

Crossroads Christian Fellowship

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A Biblical Study To Consider the Following Points:

1. Should a Christian Own Firearms?
2. Did Jesus Christ Teach Pacifism?
3. Is Self Defense Scriptural?
4. What is the Role of the Civil Government Regarding Gun Control?
5. What Role Does Romans Chapter 13 Play?

For the purpose of this study, I will use the Authorized King James Version of the Holy Bible as my sole reference source of Scripture quotations.

1. Should a Christian Own Firearms?

Since firearms were not present during the writing of the Old and New Testaments, we must revert to the weapons that were in existence, and which were referred to in the Bible.

The word "*sword*" is found 384 times in the Bible. Other miscellaneous "*weapons*" might be knives, spears, javelins, bows and arrows, and even rocks.

For the purpose of this study, I will presume the "**sword**" of Biblical days to be the equivalent of the firearm of today.

There are more passages in the Bible that seem to authorize believers to "*bear arms*" than will be listed in this study. Some of these passages are:

- Jacob, in blessing his son Joseph, makes reference to his own sword and bow: **Genesis 48:24** "*Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.*"
- God, in **Leviticus 26:7** instructs the people to take their sword: "*And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.*"
- God, in instructing the people upon entering the land says in **Deuteronomy 20:6** "*And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword..*"
- David, in fleeing from Saul, in **1 Samuel 25:13** "*And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword.....*"
- All the residents of Jerusalem were armed while Nehemiah directed the rebuilding of the wall in **Nehemiah 4:18** "*For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded.*"
- The Jews thwarted their planned destruction at the hands of Haman in **Esther 9:5** "*Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.*"

Again, there are many more passages in Scripture which indicate that God's people were to be armed in order to defend themselves against their enemies.

Some would argue that these references are from the Old Testament, but not valid for the New Testament Church. We must keep in mind that we serve the same God, the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are the same.

Hebrews 13:8 "*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*"

Malachi 3:6 "*For I am the LORD, I change not*"

2. Did Jesus Christ Teach Pacifism?

Many people, Christians included, assume that Christ taught pacifism, and they cite **Matthew 5:38-39** for their proof.

In this verse Christ said: "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.*"

The *Sermon on the Mount*, from which this passage is taken, deals with righteous personal conduct. In our passage, Christ is clearing up a confusion that had led people to think that conduct proper for the civil government—that is, taking vengeance—was also proper for an individual.

Even the choice of words used by Christ indicates that He was addressing a confusion, or a distortion, that was commonplace.

This refers to the response of a Christian to less than lethal force. We should allow ourselves to be misused and defrauded for the sake of peace. But this in no way contradicts the responsibility of Christians to defend their loved ones from deadly criminal assault in a free society.

Several times in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ used this same "*you have heard it said*" figure of speech to straighten out misunderstandings or falsehoods being taught by the religious leaders of the time.

Contrast this to Christ's use of the phrase "*it is written*" when He was appealing to the Scriptures for authority (for example, see **Matthew 4** where on three occasions during His temptation by the devil, Christ answered each one of the devil's lies or misquotes from Scripture with the words: "*it is written*").

To further underscore the point that Christ was correcting the religious leaders on their teaching that "*an eye for an eye*" applies to private revenge, consider, that in the same sermon, Jesus Christ strongly condemned false teaching by saying: "*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven... .*" (**Matthew. 5:19**).

Clearly, then, Christ was not teaching something different about self-defense than is taught elsewhere in the Bible. Otherwise, He would be contradicting Himself, for He would now be teaching men to break one of the commandments.

The reference to "*an eye for an eye*" was taken from **Exodus 21:24-25**, which deals with how the magistrate must deal with a crime. Namely, that the punishment must fit the crime.

The religious leaders of Christ's day had twisted a passage that applied to the government and misused it as a principle of personal revenge.

The Bible distinguishes clearly between the duties of the civil magistrate (the civil government) and the duties of an individual.

Specifically, God has delegated to the civil government the administration of justice. Individuals have the responsibility of protecting their lives from attackers.

Christ was referring to this distinction in the **Matthew Chapter 5** passage.

In summary, Christians are not to take revenge against another for wrongs done to them, but defending oneself against a lethal or deadly attack is not taking revenge, but protecting oneself.

Some might say "*What right do we have to take someone's life that belongs to God?*" I would say, conversely, "*What right do we have to simply allow ourselves or our loved ones to be killed or maimed since our lives belong to God also?*"

I believe Scripture is clear. We are not to simply allow someone to kill us with no defense, but we are to defend ourselves against attack if necessary - **Exodus 22:2-3**.

3. Is Self Defense Scriptural?

Exodus 22:2-3 tells us: "*If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.*"

One conclusion which can be drawn from this is that a threat to our life is to be met with lethal force.

After "*the sun be risen*" seems to refer to a different judgment than the one permitted at night. At night it is more difficult to discern whether the intruder is a thief or a murderer.

Furthermore, the nighttime makes it more difficult to defend oneself and to avoid killing the thief at the same time.

During the daytime, it had better be clear that one's life was in danger, otherwise, defense becomes vengeance, and that belongs in the hand of the magistrate.

In **Proverbs 25:26**, we read: "*A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.*"

Certainly, we would be faltering before the wicked if we chose to be unarmed and unable to resist an assailant who might be threatening our life.

In other words, we have no right to hand over our life, which is a gift from God, to the unrighteous.

It is a serious mistake to equate a civilized society with one in which the decent people are doormats for the evil to trample on.

A question that is often posed is "*Doesn't having a gun imply a lack of trust that God will take care of us?*"

Indeed, God will take care of us. He has also told us that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (**John 14:15**).

Those who trust God work for a living, knowing that **1 Timothy 5:8** tells us: "*But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*"

For a man not to work, yet expect to eat because he is "*trusting God*" would actually be to defy God.

King David wrote in **Psalms 46:1** that "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*"

This did not conflict with praising God: "*Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight*" (**Psalms 144:1**).

The doctrine of Scripture is that we prepare and work, but we trust the outcome to God.

Those who trust God, should also make adequate provision for their own defense, even as we are instructed in the passages cited above. For a man to refuse to provide adequately for his and his family's defense would be to defy God.

There is an additional concern to taking the position that "*I don't need to arm myself; God will protect me.*"

At one point, when Satan was tempting Jesus in the wilderness, he challenged Jesus to throw Himself off the top of the temple. Satan reasoned that God's angels would protect Him. Jesus responded: "*It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*" (**Matthew 4:7**).

It may seem pious to say that one is trusting in God for protection—and we all must—but it is tempting God if we do not take the measures He has laid out for us in the Bible to provide for our own protection, and that of our family and friends.

Resisting an attack is not to be confused with taking vengeance, which is the exclusive domain of God (**Romans 12:19**).

This has been delegated to the civil magistrate, who, as we read in **Romans 13:4** "*For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.*"

Private vengeance means one would stalk down a criminal, after one's life is no longer in danger, as opposed to defending oneself during an attack.

It is this very point that has been confused by Christian pacifists who would take the passage in the Sermon on the Mount about turning the other cheek (which prohibits private vengeance) into a command to falter before the wicked.

Let us consider also that the Sixth Commandment tells us: "*Thou shalt not murder.*"

In the chapters following, God gave to Moses many of the situations which require a death penalty. God clearly has not told us never to kill. He has told us not to murder, which means we are not to take an innocent life.

Consider also that the civil magistrate is to be a terror to those who practice evil. This passage does not in any way imply that the role of law enforcement is to prevent crimes or to protect individuals from criminals. The magistrate is a minister to serve as "*a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil*" (**Romans 13:4**).

This point is reflected in the legal doctrine of the United States. Repeatedly, courts have held that the civil government has no responsibility to provide individual security.

One case (Bowers v. DeVito) put it this way:

"[T]here is no constitutional right to be protected by the state against being murdered by criminals or madmen." 7th Circuit Court, 1982

Jesus assumed the right of a man to defend his family by the use of his arms in this quotation from Him in **Luke 11:21-22**: "*When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in*

peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."

Peace in a man's palace, or home, is the result of being armed, not disarmed.

Law abiding citizens, trained in the proper use of firearms, can only enhance the peace of our communities. Armed homes are a deterrent to violent crime.

One of the most amazing passages I came across was the one in which we have a record of Jesus instructing His followers to sell some of their clothes and buy a sword.

When they indicated they had two swords among the twelve of them, Jesus then said that it was enough, as we see in **Luke 22:36** and **38**: "*Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.... And they said, Lord, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough."*

Jesus did not prohibit his disciples from having lethal weapons, but instead made sure that at least some of His disciples had them.

He even suggested the method of funding for the purchase of weapons. "*Sell your garment*" implies the fairly basic necessity of them being armed during their travels. This cannot refer to a "*spiritual*" sword since a "*spiritual*" money bag and knapsack and garment would seem to be stretching an interpretation to fit a preconceived idea.

Jesus stopped His disciples from using their weapons when He was arrested, as we see in **Matthew 26:47-52**: "*And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."*

Jesus upheld the right of His disciples to carry a weapon and held them responsible for their proper use. He also warned that those who use a weapon take the risk of escalation of conflict.

But why did Jesus tell Peter to put his sword in its place? Jesus explained why His servants didn't fight in **John 18:36**: "*Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."*

He didn't say that His servants had no right to fight, He rather explained that because His kingdom did not have its origin in this world His servants would not use physical weapons to fight what is essentially spiritual warfare.

We are not to attempt to spread the gospel by the "sword." Those who have attempted to spread the faith by the "sword" have always brought shame to true Christians.

One verse that is used to teach pacifism and disarmament is **Isaiah 2:4**: "*And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*"

Does this verse teach us to disarm ourselves? No. This verse refers to the future.

The Bible teaches that the Millennial Kingdom of God on earth has not yet arrived. There will come a day when the earth will have so much peace that we will no longer need our weapons.

Until then, we must be prepared to defend ourselves. We should now follow the command in **Joel 3:10**: "*Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong.*"

4. What is the Role of the Civil Government Regarding Gun Control?

The Bible records the first murder, in **Genesis 4**, when Cain killed his brother Abel.

God's response was not to register rocks or impose a background check on those getting a plough, or whatever it was that Cain used to kill his brother. Instead, God dealt with the criminal. Ever since Noah, the penalty for murder has been death.

We see the refusal to accept this principle that God has given us from the very beginning. Today we see a growing acceptance of the idea that checking the criminal backgrounds of gun buyers will lessen crime, but we should seldom, if ever, execute those who are guilty of murder.

In **Matthew 15** (and in **Mark 7**), Christ accused the religious leaders of the day of also opposing the execution of those deserving of death—rebellious teenagers.

They had replaced the commandments of God with their own traditions. God has never been interested in controlling the means of violence. He has always made it a point to punish and, where possible, restore (as with restitution and excommunication) the wrongdoer.

Control of individuals is to be left to self-government. Punishment of individuals by the civil government is to be carried out when self-government breaks down.

Man's wisdom today has been to declare gun-free school zones which are invaded by gun-toting teenage terrorists whom we refuse to execute. We seem to have learned little from Christ's rebuke of the Pharisees.

Nowhere in the Bible does God make any provision for dealing with the instruments of crime. He always focuses on the consequences for an individual of his actions.

Heaven and hell apply only to people, not to things. Responsibility only pertains to people, not to things. If this principle, which was deeply embedded in the common law, still pertained today, lawsuits against gun manufacturers would be thrown out unless the product malfunctioned.

Responsibility rightly includes being liable for monetary damages if a firearm is left in a grossly negligent fashion so that an ignorant child gets the gun and misuses it. The solution is not to require that trigger locks be used on a gun to avoid being subject to such a lawsuit.

Some might argue that this is nothing more than an application of the Biblical requirement that a railing be placed around the flat rooftop of a house where people might congregate. But trigger locks are to be used with unloaded guns which would be the same as requiring a railing around a pitched roof where people do not congregate.

Surely in protecting against accidents we cannot end up making ourselves more vulnerable to criminal attack, which is what a trigger lock does if it is in use on the firearm intended for self-protection.

The firearm that is kept for self-defense should be available in an emergency. Rooftop railings have no correspondence to the need for instant access to a gun.

On the other hand, guns that are not intended for immediate use should be kept secured as a reasonable precaution. But to make the owner criminally or monetarily liable for another's misuse violates a basic commandment of Scripture: "*the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*" (**Ezekiel 18:20**)

5. What Role Does Romans Chapter 13 Play?

In recent years, Christians have interpreted Romans 13 as a command for unlimited submission to government by God. Many proponents of this belief have sat passively by, in the soft pews of their place of worship, while evil has triumphed in most areas of family and church life. In our pacifistic smugness, many have allowed government to become god without even knowing.

Yet, when confronted with the true meaning of Romans 13, absurd accusations are shouted in religious rhetoric toward those who would dare to break an unjust law or even to question the almighty government. The opponents of unlimited submission to government are deemed as rebellious, anarchist and disobedient. However, there is no practical, historical or biblical consistency in the shallow agreements of these simpletons.

First, unlimited submission to government is not practical. For a philosophy to be a valid philosophy, it must be consistent. As a result, it does not make practical sense to blindly obey a tyrant like Adolph Hitler or deem a law such as abortion-on-demand a legitimate law just because one's government says it is public policy.

However, if Romans 13 teaches unlimited submission to government, then we must obey and acknowledge all laws, good and bad, as the will of God. If all governments are of God, then all laws are of God. This is not practical from any point of view.

Second, it is not historical. Our founding fathers recognized and understood tyranny and despotism. They perceived the ultimate end of the king's actions. Thus, they besought George III to relent in his persecutions and implored him to uphold his covenant agreement.

In July of 1774, our forefathers met in Fairfax County, Va., and considered ways of forcing Great Britain to redress American grievances. George Washington and George Mason were the instrumental agents in drafting what has come to be known as the "*Fairfax Resolves*."

In simple terms, the Resolves offered George III two obvious choices. One was to fulfill his covenant obligations and be the king and ruler to the American Colonies that he had agreed to be or, second, to prepare for war. George III was asked to reflect upon the fact, that if he did not keep his end of the covenant, there could "*be but one appeal*."

Last –and most important – it is not biblical.

- Daniel disobeyed Darius and went to the lion's den
- The three Hebrew children broke the law for not bowing
- The parents hid baby Moses from Pharaoh
- Rahab lied to protect the Hebrew spies

- The Apostles went to prison for preaching Christ in the authority of Heaven
- Paul and his followers in Acts 17 did contrary to all the decrees of Caesar in order to make Jesus the King
- Even Jesus lived in direct opposition of the political religious leaders of his day and went to the cross for us

Romans 13 is a treatise by Paul and the Apostles on the institution of model government. As we rightly divide the word of truth and take this passage in its total context, we will discover seven truths:

1. Good government is ordained by God
2. Government officials are to be good ministers who represent God
3. We the people must obey good and godly laws
4. As we relate Romans 13 to America, our Constitution is the higher power — not the IRS tax code
5. Good government is not to be feared
6. In America, we are to pay honor and custom and constitutional taxes to whom it is due
7. Government is to protect the righteous and punish the wicked

As a result, we have a practical, historical and biblical mandate to fervently disobey any unconstitutional laws and all government officials who cease to be good ministers of Jesus Christ.

God almighty is the only power that deserves unlimited obedience.

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