

Dear Fellow Pastors:

We received a communication from the Conference Office regarding the topic of bearing arms. Pastors A and B expressed their views with the following excerpts:

**Pastor A on Bearing Arms:**

Let's look at several passages and see if they give us any meaning.

1. John 18:36 Christ said, "If my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight."
2. Matthew 5:44 "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." Jesus is declaring that we are to love our enemies and not to kill them.
3. Luke 9:56 "The son of man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."
4. Jesus also taught, "Resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matthew 5:39
5. When Peter was about to defend his lord with a sword, Christ said to him, "Put thy sword into its place for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matthew 26:52
6. In 1 Peter 2:21-23 the apostle Peter presents this picture of the character of Christ who is our great example, "so even hereunto were ye called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. When he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

It appears to me that Christ portrayed a picture of non-violence and even non-retaliation. So then I must then revert to the example of Jesus who told us to put away the sword. "He that lives by the sword dies by the sword." And to love our enemies and not hate them. Those are all examples that he has given us of the peace that we are to promote in this world.

Certainly I would not judge anyone who chose to carry a gun who felt that they were following God's will and following His command to serve their government in the military with weapons. Personally my conscience would not allow me to do that and I would pray that God would give me another option.

**Pastor B on Bearing Arms:**

“The only time I preached a sermon on this topic I appealed for people to consciously choose to be non-combatants, even though I claimed that it was a matter of personal conscience among us. And I asked them to be non-combatants whether they lived in a "dangerous" metropolitan area, a "dangerous" rural area, or whether they found themselves in a real combat zone. One member came to me afterwards and revealed his decision not to buy a handgun the next week as he had planned. . . . I will continue to encourage non-combatancy, but I will provide all the support I can for those whose conscience allows the use of weapons. Both will be welcome in my congregation.”

Pastors, before we encourage our members along the lines of pacifism, we need to be certain that this doctrine holds up under close biblical scrutiny. Because we live in a sinful world, our members are exposed to the dangers of burglary, rape, and murder. We all know godly people who have been affected by these crimes. The following is another point of view for you to consider.

John Witcombe  
pastorjcw@gmail.com

## Christians Bearing Arms?

It's 3 A.M. You awake from a deep sleep to hear noises downstairs. Someone is breaking into your house! As you pray you reach for the phone, but it is dead. You go out into the hallway. There in your living room is a man you don't know! He turns to you and you see a large knife in his hand! He says, "Go get your wife!" What do you do?

I was given a rifle when I was 12 years old. When I moved out on my own, I kept it out of my home. I did not want it because I did not want to be tempted to use it against someone who might be murdering my family. As a pacifist, I believed that self-defense was contrary to Christianity. However, when my brother returned my 22 cal. rifle to me recently, I decided to find out just why I was a pacifist.

Is it right for a Christian to use deadly force to defend his family? The Bible has much to say about weapons. The word "sword" appears over 400 times in the Old and New Testaments.

"Their route took them through heavy woods." Observed Ellen White in her diary: {3BIO 110.5} "It seemed very lonesome journeying in the thick forest. We thought what might be if robbers or horse thieves--Indians or white men--should molest us, but we had a vigilant watch guarding the animals." --MS 4, 1879. {3BIO 110.6} The precautions they took were in line with what was generally followed in like circumstances. The wagons were placed in a circle surrounding the horses and mules; **two men carrying guns stood guard** in two-hour shifts (Letter 20a, 1879).

**"We have to be very well armed in passing through the Indian territory.** We have our wagons brought up in a circle, then our horses are placed within the circle. We have two men to watch. They are relieved every two hours. **They carry their guns upon their shoulders.** We have less fears from Indians than from white men who employ the Indians to make a stampede among the horses and mules and ponies." {Lt20a-1879 (May 3, 1879) par. 7}

**"Clergymen, and it is said even the police, advised men and women to carry firearms for their own protection.** For the past three months San Francisco has been living under a reign of terror. In eighty days eighty-three murders, robberies, and assaults were registered on the police records. A dispatch to "Ridgeway's," a new weekly periodical, reports the sale in San Francisco during one week in October of over six thousand revolvers. The police have been, and are, powerless to preserve order and protect the city--in the opinion of the best citizens of San Francisco because the heads of the force are corrupt and are doing the will of a corrupt government." {ST, December 4, 1907 par. 6}

"Yesterday eve two hundred Indians passed through. Five horses of Mr. Walling's were missing; also his cow. It was thought the Indians might have stolen the horses. Mr. Walling threw off his coat, **armed himself with two revolvers and a bowie knife**, and in company with one of his men started on horseback to find the horses. We were disappointed in not eating our dinner by the roadside. We enjoyed our simple meal, however, very well. About two o'clock Mr. Walling came back, having found his horses and cow. He had no occasion to use his firearms, for which we were thankful." {3MR 157.2}

"A mob of twenty-five men on horseback called at the school, sent the white teacher, one of Edson's men, out of town "on a rail," nailed the doors and windows shut, and burned books, maps, and charts in the schoolyard. Then they found one of the leading black believers in the area, N. W. Olvin, and thrashed him with a buggy whip, stopping only when commanded to do so by a white man who **brandished a revolver.**" {5BIO 62.4}

**But doesn't having a gun imply a lack of trust that God will take care of us?** King David wrote in Psalm 46:1 that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." For David, this did not conflict with praising the God, "Who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle" (Ps. 144:1). 21:31 "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD." (Proverbs 21:31) The doctrine of Scripture is that we prepare and work, but we trust the outcome to God.

DA 535 "What human power can do divine power is not summoned to do. God does not dispense with man's aid. He strengthens him, co-operating with him as he uses the powers and capabilities given him."

LP.267 “At these words hope revived. Passengers and crew roused from their apathy, and put forth all possible exertion to save their lives. There was much yet to be done. Every effort within their power must be put forth to avert destruction; **for God helps those only who help themselves.**” EGW

Hi, John. Something more for both of us to think about. Mrs. White's position on bearing arms in military service is well documented. Many SDA men because of this have served as medics on the battlefield. In light of your position on defending oneself from the intent of evil persons, what would you do if: 1) you were a medic in battle, 2) you were in the act of saving a comrade's life, 3) you had access to a firearm 4) the enemy was upon you and 5) by firing on the enemy you would save lives. This situation has presented itself many times during actual combat. What would you do? Is it consistent to say you would not use deadly force in this situation (where Mrs. White is clear about SDAs bearing arms) but believe your current position is still tenable? Just trying to figure this out. Thanks. JJ

JJ, I would be very interested in what Ellen White had to say about bearing arms in military service. My position on the subject of military service is that a Christian brother would never be found fighting against a Christian brother in any war. If I was a German in the 1940's I could not with clear conscience engage in Hitler's war because the cause was evil; it was a war of conquest. I must rather suffer execution than take up arms in a war of conquest. However, if Hitler was invading my country and his soldiers were killing the innocent people of my country, I would take up arms as Abraham did and defend the innocent. God, speaking through Ellen White, clearly supports bearing arms for a righteous cause; for the defense of the innocent:

PP 134 “**Seeking, first of all, divine counsel, Abraham prepared for war.** From his own encampment he summoned three hundred and eighteen trained servants, **men trained in the fear of God, in the service of their master, and in the practice of arms** . . . The patriarch divided his force so as to approach from different directions, and came upon the encampment by night. His attack, so vigorous and unexpected, resulted in speedy victory. The king of Elam was slain and his panic-stricken forces were utterly routed. Lot and his family, with all the prisoners and their goods, were recovered, and a rich booty fell into the hands of the victors. To Abraham, under God, the triumph was due. The worshiper of Jehovah had not only rendered a great service to the country, but had proved himself a man of valor. **It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed.** His heroic act gave him a widespread influence among the surrounding tribes.” EGW

PP 308 “Both public and private sins are included in this prohibition. The eighth commandment condemns man stealing and slave dealing, and **forbids wars of conquest.**” EGW

“Are our people affected by the war (World War 1)?” she (EGW) asked. “Yes,” I said, “hundreds have been pressed into the Army. Some have been killed and others are in perilous places. . . . Some of our people in America and in Europe feel that those of our brethren who have been forced into the Army would have done wrong to submit to military service. They think it would have been better for them to have **refused to bear arms**, even if they knew that as a result of this refusal they would be made to stand up in line to be shot.”

“I do not think they ought to do that,” she replied. “I think they ought to stand to their duty as long as time lasts.”--WCW to Guy Dail, May 26, 1915. EGW {6BIO 427.2}

“I commenced a letter to you some time since, but was called away. It was mislaid and I never finished it. I received yours in due time and should have answered immediately but for the piece my husband wrote in the Review (see below), which expresses my mind, although I am not fully settled in regard to taking up arms; but this looks consistent to me. I think it would please the enemy for us to obstinately refuse to obey the law of our country (when this law is not against our religious faith) and sacrifice our lives. It looks to me that Satan would exult to see us shot down so cheaply, for our influence could not have a salutary influence upon beholders, as the death of the martyrs. No, all would think we were served just right because we would not come to the help of our imperiled country. Were our religious faith at stake, we should cheerfully lay down our lives and suffer with Christ. EGW {Lt7-1862.2}

James White's Review article: <https://adventisthistory.wordpress.com/2008/06/14/the-nation-1862-by-james-white/>

2SM 335 “We have just said farewell to three of our responsible men in the office who were summoned by the government to serve for three weeks of drill. It was a very important stage of our work in the publishing house, but the government calls do not accommodate themselves to our convenience. They demand that young men whom they have accepted as soldiers shall not neglect the exercise and drill essential for soldier service. We were glad to see that these men with their regimentals had tokens of honor for faithfulness in their work. They were trustworthy young men. These did not go from choice, but because the law of their nation required this. We gave them a word of encouragement to be found true soldiers of the cross of Christ. Our prayers will follow these young men, that the angels of God may go with them and guard them from every temptation.” EGW            John

John, Thank you for this very valuable information. I stand corrected. I did some searching last night in EGW writings and found nothing to support my overly confident statement about her position on bearing arms. I thought they were there...I need to make sure of my facts before I raise my hand. Still thinking. Talk to you later. JJ

### **History of Adventist Pacifism**

How did the Seventh-day Adventist Church come to adopt a pacifist view? The Quakers held this view long before we adopted it. Is it a view in harmony with the scriptures? The Quakers also believe that scripture teaches an eternally burning hell and Sunday sacredness. Yes, they believe they have scripture to support all three of these positions. Our pioneers diligently studied the scriptures to arrive at our present position on the subjects of the Sabbath and an eternally burning hell. Unfortunately, we did not arrive at our position on pacifism through the same diligent method. Here is how it came about:

The American Civil War forced the Adventist Church to grapple with the issue of military service just as it created its organizational structure between 1860 and 1863. Since they expected to be persecuted by the state before the return of Christ, an event which was itself imminent, and meanwhile they had the responsibility of spreading God's last warning message to the world, there was widespread reluctance among Adventists to volunteer for service. When he discovered that they were being accused of disloyalty, James White, editor of the Review and Herald, wrote in favor of participating: "in case of drafting, the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God" [Aug.12, 1862]. This editorial initiated a debate that revealed deep divisions over the issue. Adventist ranks included many who had been touched by pacifism through the Abolitionist Movement. These regarded military combat as a violation of the Sixth Commandment and of the nonviolent teachings of Jesus. They embraced the examples in the book of Daniel, where the three Hebrews and the prophet defied orders from the state. On the other hand, since Adventists were at that time concentrated in the north, and key church leaders had taken positions against slavery, there was also considerable sympathy among them for the Union side. Some became protagonists for active participation in the military struggle. They found biblical support for their position in passages in the epistles granting considerable authority to the state (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13-17) and in the Old Testament stories in which God sent Israel to war; they also restricted the meaning of the Sixth Commandment to murder, thus removing war from its purview [Graybill, 1978; Knight, 1992].

The issue became urgent when conscription was instituted in March 1863. The infant church eventually took a position against military service. However, consensus was reached primarily on practical rather than ideological grounds.

Although their position placed them, along with the Quakers, in a small statistically deviant minority, and subjected them to some scorn and questioning of their loyalty, it did not result in legal punishments. Adventists escaped legal problems because the military draft contained loopholes, some of which catered to the Quakers, through which they could fit--and because these loopholes allowed them to avoid military service altogether, the issues associated with Sabbath observance in the military were not raised.

Adventists usually chose to avoid the draft by paying the standard commutation fee of \$300, and churches helped poor members raise this sum. When provision for noncombatant service was passed in February 1864, Adventists initially made no attempt to gain recognition as noncombatants under the act because they were generally using the commutation fee to avoid service. "Only in July of 1864, when the privilege of buying commutation was restricted to those recognized as conscientious objectors, did the church act to secure such recognition for itself" [Graybill,

1978:6]. In order to accomplish this, Adventists fudged the record by declaring that their membership had always been united in believing that war was wrong and gained such recognition, first from state governors and then federal authorities. Having adopted a position, Adventists then enforced it, disfellowshipping members who volunteered for military service [Graybill, 1978:7; Brock, 1974:26].

### **Self-Defense in the Old Testament**

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."

The Scriptures support the principle of self-defense by stating that if an intruder is killed during a break-in, the homeowner is not liable for his death. "If the sun is risen on him" in other words, if on the next day you track him down, you have no right to take his life for the property he stole from you. Instead he must make full restitution for the thievery he got away with. Scripture supports the use of deadly force only to protect the lives of the innocent. It does not support personal vengeance.

Nehemiah 4:14-18 "Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and **fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses**....They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. **For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side**, and so builded."

One verse that is used to teach pacifism is Isaiah 2:4: "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and 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 any more."

Does this verse teach us to disarm ourselves? No. This verse refers to the future. There will come a day when the earth will have been made new – sin will have been eradicated, we will no longer need to defend ourselves. Until then, we are permitted to defend ourselves. We should now follow the command in Joel 3:10: "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong."

God is not against the use of arms. He was the first One to introduce a weapon to planet earth. He used a sword to block the access of Adam and Eve to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24) rather than just putting up a no trespassing sign. 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, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."

The Sixth Commandment says, "Thou shall not murder." In the chapters following, God gave to Moses many of the situations that require a death penalty. God clearly has not told us never to kill. He has told us not to murder, which means we are not to take an innocent life.

### **What would Jesus do?**

1 Samuel 11:1 About a month later, King Nahash of Ammon led his army against the Israelite city of Jabesh-gilead. But the citizens of Jabesh asked for peace. "Make a treaty with us, and we will be your servants," they pleaded. 2 "All right," Nahash said, "but only on one condition. I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you as a disgrace to all Israel!" 3 "Give us seven days to send messengers throughout Israel!" replied the leaders of Jabesh. "If none of our relatives will come to save us, we will agree to your terms." 4 When the messengers came to Gibeah, Saul's hometown, and told the people about their plight, everyone broke into tears.

What would Jesus do? "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Mathew 5:39

Based upon the popular understanding of this text, we would send the messenger back with this message: men, women and children of Jabesh-gilead do not resist evil but rather offer the enemy your left eyes also. We will stay here and weep for you.

Come on now, is that what Jesus would do? What did Jesus in fact inspire Saul to do?

1 Samuel 11: 5 Saul was plowing in the field, and when he returned to town, he asked, “What’s the matter? Why is everyone crying?” So they told him about the message from Jabesh. 6 **Then the Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul**, and he became very angry. 7 He took two oxen and cut them into pieces and sent the messengers to carry them throughout Israel with this message: “This is what will happen to the oxen of anyone who refuses to follow Saul and Samuel into battle!” And the LORD made the people afraid of Saul’s anger, and all of them came out together as one. 8 When Saul mobilized them at Bezek, he found that there were 300,000 men of Israel, in addition to 30,000 from Judah. 9 So Saul sent the messengers back to Jabesh-gilead to say, “We will rescue you by noontime tomorrow!” What joy there was throughout the city when that message arrived! 10 The men of Jabesh then told their enemies, “Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you can do to us as you wish.” 11 But before dawn the next morning, Saul arrived, having divided his army into three detachments. **He launched a surprise attack against the Ammonites and slaughtered them the whole morning.** The remnant of their army was so badly scattered that no two of them were left together.

Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever.”

Genesis 14:11 The victorious invaders then plundered Sodom and Gomorrah and began their long journey home, taking all the wealth and food with them. 12 They also captured Lot—Abram’s nephew who lived in Sodom—and took everything he owned. 13 One of the men who escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was camped at the oak grove belonging to Mamre the Amorite. Mamre and his relatives, Eshcol and Aner, were Abram’s allies.

What would Jesus do? “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;” Mathew 5:44

In other words, Abraham, sit tight, pray for those marauding thieves; think of some way you can bless them and do something nice for them.

Do you really think Jesus would say that? What did Jesus help Abraham to do?

Genesis 14:14 When Abram learned that Lot had been captured, he called together the men born into his household, 318 of them in all. He chased after Kedorlaomer’s army until he caught up with them in Dan. 15 There he divided his men and attacked during the night from several directions. Kedorlaomer’s army fled, but Abram chased them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Abram and his allies recovered everything—the goods that had been taken, Abram’s nephew Lot with his possessions, and all the women and other captives. 17 As Abram returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and his allies, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). 18 Then Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought him bread and wine. 19 Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing: “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. **20 And blessed be God Most High, who has helped you conquer your enemies.**” Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.

Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever.”

### **Self Defense in the New Testament**

Many people, Christians included, assume that Christ taught pacifism. They cite Matthew 5:38-39 for their proof. In this verse Christ said: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."

The Sermon on the Mount from which this passage is taken deals with righteous personal conduct. In this passage, Christ is clearing up a confusion that had led people to think that conduct proper for the civil government -- that is, taking vengeance -- was also proper for an individual.

Even the choice of words used by Christ indicates that He was addressing a confusion, or a distortion, that was commonplace. Several times in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount Christ used this same "you have heard it said" figure of speech in connection with clarifying or intensifying various biblical teachings.

The reference to "an eye for an eye" was taken from Exodus 21:24-25 which deals with how the magistrate must deal with a crime. Namely, the punishment must fit the crime. The religious leaders of Christ's day had twisted a passage that applied to the government and misused it as a principle of personal revenge.

MB 70 "With sadness Jesus looks into the upturned faces before Him. He notes the spirit of revenge that has stamped its evil imprint upon them, and knows how bitterly the people long for power to crush their oppressors. Mournfully He bids them, 'Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' Math. 5:39. **These words were but a reiteration of the teaching of the Old Testament.** It is true that the rule, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Leviticus 24:20), was a provision in the laws given through Moses; **but it was a civil statute. None were justified in avenging themselves**, for they had the words of the Lord: "Say not thou, I will recompense evil." "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me." "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth." "If he that hateth thee be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink." Proverbs 20:22; 24:29, 17; 25:21, 22, R.V., margin." EGW

Matthew 5:39 is the principal text of the Christian pacifist. They think this is a new teaching; presenting a principle of action that is higher and holier than what is found in the Old Testament. Ellen White clarifies this for us, reminding us that "These words were but a reiteration of the teaching of the Old Testament." Nothing new here. The provisions for self-defense and the punishment of the evildoer by the state still stand. She lets us know that Jesus is teaching us in this text that we must not harbor a spirit of revenge towards those who treat us unjustly. Avenging oneself verses protecting one's family; these are distinctly different from each other. One is prohibited and the other is permitted. If God wanted us to know that the meaning of "Resist not him that is evil" meant that we could no longer resist evil murderers with lethal force if necessary in order to defend our families then He would have had His Messenger let us know right here in this commentary on Matthew 5:39 that pacifism is a new doctrine from God. Why the silence for the support for pacifism in the Spirit of Prophecy? Because it is a false doctrine. It is only the misinterpretation of Scripture that causes the pacifist to believe that Jesus supports their doctrine.

One more thought on Matthew 5:39 "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

A slap on the right cheek is quite different from a slash to the right jugular. If insulted, ridiculed, denounced, we should not retaliate. That is what Jesus is teaching. Self-defense from deadly force is not being addressed in this passage. You do not offer your left jugular.

Just before going to Gethsemane Jesus brought up the topic of swords and the disciples responded: "Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough." Luke 22:38.

Enough for what? Enough to demonstrate the fact that Jesus willingly gave Himself to those who had come to arrest Him.

When the disciples asked Jesus if they should resist those who came to arrest Him, it is significant that Jesus did not answer them. "When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" Luke 22:49

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" John 18:10, 11. Peter's brave act in defending His Lord against such

overwhelming odds and Jesus' response to Peter made it clear that Jesus willingly gave Himself to this posse for the purpose of drinking the cup His Father had given Him.

The fact that the disciples were armed and prepared to use those arms in legitimate self-defense and that Jesus stopped that action on this particular occasion helped to prove that His kingdom was not of this world. "Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." Jn 18: 35, 36

In Mathew's gospel, commenting on the arrest in the garden, Mathew reports Jesus as saying, "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matthew 26:52. Peter's use of the sword was for legitimate self-defense which would have been appropriate under other circumstances. But the mob's use of the sword was an illegitimate use because they were using it against an innocent party. They are the ones who will ultimately perish with the sword.

In other words Peter, these men, Jews and Romans, who have taken the sword against the innocent, shall perish by the sword. God will take vengeance on them. This was not a rebuke to Peter but a prophesy against those who were unjustly and illegally arresting an innocent person.

If what Jesus said, "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" meant what pacifists believe it means (a death sentence for anyone who bears a sword) then you have Jesus saying that those who serve as policemen are sentenced to perish. That cannot be. God calls those who bear the sword to execute wrath on evildoers ministers of God. "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." Romans 13:4

Revelation 13.10 "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword."

Understood in this light, Jesus gives no support for pacifism. It is those who use the sword to enforce religious positions or use it for unjust action who will perish by the sword. So the Waldenses and other early Christian groups who used the sword to protect their families from the murderous papist crusaders were fulfilling this verse that declared that the persecutors should perish. This verse, rightly understood, supports the Christian's right to self-defense.

The Waldenses—their humble supplication for peace having been contemptuously rejected, as we have already said—had three courses in their choice—**to go to mass, to be butchered as sheep, or to fight for their lives. They chose the last, and made ready for battle . . .** The Waldenses interpreted this as an interposition of Providence in their behalf. It had given them the power of repelling the invader. Climbing the slopes of the Pra, and issuing from all their hiding-places in its environs, they spread themselves over the mountains, the paths of which were familiar to them, and while the host stood riveted beneath them, caught in the double toils of the defile and the mist, they tore up huge stones and rocks, and sent them thundering down into the ravine. The Papal soldiers were crushed where they stood. Nor was this all. Some of the Waldenses boldly entered the chasm, sword in hand, and attacked them in front." *The History of the Waldenses*, Ch. 5

"The brave Huguenots, battling for those rights which the human heart holds most sacred, had poured out their blood on many a hard-fought field." GC 271 "The Huguenots, these are the world's true nobility. In this line the youth of today are called to take their places." Ed 254 (condensed)

For many more stories about early Christians using arms to protect their families see:

<http://pastorjcw.wordpress.com/>

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 could apply to our

subject because it would be irresponsible to buy a house, furnish it with food and facilities for ones family, and then refuse to install locks and provide the means to protect the family and the property. (Ex 22:2-3).

Jesus said, "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Matthew 6.25, 26

A misunderstanding of this text could cause someone to passively wait upon God to provide for his clothing and nourishment needs. The fact is we must take thought for our lives; we must toil and spin if we want to be clothed. We must sow, reap and gather into barns if we want to eat. So what does that text mean? "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought"—**no anxious, troubled, complaining thought**—"for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" RH.1905-02-23 EGW

"...if any would not work, neither should he eat." 2 Thessalonians 3:11. Passively waiting upon God when it comes to clothing and nourishment needs simply is not taught in the Scriptures. Would not this same principle apply to our security needs as well? "...for God helps those only who help themselves." LP.267.

In the final crisis many things will change for us. At this time we are to make no provision for our temporal needs. Food and security issues will be handled by the angels.

EW 56 "The Lord has shown me repeatedly that it is contrary to the Bible to make any provision for our temporal wants in the time of trouble. I saw that if the saints had food laid up by them or in the field in the time of trouble, when sword, famine, and pestilence are in the land, it would be taken from them by violent hands and strangers would reap their fields. Then will be the time for us to trust wholly in God, and He will sustain us. I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah, or rain manna from heaven, as He did for the Israelites." EGW

GC 631. "The heavenly sentinels, faithful to their trust, continue their watch. Though a general decree has fixed the time when commandment keepers may be put to death, their enemies will in some cases anticipate the decree, and before the time specified, will endeavor to take their lives. But none can pass the mighty guardians stationed about every faithful soul. Some are assailed in their flight from the cities and villages; but the swords raised against them break and fall powerless as a straw. Others are defended by angels in the form of men of war." EGW

### **Role of Government**

Resisting an attack is not to be confused with taking vengeance, which is the exclusive domain of God (Romans 12:19). This has been delegated to the civil magistrate, who, as we read in Romans 13:4, "is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."

Private vengeance means one would stalk down a criminal after one's life is no longer in danger as opposed to defending oneself during an attack. It is this very point that has been confused by Christian pacifists who take the passage in the Sermon on the Mount about turning the other cheek (which prohibits private vengeance) as a call to pacifism.

Consider also that the civil magistrate is to be a terror to those who practice evil. This passage does not imply that the role of law enforcement is to prevent crimes or to protect individuals from criminals. The magistrate is a minister to serve as "an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Romans 13:4).

This point is reflected in the legal doctrine of the United States. Repeatedly, courts have held that the government has no responsibility to provide individual security. One case (Bowers v. DeVito) put it this way: "there is no constitutional right to be protected by the state against being murdered."

The right to personal defense is a biblical doctrine. While Christians are authorized to defend their families, there is no biblical basis for personal revenge, hatred or political persuasion by means of arms. Christianity was never meant to be spread by means of the sword. And while we do have a right to self-defense, we must decide when it is proper to use it. Difficult choices exist in this evil world and I hope that I never have to defend my family or a neighbor from a violent criminal assault.

### **The “Peace Church” Mistake**

The major Christian pacifist churches support their position by the idea that there are two dispensations - the Old Testament dispensation of law and the New Testament dispensation of Grace. They believe that Christ canceled out the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and the provision for justifiably killing an intruder in Exodus 22.

The following are statements from pacifist of the past. Notice how it is a misunderstanding of what the old and new covenants are that allows them to arrive at their doctrine of pacifism.

“The Gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected with the sword, neither should they thus protect themselves. . . . They use neither the worldly sword nor engage in war, since among them taking human life has ceased entirely, **for we are no longer under the Old Covenant.**” C. A. Cornelius, *Geschichte des Muensterischen Aufruhrs*, Leipzig, 1860, Bd. 2, pp. 240-249. An English translation of this letter was published by Walter Rauschenbusch in the *American Journal of Theology*, January, 1905.

“But that the Christian should be an executive of the government, or a magistrate, we do not admit. Christ says, Luke 22, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But among you it shall not be so, but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” Here the believers are forbidden the execution of government by force. And the fact that **under the Old Covenant** God has permitted His people the use of the sword does not concern or bind us, **for the old law has been replaced** by the new commandment of Christ that we should love our enemies. . . . The believer is not to be an earthly ruler, or to use violence, or go to war, or use the sword.” E. Goetzinger, *Vadions Deutsche Historische Schriften*, Bd. 3, St. Gallen, 1877, p.501

“It is needful to distinguish between the **New and the Old Covenant**. Under the Old Covenant Israel engaged in war, revenge was taken on enemies, there was fighting and taking human life; and under the old Law this was done by the will, command, permission and also help of God. But now, in the **dispensation of the Gospel under the New Covenant**, these things cannot be permitted, they are plainly forbidden by the word and example of Christ, Himself God and the Son of God, whom we are commanded to hear (Matt. 17:5). These things, I say, are plainly and clearly prohibited, not by man but by God Himself.” T. J. Van Bragt, *Martyrs' Mirror*, Scottsdale, Pa., 1938, p. 752. 32. Protocol, Dot is Alle handelinge des Ghesprecks tot Embden, etc., Amsterdam, 1616, pp. 229, 232.

The doctrine of pacifism has its origins amongst the same folk who misinterpret other important Bible truths – hell, state of the dead, Sabbath. How thankful we can be for the Spirit of Prophecy that clarifies this issue.

Pastor A, I would like to comment on something you said in your response to my thoughts on the topic of bearing arms. You wrote: “I choose not to have a weapon because I don't want to play God.”

I don't believe that those who bear arms are playing God. Life is a sacred trust and I am under obligation to preserve my life by living in harmony with the laws of health and by taking those preventive measures that will protect myself from dying. Not because I want to stick around on this sin-cursed earth but because my untimely death would bring sorrow and hardship on those who love me and depend upon me. The apostle Paul desired to be released from this present world and to be at rest. But he knew God had work yet for him to do and so he took those precautions that were consistent with faith. He relied on arms when his life was in danger (Acts 23:12-24). Armed soldiers escorted him past those who had vowed to end his life. Yes, he could have relied solely on the angels but God expects us to use what is at hand and to not be presumptuous. Remember, “God helps those only who help themselves.” (LP.267)

You may say, “What about the untimely death of the murderer who was stopped by self-defensive measures? What if he would have later come to repentance?”

PP 516 “‘Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.’ Genesis 9:6. ‘Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.’ ‘Thou shalt take him from Mine altar, that he may die,’ was the command of God; ‘the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.’ Numbers 35:31, 33; Exodus 21:14. The safety and purity of the nation demanded that the sin of murder be severely punished. **Human life, which God alone could give, must be sacredly guarded.**” EGW

It is the innocent party’s life, whether yours or your neighbors that is to be sacredly guarded – not the murderer’s life. I cannot say, “I will not stop this murderer from murdering me or another innocent person so that the murderer will have an opportunity to come to know God. It’s better that I die because I am ready.” I have no right to decide who should live and who should die. **God has already decided that the murderer should die** – and God gives permission to kill the transgressor in the act of his crime. (If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. Ex. 22:2)

Ms126-1901.44 “How carefully God protects the rights of men! He has attached a penalty to willful murder. “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” (Gen. 9:6) If one murderer were permitted to go unpunished, he would by his evil influence and cruel violence subvert others. . . Mercy shown to a wilful murderer is cruelty to his fellow men.” EGW

The condemned murderer will not die by prayer. Someone must pull the switch and God calls that someone a minister of His. “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.” Romans 13:4

The topic of bearing arms is an emotionally charged subject. Upholding the right to bear arms is not “politically correct” in this day and age, especially in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But we are people of the Word and must base our conclusions on a clear, carefully and prayerfully thought out “thus saith the Lord.”

Defensive weapons save lives. Of the 2.5 million times citizens use their guns to defend themselves every year, the overwhelming majority merely reveal their weapon or fire a warning shot to scare off their attackers. Less than 8% of the time, a citizen will kill or wound his/her attacker. A gun kept in the home for protection is 216 times as likely to be used in defense against a criminal than it is to cause the death of an innocent victim in that household.

In the ten years following the passage of Florida's concealed carry law in 1987, there were 478,248 people who received permits to carry firearms. FBI reports show that the homicide rate in Florida, which in 1987 was much higher than the national average, fell 39% during that 10-year period. The Florida rate is now far below the national average.

Defensive weapons prevent crime. A dramatic increase in criminal activity was experienced after Australian gun-owners were recently forced to surrender 640,381 personal firearms to be destroyed. At the time of the ban, the Prime Minister said: “Self-defense is not a reason for owning a firearm.”

Observable facts, after 12 months of data:

- \* Australia-wide, homicides are up 3.2%
- \* Australia-wide, assaults are up 8.6%
- \* Australia-wide, armed-robberies are up 44%
- \* In the state of Victoria, homicides-with-firearms are up 300%
- \* Dramatic increase in break-ins and assaults of the elderly

Those countries that base their gun laws in harmony with God’s Word, laws that acknowledge the God-given right for citizens to own weapons for self-defense, are much better off.

Pastor B, I am currently over in Ukraine conducting an evangelistic series and received your e-mail from Pastor A. I would like to question the following point you made:

“One reason I remain a non-combatant is that I believe the willingness to kill with a weapon at home or in the military begins a change in a person. Actually pulling the trigger and taking a person’s life completes that change.”

Pastor B, could it be true that having a pacifist mindset that creates a willingness to not defend your wife from an armed rapist/murder would also begin a change in a person? And actually witnessing your wife being raped and murdered, while you stand passively by, completes that change? Yes, stopping an attacker with lethal force is not something I would ever want to do. However, I would much prefer the “change” that would occur from stopping an attacker over the “change” that would occur from not stopping the murderer. John

AH 215 “The Lord has constituted the husband the head of the wife to be her **protector** . . .” EGW

A pacifist is not allowed to stop a deadly attack against his wife, but must passively submit. This is contrary to the Bible and to the natural instincts that God has given to husbands. Pacifism effeminates a man, taking away his God-given, manly duty and responsibility to protect his family.

In response to the following quotation, “The Lord has constituted the husband the head of the wife to be her **protector** . . .” Adventist Home, p. 215, Pastor A wrote: “How about James White, the husband of the writer of Adventist Home, did he have guns?”

Pastor A, I would think that James White would have had a gun seeing that his son even had one:

"Our provisions have been very low for some days. Many of our supplies have gone. . . . We expected supplies three days ago certainly, but none has come. Willie went to the lake for water. We heard **his gun** and found he had shot two ducks. This is really a blessing, for we need something to live upon."--Ms 12, 1873, p. 3.

Pastor A responds: “He ate ducks? Must have been before the health message. I don't believe James ate much meat at all after health reform. Did he have a gun after health reform?”

Pastor A, you asked about eating ducks and whether that was before the light on health reform. The health reform message came in 1863 and the duck account happened in 1873. You asked, “Did he have a gun after health reform?” Most likely. In 1878 Ellen wrote to her husband, James, the following: “The few days you now have together, improve. Roam about, camp out, fish, hunt, go to places that you have not seen, rest as you go, and enjoy everything. Then come back to your work fresh and vigorous.” 9MR 317.2

James and Ellen White did not subscribe to the unbiblical doctrine of pacifism that many Adventist have somehow come to endorse. Most Adventist pacifists I have talked with have never done an in-depth study on the topic for themselves.

I wish I could say that these following newspaper accounts could never happen to a Seventh-day Adventist Christian:

Dave Mezzanotte was at his Fairmont, West Virginia, home with a sleeping infant one Tuesday night when he heard noises and went to investigate. According to police, Mezzanotte said an intruder attacked and beat him. Retreating to another room, Mezzanotte retrieved his .45 cal. handgun and fired at the man, who quickly fled and sought medical help. Police later charged the intruder with one count of aggravated robbery. (Times West Virginian, Fairmont, WV, 12-24-98)

A woman ran into a local church for protection from an attacker. The pastor hid her in a back room, then came out and tried to reason with the assailant. The man didn't want to listen, however, and opened fire. Shot in the hand, the pastor ran to his office and slammed the door shut. The gunman broke through the door, at which time the pastor shot him between the eyes, killing him instantly. (Mountain Press, Prather, California, 12-12-95)

See <http://pastorjcw.wordpress.com/> for over a 1000 more newspaper reports on citizens defending themselves.

Why would a pastor carry a weapon of self-defense? Perhaps it has something to do with what Jesus commanded in Luke 22:36. "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.**" How do we decide if Jesus meant what He said here or if He was speaking in riddles? If the Bible teaches pacifism then we know that Jesus did not mean what He said. If however, the Bible does not teach pacifism then we would take His words as they read and purchase a weapon of self-defense. Below are some commentary views on Luke 22:36:

### **John Wesley's Notes on the Old and New Testament**

He that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one - It is plain, this is not to be taken literally. It only means this will be a time of extreme danger. (*plain only to a pacifist*)

### **Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary**

The apparently figurative language Jesus here uses has often been misunderstood. As the disciples went forth into a hostile world they often found themselves in circumstances in which, from a human viewpoint, weapons would have been most useful. But the entire account of the book of Acts records no instance in which any of the apostles used, or even carried, a weapon. We may be sure that had Christ intended them to do so, they would have. An hour or two later this very night, when Peter essayed to use a sword (see on Matt. 26:51-53), Jesus rebuked his action and made it clear that the Christian, like his Master, is not to rely on weapons for protection. The Christian is not to repel force with force (see on Matt. 5:39). (*Notice the "straw man" this commentary now erects!*) We do not defend the life-giving gospel by killing men for whom Christ died. The supreme evidence of Christian love is willingness to die for others (see John 15:13). The desire or intent to take the lives of those who may disagree with us is evidence of the spirit of Satan, who was "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). Persecution is ever the work of the devil, and is perpetrated by men who have surrendered themselves to his control. The only weapon the Christian may feel free to use in his defense of the faith is the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17; see Heb. 4:12; see on Matt. 26:52). Thus, in view of Christ's own teachings and of the NT record of apostolic methods of advancing the gospel, we conclude that Christ here speaks figuratively, warning the disciples of the persecution they and their converts were to suffer, not of the literal use of weapons of any kind.

### **Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries**

Did Jesus advocate the use of a sword for self-defense purposes (Luke 22:36-38)? Jesus is well known for His continued emphasis on love, forgiveness, and "turning the other cheek." It is therefore surprising to find Jesus advising the disciples to buy a sword in Luke 22:36: "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one." Did Jesus in this verse advocate the use of a sword for self-defense purposes?

This is an issue over which Christians have vehemently disagreed for many centuries. Following is a summary of the two basic views of how Christians have interpreted Jesus on this issue.

Christian pacifists believe it is always wrong to injure other humans, no matter what the circumstances. And the same principles supporting pacifism carry over to nonresistance--the belief that any form of self-defense is wrong. This view is usually based on the exemplary life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

According to Christian pacifist John Yoder, Jesus rejected the existing political state of affairs and taught a form of radical nonviolence. Central to Christ's teaching, Yoder says, is His biblical mandate to "turn the other cheek" when encountering violence (Matthew 5:38-48).

In Yoder's view, the way to victorious living is to refrain from the game of sociopolitical control. Jesus exposed the futility of the violence engrafted in the present world system by resisting its inclinations even to the point of death. Hence, Christians are to refuse the world's violent methods and follow their Savior to the cross (Matthew 26:47-52). When Jesus told the disciples to buy a sword (Luke 22:36), pacifists suggest He was only speaking figuratively.

"Turn the other cheek always? It is true that Jesus said to turn the other cheek in Matthew 5:38-42. However, many scholars do not believe pacifism (or nonresistance) is the essential point of His teaching in this passage. These scholars do not believe Jesus was teaching to "turn the other cheek" in virtually all circumstances. Even Christ did not literally turn the other cheek when smitten by a member of the Sanhedrin (see John 18:22-23).

The backdrop to this teaching is that the Jews considered it an insult to be hit in the face, much in the same way that we would interpret someone spitting in our face. Bible scholar R. C. Sproul comments: "What's interesting in the expression is that Jesus specifically mentions the right side of the face [Matthew 5:39]....If I hit you on your right cheek, the most normal way would be if I did it with the back of my right hand....To the best of our knowledge of the Hebrew language, that expression is a Jewish idiom that describes an insult, similar to the way challenges to duels in the days of King Arthur were made by a backhand slap to the right cheek of your opponent."

The principle taught in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:38-42 would thus seem to be that Christians should not retaliate when insulted or slandered (see also Romans 12:17-21). Such insults do not threaten a Christian's personal safety. The question of rendering insult for insult, however, is a far cry from defending oneself against a mugger or a rapist.

In terms of following Christ's example, one must remember that His personal nonresistance at the cross was intertwined with His unique calling. He did not evade His arrest because it was God's will for Him to fulfill His prophetic role as the redemptive Lamb of God (Matthew 26:52-56). During His ministry, however, He refused to be arrested because God's timing for His death had not yet come (John 8:59). Thus, Christ's unique nonresistance during the Passion does not mandate against self-protection.

It is noteworthy that the Bible records many accounts of fighting and warfare. The providence of God in war is exemplified by His name YHWH Sabaoth ("The LORD of hosts"--Exodus 12:41). God is portrayed as the omnipotent Warrior-Leader of the Israelites. God, the LORD of hosts, raised up warriors among the Israelites called the shophetim (savior-deliverers). Samson, Deborah, Gideon, and others were anointed by the Spirit of God to conduct war. The New Testament commends Old Testament warriors for their military acts of faith (Hebrews 11:30-40). Moreover, it is significant that although given the opportunity to do so, none of the New Testament saints--nor even Jesus--are ever seen informing a military convert that he needed to resign from his line of work (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 3:14).

Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus revealed to His disciples the future hostility they would face and encouraged them to sell their outer garments in order to buy a sword (Luke 22:36-38; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:26-27). Here the "sword" (Greek: maxairan) is a dagger or short sword that belonged to the Jewish traveler's equipment as protection against robbers and wild animals. A plain reading of the passage indicates that Jesus approved of self-defense.

Self-defense may actually result in one of the greatest examples of human love. Christ Himself said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:14). When protecting one's family or neighbor, a Christian is unselfishly risking his or her life for the sake of others.

Theologians J. P. Moreland and Norman Geisler say that "to permit murder when one could have prevented it is morally wrong. To allow a rape when one could have hindered it is an evil. To watch an act of cruelty to children without trying to intervene is morally inexcusable. In brief, not resisting evil is an evil of omission, and an evil of omission can be just as evil as an evil of commission. Any man who refuses to protect his wife and children against a violent intruder fails them morally."

"Firearms stand next in importance to the Constitution itself. They are the American people's liberty teeth and keystone under independence. From the hour the Pilgrims landed, to the present day, events occurrences and tendencies prove that to ensure peace, security and happiness, the rifle and pistol are equally indispensable. The very atmosphere of firearms everywhere restrains evil interference - they deserve a place of honor with all that's good." -- George Washington, Commanding General of the Continental Army, Father of Our Country and First President of the United States in a speech to Congress, January 7, 1790 The Second Article of Amendment to the Constitution for the United States Stands as the Guarantor of All The Liberties and Rights of We The People.