

SALT & LIGHT (A CHRISTIAN JOURNAL)

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“Sell Thy Cloak and Buy a Sword”

Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock. Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads. So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found.

– I Samuel 13:19–22

Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

– I Corinthians 10:11

And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. 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. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.

– Luke 22:35–38

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1 Introduction

On the night in which he was betrayed, immediately after the Passover meal, Jesus gave instructions to his disciples. Others were present in addition to the Twelve.

The instructions include the directive to pack along a “purse” and a “scrip,” items for which the disciples previously had no need. And the instructions include the command to buy a sword. Of course, the clear implication of the command is that every follower of Jesus should be armed. However, the inclusion of a sword in the list of required gear seems to be in conflict with other commands of Jesus, such as those which appear in the *Sermon on the Mount*,¹ and, in particular, with the command to *turn the other cheek* to an assailant. But, the Scripture is a coherent whole, no part of which may be set aside;² thus, there can be no actual conflict between passages correctly interpreted. And, indeed, a bit of examination reveals that, for every Christian, acquisition of a sword indeed is in order.

2 Impetus for the Command

The reason Jesus instructed his disciples henceforth to pack along purse (*ballantion*, money bag) and scrip (*peran*, bag for provisions) is because the disciples no longer would be under his direct care. Hitherto, Jesus had addressed every need of the Twelve, for they were his students, and lived together as a family.

*While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*³ — John 17:12

Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. — John 18:7-9

But hereafter, the Twelve and other disciples would be going forth as Apostles, Evangelists, and Pastors, and each would need to look after himself for food, clothing, and shelter; thus, each would need to carry purse and scrip.

¹Matthew chapters 5 through 7.

²John 10:35.

³The Scripture in view is Psalm 109, which is a prayer of imprecation regarding Judas Iscariot, whom Christ Jesus termed the “Son of Perdition.”

2.1 The Sword

Moreover, each disciple would need to be watchful regarding robbers and other enemies; accordingly, each would need to arm himself. Of course, a combination of love and responsibility would extend this watchfulness to include to family and friends.

The need to be armed is so vital and so urgent that Jesus instructs the disciple not having a sword to sell his cloak (*imatiuon*, outer garment) and buy one. The sword was a serious weapon, and of the military class; it was the primary armament of the Roman soldier.⁴

The Christian seeking to comply with this commandment needs no authorization or permit, other than the Scripture.⁵ And in modern times, he would do well to procure both a hand gun (“pistol” or “revolver”) and a small shoulder gun (“rifle”), and perhaps, in addition, a shotgun. Of course, a weapon is of little value without a supply of ammunition.

2.2 Example & Exhortations from the Past

A primary reason for recording and preserving in the Scripture the history of Israel as a physical nation is encouragement, admonition, and instruction by example.⁶

In the days of Saul, Israel, perennially under discipline for disobedience to the command of the Lord, had been placed under the dominion of the Philistines. The oppression took the form of “spoilers” or marauders,⁷ who essentially were armed criminals who roved the land to plunder; they were of the same category as the Midianites who impoverished Israel in the days of Gideon.⁸

The Philistine spoilers were uncontested by Israel, for the Philistines had disarmed the populace and had put an end to smithing in the Land.⁹ Tyranny of an armed populace is difficult.

2.3 Applicable to the Present Day

The same considerations apply to followers of Christ Jesus living in the present day. The Christian must be armed so that he may protect members of family and friends who are under his care.

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. – I Timothy 5:8

Also, the existence of even a small segment of the population which is properly armed dampens the aspirations and deters the machinations of tyrants. This function of preservation is but one aspect of the “salt and light” role of the Christian to the society in which he resides.¹⁰

And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, 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. – Nehemiah 4:14

2.4 Neighbourly Love

The commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself includes coming to the aid of a neighbour against whom an enemy is waging a violent attack. Needless to say, such assistance also is the responsibility of the Shepherd of a local assembly with respect to members of his flock.

⁴In the Greek, the term “sword” is *machaira*; the same term is used in Hebrews 4:12 (“two-edged sword”). The *machaira* was the basic weapon, carried and used by civilians and military alike.

⁵Acts 5:29.

⁶I Corinthians 10:11, II Timothy 3:16.

⁷I Samuel 13:17–18.

⁸Judges 6:1–11. By threshing his wheat by the winepress, Gideon was practicing tax evasion, for which he receives no rebuke.

⁹I Samuel 13:19–22.

¹⁰Matthew 5:13–16. Consider also the negotiation of Abraham with respect to Sodom, Genesis 18:16–33.

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.

—Leviticus 19:18

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 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. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

—Matthew 22:35–40

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

—Mark 12:31

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

—Galatians 5:14

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

—John 15:13

2.5 Prophecy

A prophetic utterance typically has details, often subtle and enigmatic, by which fulfillment of the prophecy may be validated. Consider this well-known passage from Isaiah, which speaks in detail concerning the crucifixion and entombment of Christ Jesus:

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

—Isaiah 53:9–12

The generation of Isaiah would puzzle over the prophecy, but anyone familiar with the crucifixion and entombment of Jesus would know beyond doubt that Isaiah was prophesying specifically of Jesus.

For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.

—Luke 22:37–38

The response of Jesus, “*It is enough*,” indicates that the two swords present in the company were sufficient to put the group into the category “transgressor.”¹¹ This, of course, was a matter of appearance, rather than of actuality. False accusations of criminal activity are more credible if made against a man who is armed.

When the mob approached, seeking to take Jesus, the defensive response of Peter which severed the ear of the servant of the high priest,¹² gave the enemies of Jesus justification to condemn Jesus as the leader of a band of criminals. And though Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, he did not rebuke Peter for his defensive act; rather he explained the necessity for submission.

¹¹A prominent commentator says of the phrase of Luke 22:38, “*It is enough*,” that it should have been translated, “*Enough of such talk!*” But such a translation makes the phrase a reprimand, which is contrary to the sense of the passage. The adjective *ikanos* means sufficient or fit. Clearly Jesus is saying that two swords are enough for the immediate need, which is to give Jesus and the disciples the appearance of a band of criminals.

¹²Matthew 26:50–51, Mark 14:46–47, Luke 22:49–51, John 18:10.

And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.
— Mark 15:27–28

In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.
— Matthew 26:55

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me?
— Mark 14:48

Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.
— Luke 22:52–53

3 Reconciliation with the Sermon on the Mount

The attempt to exposit the *Sermon on the Mount*¹³ has put a twist in the knickers of many a teacher. It may seem impossible to reconcile the demands set forth by Jesus with the realities of life. The exhortations appear to strip the Righteous of all protection and place him at the mercy of the Wicked. But there are three keys to sorting out the matter.

3.1 Targeting *The Tradition of the Elders*

To begin with, it is necessary to recognize that the formula, “ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,” indicates that the *Sermon on the Mount* is an attack upon the Talmudic *Tradition of the Elders*.

The Faith followed by the Scribes and the Pharisees was Talmudism (Talmudic Judaism), called in the Scripture the “*Tradition of the Elders*.” The *Tradition* is a vile perversion of the *Faith of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*, concocted by unrepentant members of the Remnant during the seventy years of captivity in Babylon. By the epoch of the Incarnation, Talmudism had become dominant within the Remnant. The *Tradition* continues to the present day as the religion of the unregenerate Jew, who knows neither the Son nor the Father.¹⁴

In essence, Talmudic Judaism is an elaborate and hypocritical scheme devised to allow a man to violate the *Spirit* of the Law while remaining within the *Letter* of the Law. Accordingly, the Scripture time and time again indicts the Talmudic Jew for hypocrisy.¹⁵

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus was declaring to the Remnant of Israel that the *Law of Moses* has an intent or *Spirit* which goes far beyond the *Letter*, and that the concern of the Lord God is with observation of the *Spirit*. On another occasion, Jesus teaches that it is possible to violate the *Letter* of the Law without violating the *Spirit* of the Law.¹⁶

3.2 The Righteousness of the Scribes and of the Pharisees

The Protestant Pulpit often quotes Matthew 5:20, as if the righteousness of the Scribes and of the Pharisees were indeed genuine and worthy of emulation.

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.
— Matthew 5:20

But the righteousness of righteousness of the Scribes and of the Pharisees was a righteousness of the *Letter* and not of the *Spirit*. In actuality, the Scribes and of the Pharisees had no righteousness; theirs was but a superficial facade. The Protestant fails to appreciate the sarcasm of Jesus, which is evidenced by other passages.

¹³Matthew 5, Luke 6.

¹⁴John 8:19, John 8:54–55.

¹⁵Matthew 23:1–33, Luke 11:37–54.

¹⁶Matthew 12:1–8.

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

— Luke 16:13–15

3.3 The Purpose of the Law

The second key to understanding the *Sermon on the Mount* is the fact that the law is made not for the Righteous, but for the Wicked.

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

— I Timothy 1:5–11

The Lord God inscribes his law on the heart of each man who enters the Way of Life.¹⁷ Such an individual obeys the Law as a matter of instinct, rather than of compulsion.

3.4 Assumptions Regarding the Society

The third key to understanding the *Sermon on the Mount* is the state of the society. No system of law, not even the *Law of Moses*, can function except in an environment in which law and order prevails. A system of government must enjoy the general respect of the governed. The *Sermon on the Mount* presupposes proper operation of magistrates and courts; such operation is impossible under conditions of rioting in the streets.

The machinery of orderly, systematic law typically is limited in capacity; a system which can handle ten or even a hundred scofflaws may be overwhelmed by a mob of a thousand. Accordingly, a general state of anarchy calls for employment of the military to exercise deadly force against the lawless until order is restored.

In the epoch of the Incarnation, the Remnant of Israel lived in a society which, despite the Wickedness of Talmudic Judaism, was relatively stable and safe. The presence of the Romans ensured the populace freedom from violent crime. In such an environment, the exhortations of the *Sermon on the Mount* such as “turn to him the other [cheek] also” and “let him have thy cloak also” are not unreasonable. And note that the man seeking to take away the coat is not a violent thief; he is suing in a court of law.¹⁸

Historians note that Christians generally have disassociated themselves from Society, forming separate communities. Though he is *in* the World, the Christian is not *of* the World. Addressing the matter with the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul tells them not to concern themselves with the sinful conduct of those who are outside of the *Household of Faith*.¹⁹ The Christian is not called to the task of social reform, but to the business of Sanctification.²⁰

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¹⁷Psalm 37:31, Psalm 40:8, Isaiah 51:7, Jeremiah 31:33, Romans 2:15, Hebrews 8:10, Hebrews 10:16.

¹⁸Matthew 5:40.

¹⁹1 Corinthians 5:9–13.

²⁰Hebrews 12:14.