

Resist Not Evil

*A study on "Peaceful non-violence and gun control"
by Rev Earl Jackson*

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.*

John 14:27 *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

"Resist not evil" is a command from the Lord, which seems to be very much overlooked and ignored in our contemporary version of Christianity. It is also a commandment which needs to be carefully considered in the light of the current gun control debates and the second amendment where the right to bear arms is granted protection. Some groups in the past, like the Friends and the Mennonites, have taken this idea very seriously and have made it a foundational doctrine to serve as the basis for their ideas about Christian pacifism and never bearing weapons. The Early English Baptists drew heavily from these influences, and many of them were strict pacifists, and willingly suffered intense persecution, plundering of their possessions, jailing and even martyrdom, because of their non-resistance and pacifism. Among today's Baptist communities gospel non-violence is a minority position, Martin Luther King held the position, and some churches do, but by and large more humanistic, worldly viewpoints have taken over, because it is more convenient and agreeable to the natural man to protect yourself, and your possessions. But let's look at this in more detail?

The Schleithem Confession (Anabaptist, 1527) says: *"Thereby shall also fall away from us the diabolical weapons of violence--such as sword, armor, and the like, and all of their use to protect friends or against enemies--by virtue of the word of Christ: "you shall not resist evil." ¹*

According to their view the sword belongs to the state, and should be absent from the church, because the people of God are a heavenly kingdom, not part of the kingdoms of this world, and the weapons of our warfare are spiritual weapons.

The Schleithem spends quite a bit of time developing this idea in detail.

The sword is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked and guards and protects the good. In the law the sword is established over the wicked for punishment and for death and the secular rulers are established to wield the

¹ <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/S345.html>

same.

But within the perfection of Christ only the ban is used for the admonition and exclusion of the one who has sinned, without the death of the flesh, simply the warning and the command to sin no more.

Now many, who do not understand Christ's will for us, will ask; whether a Christian may or should use the sword against the wicked for the protection and defense of the good, or for the sake of love.

The answer is unanimously revealed: Christ teaches and commands us to learn from Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart and thus we shall find rest for our souls. Now Christ says to the woman who was taken in adultery, not that she should be stoned according to the law of His Father (and yet He says, "What the Father commanded me, that I do") but with mercy and forgiveness and the warning to sin no more, says: "Go, sin no more." Exactly thus should we also proceed, according to the rule of the ban.

Second, is asked concerning the sword: whether a Christian shall pass sentence in disputes and strife about worldly matters, such as the unbelievers have with one another. The answer: Christ did not wish to decide or pass judgment between brother and brother concerning inheritance, but refused to do so. So should we also do.

Third, is asked concerning the sword: whether the Christian should be a magistrate if he is chosen thereto. This is answered thus: Christ was to be made king, but He fled and did not discern the ordinance of His Father. Thus we should also do as He did and follow after Him, and we shall not walk in darkness. For He Himself says: "Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." He Himself further forbids the violence of the sword when He says: "The princes of this world lord it over them etc., but among you it shall not be so." Further Paul says, "Whom God has foreknown, the same he has also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son," etc. Peter also says: "Christ has suffered (not ruled) and has left us an example, that you should follow after in his steps."

Lastly, one can see in the following points that it does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: the rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the Spirit. Their houses and dwelling remain in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. Their citizenship is in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. The weapons of their battle and warfare are carnal and only against the flesh, but the weapons of Christians are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. The worldly are armed with steel and iron, but Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and with the Word of God. In sum: as Christ our Head is minded, so also must be minded the members of the body of Christ through Him, so that there be no division in the body, through which it would be destroyed. Since then Christ is as is written of Him, so must His members also be the same, so that His body may remain whole and unified for its own advancement and upbuilding. For any kingdom which is divided within itself will be destroyed.²

2 <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/S345.html>

In America; (where the right to bear arms is guaranteed by the second amendment, and where materialism is the unacknowledged god of this age); the idea of not defending yourself, your property and your loved ones is seen as unpatriotic heresy. In fact such an idea is considered to be something of great evil. All people, including Christians, are expected to defend when defending is required. Pacifism and non-violence is not given much validity, credence, or even much thought at all, in a society where you can have a shotgun in the back window of your pick up truck. It seems like a relic from a bye-gone age of spiritual idealism, or a doctrine relevant only to Mahatma Gandhi and monks living in a cloistered Abby. But Jesus' word: "do not resist evil" has little value or significance for people living in the real world where the credo is "eat or be eaten". What should we actually think about this? and why is it rarely if ever discussed in modern evangelicalism?

POPULAR IDEAS THAT MILITATE AGAINST PEACEFUL GOSPEL NON-VIOLENCE!

First of all I would like to suggest some modern ideas which militate against the peaceful non-violent teachings of Jesus. You may not agree with my observations or comments. All I ask is that you read them yourself, and ask yourself if it is possible that these may in fact be part of the cause for the contemporary rejection of non-violence and pacifism?

1. Secular humanism permeates the society and makes "the self" the all important idea.

Self-centeredness, self-beautification, self-improvement, introspection and personal achievement, become the lofty goals in any society where humanism is the basic underpinning. God and others do not matter, in the secular humanist society, thus violating both of the commandments which Jesus taught as the idea embodiment of the whole law of God.

Matt 22:36-40 *Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

The vertical (God-ward) and the horizontal (man-ward) commandments embrace the entirety of the Christian ethic of Christ's teachings. But in our society today "love God" and "love others" has been replaced with "love yourself"? This is the essence of secular humanism, and it is problematic when

it comes to understanding and interpreting Christ's teaching of "Do not resist evil", because everything in this society, tells us we must resist anything and any one who encroaches on our personal and individual rights. "Rights" become more important than "right". Jesus' teaching are therefore ignored in favor of protectionism, and self vindication.

2. Materialism creates a false idea of personal ownership.

When you own stuff, you are obligated to protect the stuff you own. At least that's what we are told in the American society. If not? then somebody will steal it from you, so that they in turn will own it. Not only that, but when you own stuff, you develop the inordinate desire to own more stuff and **accumulation takes the place of sharing**. This is exactly why Jesus taught... *Sell that ye have, and give alms (Luke 12:33)*.

Luke 12:15-34 *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. 16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? 18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? 21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. 22 And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. 23 The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. 24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? 25 And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? 26 If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? 27 Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? 29 And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. 30 For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. 31 But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. 32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

The idea of personal ownership seems to have been repudiated in the primitive church of Acts.

Acts 2:44-45 *And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

Acts 4:32 *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things*

common.

But even though this seems to be true in Acts, and seems to be the norm in the early church, the idea of ownership of stuff is clearly rooted in the ten commandments. It is from “Ten Commandment legalism” that the pursuit of the American dream has sprung.

"Thou shalt not covet" and "thou shalt not steal" are the commandments used to justify all private ownership. Even people (Wives, children, man-servants and maid-servants) are owned and are held as property under the Mosaic Law system. There were however unique features in the Law designed to hinder the notion of perpetual ownership. Ownership seems to have had term limits established by the year of jubilee when slaves and property were set free and returned to their original owners, and when debts were canceled so that they could not go on indefinitely. These ownership restrictions of Moses, made it a system completely unlike modern capitalism, even though Americanism tries to find its basis in these laws. The Biblical notion ultimately is that God owns all things, and man is a borrower from the Almighty. Americanism is not based upon that, but rather instead on the idea that God gave all things to man for man to subdue and have dominion over in any way that he so desires. Americanism is based on greed and the total subjugation of the whole earth to the men who have the fortitude and stamina to do the subjecting. If you work, you are entitled to whatever you can take. Biblical ownership on the other hand, even under Moses, was based on God's ultimate and overarching ownership of all things, with man fully required to honor and worship God in all things, and to give all things to God, rendering unto Him worship through yieldedness and thanksgiving. The idea in all Biblical ideas of property, is that it belongs to God, and we give it back to Him, in our worship. Therefore, to take the 10 commandments as a basis for greed and personal accumulation, is to turn them from their true intention into a false doctrine, never included in the original ideas. “Thou shalt not steal”, does not mean... grab all you can get, and hoard it for yourself defending your right to do so at all costs. To twist the commands which were given against materialism, and to turn them into the basis for materialism, is to abuse the teachings of the Bible.

A LOOK AT TWO OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IN THE NEW COVENANT!

1. “Thou shalt not steal” in the New Covenant.

The perspective of Jesus on “thou shalt not steal” in relation to possessions is clearly set forth in His discourse with the rich young man.

Matt 19:16-24 *And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? 21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. 23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

Notice that Christ quotes the commandment, and thus gives His seal of approval for it's continuation under the New Covenant, but not without modification and re-interpretation. All the 10 Commandments are treated this way in the New Covenant, with immediate modification and redefinition by Jesus Christ Himself. He immediately puts it, and all the rest of these commands into the New Covenant perspective by owning them as His own, and then by changing them to suit the New Age which He inaugurates...(the New Covenant). Under the New Covenant, all the laws from the Old Covenant are taken by Christ from the material level of application to the spiritual level of the New Testament age of light and not shadows. The Old Testament interpretation and understanding of the Law is thus completely invalidated by Christ, who is the only person ever to fulfill the Law. He is the law giver, the Law owner, the law definer and the laws only interpreter. He invalidated the Old Testament understanding of the law without actually nullifying the law itself. Instead He nullified the entire Old Covenant and instituted the new, and He transferred the law from the one into his own law and he eliminated the condemnation, death penalties, and required obedience through legalistic observances, and carried them into an age of Grace, where righteousness is imputed on the basis of Christ's own fulfillment of the law.

Adultery for instance, becomes “*If you look upon a woman with lust, you have committed adultery in your heart*” (Matthew 5:28). “*Thou shalt not steal*” becomes “*Go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven*” (Matt. 19:21). Christ transfers all the Laws of Moses into His own Kingdom, with similar spiritualization and modification. None of the old laws are left untouched by the Masters hand. All of them are modified when they are transferred into the kingdom which is not of this world, so that they all relate primarily to our relation to God and to our relation to others as people of the new kingdom and new order. The New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant,

and in doing so, all of the law was changed into the “Law of the Spirit”. There are no more tablets of stone, just as there is no more temple of stone. Everything is now on the heart and in the heart, but nothing on stone was taken into the New Covenant . This is of massive significance, because if we are in Christ's kingdom we are under his laws, which is the highest stage in the development of the Divine law. On Sinai God wrote it on tablets of stone, but in the Kingdom of Christ, He re-writes it, but this time on the heart (Jer. 31:33). This is key element of the New Covenant. We are no longer trembling under stone tablets at Sinai. Now we worship God at the foot of a different mountain...Calvary, and now the law is in our hearts because our worship is “In spirit and in truth”.

Christ turned the “thou shalt not steal” commandment into “Sell all your goods and give to the poor”. That is a radical notion, which is found nowhere in the law of Moses. Christ took all the old truths and brought them to their highest level of meaning and application.

2. “Thou shalt not kill” according to Jesus

Similarly to “Thou shalt not steal”, the command against murder, is likewise modified by the Lord Jesus Christ, as it is carried into the New Covenant. Look.

Mat 5:21-26 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. 26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

Notice that this command, (like all of the other 10 commandments), when it is transferred from stone tablets to fleshly tablets of the heart, is given a new spiritual twist and a kingdom dimension. Instead of “Thou shalt not kill” it becomes “Thou shalt not be angry” coupled with “thou shalt be reconciled to thy brother”. “Agree with thine adversary quickly” is clearly meant to entirely replace the mere prohibitive "Thou shalt not kill”. Seeking agreement, not being angry and being reconciled even with your enemies, is the essence of the new law of the Kingdom of Christ. The old, mere bare bones, prohibition, to not kill, simply does not fit with the tone and tenor of the spiritual kingdom. This is exactly why Christ redefined the capital punishment issue. While the old law (the stone tablets) allowed for stoning of prostitutes, the new law, the law of

Christ, the law of God written on the hearts of believers says, no stones! but grace. *“Let Him that is without sin cast the first stone!”* It is Christ's right to own His own laws, and to redefine them for the New Covenant. That's exactly what He did. This act did not do away with the ten Commandments, it simply re-wrote them. They are no longer valid in the new age, because Christ's new laws have supplanted and replaced them. They serve no purpose in the Kingdom, because they were too narrow and too restrictive for the spiritual realm. They have ascended, with the Lord who fulfilled them all, to the realm where they no longer need to be fulfilled. That's been done already, by Jesus, who came not to destroy them but to fulfill them. He did it, and now they have all been adjusted and modified by the Lord Himself. They are now all about the heart, worship and our relationship to God and man. Their negative prohibitions have all been expanded, so that we no longer rest one day in seven, now there is a rest for the people in God 365 days a year in the person of Christ. Every command of God, is the command of Christ. Christ fulfilled them all, so that we do not have to. They exist not as a motive to obedience, but as expressions of the highest form of worship, worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Prohibitions are now opportunities for worship, hundreds of laws have now been reduced to only two (Matt. 22:40).

What does this have to do with peaceful non- violence and gun control?

It has everything to do with it, because if personal property is unimportant to Jesus it should also be unimportant to us. If agreeing with our enemy is important to Jesus, it should be important to us. If the idea of detachment from this world, is important to Christ, it should also be important to us. We may be in this world but we are not of it. Our Biblical law system, has now been modified from mere commands that prohibit destructive behaviors, to statements of Grace and love, which open the heart and invite men into a perfect relationship with both God and man. Prohibitions have given way to worship of the highest and most spiritual sort. Self-defense is not taught or modeled by Jesus or any of the Apostles. On the one occasion when Peter cut off the centurion's ear, trying to defend his Lord, he was strongly rebuked.

Matt 26:51-52 *And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. 52 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.*

Some may even ask, if self-defense was not intended, then why did Peter have a sword to begin with? Of course the question is sort of nonsensical? Because swords can be used for other things beside self-defense, and killing other humans. Weapons are certainly allowed for hunting, for the cutting and preparing of meats prior to cooking. The case of Peter and his sword shows clearly that weapons can be misused, even in the hands of someone with admirable intentions, and in their right mind. The whole point of the incident, is that weapons of violence are innately incongruous with a kingdom of non-violence and peace! No amount of rationalizing and reverse engineering can trans-mutate the incident into a reason supporting the idea that Christians are permitted to arm themselves for self-protection when they go out in public? Peter sinned when he cut off another human beings ear, and Jesus repudiated it. Peter's action demonstrated lack of faith, a deep seated belief that Jesus did not have everything in perfect sovereign control, and the idea that God need men to use human force to achieve the Divine purposes. All of those things demonstrate sinful thinking, and they resulted in sinful actions. There is never a case in the New Testament where Christian are told to arm themselves against their fellow man, or even against their enemies. The idea that we need to protect ourselves is antagonistic and incongruous with the idea that God is our protector. All arguments that can be presented in favor of Christians arming themselves, are worldly, humanistic, deductive arguments, and are not based upon the actual teachings of the Founder of our religion. Vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:9), and the fruits of the spirit are supposed to characterize God people, the first one is love. The third one is peace.

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

Consider one final passage.

Luke 6:27-36 *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. 31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. 32 "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

This magnanimous passage ought to mark and identify every true child of Christ. Our lives are supposed to be lives of love, patience, enduring wrongs, peaceful helping, and always doing right. How inconsistent it would be if the Lord stuck a sentence in like this... “love your enemies, but don't hesitate to arm yourselves against them so they do not take advantage of you or your stuff”? Does that sound like it belongs? Or how about: “love your enemies and pray for them if you have not shot them in self-defense first?” Does that fit with Christ's teachings? I don't think so. It does not fit with the tenor or tone of our Lord's life or teachings at all. Nor should it characterize His children.

CONCLUSION

I have been told that I am just burying my head in the sand, and that the world today is vastly different from the Biblical world. My answer is... SO WHAT? If my Lord idealized and lived out a perfect system, where he never harmed anyone, then I should do the same. There is no room in my bedroom or in my heart for a gun-closet. It does not fit. The idea of it repulses me. God placed me on this earth, to help save men, and to love them into His kingdom of love, not to kill them or to teach them how to be violent just like the rest of the world which follows the wicked one. Join me and other concerned Christians in opposing “the gun rights activists” who want to arm everyone and turn America into a battleground. It's a shame when we see followers of Christ, protesting and marching for their supposed “god given right” to bear arms. If you claim to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ then join the rest of His true followers and lay down all weapons, and urge other to do the same. Help free our country from the grip of mad-men who roam our streets with military style assault weapons, when they ought to be locked up in insane asylums where they are restrained for their own protection as well as for the protection of society. More weapons is not the cure for either insanity, or godlessness. In fact more weapons, is both insane and is godless. We will never fix a broken world with armaments in every household. We fix a broken world when every household loves and obeys Christ first, and loves their neighbors as themselves.

Matthew 22:36-40 *Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

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