



"We are usually convinced more easily by reasons we have found ourselves than by those which have occurred to others."

—Blaise Pascal

21-Dec-12

A Christian's Information Filter

We live in the Information Age. News hits us from the four corners of the earth, making the journey in mere minutes. Images flash before us on the screens of televisions, computers, and phones. The Internet hums and thrums in and out of our lives many hours every day, bringing us data on a million subjects, major, minor, serious, absurd, useful, and useless. We have access to more timely information than we know what to do with.

It is becoming harder to remember what it was like before this incessant glut of information enveloped [the world](#). Children and even some young adults have lived their entire lives "plugged in" to the digital universe, facts and figures and fun at their fingertips at any time, day or night. To them, using all the new gadgets and gizmos is as natural as running and jumping. How many grandparents call their grandchildren to help them when the computer or DVR "acts up"? Today's technology is intuitive to them, almost organic and simple.

Even so, it was not very long ago when we were doing things with paper and pencil. Perhaps the big corporations and learning institutions had mainframe computers to crunch heavy data and store important information, but most of

us were still using rotary phones and real card catalogs. Many older folks have had a difficult time making the transition from analog to digital. Some refuse to conform at all, conceding only when they have to and only as much as they have to (some may have given up the corded phone but refuse to touch a cellphone). In any case, while the computing and communications industry giants urge us to purchase the newest and fastest technologies, not everyone is so eager to join the information revolution.

And it is no wonder. The level of information inundation is already higher than most people can handle. While the human brain is far superior to any computing device ever made or even imagined, because it is part of a conscious, critical, organic entity, it easily overloads. Unlike a computer, which uncomprehendingly stores all data as strings of ones and zeros, the human mind is aware to some extent of the value, ramifications, and usefulness of the information it receives. People make judgments—sometimes consciously, but probably more often unconsciously—about what goes into their minds, and this has an effect on them over time.

Speaking of good, helpful information—particularly, God's instruction—Solomon advises us about this in [Proverbs 4:20-23](#):

My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.

Other proverbs bring out a similar thought, along with its opposite:

- "The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked" ([Proverbs 10:11](#)).
- "The words of the wicked are, 'Lie in wait for blood,' but the mouth of the upright will deliver them" ([Proverbs 12:6](#)).
- "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" ([Proverbs 18:21](#)).

The principle that derives from such scriptures is that good words—good information, truth—have a beneficial effect, while bad words cause

problems. The Bible, then, supports the well-known catchphrase, "Garbage in, garbage out." We have to make sure that the information we allow into our minds is true and good, while filtering out and rejecting what is false. This has probably never been more critical for Christians to do than in this information-heavy age of the world.

One reason that this is so vital to do is because we are required to make moral and ethical choices on a daily basis, and we make such decisions based on the information we have at hand—or, more correctly, in our minds. If we make a decision—a judgment—based on faulty data, it is probable that our decision will itself be flawed. If we are constantly hearing from the world that $2 + 2 = 5$, and we have allowed that information to pass uncritically into our minds and thus into our daily life, then it will not be long before $2 \times 2 = 10$ and fifteen apples make a dozen.

Such a flawed judgment has happened in the recent mass murders in Newtown, Connecticut. A troubled young man, said to have been a social misfit and prone to rages, gunned down his mother with her own weapon and then proceeded to the local elementary school to kill six adults and twenty students. Hearing of this terrible and tragic event, the nation poured out its sympathy and its desire for justice. In the aftermath, the news has been full of debate about the Second Amendment to the Constitution and the need for stricter gun-control laws. Social media have been inundated by advocates on both sides of the issue, many of them stridently pushing their views on their friends.

It is clear that the American Constitution gives citizens the right to own and bear arms. The Second Amendment was specifically included in the Bill of Rights to allow citizens to fight against, and if successful, overthrow a tyrannical government. The Founders believed that an armed citizenry was the best deterrent against overreaching federal power. Of course, citizens could also own firearms for hunting, shooting, and collecting.

Into this fray have plunged a good many members of God's church, almost all of them on the side of gun and self-defense rights. Christians have the right and freedom to own guns, and many do, using them for hunting and shooting. There is no problem with that. However, some church members have no qualms about owning guns for self-defense, and it is at this point

that some serious moral questions arise. If a Christian has a weapon for self-defense, and he and/or his family were attacked in some way, would he use it and would he be justified in doing so? How would [God](#) judge his actions, whether he killed the attacker or not? Is killing in self-defense willful murder? Unpremeditated murder? Voluntary manslaughter? Involuntary manslaughter?

Perhaps to begin answering these questions for ourselves, we first need to ask, "Have we ever truly considered what God thinks on the matter, or have we just absorbed what the world says about it?" On questions like these, we need to filter out all of the world's chatter on the subject and find out what information God has provided to us in His Word that reveals His mind on it. If we fail to do this, can we be sure that we have reached a godly decision? As God says in [Isaiah 8:20](#), "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." There we will find true words to steer us right.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Sixth Commandment](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

An immediate penalty can more quickly be seen in the violation of the Sixth Commandment than for any other commandment. The startling annual statistics of suicide, murder, and abortion reported in the United States dwarf into insignificance the cumulative military deaths in the entire Iraq War. The prohibition against killing in Exodus 21 refers to premeditated murder. Cities of refuge were allowed for accidental killings, serving as jails or house arrest. False witnesses in a capital murder trial would forfeit their lives. Ancient Israel had a supreme court (in the office of the High Priest) to decide murder, injury, and damage cases, with the punishment matching the gravity of the damages. Jesus magnifies the Law in Matthew 5, moving beyond the behavior into the motivating thought behind the deed, warning that we do not retaliate in kind, arrogating God's prerogative for revenge to ourselves. In

this context, there can be no such thing as a "just" war. Consequently, the Christian is not permitted to engage in mass homicide on behalf of the state. We must remember that the Bible is not written for the world at large, but for God's called-out ones (John 6:44), the Israel of God, the Family of God, or a Holy Nation, equipped to understand the truths of scripture through the power of the Holy Spirit, opening the mind to divine knowledge, transforming the fleshly heart to a spiritual heart. Because our citizenship is in heaven, we are ambassadors forbidden to fight in the conflicts of the countries in which we have our embassies, taking our marching orders only from Jesus Christ.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Does Scripture Allow for Killing in Self-Defense?](#)

by David C. Grabbe

Many Christians believe that we are allowed to take another's life in defense of our own, but is this what the Bible teaches? David Grabbe shows that God's Word distinguishes only between accidental and premeditated killing, meaning self-defense is not a biblical justification for murder!

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