

GUNS AND THE BIBLE

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A guiding principle in the life of the faithful Christian is that every thought or action be authorized by the last will and testament of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17). Therefore, all actions must have authority from Jesus Christ. Likewise, if the organization of any religious institution or the doctrine by and in which that institution abides, falls short of, or goes beyond, the gospel of Christ rightly divided (2 Timothy 2:15), that is an institution that is acting without the authority of Jesus Christ.

In the debate respecting whether the Christian has a “right” to possess (i.e., is authorized by the New Testament to possess) a firearm, there are two things to consider. First, does the Bible authorize one to possess a weapon (and having such authority, may one rightly use it as its design and purpose would allow)? If it does, then this is a biblically established “right”. Second, is this biblically established right recognized by our government? Let’s consider the second point first. It should be clearly understood that the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution do not establish “rights”, but merely protect pre-existing rights. The Declaration of Independence recognized this fact when it speaks of the rights “to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them”. On this premise, this document further declared “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,... That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men...” During the period 1776 through 1787, the U.S. operated under the Articles of Confederation (actually 1781). But it had many weaknesses, chief among these was the inability to regulate commerce between and among the states, and to raise revenue from taxation. Therefore, delegates from the various states met in Philadelphia ostensibly to amend the Articles, but they, in fact, drafted a wholly new constitution to replace the Articles, going way beyond their mandate for meeting.

The delegates, however, were fearful of investing too much power in a central government. This fear had its basis in history (e.g., King George III), and in the propensity for humankind to usurp power and to rule as a despot (cf. Romans 3:23). Therefore, the U.S. Constitution was designed to establish a form of government that allowed it “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity...” It is interesting to note that one purpose of the Constitution was to “provide for the common defense”, not to provide for the individual defense. In order to limit the power of a central government and the concomitant abuse, three branches of government were established, with checks by one on the other, so-called checks and balances. This three-branch form of government is not without biblical precedence (cf. Isa. 33:22). Nothing is said in the body of the Constitution about moral principles. Murder, stealing, and like moral vices are not mentioned or outlawed in the Constitution. Given the limits on powers within the Constitution, criminalizing such behavior was the prerogative of the States.

Our national foundational documents, the various state foundational documents, elected officials, and institutions all operated under “Higher Law” principles, i.e., we are a nation of laws and those laws must conform in their very essence to a concept of

absolute (divine perhaps) laws that transcend man. It is within this idea of “Higher Law” that the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, the so-called Bill of Rights, were proposed and adopted. Not one of the amendments in the Bill of Rights creates a right, rather they were proposed and adopted to protect pre-existing rights.

Which brings us to the Second Amendment. In Article 6 of the Constitution, it states that “This Constitution, and the laws of the United States which shall be made Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land;...” What we must understand about the Constitution is that it is a civil law document. There is very little in it that we would consider “moral” law. Are murder, rape, theft, and a host of other crimes against the law? Yes. Yet none of these is prohibited or even mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. It is supreme only in the things that it enumerates; if it doesn’t do so, it has no authority. But numerous crimes not enumerated in the Constitution are against the law. How is that? The U.S. Constitution subsumes an existing body of moral law, which laws were long ago settled by the populations of the various colonies (later states) and incorporated into state law. Gun “freedoms” are not provided by the 2nd amendment. These “freedoms” were well understood to be such by the colonies, subsequently states, prior to the writing of the U.S. Constitution. The 2nd amendment only guarantees a pre-existing right (“freedom”). The second amendment reads: “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 Supreme Court, in the District of Columbia vs. Heller decision, had this to say: “The prefatory clause ‘A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State’ merely announces a purpose. It does not limit or expand the scope of the operative clause ‘the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.’ The operative clause’s text and history demonstrate that it connotes an individual right to keep and bear arms.

“The militia consisted of all males capable of acting together for the common defense. The Antifederalists feared that the Federal Government would disarm the people in order to disable citizen militias, thereby enabling a politicized standing army or a select militia to rule. The Antifederalists therefore sought to preserve the citizens’ militia by denying Congress the power to abridge the right of individuals to keep and bear arms.

“This interpretation is confirmed by analogous arms-bearing rights adopted in state constitutions immediately preceding and following the Second Amendment. Furthermore, the drafting history reveals three proposals that unequivocally referred to an individual right to bear arms. Interpretation of the Second Amendment by scholars, courts, and legislators from ratification through the late 19th century also supports the Court’s interpretation.”

Now you may disagree with the Heller decision, but it is the “Supreme Law of the Land” having been incorporated against the states.

But we as Christians are obligated to do only what is authorized by the Bible and, in particular, the New Testament (Col. 3:17). So does the Bible authorize us to “keep and bear arms” and use deadly force to protect our own persons and the persons of others against those whose design and intent are to cause us bodily harm? I will state affirmatively and unequivocally that it does so authorize.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3). “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (Gen 1:26a). “So God created man in his own image...” (Gen 1:27a). As one of God’s creation, everything about man is part of God’s design for man in this physical realm. And everything about the design of man is for man’s own good. Of course, man may abuse that which is provided by God for man’s good. One attribute making up the very fabric of mankind is that of self-preservation. One can find many instances in the Old Testament in which King David pleaded for deliverance from those that sought his harm (Psalm 35; 22:20-21; 69:14-15; and many other verses). When the Jews plotted against Paul, seeking to kill him (Acts 23:12-24), Paul had his nephew advise the chief captain of the centurions of the plot. Upon learning of such, the captain sent Paul to Caesarea under protection of a strong detachment of armed guards. No doubt the armed guards would have killed anyone offering resistance to their transport of Paul. Paul did this to preserve his life. When Paul stood before Festus to make his defense (Acts 25:11), he stated that “if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal to Caesar.” Paul recognized that there are certain actions that may cause one to forfeit his life, but if he was not guilty of any of these, he really did not want to die. He appealed to Caesar to preserve his life.

Given this attribute of self-preservation, does the Bible provide any examples of the use of deadly weapons to neutralize deadly threats? Yes, it does. I will give just a few. Goliath was a champion of the Philistines who challenged the armies of Israel (cf. 1 Samuel 17). Only the shepherd boy David had the temerity to challenge the giant. Did David try to reason with Goliath or cajole him? No, he killed him. The circumstances of the confrontation were such that it was clearly evident that the time of appealing to the better nature of Goliath was over. It was time for action. David “armed” himself with a sling and five smooth stones, the modern day equivalent of which is the firearm. Actually, David did not have time to rush home and retrieve his sling from above the fireplace mantle, therefore, he had to be carrying it on his person when he made the trip to visit his brothers. And I doubt he had a concealed carry license.

In Exodus 22:2, we read, “If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.” The homeowner may rightly assume that someone breaking into his house has evil intentions, and there is no guilt if the thief suffers death from the use of deadly force by the homeowner. Nothing is mentioned about the instrument that inflicts death; death is the result. Furthermore, the homeowner is under no obligation to first sit down with the intruder to determine anything at all about the intruder’s intentions (Bible study, theft only, or mayhem), background (radical Jihadist or Eagle Scout), or upbringing (his momma sent him to bed without supper). The intrusion itself is sufficient evidence that the intruder’s intentions are bad.

Preservation of self and property is a principle acknowledged by Jesus. In Matt 24:43, Jesus says, “But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.” In so saying, Jesus recognizes without objection that a homeowner will act to protect his household, and by implication, will be prepared at all times to so protect since the homeowner cannot know when the thief will attempt his

break-in. It is not enough to be armed with a feather duster when the thief is armed. Likewise, in Luke 11:21, Jesus said, "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." Jesus is teaching by analogy that a strongly armed householder is a deterrent to a thief. If this is known to the thief, it protects the thief from being harmed by the strongly armed householder. Indeed, strongly armed persons save lives by making evil people think twice about placing themselves in harm's way.

Jesus did not object to his disciples (or anyone else) keeping and bearing arms. In Luke 22:36-38, we read, "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. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough." He did not object to them being armed. Why? Because these were dangerous times and there were evil people about. One may say that Jesus never carried a sword. The Bible does not say if He did or did not. (Personally, I do not think He did. (cf. Mat. 4:6)) If He did not, He was certainly relying on someone who did (cf. Mat. 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:49-50; John 18:10)!

We read in the 13th chapter of Romans that we are to be subject to the governing authorities. It says that "rulers (plural) are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." The apostle Paul goes on in verse 4 to say "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." The question that needs to be asked and answered is this: Is the homeowner able to be the ruler (or minister) contemplated in this passage? If the homeowner acts in the capacity of one having authority over his very limited domain, or over his own person, and such action is in compliance with established civil law, is this individual acting as an agent of the state, or as authorized by the laws of such state? He in effect has become a "ruler" over a very limited domain, but a ruler nevertheless. If in this capacity, he must use deadly force against "him that doeth evil", he is acting with the authority vested in the ruler of Romans 13.

In 1 Timothy 5:8, we read, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." The apostle Paul speaks of a group of people that has a subset. The phrase "his own" indicates a class of people that are in some way dependent upon the person or persons contemplated in the "any". The subset group are those within the person's own household, i.e., those living under the same roof. The idea here is that the responsible person is to think about and prepare beforehand the necessary provisions for the welfare and benefit of the subject group of persons. Provisions would include food, shelter, and clothing. How could it be possible that providing security in one's person and property is not consequentially included in the phrase "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."? What good is providing food or clothing if an intruder is permitted to steal it, or in providing shelter if that shelter is not safe and secure? Indeed, safety and security must be provided as well.

But does not Jesus Himself say, "And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat

also" (Luke 6:29). Does this preclude any defensive measures that may be taken to protect one's person and that of his family? Even Jesus and Paul did not take this to such extreme (cf. John 18:22-23; Acts 23:3). The commentator Albert Barnes had this to say:

"The general principle which he laid down was, that we are not to resist evil; that is, as it is in the Greek, nor to set ourselves against an evil person who is injuring us. But even this general direction is not to be pressed too strictly. Christ did not intend to teach that we are to see our families murdered, or be murdered ourselves; rather than to make resistance. The law of nature, and all laws, human and divine, justify self-defense when life is in danger. It cannot surely be the intention to teach that a father should sit by coolly and see his family butchered by savages, and not be allowed to defend them. Neither natural nor revealed religion ever did, or ever can, inculcate this doctrine." (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Many subscribe to the notion that the authentic Christian is loving, peaceful, just, and generous. Who denies such? But then they go beyond this to say that such Christian attributes would not permit one to be prepared with a good self-defense strategy that incorporates the use of deadly force. Being armed to defend ourselves, our family members, our neighbors, or those innocents that we do not personally know is not unloving or unkind. Exactly the opposite. If an evil person intent on mayhem threatens you with death, do you have the right to defend yourself? What if the same evil person threatens your entire family? Or all of the children in a school? Or all the people gathered together at the Super Bowl? And what if you are the only person with the means and opportunity to stop the whole mess? What is the loving thing to do then? It does not matter to the perpetrator if you are loving or peaceful, he has cast the die (Gal 6:7). It is now up to you! But as for me and my household, I am going to whip out my .45 (or .22, 38 special +P, 357 magnum, 44 magnum, shotgun, or whatever is readily available) and make known my thinking on the matter!~