

TO WHAT EXTENT DO CHRISTIANS VIEW
THE MORALITY OF THE ACTION OF
KILLING AS SINFUL?

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Criterion A: Rational and Preliminary Research

Since I was born, I have been raised in a Christian family that has always been accepting of people from other faiths and religions. From movies to stories, I have seen so many instances where people kill others for the good of humanity, and I have always wondered how that could tie to the religion that I follow, Christianity, and to what extent can it be deemed morally good or bad in the context of the Bible.

The sources I will be using to in this investigation will be an interview with the head pastor in the church I attend, with the addition of other interpretations from religious scholars regarding the Christian view on killing. The head pastor of this church has been in the field of the study of Christ for more than thirty years, and is seen as one of the most reputable sources within the Christian community in Taiwan and has the expertise and knowledge in Christianity that is highly utilized in this investigation. I created and compiled a set of questions for the interview from prior research I had done on this topic. However, the addition of other scholars' interpretations on this topic allowed for this paper to have a more open view about the large complex topic of killing in the view of Christianity.

I noticed that generally, Christian communities throughout the world were consistent in when it was justified to kill but had slight differences in interpretations. The Officer Christian Fellowship (OCF) in the USA states that "the Lord's warriors are called to give praise and glory to God upon completion of a successful battle. But we are also cautioned, "Do not gloat when your enemy falls... do not let your heart rejoice (Proverbs 24:17)". In extension to this, the Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) organization in the UK made the statement that "under the old covenant God authorized killing in two situations, in the context of holy war and for capital offences." When referencing the 6th commandment, they said that "the commandment only forbids 'unauthorized' [and] 'intentional' killing". The ideas regarding being the "Lord's warriors" within the "holy wars" seemed to be similar but were slightly different when it came to the authority. The Officer Christian Fellowship seems to suggest that the government, or the people, have the right to deem when it is morally justified to kill someone, as the author was a veteran and a police officer himself. However, the CMF seems to suggest that God has already made the authority to kill in certain situations, thus making humans not have the right to deem when an instance of killing is "authorized".

The found focus of this investigative study is to provide an exploration on why certain instances of killing are morally deemed right and an extensive clarification on whether the people or God have the right to "authorize" killing through the teachings of the Bible and ideals of the Christian religion. This then allowed me to formulate the question: to what extent do Christians deem the morality of the action of killing as sinful?

Criterion B: Plan for Study

The research question is: To what extent do Christians view the morality of the action of killing as sinful?

This exploration will first establish the difference between an act of killing and an act of murder, and why that is crucial to the foundational understandings to this paper. It will also consist of the death penalty and defense of a nation as two contrasting examples of killing, the morality of these acts, and finally whether or not “authorized” killing can be deemed by the people, by God, or by both the people and God.

I will accomplish this aim by first interviewing the main head pastor my local church.¹ I have composed a set of questions regarding the fundamental concepts regarding the morality of killing in certain situations that I will have sent through email for a recorded response. I intend to acquire biblical evidence to support their view, potentially raising a couple of prevalent characteristics on the stance that Christians take, and finally a commentary on any of the prevalent aspects revolving around the topic of killing in the Christian view.

¹ The questions for the interview were the following: Is the Death Penalty just in Christian eyes? Should criminals such as serial killers be given a second chance? How should Christian soldiers and police officers, who constantly work in dangerous environments, view the act of killing? Do different denominations of Christianity (Catholicism, Mormonism, Protestant, Baptist, Evangelical, Angelical, etc.) view the act of killing/murder differently? How can Christians differentiate between “thou shall not murder” and “thou shall not kill”? What are some verses/stories in the Bible that construct the Christian view on killing and/or murder? Has the view on murder/killing changed over the course of Christianity?

Criterion C: Summary of Significant Findings

According to Pastor David Homer from Grace Baptist Church, killing is not always sinful and can be deemed right in many situations – as there is a necessity to realize that God does not view human life as restricted to this place or this time. The government allows societies to live in some semblance of order, and orderly laws and rules allow us to live life in a godly and dignified manner (Homer).² Because of this, it seems that Christianity can support giving the consideration of a “justified” killing to people of authority. The main idea is that God does not see this life as the end, and that he simply wants humans to take the opportunity to choose life on this earth receiving and enjoying his mercy.

The bible is crucial to the understanding of justified killing, and Pastor David Homer references various books from the Old and New Testament to provide instances in the scriptures where there were enormous amounts of body counts after natural disasters and tragedies – mostly under God’s judgement. However, this is not to say that all Christian denominations position themselves in this stance. Mennonites and Quakers have view quite different from mainline evangelicalism or mainline Christianity. They also are strongly biblical in defense of their stand against war, killing, or murder (Homer).³

Regarding the definitions of murder and kill, both the English dictionary and Hebrew Bible make it clear that they are not the same meaning. “Murder” is the unlawful premediated killing of one human being by another, the key work being “unlawful”. “Kill”, however, is taking or causing the death of a person or living thing (Homer).⁴ Therefore, killing and murder have different definitions even though there are some versions of the bible that say “murder” while other versions say “kill”.

² According to Pastor Homer, “God has given the gift of human government to allow societies to live in some semblance of order. A cursory reading of the Old Testament reveals enormous body counts after battles and natural tragedies (usually associated with God’s judgement). It appears we moderns apply a much higher value to life on this earth than our Creator does. He does not view human life as restricted to this place (earth) or this time. Our Creator seems to value our quality of life rather than the longevity of one’s life. He has given every human the opportunity to choose life on this earth receiving and enjoying his mercy, grace, love, and order or rebelling against his authority as Creator and receiving the just consequences.”

³ According to Pastor Homer, “The denominations listed above are fairly similar in their view of killing and murder. However, the Mennonites and Quakers have views quite different from mainline evangelicalism or mainline Christianity. They also are strongly biblical in defense of their stand against war, killing or murder.”

⁴ Pastor Homer referenced “In the English dictionary “murder” is the unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another the key word being “unlawful”. “Kill”, on the other hand is, simply put, taking or causing the death of a person or living thing. The Hebrew word for “murder” in Exodus 20:13 in the Authorized Version “translates as “slayer” 16 times, “murderer” 14 times, “kill” five times, “murder” three times, “slain” three times, “manslayer” twice, “killing” once, “slayer + 310” once, “slayed” once, and “death” once.” (James Strong, Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995)). Killing and murder are not the same meaning.”

One aspect that the Pastor emphasized throughout the interview answers was how the history of “Christianity” views are in constant movement – and the same applies for the view of the act of killing as well. This is the reason why Christians need to be faithful to “The Holy Bible.” The important part is that Christians have the duty to seek and understand God through his teachings and the Bible. (Homer).⁵

⁵ According to Pastor Homer, “In the history of “Christianity” views have changed, are changing, and will change. In human history our views and thoughts are constantly in flux. That is why Christians need to faithfully be a people of a Book we call God’s Word, or, more colloquially, “The Holy Bible.” Granted, there are various views about the authority and veracity of the Bible, but if we define a Christian as one who is a believer in, a follower of, and one who emulates the Christ of God, Jesus, then we need to seek our understanding and meaning of life from his Word and his Life. Jesus died to save his creatures from the curse of sin which is death—separation from God!”

Criterion D: Critical Reflection and Evaluation

The interview with Pastor Homer gave me a deep comprehension as to how Christians view the morality of killing in different instances. God does not see the human life as the end to all life, and that he cares more about your choices of having faith in him to give you the infinite unconditional love rather than how long you live on this earth. Most of society is given order through different forms of government, and Christian denominations agree that at times where the individual or group of people is defending against God's people with the right intentions, killing can be deemed as not sinful.

The interview had a lot more biblical evidence than I expected, therefore adding a lot of complexity to the Christian stance of this topic that I did not know existed. There were multiple references to verses in the Old and New Testament associated with previous Christian wars, and insights as to how God views our quality in this humanly life rather than the longevity of it such as when James, Jesus' half-brother, who asks "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." (James 4:14). This bible verse demonstrates the depth of the understanding of life that needs to be applied to the topic of killing and death, as God sees life as not ending on earth, but yet values life so highly as he sent his son to die for everyone on this earth (Homer).⁶

Upon further research, I realized that when it came to the definition of killing and murder, other scholars in the field of Christianity tend to take a parallel stance on the differentiation. John K. Roth in his book *Encountering the Stranger: A Jewish – Christian – Muslim Trialogue* states that "the Sixth Commandment is unequivocal and absolute. Allowing no exception, it does not say that 'murder is wrong in situation X, but it may be permissible in situation Y.'" David Decosimo in his essay on the *Killing and the Wrongness of Torture* states that "as I see it, killing is an act-type morally neutral in kind that becomes good or evil on the basis of a particular act's intention, agent, circumstances, and so on."

One difference that I found in the interpretations from Pastor Homer answer and John K. Roth's book came to how the quality of life is viewed. Pastor Homer emphasized that the quality of life is deemed by the individual receiving the mercy, love, and judgement from the Creator while John K. Roth said that "human existence and especially its quality also depend on careful discrimination between killing that is justifiable or excusable and killing that is not." Having one answer being directed to God while the other answer talking about the discrimination between killing that is justifiable and killing that is not highlights the differing view that these two religious scholars hold.

With all three of the sources supporting the claim that murder and killing is indeed different, it got me to question whether or not all versions of the bible are permissible in God's eyes, as some versions of the bible say that the 6th commandment is "thou shall not kill" whilst others versions state that it is "thou shall not murder". Studying different versions of the bible to see the extent to which their teachings are the same is potentially a topic that could be done with future research, expanding to other controversial areas in the Holy Bible rather than just the act of killing.

⁶ According to Pastor Homer, "It is not our human understanding of life that is critical. What are Gods' thoughts? Consider the question of James, Jesus' half-brother, who asks... "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." (James 4:14) Really? A vapor? A cloud? Then, it just vanishes? Is this how we view human life? (See also Psalm 37:30, 102:3, and Job 7:7) No doubt God does see value in human life! He died for us! Why?"

To receive a more conclusive answer to the question, the more varied range of pastors from different churches around the world could be questioned about the stance on killing. In addition to obtaining more pastors, an additional set of questions regarding the Christian view on death could have been implemented as well to add to the holistic view on the morality of killing with accordance to the Holy Bible.

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