

For Our Information

Ruben Keisler is scheduled for knee surgery this Tuesday.

John LaValla has been doing better the last week or so.

Joyce Venable has been hurting and dealing with changing medicines.

Theresa Ragsdale's Father, Thomas Holtzclaw passed away Friday. Stacie (Gray) Edie's Father-in-Law passed away Friday also.

Several have been out with colds and fever. Pray for one another.

Keep our brothers & sisters in mind

We seek only to serve God according to His Will!

teamwork, and rules of engagement. Leaving Christians to figure out on the fly what they should do in (God forbid!) a live-shooter situation, or even a situation that looks like it's headed that way, is a recipe for disaster. However, when people with the ability to protect the congregation from violence know their responsibilities and their roles, they are much better able to defuse and minimize problems that do occur.

Biblical teaching on non-violence is complicated, but we have to be careful not to read it more broadly than the context requires. If Luke 6:29a means that Christians and churches can't defend themselves, then Luke 6:29b means that Christians and churches shouldn't have locks on the doors. Does anybody endorse both halves of this?

A church can lock its building's doors at night and still trust God. So too can a church have a security plan and still trust God. Indeed, I think having one is completely in line with the Lord's admonition in Matthew 10:16. God gives us wisdom, and we have to be wise about the evils of our age. Confusion about His expectations when it comes to self-defense certainly doesn't help matters.

(This is a topic that each individual and congregation must consider according to their own study of Scripture and conviction of heart. DLH)

Contact Us

We want opportunities to speak with others about our work in the Lord's Kingdom.

Church of Christ
1512 Tanner Street
Malvern, AR 72104
(501) 332-8806

preacher@tannerst.com

Find us online

tannerst.com
FB @TannerStCoC

Seeking His Righteousness

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Church Security, the Bible, and the Law

Matthew W. Bassford

Ever since the Sutherland Springs shooting of Sunday November 5th, brethren have been debating the issue of whether churches should have armed security to protect congregations from shooters. I've seen the arguments online, and I suspect they've been happening in real life as well. I think that both sides have some points to make, but I also see some important aspects to the Scriptural witness on the subject that have been overlooked.

Of these, perhaps the most important is the social context in which Jesus spoke and the apostles wrote. Looming over everything in the gospels like Vesuvius over Pompeii is one burning sociopolitical issue: the Roman occupation of Palestine. One of the foremost goals of Jesus' ministry is to warn His people not to take up arms against their oppressors. He tells them that they're



Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

Matthew 10:16



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looking for the wrong kind of Messiah, and that if they don't listen to Him, they're going to be destroyed. Many of the passages that we tend to apply to some future Day of Judgment are actually about God coming in judgment against the Jewish nation in AD 70.

It's easy to make the same kind of mistake when it comes to the teaching of Jesus and Paul about nonviolence. When we read the text closely, it becomes apparent that the New-Testament discussion of the subject is focused on two intertwined issues: taking vengeance (or retaliating or being provoked) and armed rebellion against the government. The Jews weren't using "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" as a justification for violence generally. Instead, they were using it as a pretext for taking revenge, and the events of AD 66 make quite clear what kind of revenge the Jews had in mind.

We ought to be careful to read Jesus' admonition to turn the other cheek in that same specific context. Most of us clearly see the Roman shading of Matthew 5:41. If we aren't reading the entirety of 5:38-41 with a similarly heavy Roman overlay (which certainly doesn't foreclose other applications), we're making a mistake.

In Romans 12:19-13:7, Paul combines the two issues. He urges Christians not to take revenge because God is the avenger, and then (on the other side of a chapter break, which does a marvelous job of interrupting the argument) points out that God uses the government as an instrument of His wrath. Christians aren't to usurp the role of government in taking revenge; instead, they're supposed to submit to the government.

By contrast, the Bible appears to take it for granted that a private citizen will use force to protect his household from robbers. This is assumed in Luke 11:21-22 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8. The latter passage is particularly enlightening. Paul tells us that we're supposed to equip ourselves with virtue in preparation for the Lord's coming like a homeowner puts on his helmet and breastplate to get ready for a thief. Nobody puts on a helmet so that they can turn the other cheek!

Nor is there anything in Scripture that implies that Christians shouldn't do this (as opposed to James' comments

Store In My Heart

Revelation 7:10

"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

The cry of praise from the great multitude from all nations that are gathered around the throne and the Lamb in John's vision of the eternal heaven. This cry reminds us where our salvation is found, but also gives us a glimpse of heaven.

Many see heaven in terms of this life, but this vision presents heaven as filled with praise and adoration to the Father and the Lamb. This praise is offered by those who lived for Him in this life and is an expression of the gratitude felt by one saved from damnation by Deity. We cannot save ourselves unless we put our life in the hands of God. Praise Him now and forever!

about resisting the legalized oppression of the rich in James 5:1-11—another text about the Great Jewish Revolt). Christians aren't supposed to use violence against a corrupt and evil society, but self-defense against the lawless is an open question.

Additionally, Christians are permitted to assert their rights as citizens of an earthly country. Paul does this in Acts 16:37, 22:25-29, and 25:10-12. In the first case, he does it as a protest against physical violence. In the second two, it's to protect himself from physical violence.

When we put all of this together, I think a couple of applications emerge. First, we have to distinguish very carefully between violence against the government, violence that usurps the role of the government, and violence used with the permission and even encouragement of the government. The first two work to overturn the social order; the third works to preserve it. I have no doubt in my mind about what would happen if I called the Columbia Police Department and said to them, "We're considering developing a security plan for our church. Do you think that's a good idea?" This is something that the forces of law and order want us to do.

Second, I think that churches have to reckon with the decisions of individual Christians to use their rights as U.S. citizens to carry concealed weapons. Yes, in theory, a church has the right to prohibit concealed firearms on its property. In practice, in the modern-day United States, that ain't ever gonna happen. There are too many Christians who firmly and conscientiously believe that they have a right to bear arms, both under the law of man and under the law of God. Insisting that such brethren aren't allowed to carry in the assembly is probably a pretty good way to split a church.

That leaves churches, then, with two choices. First, they can adopt the Wild-West approach to the issue and leave firearm use to the discretion of the brethren who are packing. However, this strategy is likely to ensure that any tense situation will escalate into bloodshed, particularly these days.

Second, a church can work to coordinate the efforts of its armed members. I believe that such brethren mean well, but good intentions are no substitute for planning, training,