

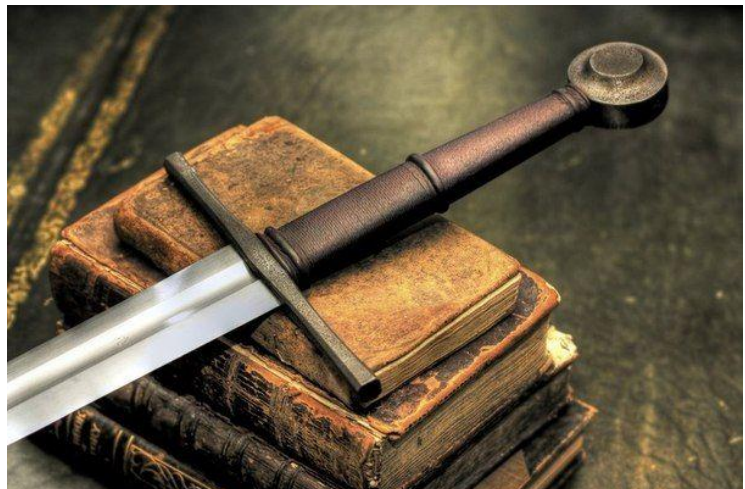
LIVING BY THE SWORD

Do you remember how Jesus told Peter, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword?” ([Matthew 26:52](#); also [John 18:11](#)). Jesus was reminding Peter that using a weapon encourages others to do the same. Jesus also wanted Peter to know that, even at the point at which Jesus was being arrested, he could ask and God would send an army of angels.

What does that mean for us? Obviously, huge numbers of us would rather have a gun than not have one. In fact, there are an unbelievable number of guns in the USA. A recent report noted that we Americans own 300 Million guns! That suggests that many of us live with a great deal of fear. We are not about to put our “swords” (guns) back in their places! We “need” them for protection!

What’s truly upsetting is the number of us who never see this as a moral issue. When an event like the massacre of 49 people and the wounding of dozens more in Orlando happens, we tell ourselves that we are right to own one or more guns. Or we imagine that we would use our guns only in defense of our family and nation. We might even believe that we would feel good about killing the “bad guys.” I’ve worked with a lot of combat veterans who would not agree.

Providing the “swords” to protect us from those who would steal, rape, or murder us or even destroy our nation is a huge industry even in America. In truth, making and selling weapons much mightier than the sword is a significant source of jobs and economic stimulation for our economy.



What is the morally correct way to cope with our desire for more weapons for ourselves? How moral is it for us to give or sell weapons to people we know want to use them against their enemies? Where is the high moral ground when we provide one group or another not only with guns but also advanced fighters, missiles or combat training?

If I turn to the Bible for simple answers they aren’t there. Actually, there are some insights, but the Bible is not consistent on the question of war. In one of my favorite Biblical passages the prophet Isaiah wrote of a time when the peoples “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” ([2:4b](#))

However, a little further into the Bible and a few centuries closer to the birth of Jesus, the prophet Joel urged the people to “Prepare war, stir up the warriors Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears ([3:9a](#), [10a](#)). It sounds like what a modern-day prophet might have said about the results of picking up our “swords” as we did in World War II. Factories that had been building cars and many other consumer goods were tasked with building bombs, tanks and other weapons needed to win the war.

There are times when we choose not to look to the Bible for guidance. We find it easier to respond to violence with violence. We have all kinds of reasons to justify our picking up the “sword” (gun, knife, nuclear bomb, etc.). In the midst of our fear of not surviving an attack we even lived for decades with the so-called MAD system of defense. MAD stood for “Mutual Assured Destruction.” Both the Soviet Union and we understood that hurling nuclear weapons at the other side would lead to an unthinkable level of destruction for both sides as well as many nations who were not involved in the conflict.

If we understand this concept on an international level, why don't we get it on a local level? If one person on the block has an AK-47 or one gang has machine pistols, how long will it be before everyone else “must” have similar weaponry? If there is anything more symbolic of our individual and collective fear, imagine people carrying guns into church! It is both legal and happening in Texas and either Illinois or Ohio right now. Is that what we want in any of our places of worship for any religious or faith group?

So where do we turn for more insight about not picking up the sword? We could do a lot worse than reading the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5:1-11](#)). In those verses, known as the Beatitudes, Jesus went beyond what he would later say to Peter. He taught us the importance of being peacemakers when he said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” ([Matthew 5:11](#))

How do we become peacemakers? Here are a few suggestions:”

1. Refuse to dominate anyone. That includes not humiliating them verbally, not damaging their spiritual, social, psychological or physical well-being – as well as not abusing them sexually. If we can't meet that standard, we need to get help! Talk with someone whom you trust about sources of psychological, social and spiritual healing.
2. When we are the victims, we need to be safe. We also need to “love our enemies,” ([Matthew 5:43-48](#)) and that includes praying for them as well as setting limits with them, but it does *not* include destroying them.
3. Urge the government at every level to restrain its use of force to what is absolutely needed to protect the common good.
4. Forgive: a) sooner rather than later; b) even when our opponent (person or nation) doesn't care about being forgiven; c) knowing that God is able to bring good out of all situations to those who trust God.

Once again, there is much more to say about this topic, and I will write more as God guides me. Meanwhile, I am always willing to [discuss your responses](#).

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