

No one likes war. Who likes it? Everyone will agree on that. But the irony is that there has always been war in the world. It is just the way it has been; and we have so many unanswered questions why it should be the way it is.

As honest Christians, we also wonder why the Bible is filled with so many stories of war, especially in the Old Testament. I don't like that. And whenever I am asked about it, I also have many questions too.

We talked about King David—how good he was and what kind of faith he had, all that. Many Jewish people still regard him as one of the greatest men in history.

But how would you explain when you are asked about what he did.

If you read 2 Samuel 8:2, King David is at war with Moab. Basically what he did was this: he captures many enemy soldiers and lines them up and lets them lie down on the ground. And using a measuring line, he measures two lines and kills them; and then, he takes another line of people and their lives are spared.

What is surprising is that he is still described as the man of God. No wonder that some Christians in early church argued that the God of the Old Testament cannot be the same God of Jesus.

A 2nd century scholar and evangelist Marcion said that there are fine lines between the religion preached by Jesus and that found in the Old Testament.

The Jewish God punishes those who disobey, Marcion said, but the God of Jesus extends mercy and forgiveness;

The God of the Jews says "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but the God of Jesus says to "turn the other cheek."

Whereas the Old Testament God tells the Israelites to conquer Jericho by killing all the people—men, women, and children—the God of Jesus says to love your enemies.

So for these radical Christians, there are two separate and unrelated Gods, the God of the Jews and the God of Jesus.

It was a very challenging statement. We are talking about a man almost two thousand years ago, who was wrestling with this tough issue in the Bible.

But we cannot do away with the Old Testament; Jesus himself cited many scriptures from the Old Testament when he taught people; he always gave credit to the teachings of the Old Testament.

Plus, Gospel writers called him, "Son of David"; that means Jesus was always understood as a part Jewish tradition.

What Jesus always did was, however, a new interpretation of those Jewish teachings; he always thought of people first; he always put himself in the shoes of those poor, those weak, and those on the margins.

When I was in Uganda a month ago, I had a roommate from Korea who is now serving an Iranian church in Seoul. He is a Korean minister and lived in Iran for 18 years. So he speaks their language pretty well and that is how he started this church 4 years ago.

And he said that he travels around the world as an expert in Islam. He also wrote many books on Islam. The reason why he was in Africa was for the same reason: he taught those African church leaders about ISLAM.

During the day time, I was really busy teaching and attending meetings; and during the evening, I was supposed to rest a little bit. But I couldn't rest because of this man.

He really taught me something about Islam. Beginning with his personal story of how he ended up in Iran 20 some years ago as a missionary, he taught me the history and life of the people in Iran.

And the conclusion is this: In Islam, he said, there is no such thing as

love your enemy as yourself.

For Jesus, love and forgiveness was the ultimate weapon we could use. Violence was not allowed, whatsoever. "Those who use swords shall die by swords," Jesus said.

And, compassion was the only way of dealing with people, not violence, not physical forces, not any way of abusing people, because for Jesus, that was what he believed God would do to any human being.

So we talked about the Old Testament on war or violence; we also talked about Jesus on the issue—which is written throughout the Gospels, which takes up one half of the New Testament.

Then, what about the rest of the New Testament on the issue? What is the other view on war?

That is exactly what today's Ephesians' text is about; St. Paul gives his lecture on war; he knew about war; he lived through many wars; as a missionary, he travelled around the world and no matter where he went, he saw many conflicts among different people.

But here is the bottom line: for Paul, war is a spiritual matter. Behind all the battles we have in the world, behind all the conflicts we have with each other, there is a spiritual war going on inside us.

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the world forces of the darkness, he says.

It does not matter, rich or poor, educated or not, high or low, everyone has to deal with this war—the war of good vs. evil. War is a product of a sinful world; war is a product of our sinful human nature.

No matter how hard we try to be good and faithful, we know how hard it is to act that way.

We want to love; we want to be kind; we want to forgive; we want to

live justly; we want to be good. But before we know it, we go the other direction.

That is who we are. The Christian life is more often an out-and-out battle against hatred, oppression, sin, and evil, for which we need the appropriate "weapons."

Paul says that the weapon is not of us; it is of God; it comes from God; it is something we receive as a gift from God. Sometimes it comes from the word of God; sometimes it comes from the spirit of God when we pray; sometimes it comes through acts of mercy you do for your neighbors.

We need this weapon badly; we need to win this battle; this battle is a kind of battle with ourselves—a battle we have to win with God's help!

Life is full of wars; we are at war all the time—a spiritual war. In our life journey, we were never promised smooth sailing as ambassadors of Christ, but we were promised that God would be with us and that His grace is sufficient for us.

The apostle Paul called himself an "ambassador in chains". He fought the good fight, ran the race and endured until the end.

Now, Paul is in chains; he is in prison; but that doesn't mean that his life is over; he is boldly proclaiming what leads Christians to a life of hope.

No matter what we do and no matter where we go, there will be chains that will try to keep us from moving forward. Those chains could be our human desires and worldly things.

With God's help, however, we want to speak boldly to ourselves and to the world that we are not going to give in to all the evil powers; we are not going to turn ourselves into those temptations; we want to continue our spiritual fight; we want to live a godly life; we want to remain faithful; we want to keep doing what God is asking us to do.

"Ambassador in Chains"; Psalm 84; Ephesians 6:10-20; 8/23/09/AUMC

God is good; He will help us win this spiritual battle.

Amen.