

The Christian And Self-Defense

Introduction. The world is becoming increasingly dangerous. Tyrannical governments continue to amass power and control. People in America are raped, assaulted, kidnapped, and murdered. Places where people were once immune to the threat of physical harm are now unsafe. Random acts of violence are becoming more commonplace. Many of our larger cities and areas along our southern border are plagued with drug and gang-related violence. People now face heavily armed home invaders who have no respect for human life. Mass shootings occur at a steady pace. Some people become violent and abusive for as little reason as their favorite sports team losing a game. Social and political unrest often result in violent demonstrations.

For the Christian, there are spiritual, moral, and eternal considerations regarding the question of the use of physical or lethal force. His conscience is directed by the Scriptures, not by mere human reasoning. He knows that he will be judged by those Scriptures, so he wants to be sure that his actions are authorized by God (John 12:48).

The use of force against one's fellow man does not come naturally to the Christian. Christians are told to "live peaceably with all men" to the extent that such is possible (Romans 12:18). But what are we authorized to do in situations where peace is not possible? What are we to do if we or others are physically attacked?

I. Misconceptions About Protection

A. "I will just pray for safety".

1. Yes we should "pray," but some religious people believe that mere prayer alone can protect them from dangerous people. They have convinced themselves that God will miraculously intervene to protect them from dangerous people and circumstances, and that they have no personal responsibility in providing for their own protection or that of others.
2. This view is naive and reflects a misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of prayer. While we should pray for safety, we must also do what is necessary for our safety. We are instructed to pray for our daily food (Matthew 6:11), but if we refuse to work, we will not eat (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10). One can pray for safety all day long, but if he steps in front of a fast-moving car he will be injured or killed. Prayer operates in the realm of providence, and does not relieve us of our personal responsibility, nor will it eliminate the effects of "time and chance" (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

B. "I will talk the attacker down".

1. Some people hope to rely upon the power of the argument. They want to believe that all people can be ultimately talked out of their evil intentions. They assume that the "soft answer" of Proverbs 15:1 will always have the same dissuading influence on all people.
2. The Bible teaches that some people are beyond reason. They are like "unreasoning animals" (2 Peter 2:12). Their consciences are "seared" (1 Timothy 4:2). Their minds will not be changed by verbal appeals. They must be stopped or deterred by other means, often by physical force. While the Christian is to assume no evil of others (1 Corinthians 13:5), he is to also be cautious and discerning (Matthew 10:16).

- C. "I believe in turning the other cheek".
1. Many religious people cite the principle of Matthew 5:39 as a prohibition against all use of protective force. However, Jesus was condemning retaliation, not self-protection. The Jews were as guilty of ignoring the context of Exodus 21:24 as many people are today with Matthew 5:39.
 2. According to the convoluted application that some people make of Matthew 5:39, if a rapist broke into your house and raped your wife, you would be obligated to also offer him your daughter! If an attacker were to cut off your right arm with a machete, you should then extend your left arm for him to also cut off! This is not what Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:39. There is a difference between protecting oneself and seeking retaliation.
- D. "I let my conscience guide me".
1. Some people classify themselves as "conscientious objectors" with regard to the use of lethal or potentially lethal force. They object to the use of any force that might result in the death of another person. This applies to participation in law enforcement and military service, as well as a civilian defending himself or others from an attacker.
 2. Conversely, other people cite their conscience as their sole authority for their actions. They justify their use of deadly force by the fact that it does not violate their conscience. But, for the conscience to be an a safe guide it must be properly educated (cp. Acts 26:9-11; 8:1-3; 9:1; 1 Timothy 1:13). Paul did evil but his conscience approved his actions (Acts 23:1; 24:16). This means that Paul's conscience was not an adequate guide at that time in his life. There are necessary biblical principles involved that need to be learned.
- E. "The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not kill'".
1. Some people object to the use of force against others by citing Exodus 20:13: "Thou shalt not kill". It is often argued that this prohibition against killing is a prohibition against all types of killing, including defensive killing. This view is based on a misunderstanding of Exodus 20:13 and related passages (Deuteronomy 5:17; Matthew 5:21; 19:18; Romans 13:9).
 - a) The Hebrew verb "kill" used in Exodus 20:13 is one that suggests killing with deliberation and premeditation. "Murder" is the premeditated, malicious killing of innocent life.
 - b) Thus, only a certain type of killing is prohibited by Exodus 20:13. It does not address or condemn all killing.
 2. Proof of this is found in the immediate context of Exodus 20. Just one chapter earlier, God imposed the death penalty on those who touched Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:12). Just one chapter later, God imposed the death penalty on those who committed murder (Exodus 21:12; cp. Genesis 9:6). Many other capital offenses are listed in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:15-17; 22:18-19; 31:14; Leviticus 20:2, 10; 24:14; Deuteronomy 19:16-19; 22:21-25). If Exodus 20:13 forbids all killing, then what explanation can be given for the many other passages that require the killing of certain evildoers?
- F. "Killing an attacker removes his chance of being saved".
1. While it is true that death removes a sinner's chance of being saved, it is not true that it is the innocent defender's fault. The attacker who is killed in the

commission of his godless act is responsible for his lost spiritual condition (Ezekiel 18:20).

2. Those who make this argument fail to consider its implications with respect to God Himself. If innocent people are responsible for the souls of vicious criminals that they may kill in self defense, then God must be responsible for the souls of the hundreds of millions that He has killed in their punishment. If the home defender “takes the hope of heaven away” from the armed invader, then God “took the hope of heaven away” from Nadab, Abihu, Ananias, Sapphira, Herod and millions of other people. The argument is obviously ill-conceived and flawed. People are responsible for their own behavior.

II. The Principle Of Protection

- A. Ephesians 5:25-29 teaches that true love obligates a husband to “nourish and cherish” his wife. As a man naturally and instinctively protects his own body, he should naturally and instinctively protect his wife. This is not an option for the husband — it is a divine obligation.
- B. By divine design, humans and other creatures are equipped with protective features, abilities, and instincts. The immune system protects against disease and infection. Pain sensors alert us to destructive actions that may damage our bodies. We flinch when poked by sharp objects and when touching hot surfaces. We often jump back when we encounter snakes and dangerous animals. The fact that God designed us with various defensive reflexes and capabilities tells us that self-defense is natural and right.
- C. Furthermore, this protection principle extends beyond just that of self-protection, for animals and humans instinctively protect their young. In doing so, they protect those that are too small or too weak to protect themselves.

III. Protection And Use-Of-Force Scriptures

- A. While lessons from nature and design are interesting and instructive, the Christian is instructed to “do all by the authority of Christ” (Colossians 3:17).
- B. Since his conclusions regarding the use-of-force have the potential to affect his behavior towards his fellow man and his standing before God, the person of faith looks to the principles of Scripture for his guidance (Psalm 19:8; 119:128).
 1. Luke 4:29-30.
 - a) Several passages, including the one listed above, show that the Lord had to escape multiple dangers (John 7:30; 8:20, 59; 10:39).
 - b) While people differ over whether or not Jesus invoked supernatural powers in these escapes, the fact remains that Jesus did escape and hide in order to save Himself from injury or death. He took actions to protect Himself. Of course, when the right “hour” did eventually come, Jesus voluntarily laid down His life on the cross (John 10:18; 12:27).
 2. John 18:36.
 - a) Responding to Pilate’s question about whether or not He was the king of the Jews, Jesus did not oppose “fighting” when it was physically necessary. The only reason that His servants did not fight for Him was

- because His kingdom was spiritual. This is why Jesus earlier rebuked Peter for his violent reaction to Malchus (John 18:11).
- b) Matthew 26:53-54 adds the fact that Jesus could have called legions of angels to protect Him had He chosen to physically defend Himself. Jesus did not wish to be physically protected from those who tortured and crucified Him, for such was His purpose for coming to the earth.
3. Matthew 24:16.
 - a) Jesus told those of Judea to “flee into the mountains” when they saw “Jerusalem surrounded by enemies” (Luke 21:20).
 - b) Those who heeded Jesus’ warnings and watched for the signs preceding Rome’s invasion of Jerusalem could save their lives by flight. Jesus did not recommend fight, for Jerusalem’s destruction was ordained by God.
 4. Luke 11:21-22.
 - a) In correcting a false allegation about casting out devils, Jesus cited the armed man as an illustration of strength and protection. By casting out devils Jesus proved Himself to be stronger than the devil.
 - b) The illustration contains 3 pertinent truths:
 - (1) A person is safe from attack when he is sufficiently “armed” and strong enough to defend himself from his attacker.
 - (2) Force must be matched with force. An unarmed or inadequately armed homeowner/defender is more vulnerable to an intruder/attacker than one who is “fully armed.” Liberal and socialist-minded bureaucrats constantly clamor for gun control, including bans on certain styles of weapons and limits on magazine capacity. The problem is that criminals, by definition, do not respect such laws. Government gun laws always make the criminal “stronger” than the law-abiding citizen.
 - (3) While this passage does teach the principle of self-protection, it also contains a warning against “trusting” in one’s own might (1 Timothy 6:17). What we use to protect ourselves comes from God. This includes our senses, minds, bodies, and the defensive tools that can be manufactured from what God has provided in creation.
 5. Matthew 24:43.
 - a) Jesus did not use ungodly or immoral illustrations. He used realistic cases to which people could relate.
 - b) Jesus here acknowledges the right of a homeowner to protect himself and his property.
 6. Acts 9, 23, 25.
 - a) On various occasions, Paul accepted protective assistance from others. The disciples in Damascus saved Paul from Jewish plotters (Acts 9:25). When he was later endangered by the Jews, the Romans took Paul into protective custody. While Paul was in Jerusalem, over 40 Jewish assassins formed a conspiracy to kill him (Acts 23:12-13). When his nephew uncovered the assassins’ plot, Paul had him inform the tribune, who then assembled a security team to deliver him safely to Felix in Caesarea (Acts 23:23). From the description of the military unit, and from the seriousness of the threat, it is obvious that the use of deadly force was

authorized. If it were wrong for deadly force to be used in the defense of others, Paul would have refused the aid of the Roman escort. After a failed appeal before Festus, Paul made legal appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11). Paul later explained that his reason for appealing to Caesar was that the Jews of Jerusalem had baselessly objected to his release. His appeal to Caesar was therefore a defensive measure.

- b) While these passages do not show Paul personally using or preparing to use physical or deadly force, they do show him accepting the benefits of its potential use by others. This constitutes tacit approval by the apostle of the use of protective force. It serves as an approved example for us today.
7. Exodus 22:2-3.
- a) This passage authorized the use of deadly force by a homeowner against a nighttime home invader. A distinction was made between a nighttime invasion and an ordinary theft because darkness adds a degree of difficulty. In the dark a homeowner cannot quickly know important details, like whether or not the invader is armed. God's law contained a provision for the extenuating circumstance of nighttime home invasion.
 - b) We are not under the Law of Moses today (Ephesians 2:14; Hebrews 7:12). But as 1 Corinthians 14:34 and Hebrews 12:5 invokes the Old Law regarding the role of women in public worship and the disciplining of children, the defense principles contained in Exodus 22 can be used in connection with New Testament passages.
8. Luke 22:36-38.
- a) Jesus told His disciples to purchase swords. He explained that the hour of His death had come, and that He was obliged to fulfill Scripture through His death (Matthew 26:54).
 - b) The fact that Jesus did not want to be protected by Peter on a later occasion (Matthew 26:51-52; Luke 22:50-51) does not prove that there were no occasions on which Peter should protect himself or others.
 - c) Jesus wanted the disciples to know that they would face dangers against which they would need to protect themselves, and that they were authorized to use deadly force when necessary.
9. 1 Corinthians 15:32.
- a) Paul "fought with beasts" at Ephesus. Whether the word "beasts" is used literally of animals, or figuratively of men who behaved as animals, the fact remains that Paul "fought" with them.
 - b) He did not surrender his life to the animals. He was not passive. He took whatever action necessary to protect his life.
10. 1 Timothy 5:8.
- a) This is a protection passage. One protects the members of his family from starvation by feeding them. He protects them from cold and heat by clothing and sheltering them. He protects them from sickness, disease, and injury by providing medical care for them. He protects them from vicious animals and people by hiding or fleeing from them, or by fighting and possibly killing them.

- b) Someone who refuses this responsibility has “denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” An “infidel” is someone who has no faith!
11. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.
- a) Paul tells us that our bodies and spirits belong to God and that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.
 - b) God created the human body as well as the human spirit. The body is the instrument through which the Spirit functions in service to God (Romans 6:13). Its purpose and value should not be underestimated. Our bodies are worthy of our care and protection. We should not unnecessarily abuse our bodies, nor should we allow the purposeless destruction of the body by others. Some false religious groups find some “spiritual” value or honor in the neglect and even mutilation of the human body (Colossians 2:23).

Conclusion. There is no biblical or logical reason why innocent people should be abused and victimized by unfeeling, cruel, and shameless people. When possible, we may be able to flee and hide from dangerous people. However, there are times and circumstances when such is not possible. The lives of children or other defenseless people may be at risk. There may be no time to wait for the police. At such times we must do as Paul did — we must fight. We can and should use whatever force is necessary to protect innocent life.

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