

In the Turner family we sometimes use the expression "bottom bag." It means "the worst" of something, that which is or should be neglected. The worthless items that show up in a garage sale, tacky gifts you receive on your 40th birthday, overripe and inedible produce from the grocery store -- those items are bottom bag. We coined the term when we were kids after Halloween one year. We used to work through our bags of candy from the top down. We'd eat the best stuff first; if it wasn't on top we'd fish it out. After a week or so, the candy we hadn't eaten yet we called "bottom bag."

A couple weeks ago the U.S. Senate served up a bottom bag vote. They defeated the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. For over 40 years, one of our foreign policy goals has been an end to the testing of nuclear weapons. If nations stop testing, those who don't have weapons yet won't be able to develop them, and those who do will be disinclined to use them. Our weapons are better than anybody else's, so if we could freeze development, we wouldn't lose any ground. 82% of Americans accept that reasoning and support the treaty. The senate sat on this treaty for two years. Then they suddenly called for a vote over the objection of 62 senators. After one day of hearings, very little debate, and no committee report for clarification, they defeated the treaty. It embarrassed our ally countries, like France, Great Britain, and Germany, who supported it; it gave China and Russia an excuse to reject it; and it practically permitted India and Pakistan to keep on testing and developing their weapons. It's probably the greatest foreign policy setback since the Senate rejected the League of Nations in spite of efforts by Woodrow Wilson and a certain senator from Missouri named James A. Reed.

In this stage of American history our country is committed to weapons. We love the use of force. We prefer tools of submission over tools of negotiation.

The first letter to the Thessalonians by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy takes a very different attitude with regard to force. The three of them carried a lot of clout. They could have entered Thessalonika, laid their credentials on the table, and with those weapons of authority, they could have demanded certain behaviors of those people. But they didn't. They write, "Though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ, we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children." They didn't take advantage of people's good will; "We worked night and day," they wrote, "so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." They pulled their own weight. They didn't have nuclear weapons, but they had weapons of authority, weapons they chose not to use. Instead they used self-sufficiency and charity.

Our country needs to make a stronger commitment to the nonproliferation of weapons, but it's not going to happen in the senate until it happens in our homes. What are the weapons we use in our homes? Sometimes we use the weapon of authority. Sometimes it's pride. Sometimes it's words which we aim and fire. Sometimes it's a hand or a fist. Sometimes we use silence as a weapon against people we love. Some homes have handguns. I don't expect the senate to get the

message until our homes get the message. What are our weapons and how willing are we to ban their testing?