

Salt & Light

Summer 2005

The Newsletter of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

Educating and informing the church body in light of biblical principles

You are the salt of the earth...
You are the light of the world...

Mt. 5:13-14

Editorial Note:

Once before the Salt & Light newsletter addressed an issue on which biblical Christians are sharply divided. The issue was capital punishment, and the newsletter presented arguments both for and against in order to educate WBC members regarding the debate.

The debate over gun control, examined in the present issue, has some resemblance to the capital punishment debate, because the question of whether Christians can ever support killing in extreme situations is involved in both. However, gun control is not the all or nothing issue that capital punishment is. It may be possible to restrict people from having certain types of weapons in certain settings without affirming the idea that people should not be allowed to bear arms in general.

The first article here argues why it is so important for us to discuss this high-stakes question. The second article here raises some practical reasons why some limitations may be wise. In response, the authors contributing to the final article argue why the Constitution and Christian faith do not require giving up weapons. Whether there are some types of weapons that should be limited in some settings is a matter worthy of prayerful consideration.

The Gun Control Question

From: Christianity Today, (ctlibrary.com accessed 6-22-05)

Would Jesus carry an Uzi? Would he have packed a concealed weapon as he entered Jerusalem, moving among those who wanted to do him in? What would Jesus do with the studies showing that concealed weapons are the best deterrent to crime? How would he respond to fears that our government might one day confiscate all our guns if people were forced to register them? What would Jesus say to parents living in crime-prone neighborhoods who feel they and their children are vulnerable to violence? And how would Jesus judge the United States, with its 15.22 firearm deaths for every 100,000 citizens (compared with .46 for England/Wales and .07 for Japan, according to Newsweek)? What would he say to those gun owners who carelessly allow their "means of protection" to be found and used by their kids?

These questions are hard to answer.

Asking, "What would Jesus do?" will get us only so far. This is probably why the National Association of Evangelicals has no statement on gun control. The Southern Baptist Convention last commented on the issue in 1968, encouraging President Johnson to crack down on the gun trade while reaffirming the constitutional right to bear arms. Evangelicals include both pacifists and core members of the National Rifle Association.

But just because questions are difficult does not relieve us from the responsibility to address them. We must contribute our voices to the cultural debate over guns because the stakes are so high. How?

Let's debate less and dialogue more. Most Americans, whatever their stance on gun control, want less violence, fewer family accidents, less gun-related crime. However, minds often are clamped shut.... †

A Case for Gun Control?

Jason Gottlieb, from <http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~zj5j-gttl/guns.htm>

The Second Amendment of the United States Constitution: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

What does this mean? Does it mean that all people should have the ability to possess whatever arms they wish?

Opponents of gun control disagree on the limits of this Amendment: some people believe it should be absolute,

and any and all arms should be legal. Some opponents draw what seems to be obvious limitations, for instance, the owning of a nuclear weapon or other weapon of mass destruction should be illegal. Some go even further and declare that such heavy military equipment such as tanks, bazookas, etc., should be illegal, and then some believe that reasonable controls on items such as automatic machine guns are all right.

(Continued on page 2)

A Case for Gun Control?

(Continued from page 1)

So, there is obviously much disagreement already about the limitations of the 2nd Amendment. One thing is clear, though, and that is it can be limited to a certain extent, morally and legally.

First, it is important to note that no right is absolute, even those supposedly granted by God and guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. For example, even though the 1st Amendment guarantees me the right to free speech, the right is limited. I cannot publish a newspaper in which I claim that a certain figure, for example the president of a major company, is a cocaine user, if that fact is known to me to be completely untrue. It would be called libel, and it is a valid abridgement of my rights. The classic example of an abridgement of freedom of speech is the imminent danger rule: I cannot stand up in a crowded theatre and scream that there is a fire (if there is not), because the ensuing panic may cause injury....

The reason abridgement of rights is sometimes valid is that rights can very easily clash. In the example above, my right to free speech clashes with people's rights in theatres to not be trampled. The same analysis can be applied to the 2nd Amendment. If the right to own a gun interferes with public safety, that right can morally be abridged, in order to protect public safety. And the courts have agreed with this position, as follows.

Throughout the history of the USA, many Court decisions have limited the right to keep and bear arms. The Miller case in the early 20th century limited the right to own certain classes of weapons. More recently,

we have the following from the United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, which indicates that the clause about "a well regulated militia" does not mean

that the average citizen is part of that militia: "Since the Second Amendment right 'to keep and bear arms' applies only to the right of the state to maintain a militia, and not to the individual's right to bear arms, there can be no serious claim to any express constitutional right of an individual to possess a firearm." (Stevens v. U.S., United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, 1971).

A similar ruling from the Seventh Circuit held that "Construing [the language of the S e c o n d A m e n d m e n t] according to its plain meaning, it seems clear that the right to bear a r m s i s inextricably connected to the preservation of a militia. We conclude that the right to keep and bear handguns is not guaranteed by the Second Amendment." (Quilici v. Village of Morton Grove, U.S. Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, 1982)....

Research has shown that a gun kept in the home is 43 times more likely to kill a member of the household, or friend, than an intruder. (Arthur Kellermann and Donald Reay. "Protections or Peril? An Analysis of Firearm Related Deaths in the Home." *The New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 314, no. 24, June 1986, pp. 1557-60.)....

Research by Dr. A r t h u r Kellermann has shown that keeping a gun in the home carries a murder risk 2.7 times greater than not keeping one. That is, excluding many other factors such as previous history of violence, class, race, etc., a household with a gun is 2.7

times more likely to experience a murder than a household without one, even while there was no significant increase in the risk of non-gun homicides.

This study (Arthur Kellermann et al., "Gun Ownership as a Risk Factor for Homicide in the Home," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, October 7, 1993, pp. 1084-1091) has been much maligned by the gun lobby, but despite repeated efforts to tar it as non-scientific, its publication in one of the most respected peer-reviewed journals in the

world is just one indication of its soundness.

Obviously, there is a problem with criminals having access to guns, which is why so many people feel they, too, need a

gun for self-defense. But this is a vicious cycle: FBI Crime Reports sources indicate that there are about 340,000 reported firearm thefts every year. Those guns, the overwhelming amount of which were manufactured and purchased legally, are now in the hands of criminals. Thus, the old credo "when guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns" is silly. What happens is many guns bought legally are sold or stolen, and can then be used for crime. If the 340,000 guns were never sold or owned in the first place, that would be 340,000 less guns in the hands of criminals every year. Part of the reason there are so many guns on the street in the hands of criminals is precisely because so many are sold legally. Certainly, there will always be a way to obtain a gun illegally. But if obtaining a gun legally is extremely difficult, the price of illegal guns goes way up, and availability goes way down. Thus, it is much more difficult for criminals to obtain guns. †

**"You were called to be free.
But do not use your freedom
to indulge the sinful
nature; rather, serve one
another in love."**

Galatians 5:13

**"Everyone must submit to the
governing authorities."**

Romans 13:1

The Constitution and the Bible: Against Gun Control?

Roy Copperud, from largo.org

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

The sentence does not restrict the right to keep and bear arms, nor does it state or imply possession of the right elsewhere or by others than the people; it simply makes a positive statement with respect to a right of the people.

The right is not granted by the amendment; its existence is assumed. The thrust of the sentence is that the right shall be preserved inviolate for the sake of ensuring militia.

The right to keep and bear arms is not said by the amendment to depend on the existence of a militia. No condition is stated or implied as to the relation of the right to keep and bear arms and to the necessity of a well-regulated militia as a requisite to the security of a free state. The right to keep and bear arms is deemed unconditional by the entire sentence.

The right is assumed to exist and to be unconditional, as previously stated. It is invoked here specifically for the sake of the militia.

The phrase "well-regulated militia" means "subject to regulations of a superior authority;" this accords with the desire of the writers for civilian control over the military.

Some statements by founding fathers of the United States:

"No free man shall ever be debarred the use of arms." - Thomas Jefferson

"I ask, sir, what is the militia? It is the whole people, except for a few public officials." - George Mason

"...the people have a right to keep and bear arms." - Patrick Henry and George Mason

Should a Christian ever use deadly force to protect himself, his family, and other innocent people? Those Christians who hold to the "Just War Theory" would probably say, Yes! Those who take a pacifist or nonresistance view of Scripture would probably say, No! However, one should not confuse the

issues. The right of the people (individuals) to keep and bear arms is a right clearly enunciated and preserved by the constitution. It is not something that government grants to individuals. The Ten Amendments commonly called the Bill of Rights are all individual rights that existed prior to any constitution or government regulation. They are what the writers of Declaration of Independence considered "self-evident" truths of "certain unalienable Rights" granted by God.

Dan Peters, from *The Biblical Evangelist*, vol. 29, no. 3

Is God a pacifist? He used a sword to block the access of Adam and Eve to the Garden of Eden after they sinned (Genesis 3:24). He stood with a sword to block the way of Balaam and his donkey (Numbers 22:23). He appeared to Joshua as a military commander with a sword in His hand (Joshua 5:13-14). He wears a sword on His thigh (Psalm 45:3). He has a double bladed sword (Revelation 2:12). He says that He kills in Deuteronomy 32:39: "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand."

God is not a pacifist. He has killed many, as in Noah's flood, and

is shown in the Bible as having a sword and using it to bring justice and peace.

Should government try to bring about peace by confiscating weapons from law abiding citizens? [Consider] the instance of disarming people in I Samuel 13:19-22: "Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears! So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their plowshares, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened. The price was two thirds of a shekel for sharpening plowshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and

for repointing goads. So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them." I discovered in the Bible that weapons confiscation is a method used by "Philistine" governments who seek to make slaves out of the people they rule. The right to keep and bear arms is not only a basic American right. It is a right given by God in this sinful world. It is assumed in the Bible.

Larry Pratt, from kfc.com

We must consider what Christ told His disciples in His last hours with them: "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a sack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36). Keep in mind that the sword was the finest offensive weapon available to an individual soldier, the equivalent then of a military rifle today.

The Christian pacifist will likely object at this point that only a few hours later, Christ rebuked Peter who used a sword to cut off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest in the company of a detachment of troops. Let

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 3:23

us read what Christ said to Peter in Matthew 26:52-54: "Put your sword in

its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"

In the companion passage in John 18, Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away and tells him that He has to drink the cup that His Father has given Him.

It was not the first time that Christ had to explain to the disciples why He had come to earth. To fulfill the Scriptures, the Son of God had to die for the sin of

(Continued on page 4)

Winnetka Bible Church
555 Birch Street
Winnetka, IL 60093

Inside this issue:

The Gun Control Question	Pg. 1
A Case for Gun Control?	Pg. 1
The Constitution and the Bible: Against Gun Control?	Pg. 3

The Constitution and the Bible

(Continued from page 3)

man since man was incapable of paying for his own sin apart from going to hell. Christ could have saved His life, but then believers would have lost their lives forever in hell. These things only became clear to the disciples after Christ had died and been raised from the dead and the Spirit had come into the world at Pentecost (see John 14:26).

While Christ told Peter to "put your sword in its place" He clearly did not say get rid of it forever. That would have contradicted what He had told the disciples only hours before. Peter's sword was to protect his own mortal life from danger. His sword was not needed to protect the Creator of the universe and the King of kings.

Years after Pentecost, Paul wrote in a letter to Timothy, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an

unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). This passage applies to our subject because it would be absurd to buy a house, furnish it with food and facilities for one's family, and then refuse to install locks and provide the means to protect the family and the property. Likewise it would be absurd not to take, if necessary, the life of a night-time thief to protect the members of the family (Exodus 22:2-3).

Exodus 22:2-3 tells us "If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so

that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has 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. During the day, presumably because we can recognize and later apprehend the thief if he escapes, we are not to kill him in non life-threatening circumstances. †

Members of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

Tom Clark
Hillary Kolssak

Tony Eager
Mike Rempe

Steve Kashian
John Rousopoulos

John Kilner, Chair (847-256-5347)

Newsletter Layout: Carrie Wiebe