6). This is made clear from many considerations:

- (1) First, the Bible does not prohibit all taking of life. For instance, killing in self-defense is justified (Exodus 22:2), as is killing in capital punishment (Genesis 9:6). Government is divinely authorized to use “the sword” (Romans 12:4), as Jesus Himself recognized (John 19:11).
- (2) Second, under the law, God spelled out the rules of warfare for Israel (Deuteronomy 20).
- (3) Third, while Jesus forbade His disciples from using a sword for spiritual purposes (Matthew 26:52), He urged His disciples to buy a sword if necessary for protection (Luke 22:36-38).

(4) Fourth, John the Baptist did not say that armies should be abolished and did not call for repentance from serving in the office of soldier (Luke 3:14).

The Bible commands Christians to obey their government (Romans 13:1-7; Timothy 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14). However, there are limitations to such obedience. When a government commands worship of idols or a king (Daniel 3:6), forbids preaching the gospel (Acts 4-5), or orders the killing of children (Exodus 1), then it is a believer's duty to disobey.

Likewise, if government engages in unjust warfare, believers may dissent. However, like Daniel (Daniel 6), the three Hebrew young men (Daniel 3) and Peter (Acts 4-5), those who disobey government must accept the consequences meted out by the nation.

Several conditions for Just War are given in the Bible:

- (1) First, it must be declared by one's government (Romans 13:4).
- (2) Second, it must be in defense of the innocent and/or against an evil aggressor (Genesis 14).
- (3) Third, it must be fought by just means (Deuteronomy 20:19).

In addition to the above reasons for a just war policy, biblical arguments for total pacifism are flawed. For example, Jesus' command to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39) refers to a personal insult (like a slap in the face), not to bodily harm. Indeed, even Jesus refused to turn His cheek when smitten unjustly (John 18:22-23). The exhortation to love our enemies does not preclude the use of force to restrain them from killing us (see Paul's instigation of government intervention for his protection in Acts 23).

SUMMARY (15 minutes)

1. **Just War Theory** is a tradition of Christian thought that deals with the questions of when it is just to go to war, how to conduct war justly, and justice in terminating war. It technically applies to states/nations but can be applied to individuals who act as combatants. Just War Theory states that the use of force is a last resort, out of love for neighbor and enemy, in pursuit of peace.
2. **Definition:** Just War theory postulates that war is sometimes necessary in the defense of life and the pursuit of peace. War is always terrible, but some situations may be so vital, atrocities so horrific, or outcomes so undesirable that war is "justified."
3. **Three phases of Just War Theory application:**
 - a. Going to war: Justified in the use of force
 - b. Conducting war: Just use of force
 - c. Terminating war: Justice in cessation of the use of force
4. **Seven Just War criteria (CARSDIP):**
 - a. **Cause:** Just War is only started for a JUST CAUSE
 - b. **Authority:** Just War is started/stopped by a COMPETENT AUTHORITY

- c. **Resort:** Just War is only commenced after trying alternatives to conflict as a LAST RESORT
 - d. **Distinction:** Just War discriminates between combatants and non-combatants.
 - e. **Success:** Just War is only engaged with a reasonable PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS
 - f. **Intent:** Just War is executed with RIGHT INTENTION
 - g. **Proportionality:** Just War is waged while weighing the cost-benefit of force in action.
5. **Christian ethics of Just War Theory:**
- a. In defense of the state and/or innocent life.
 - b. The purpose of all wars is peace.
 - c. Enforce the Basic Guidelines.
6. **Biblical basis for Just War Theory:**
- a. Just cause
 - b. Competent authority
 - c. Last resort
 - d. Distinction
 - e. Probability of success
 - f. Right intention
 - g. Proportionality
7. **Scripture supporting Just War Theory**
- a. Micah 6:8 - God's requirements for His people to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly.
 - b. Romans 12:18-19 - God's desire for His people to seek peace and not taking revenge individually.
 - c. Romans 13:4 - God's avenger is the state/nation, which bears the sword for good.

INSTRUCTIONS TO TEACHER: *This lesson plan is designed for one and ½ hour. It may be modified as desired. The underlined portions are answers for blanks on the worksheet.*

Worksheet: Just War Theory

INTRODUCTION:

Just War Theory is: _____

Just War Theory reconciles: _____

OBJECTIVE: By the end of this presentation, you should be able to do the following:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

PRESENTATION:

1. Definition: _____

2. Three phases: _____

3. CARSDIP acronym: _____

4. Ethical base: _____

5. Biblical foundation: _____

6. Scriptural support: _____

7. Case studies (explain one): _____

SUMMARY:

Just War Theory is: _____