

## **TOPICS THAT DIVIDE**

### **A CONVERSATION ABOUT GUNS AND VIOLENCE**

This year, the council is working on addressing topics that can be divisive both in our culture and in our church. We feel comfortable discussing these issues because our unity is not based on agreement around topics, but on our life, which we receive from Jesus.

In that unity, we invite the people of Peace Church to enter into dialogue with one another to determine God's will about some difficult subjects. To help us, we are providing the following resources:

#### **IN PREPARATION FOR DISCUSSION, PLEASE READ:**

- † Philippians 2:1-11
- † Romans 14
- † Philippians 3:1-16

#### **FROM THESE VERSES, WE FIND THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. We are united, we just need to live like we are (Philippians 2:1-2).
2. In union with Christ, we share His attitude of humility (Philippians 2:5-7).
3. We can arrive at different conclusions even when we are all basing our understanding on scripture (Romans 14:5-12).
4. Knowing Jesus is more important than being right (Philippians 3:1-14).
5. If our top priority is to know Jesus, then God will reveal His will in His timing (Philippians 3:15, 16).

#### **THERE ARE THREE GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING THE WILL OF GOD:**

1. God clearly communicates that there are certain things we should be doing.
2. God clearly communicates that there are certain things we should not be doing.
3. We can do whatever we want, as long as we are not breaking points 1 & 2.

#### **WHEN LOOKING AT A TOPIC, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Remember and return to the 5 guidelines for discussion.
2. Does God clearly communicate in scripture about the topic?
3. If not, what are some general Biblical guidelines that speak to the topic?
4. How might our differing opinions, when held in unity, keep us from slipping to a non-Biblical extreme?
5. Being led by the Spirit of Christ, what is God leading us to do in this moment about this issue?

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### PEACE CHURCH COUNCIL MISSION STATEMENT REGARDING GUNS AND VIOLENCE

The subject of gun violence is not an easy subject and has many different viewpoints and passions. The Council of Peace Church shares your concerns and understands your passion. Although Council member positions may differ, we agree that any discussions regarding all topics that face our congregation and world must be approached from a biblical perspective.

All of us need to read the Bible and listen to the perspective put forth by the one true King. James 1:22 directs us to “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” We should never forget Psalm 18:30 which states, “As of God, his way is perfect: The Lord’s word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him.”

Through much discussion, we have heard God speak through scripture. However, different parts of scripture give us different views that can then shape our overall understanding of the issue. We know that God does not contradict Himself, so we have concluded that the confusion is on our part, requiring more study.

These are the truths we have heard from the Bible:

- † Exodus 22:2-3 says “If a thief is caught breaking in at night and is struck a fatal blow, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, the defender is guilty of bloodshed.” So, killing someone in self-defense is biblical, but under certain conditions. Also, the question remains, does this Old Testament instruction still apply after Christ?
- † God says, in Exodus 20:13, “You shall not murder.” Heidelberg Catechism Answer 107 tells us what is meant by this command: God tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly to them, to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.
- † God distinguishes between intentionally taking a human life and the accidental loss of life, in Numbers 35:20: “If anyone with malice aforethought shoves another or throws something at them intentionally so that they die or if out of enmity one person hits another with their fist so that the other dies, that person is to be put to death; that person is a murderer.”
- † Jesus tells His disciples, in Luke 22:36, in preparation for their mission to the world: “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.”
- † However, in Matthew 26:52, Jesus stops Peter from defending Him, saying: “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

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- † Jesus says, in Matthew 5:39, “Do not resist an evil person.” He tells us to turn the other cheek, but is this limited to receiving an insult or does it apply to a threat to one’s life?
- † 1 Timothy 5:8 tells us to provide for our loved one: “If anyone does not provide for his relatives ....” This seems to include self-defense.
- † Jesus indicates that He has an army available to protect Him, not requiring human intervention. He says, in Matthew 26:52-54: Then Jesus said to [Peter], “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”
- † Jesus says, in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”
- † Romans 13:1-4 affirms that the government has the right to resist violence: “The one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

The conversation regarding guns and violence is important, but we must remember that many lives are lost every year for reasons not related to guns.

### Annual deaths in the U.S.:

600,000 abortions  
70,000 drug overdoses  
43,000 suicides  
13,000 gun-related

As followers of Jesus we must be concerned about the sanctity of human life in general, and address the leading causes of death in the US in which we do have clear biblical positions to align with. Christians should do all we can to combat evil, as the Lord hates the one who is a lover of violence (Psalm 11:5).

In summary, the Council recognizes that individuals can hold differing views on the issue of guns and violence while still maintaining the authority of scripture. We believe that each member of the council desires to honor God and obey what He has taught us from scripture.

While we may arrive at different conclusions, we all agree that the true solution to violence is not found in the restriction or proliferation of guns, but in hearts that are changed by Jesus. Through the ability Jesus gives to forgive offense, to resist the urge for revenge, and to strive for peaceful resolution and love, violence in this world, whether from guns or other means, will be minimized, as the kingdom of God expands.

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### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER ABOUT THE TOPIC OF GUNS AND VIOLENCE:

1. Should we focus more on changing hearts than on legislating morality?
2. Do we need laws to protect us while hearts are being changed?
3. Which most effectively protects human life, the proliferation or the restriction of guns?
4. How does the death and resurrection of Jesus make our view on gun control different from a non-believer's?
5. What role do I play in this issue? What is God calling me, personally, to do? What is He calling Peace Church to do?
6. Are we experiencing unity in spite of difference?