

On Just War and the Pursuit of Peace

WHEREAS, The Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), his followers are called to be peacemakers (Romans 12:18), and we eagerly anticipate the perfect peace of eternity with him (Isaiah 11:6); and

WHEREAS, Jesus assured us that “wars and rumors of wars . . . must take place,” teaching us that war is a sadly recurrent reality in this fallen world (Matthew 26:4); and

WHEREAS, Scripture teaches that the government has been “instituted by God” and “does not bear the sword in vain” but is a “servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (Romans 13:1-7); and

WHEREAS, The historic Christian stance on war and peace has traditionally been defined by the just war tradition; and

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have lamented war as a “sorrowful calamity” (“Resolution on Peace,” 1917) and declared our “abhorrence of war,” yet we have simultaneously concluded that “some things are worth dying for; and if they are worth dying for they are worth living for; and if they are worth living for they are worth defending even unto the death” (“Resolution on Peace,” 1941); and

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have served in the United States government and armed forces during World War II that called for a “just and righteous peace” after the war (“Resolution on Peace,” 1943), and called on all nations to seek an “honorable solution that will bring a just and durable peace that recognizes the dignity and values of human personality and the inalienable right of all men to be free” during the Vietnam War (“Resolution on Peace,” 1968); and

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have previously condemned al-Qaeda’s attack on the United States affirming America’s right of self-defense (“On the War on Terrorism,” 2002), argued that the 2003 War in Iraq was “a warranted action based upon historic principles of just war” (“On the Liberation of Iraq,” 2003), and condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine affirming Ukraine’s right of self-defense (“On the War in Ukraine,” 2022); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 11-12, 2024, affirm the historic, Christian principles of the just war tradition; and be it further

RESOLVED, That war must be fought for a just cause, to defend, vindicate, and restore public order, peace, and justice when they have come under attack; and be it further

RESOLVED, That war must be fought by right authority, a duly constituted sovereign government; and be it further

RESOLVED, That war must be fought with right intention and love for our enemies, truly intending to achieve peace and justice for ourselves, our enemies, and the world; that an otherwise just war may not be used as pretext to fight for glory, profit, revenge, or conquest; and be it further

RESOLVED, That war, so far as possible, must be waged only as a last resort and only if there is a reasonable chance for success, though we give allowance for the great uncertainty inherent in such prudential judgments; and be it further

RESOLVED, That war must be fought with proper discrimination between combatants and civilians, civilians may not be deliberately targeted for attack, and war is not an excuse for murder or terrorism; and be it further

RESOLVED, That war must be fought with proper proportionality and the scale of death and destruction must be proportional to the scale of peace and justice at stake in the conflict; and be it further

RESOLVED, That military personnel should adhere to the principle of military necessity and are permitted to use the degree of force necessary to achieve military goals, no more and no less; and be it further

RESOLVED, That policymakers' obligation is not discharged once the fighting stops; that wartime leaders must pursue order, justice, and conciliation in the aftermath of war; that war plans that take no heed of war's aftermath are fundamentally unjust; that an otherwise just war that fails to consolidate order, justice, and conciliation in its wake is not a fully just war; and be it further

RESOLVED, That Southern Baptists reaffirm our stance on the freedom of the conscience and on conscientious objection, that “those who for reasons of religious conviction are opposed to military service should be exempted from forced military conscription” (“Resolution on Conscientious Objectors,” 1969); and be it finally

RESOLVED, That Christians everywhere should pray for our brothers and sisters serving in the armed forces, for their safety and the state of their hearts as they serve; for Christians and non-Christians alike caught in conflict zones or living under threat of political violence, for their safety; for our leaders, that they would discern wisely and govern righteously, especially in times of war; and for the world, that God would show mercy and bless us with a just and lasting peace among nations, as far as possible in this sinful world.

