

Studies in James

Lesson 16

When Is It Right to Fight?

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our previous lesson, we looked at the question of "HOW FIGHTS ARE STARTED AND STOPPED," and we examined **James 4:1-10**.
 - A. James was clearly concerned with CONFLICT and TURMOIL among brethren.
 1. It seems when "wars" and "fights" happen among brethren, they have a tendency to bring out the WORST in all of us.
 2. Therefore, we need to AVOID "wars" and "fights" among ourselves because they NOT ONLY lead to UNFAITHFULNESS, they ALSO drive a WEDGE between us and God – we become His ENEMY.
- II. But the question we want to consider NOW is:
 - A. "Is it ever RIGHT to fight? Can we stand up for what is RIGHT, and IF so, WHEN is it right to take a stand?" In other words:
 1. Are there times when conflict is NECESSARY and even JUSTIFIED?
 2. Are there times when it is necessary to DEFEND ourselves?

3. What does the BIBLE teach about JUSTIFIABLE conflicts and battles?
- B. Basically, let's condense our questions into this one:
1. "According to the BIBLE, are there times when a person SHOULD stand up and FIGHT for what is right?"
- III. Before we attempt to ANSWER that question, there are TWO THINGS we need to remember.
- A. FIRST, every Christian needs to realize that this issue is made even more complex because of our relationship to Jesus Christ.
1. In essence, we are citizens of TWO worlds or kingdoms – one is SPIRITUAL while the other is EARTHLY.
 - a. In other words, we are under BOTH the authority of GOD and the authority of our CIVIL GOVERNMENTS.
- B. SECOND, every Christian needs to understand that we MUST be guided by the Scriptures in answering THIS as well as all OTHER questions that could affect our relationship with GOD and with fellow mankind.
1. We need to keep everything in FOCUS with the Word of God.
 - a. That is our REFERENCE point.
 - b. Our answers for ALL questions must be anchored in Biblical principles or commands.

BODY:

- I. Are there times when a person SHOULD fight for what is right – even to the extent of going to WAR?" (By the way, you might find it interesting that the words "fight," "fighting," "war," and "warfare," along with their synonyms, appear approximately SIX HUNDRED TIMES throughout the Bible.)
 - A. Let's review a few examples from both the Old and New Testaments that may help us answer the question.
 1. **Ecclesiastics 3:1-8** – Solomon wrote, *To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*
 2. Solomon said there is an appointed time for everything under heaven.
 - a. "A time to kill, and a time to heal."

- b. "A time to tear down, and a time to build up."
 - c. "A time to love, and a time to hate."
 - d. "A time for war, and a time for peace."
3. Solomon – who was inspired by the Holy Spirit – gives a summary of God's general design for life.
 - a. And ONE of those purposes includes battles or wars.
- B. SOMETIMES this passage in Ecclesiastics comes as a SURPRISE to SOME people because they have MISUNDERSTANDING of the sixth commandment, which said, "*THOU SHALT NOT KILL.*" (**Exodus 20:13**)
1. God obviously GAVE this commandment because it was important for all men to RESPECT and PRESERVE the SANCTY of human life.
 2. But the reason this passage is so often MISQUOTED and MISAPPLIED is because the Hebrew term "kill," is more CORRECTLY translated "murder"— "*You shall not COMMIT MURDER*" – you shall not take the life of a person as a PERSONAL act of vengeance that is both DELIBERATE and PREMEDIATED.
 - a. A soldier carrying out the orders of his or her officers to engage in battle in which lives are taken is not sinning, in my

opinion, UNLESS that soldier turns the engagement into a PERSONAL VINDETTA prompted by bitterness, anger and hatred.

- b. The issue here is not the ACT of taking another life in war, but the MOTIVE for taking that life.
- c. I also believe this SAME PRINCIPLE would apply to those in LAW ENFORCEMENT who may be forced to take the life of another.

C. Here's another example of WARFARE in the Old Testament.

- 1. **1 Chronicles 5:18-22** – *The sons of Reuben, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh had forty-four thousand seven hundred and sixty valiant men, men able to bear shield and sword, to shoot with the bow, and skillful in war, who went to war. They made war with the Hagarites, Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab. And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all who were with them, for they cried out to God in the battle. He heeded their prayer, because they put their trust in Him. Then they took away their livestock – fifty thousand of their camels, two hundred and fifty thousand of their sheep, and two thousand of their donkeys – also one hundred thousand of their men; for many fell dead, because the war was God's. And they dwelt in their place until the captivity.*

2. These verses record a war when the men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh fought the Hagrites (people from the Northern Arabian deserts).
 - a. The writer says, "*For many (many of the enemy) fell dead, BECAUSE THE WAR WAS GOD'S.*" (v. 22a)
3. God is obviously NOT a warmonger, but the Bible DOES say there is a PLACE for war in His sovereign plan.
4. Throughout the Old Testament, we find God blessing those righteous men who withstood the enemies of God and fought against unrighteousness and oppression.
 - a. In fact, the book of JOSHUA carries the THEME of conflict and warfare.
 - b. God instructed His people to TAKE the land He had promised them.
 - c. And SECURING that land involved WARFARE and a number of BATTLES in which THOUSANDS lost their lives.
 - d. There are several OTHER Old Testament examples:
 - (1). David verses Goliath.
 - (2). Samson verses the Philistines.
 - (3). Elijah verses the prophets of Baal.
 - (4). Josiah verses the idolaters.

- e. In EVERY INSTANCE mentioned HERE, God not only SANCTIONED the conflict – one that resulted in the enemy being slain – but He BLESSED those who were fighting for what was RIGHT and HOLY.
- D. A question that is often asked in connection with taking a life IN WARFARE, is the question about CAPITAL PUNISHMENT?
- 1. However, even in the realm of capital punishment God PERMITS the taking of life.
 - a. One example is: *"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death."* (**Exodus 21:12**).
 - (1). If God said, *"Do not KILL,"* – meaning it's NEVER right to take the life of another – then He would NOT have ordered the EXECUTION of someone who DID INTENTIONALLY take a life.
 - b. Although many people in our society, and even some Christians see capital punishment as barbaric and oppressive, we simply can't IGNORE the fact that the Bible teaches a MURDERER should suffer the loss of his OWN life.
 - 2. The apostle Paul said God uses the powers of civil government to punish those who do wrong.

a. **Romans 13:3-5** – *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.*

3. Furthermore, you NEVER read anywhere in the New Testament where Jesus, the apostles or first Century Christians ever argued AGAINST capital punishment – EVEN when they were unjustly the VICTIMS of it.
4. All this doesn't make me PRO capital punishment, it just means I'm not AGAINST it.
 - a. But, that's an issue you need to resolve for YOURSELF.

II. ANOTHER question that often comes up is whether there times when it's RIGHT to STAND UP AGAINST CIVIL GOVERNMENT? Or, to put it another way, is CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE ever sanctioned by God?

A. In the book of Daniel we find the Lord placed Daniel and his three young friends in Babylon under the leadership of a godless king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar.

1. Daniel so IMPRESSED the king that he eventually became a member of the king's cabinet.

- a. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego ALSO impressed their captors and eventually entered the king's personal service.
 2. Everything went well until Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree that these men could not accept:
 - a. **Daniel 3:6** – *"Whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."*
 3. These brave young men simply REFUSED to obey the edict – NOT because they were rebellious, but because the KING was trying to extend his authority BEYOND what God had commanded.
 - a. And so, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego fought back. And the WAY they fought back was to become disobedient to civil authorities – we would call this CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE.
 4. Was God pleased with what they did? ABSOLUTELY!
 - a. The subsequent account of the firey furnace speaks for itself!
 - b. God protected His faithful ones. **Daniel 3:27** – *And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.*
- B. On ANOTHER occasion, Daniel resisted a law issued by King Darius.

1. **Daniel 6:7** – The enemies of Daniel, who were jealous over his success, came before Darius and said, *"All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions."*
 2. Unfortunately, for Daniel, this was something he couldn't do. He was a faithful Jew and prayed to God every day.
 3. And so, Daniel DELIBERATELY disobeyed this order – NOT because he was trying to make some political statement, but because the king went beyond GOD'S authority.
 4. Was God pleased with Daniel's disobedience? ABSOLUTELY!
 - a. Once again, God protected, blessed and honored Daniel for his righteous stand.
- C. In the New Testament we see OTHER EXAMPLES of those who BOLDLY stood up against CIVIL GOVERNMENT for what was RIGHT and TRUE – namely the CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE of the APOSTLES..
1. There are three passages in Acts we need to consider which involve the preaching of the gospel of Christ by the apostles. These involve Peter and John, and later the rest of the apostles.

- a. **Acts 4:15-17** – After Peter and John gave a defense before the Sanhedrin for performing a miracle in the name of Jesus, and for preaching a resurrected Christ, the text says, *But when they [the Sanhedrin] had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."*
- b. **Acts 5:27-32** – This time, all the apostles were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His*

witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

- c. **Acts 5:40-42** – After Gamaliel urged his fellow counsel members to let these men go, the text says, *And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*
2. Peter and John, as well as the other apostles, had been "ORDERED" by the Council (Sanhedrin) "not to speak or teach AT ALL in the name of Jesus."
3. But Peter and John resisted – as did the rest of the apostles.
 - a. This is obviously a BLATANT CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE on the part of the apostles – DELIBERATELY and FLAGRANTLY disobeying the ruling of this CIVIL and JUDICIAL branch of the Jewish government.
 - b. As a result, they continued speaking – even after being flogged for doing so.

4. In fact, Luke tells us that they continued EVERY DAY teaching in the Temple, and from house to house – they continued preaching the message of Jesus Christ.
 5. Was God pleased with their disobedience to the recognized civil and religious authorities among the Jews? ABSOLUTELY!
 - a. God BLESSED these men because they REFUSED TO RELINQUISH THEIR MISSION TO A SUPPRESSIVE AUTHORITY!
- D. Once again, there is a question that is occasionally asked when we talk about CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. What about PAYING TAXES to a GOVERNMENT that USES tax money to financially support things Christians would OPPOSE?
1. During the final week in the life of Jesus He spent most of His time teaching in the Temple, and the Pharisees and Herodians took this occasion to try to entrap Jesus with a question that, depending on how He answered it, would cause Him to lose favor in the eyes of the people or make Him an enemy of the state.
 2. The question they asked Jesus was over the payment of taxes.
 - a. And so, they said, **Matthew 22:17-22** – *"Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they*

brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

3. In this passage, Jesus taught that His disciples were OBLIGATED to extend a certain kind of LOYALTY to Caesar. And that included PAYING TAXES.
4. Some today – including some Christians I've run across in recent years – say we have a moral RIGHT, if not an OBLIGATION to REFUSE to pay taxes, because the government uses some of that money to support IMMORAL practices and policies.
 - a. By this they mean such things as government funded abortions, stem-cell research using the embryos of aborted babies, and similar issues.
5. But there's a serious FLAW with the logic of those who take this stand.
 - a. The PROBLEM with this kind of logic is that it flies in the face of what JESUS taught.

- (1). There probably was NEVER a more CORRUPT and DECADENT government than that of the ROMAN EMPIRE.
 - (2). Political murders and assassinations were commonplace, and so was financial corruption and moral decadence.
 - (3). In fact, this SAME Roman Empire would EVENTUALLY target CHRISTIANS for EXTERMINATION.
- b. If paying taxes to a godless, morally bankrupt, and decadent government is WRONG, then JESUS is guilty of urging His disciples to do something MORALLY and ETHICALLY WRONG.
 - c. But HE DIDN'T! Jesus told His disciples they were MORALLY OBLIGATED to pay tribute to the governing powers, while at the SAME TIME paying tribute to the God of heaven.
 - d. And what is even MORE interesting is what is actually IMPLIED by the Lord's statement. By telling His disciples to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, He was IMPLYING that you and I are NOT responsible for the governments MISUSE or ABUSE of that money. The government LEADERS will be judged accordingly, NOT US!

6. In fact, the apostle Paul actually **COMMANDS** Christians to pay taxes.
 - a. Speaking of civil government and the authority it has over us as Christians, Paul said:
 - (1). **Romans 13:6-7** – *For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*
- III. So, how do we make application of all this for TODAY'S Christian?
- A. Do we, as Christians, have the right to **FIGHT**, or the right to **REJECT** an "AUTHORITY" that rejects the ways of God? And if so, what are our guidelines? To **ANSWER** this question, we need to **FIRST** understand there are **THREE REALMS** in which we operate.
 1. The first is what we might call the "PERSONAL REALM" – where we function as **INDIVIDUALS**:
 - a. Fights and conflicts in **THIS** area are **PERSONAL** in nature (these are **DIFFERENT** different from those in a **CIVIL, SOCIAL** or **RELIGIOUS** context).
 - b. Several scriptures help us to gain God's perspective:

- (1). **Matthew 5:38-42** – Essentially, Jesus said, *"whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also."*
 - (a). Unfortunately, this passage is OFTEN misunderstood AND misapplied.
 - (b). Jesus is attempting to convey a lesson by using EXTREMES: **Matthew 5:29** – *If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*
 - (c). Jesus is NOT saying we should PUNCH out our eye, ANYMORE than He is saying we should NOT fight.
 - (d). What He IS saying is that we need to CONTROL OUR INNER SPIRIT, and keep it in CHECK – DON'T be so quick to RETALIATE over PERSONAL insults or wrongs.
2. The SECOND realm in which we operate is what we might call the "CIVIL REALM" – where we function as CITIZENS:
 - a. The example of Daniel sets forth a DIVINE PRINCIPLE, which is: "The authority of CIVIL government is sanctioned UNTIL it comes in CONFLICT with the realm of the SPIRITUAL!"

- b. This is why Peter and the apostles were completely justified in DISOBEYING the CIVIL and JUDICIAL authority of the Jews.
 - c. Even though the Sanhedrin was functioning in an OFFICIAL capacity in issuing the ban on preaching Jesus, they came in CONFLICT with what GOD wanted the apostles to do.
 - d. If civil government passes a law that demands our DIRECT and PERSONAL participation in some unscriptural activity, we have the right to disobey that law.
 - e. Likewise, if civil government passes a law that FORBIDS us to personally participate in an activity which God COMMANDS, we have a right to disobey that law.
3. The THIRD realm in which we operate is what we might call the "SPIRITUAL REALM" – where we function as CHRISTIANS:
- a. To put it simply – our allegiance is to GOD FIRST and THEN to civil government AS LONG AS civil government does not try to supercede the authority of GOD.
 - b. **Romans 13:1-2** – *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.*

CONCLUSION:

- I. So, ARE there times when it is right to fight – right to stand up and deliberately resist what is wrong?
 - A. I think there certainly IS from what we've learned in this lesson. But there are ALSO some principles we should keep in mind:
 1. There is a great difference between standing for what is right and having a fighting attitude.
 2. There is no guarantee of temporal safety or divine deliverance when you fight for the right. **(Acts 5:40; Hebrews 11:35-37)**
 3. Our first objective is to live at peace, but our last resort is to stand and fight. **(Romans 12:18)**
 - B. Do YOU have the conviction as a Christian to stand and fight for what is right?
 1. We often hear people talk about how the day may come when we are oppressed by our own government and will need to stand up and defend, even to the death, what is right.
 2. But do you realize that your conviction to stand and fight for what is right is put to the test every day?
 - a. Your MORAL and ETHICAL values as a Christian are being tested every day in the world around you: home, work, school, friends, associates, etc.

- b. You make MORAL and ETHICAL choices every day.
3. So, maybe I should ask if you have the FAITH to make moral and ethical decisions that are in keeping with God's will?
4. The only way I know to have that kind of faith is to be a faithful child of God.