

A Theology of Weapons and Gun Control

Intro:

We will deal with three things in this lecture: What the Bible says about weapons, how to understand the Second Amendment in context, and what Christians should think about guns and gun control.

This lesson assumes you have already listened to our lesson on Just War Theory.

You do not have to agree with everything in this lesson. Christians are free to disagree on political issues that are not directly addressed in the Bible.

Interesting things that the Bible teaches about weapons

Weapons in the Bible can be classified into four types: 1. Projectile (bow and arrow, sling and stone, javelin, etc.), 2. Striking (sword, spear, rocks, dagger, axe, club, etc.), 3. Mobile (chariot, battering ram, siege works, etc.), and 4. Protective (shield, armor, etc.).

Weapons can be symbols of spiritual judgment

Deuteronomy 32:41-42 - if I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh—with the blood of the slain and the captives...

Psalms 7:12-13 If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.

Wisdom of Solomon 5:16-21 - Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm he will shield them. The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armor, and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; he will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet; he will take holiness as an invincible shield, and sharpen stern wrath for a sword, and creation will join with him to fight against his frenzied foes. Shafts of lightning will fly with true aim, and will leap from the clouds to the target, as from a well-drawn bow.

-Gen 3 says that a sword is placed in the garden

Humanity needing to use weapons is seen as a result of the fall

Genesis 27:40 – [Esau is told] - By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you grow restless you shall break his yoke from your neck.”

-In 1 Enoch 8 fallen angels teach mankind sorcery, astrology, how to make cosmetics, and how to make weapons.

Weapons are seen as ways the government punishes their opponents

Exodus 5:21 - and they said to them, “The LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

Joshua 6:21 - Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

Romans 13:4 - for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Weapons are needed now, but there is a prophetic hope that one day they will not longer be needed.

Leviticus 26:6 - I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land.

Isaiah 2:4 - ...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Israel is commanded not to trust in their own military might but in God.

Deuteronomy 20:1 - "When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

1 Samuel 17:47 - and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."

At times weapons are seen as a sign of manliness or valor

-Ehud, David's mighty men, etc.

1 Chronicles 5:18 - The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had valiant men who carried shield and sword, and drew the bow, expert in war, 44,760, able to go to war.

1 Chronicles 11:22-23 - And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds. He struck down two heroes of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he struck down an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits tall. The Egyptian had in his hand a spear like a weaver's beam, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear.

Weapons are not the way that Christ's Kingdom spreads

Matthew 26:52 - Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

It seems that Jesus' disciples had swords for defense

Luke 22:36 - He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one"

Luke 22:38 - And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough."

-Notice that Peter had a hidden sword.

Summary

The right to have weapons is logically linked to the right to go to war (Just War Theory) or self-defense. If one has the right to go to war or to defend oneself, then they have a right to use a weapon if needed.

The Second Amendment in context

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.

Things to note:

1. The purpose of this amendment has nothing to do with hunting. Hunting has always been allowed.
2. The purpose of this amendment, though it mentions a militia, includes self-defense from an attack. Self-defense had always been allowed.

In the 2008 Supreme Court case, *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the Supreme Court held that the "Second Amendment protects an individual right to possess a firearm unconnected with service in a militia, and to use that arm for traditionally lawful purposes, such as self-defense within the home." Additionally, the Second Amendment should "guarantee an individual right to possess and carry weapons in case of confrontation."

3. The Amendment does allow both for the owning and the bearing (having with them/carrying) of firearms.
4. The Amendment doesn't restrict or even specify which types of guns are allowed and which are not. The founders probably meant weapons equivalent to what would be needed for a militia (i.e. comparable to current, personal, military weapons).
5. The purpose of the Second Amendment is to allow citizens to create a militia to protect themselves from outside invasion (like Japan in WWII) and to rebel against the government if the government oversteps its bounds.

Note: The purpose of armed rebellion against the government should cause concern for Christians. Listen to our previous lecture on "Resistance and Revolution" for more info.

Common misunderstandings of gun-related terms

"Gun Control" – The set of laws or policies that regulate the manufacture, sale, transfer, possession, modification, or use of firearms by civilians.

Note: Most people are in favor of some type of gun control, even if very minimal.

"Gun free zone" – A location where a licensed weapons permit holder may not bring their firearm. *Notice that a "gun free zone" doesn't apply to a criminal who will bring their gun wherever they want.*

"AR" - This does not stand for "assault rifle." It stands for "ArmaLite Rifle." ArmaLite was the company that produced and popularized Eugene Stoner's original rifle design.

"Assault Rifle" – In one sense, there is no such thing as an "assault rifle." Assault is an action. In another sense, there is a military definition of an assault rifle which *must include selective fire to fully auto or 3-round burst*. Civilian model ARs *do not* meet that definition.

To say it stronger, I don't know that there has been a single mass shooting in U.S. history that has been done with an actual assault rifle. The media often uses this term simply to refer to any rifle, hunting or otherwise, that is painted black.

“Semi-Automatic” – A firearm that fires one round for each press of the trigger. We have had semi-automatic rifles since the 1800's (and maybe even before that). This term is often confused with “fully automatic” (which is where the gun continues to fire as long as the trigger is depressed).

“High capacity magazine” – A magazine that has a round capacity that is considered higher than normal. The media uses this term to refer to standard capacity magazines.

Police miss 80% of their shots under stress. And what if you are being attacked by two people at once? You will need a lot more rounds than you think you will. A 17 round magazine for a pistol or a 30 round magazine for a rifle is standard capacity. It is by no means "high capacity."

“Clip” – A clip is a strip of metal to which you attach or insert rounds. They are used in much older weapon systems (such as the M1 Garand). When most people say “clip” what they should be saying is “magazine.” *Most modern firearms do not use “clips.”* To say it another way: clips feed magazines and magazines feed guns.

“Military Style” – A term used to refer to a weapon that looks like it is used by the military, whether it is actually used by the military or not. It is often used by the media to make regular rifle owners sound like extremists.

“Gun Violence” – Any violence done by a firearm.

This term is unhelpful because it doesn't distinguish between righteous gun violence and unrighteous gun violence. After all, the Nazi's were technically stopped by “gun violence.” Anytime someone tries to say how many people were shot or how many people were killed by police or how many deaths were caused by guns, the information they present becomes meaningless. One must distinguish between good gun violence (such as when someone uses a gun in self-defense or a police officer stops a criminal) from bad gun violence (such as a murder).

Gun control statistics in the U.S.

1. In the United States, for every one firearm-related homicide, *there are 80 cases where a firearm is used in self-defense.* This means that one is 80x more likely to use a firearm in a lawful way to preserve innocent life than they are to use it in an unlawful way to take innocent life. A similar study done under the Clinton administration - a more liberal administration - concluded that there are almost *50 cases of self-defense gun use for every one gun-related homicide.*

2. Each year there are more than *200,000 cases of sexual assault that are prevented* by women carrying firearms.

Source: Kleck, Gary and Mark Gertz, “Armed Resistance to Crime,” in the Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, Northwestern University, Vol 86, Fall 1995.

3. The United States has the highest per capita gun ownership in the world. If more guns caused more murders (and that was the primary issue) then we should have the highest per capita murder rate in the world. However,

the United States ranks 121st in per capita murders when compared with the rest of the world. This means that there are 120 other countries with less guns and more violence than the U.S.

Source: Global Study on Homicide, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013.

4. Aren't guns in the home dangerous for children? *In one year only about 69 children accidentally discharge a firearm that is not properly locked up.* This isn't how many were hurt by the discharge (which is less), just how many accidentally fired a gun. *To put this in perspective, there are twice as many children who die from bicycles each year than who die from firearms.*

Source: Center for Disease Control - Annual Report, 2013.

5. Gun control statistically does not work: "In 2004 the U.S. Academy of Sciences released its evaluation from a review of 253 journal articles, 99 books, 43 government publications, and some original empirical research. *It failed to identify any gun control that had reduced violent crime, suicide, or gun accidents. The same conclusion was reached in 2003 by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control's review of then-existent studies.*"

Source: Kates, Don and Gary Mauser, "Would Banning Firearms Reduce Murder and Suicide," in the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy, Harvard University, Vol. 30, Spring 2007.

6. Can't we just ban guns like England? The United Kingdom (U.K.), where firearm ownership is severely restricted, *has four times the amount of violent crime as the U.S.*

Source: Edwards, Richard, "UK is Violent Crime Capital of Europe," in The Telegraph, 2009.

7. Each year there are about 323 homicides committed with rifles in the U.S. In comparison, about 496 people are killed with hammers or clubs. *This means that blunt objects account for 60% more deaths than so called, "assault rifles."*

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation - Annual Report, 2011.

8. Gun-free zones are perhaps the most notorious killers. According to John Lott, a Chief Economist with the U.S. Sentencing Commission, "*With just one exception, every public mass shooting in the USA since at least 1950 has taken place where citizens are banned from carrying guns.* Despite strict gun regulations, *Europe has had three of the worst six school shootings.*" He also writes, "Killers go where victims can't defend themselves. In the Aurora, Colo., movie theater shooting, out of seven theaters showing the Batman movie premiere within 20 minutes of the suspect's apartment, only one banned permitted concealed handguns. *The suspect didn't go to the closest nor the largest, but to the one that banned self-defense.*"

Source: Lott, John, "Guns in Schools can Save Lives," in USA Today, 2012.

Additional facts about mass shootings

-There are about 371 million guns in the U.S. (meaning, there are about as many guns as there are people). The idea that you could actually buy them all back or destroy all of them (without bad guys keeping some) is virtually impossible. A complete gun ban or government buyback, in addition to being unconstitutional, isn't a real solution.

-Almost all mass shootings happen in places where licensed concealed-carry holders cannot take their guns. If potential victims had the right to shoot back, the number of mass shootings would go down. All the following mass shootings (and more) happened in "gun-free zones:"

- Columbine
- Las Vegas
- Pulse Nightclub in Orlando
- Virginia Tech
- Sandy Hook
- Luby's in Killeen, TX
- Parkland
- University of Texas
- San Bernardino
- Post office in Edmond, Oklahoma
- Ft. Hood

-Mass shootings are usually over in 5 minutes or less (Columbine took 47 mins). The average police response time in the U.S. is 10 minutes. This means you cannot say, "we don't need guns because we can just call the police."

-Of the top 10 most violent mass shootings in U.S. history, a total of 259 people died. That is obviously tragic. But to put that in perspective consider this: 6,675 people die every day in the U.S. and 160,000 thousand die each day worldwide. This means that 25 times more people die in the U.S. every single day than the worst mass shootings combined! Though it doesn't feel this way, mass shootings (especially with rifles) are very, very rare when you consider the population.