

Since When Did Jesus Get Connected to Guns?

Since when did the gospel become associated with guns? Since when did the Christian faith become linked to the right to bear arms?

Lest I be misunderstood, this article is not about gun control, nor is it about the Second Amendment.

I am not asking whether Christians should serve in the military, and I am not questioning our right to defend ourselves.

I'm simply asking why conservative Christianity—in particular, American evangelical Christianity—is so strongly linked with a passion for guns. There's certainly no scriptural connection to be made.

Again, I'm not advocating for new gun-control laws, and I'm not saying that we roll over and die when attacked by our enemies. I'm not even questioning to what degree churches should have security in place in their assemblies.

That's not my focus or issue at all, and I understand clearly: 1) the importance of the Second Amendment in American history; 2) the emphasis many American evangelicals put on holding to our Constitutional rights; and 3) common sense issues of self-defense.

Still, I find it odd that many Americans associate evangelical Christians with guns—and I don't just mean that some evangelicals enjoy hunting. I mean that “gospel” and “guns” seem to go hand in hand. If ever there was an example of odd bedfellows, it's here.

It would be one thing if radical Muslims were associated with

guns or if white separatists were associated with guns. But conservative followers of Jesus? What's our specific and unique connection to guns? Frankly, I don't see it.

In contrast with Muhammad, who was a warrior as well as a spiritual leader, the founder of our faith was crucified. And in contrast with the early followers of Muhammad, who went to war on his behalf, the early followers of Jesus were put to death as lambs going to the slaughter.

In the words of Paul, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:35-37, quoting from Ps. 44:11).

This remains the pattern around the world today, where followers of Jesus are the persecuted, not the persecutors. How did this switch so dramatically in American culture?

Again, I'm not questioning whether Christians can serve in the military and fight against our enemies, and I'm not raising the issue of self-defense or security.

My point is that the New Testament faith was not a faith of physical violence or swords or martial confrontation, and Jesus himself said to Peter that "all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword." (See Matt. 26:52; for the record, it is quite specious to build a theology of carrying arms based on Luke 22:35-38, as I demonstrate in *The Real Kosher Jesus*.)

The point of all this is simple: Our debates about gun control and the Second Amendment and the strength of our military should not get in the way of our discussion about Jesus and the gospel. Fundamentally, there is no connection between the two, and there are devoted followers of Jesus who serve in the

high echelons of the military and devoted followers of Jesus who are conscientious objectors. (Would anyone question the Christian conviction as well as military valor of the subject of Mel Gibson's *Hacksaw Ridge*?)

What prompts me to write this article, though, is the increasing connection in our culture between the gospel and guns, and it is as foreign to me as would be a connection between Jesus and roller coasters or Paul and soccer or Peter and airplanes. To repeat: There is no scriptural (or logical) connection between them.

So, while it's fine to have our uniquely American discussion about these issues, given our roots and the purpose of the Second Amendment, let's separate the gospel from guns. I can preach the former without carrying the latter.