



Is it Biblical to Arm Ourselves for SELF-DEFENCE?

—by Dr Peter Hammond

“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 Timothy 5:8

Fathers and husbands are required by almighty God to provide for their families. This includes not only providing food, housing, clothing, education, medical care, love, discipleship, and spiritual guidance, but also protection. Of what worth is all the other provision if one does not provide protection as well? Anyone who fails to provide for their family has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. In fact, those who refuse to protect their young are worse than an animal. What animal will not fight to protect its offspring? God has endowed His creatures with claws, talons, horns, sharp teeth, stings, venom, swift wings, and other means for fight or flight. Self-defence is built into nature.

Deal with the murderer

The underlying arguments for gun control seem to be that the availability of weapons causes crime. But this has not been the Biblical position. Genesis 4 records the first murder when Cain killed Abel. God’s response was not to ban rocks, knives, clubs, or whatever murder weapon may have been used, but to banish the murderer. It is the murderer’s heart that is the problem, not the weapon used.

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God’s punishment for murder

In Genesis 9:5-6, God instituted capital punishment for murder. *“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.”* This death penalty for murder was repeatedly restated (Exo 21:12-15; Levi 24:17-22; Num 35:33; Matt

5:17-18; Acts 25:11; Rom 13:1-4; Rev 13:10). However, nowhere does the Bible advocate weapons control. The Bible does record the control of weapons by the Amalikes and the Philistines (Judg 5:8 and 1 Sam 13:19-22) but it condemns these restrictions on individual defence as a pagan attempt to centralise excessive power.

God’s Law is not ambiguous

Our Lord Jesus told His disciples that: *“He who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.”* – Luke 22:36. The Law of God is clear. *“If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed.”* – Exodus 22:2.

The Law of God establishes the basic right of self-defence. Any person is justified in defending himself, or his family, whenever they are attacked or their lives are endangered. Any weapon is permissible for use in self-defence. The Law of God does not say that the home owner is guilty if he uses a sword, but innocent if he uses a club. The issue is not one of weapons, but the right and duty of self-defence.

Foundations for freedom

To limit a person’s access to lethal weapons is to limit his ability for self and family defence. Gun control interferes with our basic right and responsibility for self-defence. Ultimately gun control can deprive you of your right to life. The right of citizens to use lethal force to defend themselves is a great deterrent to hijackers, rapists, and

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murderers. Those who choose not to have firearms still benefit from those who do. If only one in twenty people is armed, it still acts as a restraint on potential attackers who are not certain who is armed, and who is not. The deterrent value of armed citizens against crime cannot be overestimated. *“Do not be afraid of them, remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.”* – Nehemiah 4:14

From these, and many other, passages of scripture (including Num 32:20; Judges 5:8; 1 Sam 13:19-22), we can see that a man is responsible to be armed and prepared to protect his household. *“A righteous man who falters before the wicked is like a murky spring and a polluted well.”* – Proverbs 25:26

English legal tradition

English legal tradition has always recognised the right of free citizens to possess and carry weapons for self-defence. King Alfred the Great (871-899) laid the foundation for English law. The Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 formed the preamble for these laws. While abuses, such as disturbing a meeting by drawing a sword, were prohibited – the basic right to bear arms was entrenched.

The laws of King Cnut (1020-1023) declared self-defence to not only be a right, but a duty. Those who failed to assist a person under attack were to be fined. Similarly, anyone who “illegally disarms a man” were to be fined.

Magna Carta of 1215, the first written restriction on the powers of government and the grandfather of all Bills of Rights, guarantees the right of all free men to bear arms.

The English Declaration of Rights of 1689 recognised “the right of having and using arms for self-preservation and defence.” Other free

states entrenched this right to obtain, own, carry and use weapons for self-defence, including most notably the United States of America and its Bill of Rights. If these foundational principles for freedom seem extreme, or outdated, then consider recent history:

Rwanda was a gun-free zone

On 6 April 1994, one of the most dreadful campaigns of mass murder was unleashed upon the Tutsi people of Rwanda. In just over 6 weeks more people were killed with machetes and clubs than have died from atomic weapons in all of history. The MRND Hutu government of Rwanda instigated, organised, and launched the systematic slaughter of the Christian Tutsi minority after enforcing a rigorous gun control. As the population had been previously disarmed, they were helpless

to defend themselves against the state which now had a monopoly of weapons. Over 800 000 Tutsi Christians were murdered. The confiscation of weapons made the massacres possible by disarming the targeted victims. The holocaust in Rwanda again confirmed that limiting the ability of law-abiding citizens to defend themselves and their families is an open invitation to criminals to attack the innocent.

Gun control precedes genocide

The genocides perpetrated upon the Christian Armenians in Ottoman Turkey from 1915-1917 were preceded by gun control and gun confiscation. The massacres of Christian farmers in the Soviet Union from 1919-1953 were preceded by gun control and gun confiscation; against Christians in Red China from 1949-1976; against Christians in Uganda from 1971-1979; against educated people in Cambodia from 1975-1979 were all preceded by gun control legislation, which effectively disarmed the targeted victims.



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The greatest killer

A gun free sticker would not have helped these people, because the greatest threat to life is not from firearm accidents, nor even from criminals. The greatest killer in the 20th Century was secular governments who had disarmed their own citizens. Approximately 160 million people were killed by their own governments, in over 40 communist states, just in the 20th Century alone. These were not foreigners killed by invading armies during times of war, these were citizens killed by their own governments, in times of peace.

Tyrants prefer unarmed victims

Gun control deprives potential victims of their best means of protection. A free people need to be armed. Disarmed people can be easily exploited and oppressed. If a government does not trust its citizens with weapons, then the citizens cannot trust that government with power. A government that fears its people is itself to be feared. No government should ever have a monopoly of force, or weaponry.

The proposed new gun legislation is unconstitutional and counter-productive.

Firearms and missionaries

Pioneer missionary, William Carey, whose landmark book, *An Inquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (the book that launched the modern missionary movement) listed as essential equipment for any missionary: "Knives, powder, and shot."

Pioneer missionary and explorer David Livingstone, who first landed in Africa in 1840, was well equipped with some of the most advanced weapons then available, including a six-barreled revolver and a double-barreled rifle. On occasion David Livingstone was compelled to use his weapons for protection from wild beasts and to persuade slave traders to set the captives free. At one point, after his party had been compelled to shoot back at slave traders, Livingstone responded to criticism saying: "I love peace as much as any mortal man. In fact, I go quite beyond you, for I love it so much I would fight for it."

Faith and action

Missionaries such as these faced dangers that we can hardly imagine. We should not be too quick to judge and condemn others for doing what the Bible commands us to do – to take reasonable precautions for self-defence and for the protection of our families. Yes, of course, the primary weapons of missionaries are the Bible, prayer, faith, and persuasion. Just as our primary spiritual food is the Word of God. But that does not stop us planting seeds, harvesting crops, shopping, and preparing food!

This is not a gun problem

Christians must be balanced and we need to recognise that sin comes from the heart of man (Mark 7:21-23). There is no point blaming a tool, a cold metal inanimate object, for the evil in men's hearts. Pacifism is in defiance of historic Christian teaching. The 39 Articles, the foundational statement of the Church of England, states clearly in Article 37: "It is lawful for Christian men to carry weapons."

The Westminster Catechism, considered the finest expression of Biblical teaching, states under the 6th Commandment that the prohibition against murder requires as our duty: "All careful studies and lawful endeavours to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting, by just defence, against violence, protecting and defending the innocent." (Q135).

Switzerland's strategy for survival

If you want peace, prepare for war. Peace is achieved through superior firepower. This sums up the Swiss attitude towards peace and freedom. The land of William Tell, Ulrich Zwingli, William Farel, and John Calvin – with its deep mistrust of central governments, its abiding love for God's Word, and for life and liberty – remain a bastion of freedom through armed neutrality. Shooting festivals became one of the most important unifying activities in the Swiss communities. It has always been Switzerland's high level of military preparedness that has proved an effective deterrent to would-be aggressors.

A bad workman blames his tool

If firearms caused crime, then Switzerland would be a violent, lawless country, because every citizen has weapons of war stored in his home. Yet, despite having millions of military type rifles, and a great many other firearms and weapons of war in private homes, overall firearm abuse is so low as to be insignificant and Switzerland has the lowest burglary and murder rate in the industrialised world. How many mass murders take place in gun shops, on shooting ranges, or in police stations, where firearms abound?

Also, in 1945, at the end of the Second World War, when tens of millions of soldiers returned to their homes, with millions of surplus firearms sold on the open market (the South African government were selling .303 rifles for just R2 each), and hundreds of thousands of captured souvenir weapons, there was actually a sharp decline of violent crime in the USA, Britain, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

However, later, with the advent of "the permissive society" and as church attendance decreased, along with the explosion of the drug culture and the sexual revolution – then violent crime increased. Clearly, guns do not cause crime. People in rebellion against the Laws of God cause crime and violence.

Violence predates firearms

Gun Free South Africa (GFSA) advocates imaginatively promote the "dream of a country where there are no guns." The suggestion that violence would magically decrease if we could only have gun control reveals an ignorance of both history and human nature. Of course, history records that violence was prevalent prior to the invention of firearms in the 15th Century! Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, and Shaka Zulu managed to kill millions of people without firearms.

The sharp and blunt facts

In fact, contrary to the impression created by GFSA, most murders in South Africa do not involve firearms. Knives and other sharp objects and clubs are used to murder more South Africans than firearms do. Should we ban all knives, sticks, and rocks?

Improve safety features

Vastly more people die each year from bicycle accidents, car accidents, and drownings than from firearms. People are far more likely to die of a car accident than from a firearm. Should we outlaw all motor vehicles? The solution to the horrific carnage on the roads is not to ban motor vehicles, but to improve safety features in vehicles, to educate drivers, promote the use of seat belts, and severely punish drunken or reckless driving. As with motor vehicles, it would not be right to erode everyone's rights, or to take away everyone's freedom, because of the criminal activities and carelessness of some.

Armed citizens save lives

Everyday countless crimes are prevented, hundreds of potential victims are protected, and many tragedies are averted by armed citizens. Armed citizens save lives, but unarmed citizens all too often become helpless victims. The proposed new gun legislation is unnecessary, unconstitutional, and counter-productive. It is every citizen's right and duty to be armed and prepared to protect the innocent and to defend the defenceless. ■

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HAVE YOUR SAY
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DR PETER HAMMOND is a missionary who, during his 40+ years of pioneering missions throughout Africa, has been involved in holding government accountable and informing the public on such matters. He is also the author of the *Security and Survival Handbook*. Visit frontlinemissionsa.org

