



disarming the Bible

Stopping the Weaponization of Scripture

Identifying and Responding to Weaponized Scripture: A Quick Guide

1. Signs of Weaponization

- **Selective Quoting** – A single verse is lifted out of context to justify harm (i.e. using Paul's letters without considering Jesus' teachings).
- **Silencing or Shaming** – Verses are used to shut down questions, dismiss pain, or enforce obedience.
- **Defending Power** – Scripture is cited to uphold the status quo, protect the powerful, or rationalize oppression.
- **Fear and Control** – Passages are wielded in ways that instill fear of punishment or eternal damnation rather than offering hope and transformation.
- **Exclusion** – Verses are interpreted in ways that exclude groups (women, LGBTQ+, immigrants, the poor) rather than extend God's love.
- **Absence of Jesus' Character** – If the interpretation contradicts the life, teachings, and spirit of Jesus (love of enemies, care for the least, liberation for the oppressed), it's likely being weaponized.

2. Responding to Weaponization

a. Ask Clarifying Questions

- “What do you mean when you say...?”
- “How does that reading line up with Jesus’ command to love God and neighbor?”
- “Can we look at the context of that passage together?”

b. Re-center on Jesus

- Return to the Gospels as the lens: “Does this use of scripture reflect Jesus’ compassion, justice, and self-giving love?”
- Remember Howard Thurman’s insight: the religion of Jesus speaks first to those with their backs against the wall.

c. Context Matters

- Find out the historical and cultural context of the verse.
- Note when a passage is descriptive (telling what was) vs. prescriptive (telling what should be).

d. Expose the Power Dynamics

- Ask: “Who benefits from this interpretation? Who is harmed by it?”
- Often weaponization serves those already in power. Naming that truth is powerful.

e. Respond with Grace and Firmness

- You don't have to mirror aggression. Ground your response in integrity, love, and truth.
- Sometimes silence or a gentle “I don't believe that reflects the heart of God” can disarm harmful misuse.
- Know when it is time to disengage.

3. Practical Examples

- **Weaponization:** “Slaves, obey your masters” (Eph. 6:5) used to defend slavery.
Response: “Yes, slavery was happening when this was written, but Paul was speaking about a very specific and temporary goal. The verse was later abused throughout history. The larger biblical witness is liberation from bondage, from Exodus to Galatians 3:28. Jesus begins his ministry proclaiming freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4).”
- **Weaponization:** “Wives, submit to your husbands” (Eph. 5:22) used to justify control.
Response: “That's part of a larger section about mutual submission (Eph. 5:21), and the model of love is Christ laying down his life. That's not about domination, but self-giving.”
- **Weaponization:** “The Bible says homosexuality is sin.”
Response: “The New Testament never uses a word that straightforwardly corresponds to the modern category ‘homosexuality.’ The words used point to those who sexually **exploit others in a power hierarchy**, not people in egalitarian, faithful relationships. Meanwhile, Jesus never condemns LGBTQ people but again and again centers love, inclusion, and mercy.”

This guide is produced by [Justice & Jubilee](#), a movement for collective liberation, rooted in progressive Christianity, and born in West Virginia. Our areas of focus are racial justice, queer justice, and resisting Christian Nationalism.