

A photograph of a person's torso and arm, wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans. The person is holding a red, textured Bible in their right hand. The Bible cover has the words 'HOLY BIBLE' printed in white, stacked vertically. The background is plain white.

The Christian and
SELF-DEFENSE

R. Herbert

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ISBN 979-8-88526-701-4

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INTRODUCTION

Is it wrong to resort to force in the defense of oneself or others? In this world of disappearing values and growing violence, the morality of self-defense becomes an increasingly important question that every Christian should address and settle in his or her mind. Children on unsupervised school playgrounds, young adults in deserted parking facilities, elderly people, and those weakened by illness or disability are just a few of the groups of people who are regularly faced with danger in our age and for whom the question of self-defense may become both real and imminent at any time.

This book does not address or give advice on the legal aspects of self-defense which may vary from area to area, but focuses on the morality or immorality of the use of force in response to those intent on inflicting bodily harm on others. For Christians the question is not a simple one, as the Bible has no “You shall” or “You shall not” command regarding the matter of self-defense. As a result, Christians have various ideas in this regard – ranging from the belief that self-defense is always right to the equally firmly-held idea that self-defense is always wrong. However, the Bible does not leave us in ignorance regarding the underlying morality of self-protection. If we examine the Scriptures carefully, it is possible to find a clear answer to the question of whether God condones or condemns the use of physical force to defend ourselves.

This book looks first at the biblical verses that are often used by those who claim that defending oneself or others from harm is unscriptural or contrary to the teachings of Jesus himself. It then looks at those scriptures which Christian advocates of self-defense feel both allow and encourage self-defense. Finally, *The Christian and Self-Defense* looks at the issue of avoiding the need for self-defense where possible and examines practical options that can help to keep you and your loved ones safe.

1. DOES THE BIBLE FORBID SELF-DEFENSE?

In this chapter we will look at frequently quoted biblical verses that might seem to condemn the use of physical force in a self-defense situation.

The Old Testament

The sad narrative of human aggression and violence begins in the first chapters of the Bible's first book – Genesis. After the story of the slaying of Abel by his brother Cain (Genesis 4:1-15), Genesis traces increasing human violence, and by the time we reach Exodus and later books of the Old Testament we find that numerous laws were given regarding violence and homicide.

Perhaps the Old Testament law most frequently quoted as evidence that use of force for self-defense is wrong is the sixth of the ten commandments – the command often translated “You shall not kill” (Exodus 20:13). Although this verse does not apply to most self-defense situations because most do not involve the death of an assailant, if we look at the verse carefully we find that even in cases where a lethal outcome does occur, the command “You shall not kill” rarely applies to defensive encounters. This is because the Bible recognizes that while all murder is killing, not all killing is murder.

The Hebrew word *tirtzach* that is translated “kill” in older English Bibles such as the King James Version is primarily used of murder in the Old Testament and not what is legally termed “justifiable homicide.” That is why most English translations made nowadays translate Exodus 20:13 as “You shall not murder.”

To put it another way, the Hebrew word used in the sixth commandment usually means “the intentional, malicious killing of another person” and does not apply to unintentional and non-malicious situations for which a different word would usually have been used. The same biblical book that says “You shall not kill” also

calls for the death penalty for certain crimes. Consider an example of this in the book of Exodus: “Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death” (Exodus 21:12), so some killing is actually commanded. Importantly, this same verse continues: “However, if it is not done intentionally ... they are to flee to a place I will designate” (Exodus 21:13). The innocence of this kind of accidental killing – which was neither premeditated nor malicious – is further elaborated in the book of Numbers:

But if without enmity someone suddenly pushes another or throws something at them unintentionally or, without seeing them, drops on them a stone heavy enough to kill them, and they die, then since that other person was not an enemy and no harm was intended, the ... assembly must protect the one accused of murder. (Numbers 35:22-25)

But such a ruling of innocent killing (what we would today call manslaughter) was not only applied in the case of accidental deaths. The same principle applied in defensive situations:

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. (Exodus 22: 2-3)

Here, the Bible makes it clear that in a situation where an individual kills an intruder at night where the life of the individual is clearly threatened, lethal retaliation is allowable, whereas in a daytime situation where the individual is able to more easily evade an intruder or to get help from others, it may not be.

There is actually no verse in the Old Testament that forbids the use of force in self-defense. This has been clearly understood by Jewish and Christian scholars and commentators for centuries. It is in the New Testament that relevant statements regarding the use or non-use of force are to be found.

The New Testament

There is no clear verse in the New Testament that forbids or discourages the use of weapons, and it is important to realize that in situations where it would have been natural to make such a statement, if one were to be made, we do not find one. For example, when soldiers asked John the Baptist what they should do in order to live righteously, he told them “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay” (Luke 3:14), but he said nothing about laying down or refusing to use their weapons, though this would have been the perfect opportunity to do so.

As a result of this lack of any direct prohibition of weapons or self-defense, some Christians turn to verses that might possibly show disapproval of force for self-defense, though most of these really do not. The New Testament verse most frequently cited as showing biblical condemnation of defensive force is that which records the words of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” (Matthew 5:38–39)

Although these words of Christ are frequently cited as being an example of Christian pacifism, the verse actually has nothing to do with self-defense. It has to do with the way we react to insults rather than physical harm. The context throughout this whole section of the Sermon on the Mount is a legal one, with courts, suing, judges, prison, certificates of divorce and other legal terms being mentioned over a dozen times in the surrounding verses. There is no direct context or reference to conflict, self-defense, or pacifism. Most of the issues Jesus discusses in these verses are regarding being restrained when it comes to legal retribution for earlier events.

Once we realize this legal context, Jesus’ command to “turn the other cheek” is more understandable. Jesus specifically mentions

being slapped on the right cheek, meaning that this would normally be a backhand slap from a right-handed person. The Jewish Rabbinic writings show that this kind of slap was a great insult in the world of ancient Palestine, and Jesus uses it not as an example of being attacked (which is rarely done by means of backhanded slaps), but as an example of an insult (Matthew 5:11) that could be later countered in court, just as his next example of someone suing for a person's garment might also be legally countered – and in both cases he urges us to exercise restraint. But the command regarding turning the other cheek is clearly one regarding legal rather than confrontational issues.

The second New Testament statement frequently cited as being against self-defense is that in which Jesus, when he was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, commanded Peter to put away his sword:

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear ... Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:10–11)

Once again, however, there is nothing relevant to self-defense in these verses. This was a unique situation in which Jesus willingly rejected any kind of self-defense in order to be able to fulfill God's will that he sacrifice himself for all humanity. Notice also that Jesus did not tell Peter to throw away or give away his sword – simply to put it away.

In the parallel account of this event found in the Gospel of Matthew we are given some further details:

"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:52–53)

In Matthew's account we see that Jesus quoted a common saying "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (seen also in Revelation 13:10) to remind Peter that resorting to physical violence might well have undesired consequences – especially when done against legally constituted authority. But to say this teaches against self-defense in all situations is disproved by the fact that Jesus goes on to say that God would give him the means of self-defense if it were his will to defend himself rather than to offer himself sacrificially at that point.

There are also some statements of the apostle Paul that are commonly quoted regarding self-defense. The first of these is found in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." This is clearly the ideal and desired situation, but the fact that Paul says, "If it is possible" and "as far as it depends on you" shows that in some cases it is not possible to live peaceably with everyone because this may be beyond our control.

Another often quoted verse from the writings of Paul is where the apostle says that God's servants must not be violent, but gentle (1 Timothy 3:3). This is, again, the ideal behavior for everyone, but it is also not relevant to a self-defense situation. Paul's instruction is that the minister should be "not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome," showing that the violence of which he speaks is of an aggressive and extreme nature related to drunkenness and arguments. In fact, many of the better modern English Bible versions translate this statement as "not a bully but gentle" (CSB, NASB, etc.).

An Important Exception

Although none of these verses that we have considered forbids self-defense in any way, there is one situation where the New Testament does make it clear that the use of force to protect ourselves should not be undertaken. This is in the matter of religious persecution – when we are persecuted for our faith. That is not to say that the New Testament forbids our defending ourselves on an individual basis if we are attacked simply by someone who hates our faith, but

that forceful resistance to legally constituted authority is wrong even when that authority persecutes us.

The book of Revelation speaks of such situations when it describes those who were martyred for their faith because “they did not love their life even when faced with death” (Revelation 12:11 NASB). The apostle James also speaks of this kind of situation involving those holding – and sometimes misusing – constituted power: “You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous, who does not resist you” (James 5:6 CSB).

Thankfully, this type of persecution is relatively rare in most cultures. Nevertheless, when it does occur, Christians are instructed to submit and not to fight established authority, as Paul explains:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1–2)

But this does not mean that Christians cannot or should not attempt to avoid situations where they are officially persecuted for their faith. In such cases Jesus himself advised that Christians flee: “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another” (Matthew 10:23). That is what Jesus’ parents were divinely instructed to do at the beginning of his life (Matthew 2:13); it is what Jesus himself did during his ministry (John 10:39; etc.); and it is what we find the early Christians did also – just as they had been commanded (Acts 8:1; 11:19; etc.).

The key distinction to remember in such cases is that while the Bible does not ever condemn defending ourselves from illegal aggression, it does uphold the authority of constituted power and shows that in cases of official persecution we should flee, and that if we do not, we may have to suffer for our faith.

Yet it is clear that this is the only exception to what the Bible teaches generally, and the only circumstance in which we are actually commanded not to resist aggression. In the next chapter we will look at the many scriptures that do, in fact, encourage self-defense in all other situations.

2. DOES THE BIBLE ENCOURAGE SELF-DEFENSE?

In the previous chapter we saw that, contrary to what many people believe, there are no verses in the Bible – either in the Old or New Testaments – that forbid self-defense or the defense of others from harm. In this chapter we turn to scriptures that show that the lawful defense of oneself and others is not only biblically acceptable, but also in many cases actually encouraged.

The Old Testament

Beginning quite early in the Old Testament we find verses that clearly show the moral use of force against aggressors. In the story of Noah, at the conclusion of the flood narrative, God decreed “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind” (Genesis 9:6). This verse has obvious relevance to the question of self-defense as an acceptable manner of stopping an evil that God condemned. We find a clear example of this in the story of Abraham.

In Genesis 14 we are told that the cities of the Dead Sea Valley had been conquered by the kings of Mesopotamia (“Shinar”). But while Abram (before his name was changed to Abraham) was living in the area of nearby Hebron, those cities rebelled against the foreign oppression. The Amorite Mesopotamian king then assembled a large army including contingents from a number of his allies and this massive force overwhelmed the Dead Sea cities, seizing their goods and taking many of their inhabitants as slaves. In doing this they also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his family, since Lot was living in that area (Genesis 14:12). But Abram was informed of what had happened and took decisive action:

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and

went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack [the foreign armies] and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. (Genesis 14:14-16)

The account shows that righteous Abram had over three hundred “trained men,” meaning that they were not simply shepherds and other workmen hastily handed a sword or other weapon. The Hebrew word *hānīk* means an “armed servant” and was used of men whose primary function was to provide armed protection. These men were essentially a small private security force in full-time service to Abram. The men were obviously well-trained as well as well-armed, as the relatively small group defeated the much larger enemy army.

Abram and his men also gladly gave credit to God for their victory against the vastly superior force (Genesis 14:20), but we should not forget the part these men played in the conflict and how God was able to work through their actions to save the lives of those who were the victims of blatant aggression.

As we proceed through the Old Testament, we find not only examples such as this, but also laws specifically commanding the defense of those who are threatened. Deuteronomy 22:23–27 makes it clear that it is the responsibility of others to come to the aid of a woman who is being assaulted, and in the book of Psalms this principle is spelled out for us: “Rescue the weak and needy; save them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:4 BSB).

The principle is not simply one of protecting others, but also applies to protecting oneself. In the book of Esther, for example, we find that the Persian king whose empire contained many cities with Jewish inhabitants wrote official letters allowing them to defend themselves:

The king’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and

annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies. (Esther 8:11)

Although this was a human king legislating the right of his subjects to self-defense, the Bible gives no indication that such defense would be wrong. Another clear example of armed self-defense is found in the book of Nehemiah. When the Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon attempted to rebuild the defensive walls around the city of Jerusalem, their enemies began to threaten them and to attempt to stop the rebuilding. In this situation Nehemiah had the workmen arm themselves for their own self-defense:

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. (Nehemiah 4:16–18)

Examples such as these show the clear Old Testament precedent of the morality and, in some cases, the necessity both to possess and to use defensive weapons.

The New Testament

But if armed self-defense was both allowed and even encouraged in many places in the Old Testament, what about the New Testament? Was the principle of self-protection no longer supported in the teachings of Jesus and his apostles?

The answer is surprising to many people, but it is a clear one. Jesus frequently spoke of situations where people might need to defend themselves or their property. He seems to have alluded to this need, for example, when he said, “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe” (Luke

11:21). Here, a “strong man” does not necessarily imply someone who is physically strong, but could include anyone who is empowered to protect themselves.

But if such examples seem in any way inconclusive, Jesus left no doubt regarding the need for physical defense that his followers might sometimes have. While he was physically with them, Jesus clearly was able to protect his disciples, but as the time came near that he would leave them, he instructed his followers to take precautions for their own physical needs and protection: “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” (Luke 22:36).

There is no doubt what Christ meant by a “sword.” It was certainly not some kind of small utility knife for food preparation. The Greek word *machaira* that Luke records was primarily a short sword or other blade used as a lethal weapon for offensive or defensive purposes (as we see elsewhere in Luke’s writings – for example, Luke 21:24; Acts 12:2; 16:27 – and at other points in the New Testament).

But why did Jesus only instruct his disciples to utilize such a weapon near the end of his ministry? Up to that point, Christ had divinely provided his disciples’ protection and support, but now he encouraged them to use physical means to provide for physical needs where possible – especially as he knew that his disciples would be going out into a world where physical protection might well be needed.

The roads of the Roman Empire on which the disciples would have to travel often ran through dangerous areas – deserted places and places frequented by bandits and others who might attempt to rob or kill travelers. As the Australian Anglican priest and Bible scholar John Nolland has written, “The sword is thought of as part of the equipment required for self-sufficiency of any traveler in the Roman world” (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Volume 35c: Luke 18:35–24:53). The importance of such a weapon for defensive purposes is shown in the fact that Jesus even advised his disciples who did not have a sword to sell their cloak in order to buy one. The cloak was the outer garment in which travelers slept at night,

and being without one would not be a comfortable situation – yet in his end of ministry instructions Jesus advised it, nonetheless.

It is also at the end of Jesus' physical life that we find other striking examples of Jesus' attitude toward self-defense. As we saw in the previous chapter, it is ironic that the New Testament verse so often quoted against self-defensive use of force – that of Jesus commanding Peter to put away his sword (Matthew 26:52) – is one in which Jesus did not say to throw away the sword or otherwise dispose of it, but only to put it away. Perhaps his clearest words showing the morality of self-defense were made at that same time: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). Jesus knew that to use force to act in his own defense would not be wrong, but that it was simply not appropriate at that time given his sacrificial mission.

We see the same natural acceptance of the principle of self-defense in the writings of the apostle Paul. When Paul's physical well-being was threatened by a beating from Roman soldiers in Jerusalem, he immediately used his Roman citizenship to protect himself (Acts 22:25) and although this is not an example of a use of force scenario, it is nevertheless an indication of Paul's willingness to defend himself by whatever means were available to him. Paul stressed this same principle later when he said “If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me” (Acts 25:11 NLT).

After his arrest, Paul profited from the protection afforded him by armed Roman soldiers, both in Jerusalem and on his way to Rome (Acts 23:16–21), and we find no hint in his recorded statements that he did not gladly accept this physical protection of arms. Finally, in Paul's own writings, we should remember that given the apostle's emphasis on the need for the spiritual armor of God (Ephesians 6:10–17), it is only reasonable to believe that Paul saw physical armor and armaments in the same light – as being instruments of protection against physical threats.

3. REMAINING QUESTIONS

In the previous chapters we have seen that the Bible does not forbid self-defense under most circumstances and that there are a number of scriptures showing that the use of force in those defensive situations is both moral and acceptable. Nevertheless, a few final questions may still remain in the minds of some Christians regarding the morality of self-defense, and we look at the most common ones here.

1. Didn't Jesus rebuke the disciples for wanting to bring physical harm on those who opposed them (Luke 9:54)?

In this instance, some of Jesus' disciples were feeling angry and vengeful when a Samaritan village refused to help Jesus and his followers. Going to Christ, the disciples said "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" This is an important verse, but it has nothing to do with self-defense. The unfriendly Samaritans were not attacking Jesus and his followers; they simply refused to provide food and shelter for them. Anger and revenge are never reasons for the rightful use of force, and Jesus quickly rebuked his disciples for this approach.

2. Shouldn't we just call for help if we are attacked?

Calling for help is obviously not always an option that people have. The modern world (especially in most urban areas) is nothing like the small closely-knit communities of ancient Israel in which people were expected to call out for help if they needed it (Deuteronomy 22:27). Sadly, calls for help from aggression today are often ignored by people who are either too selfish or too afraid to get involved in difficult situations. In many jurisdictions of the United States, for example, it can be half an hour or longer before police can reach an area when they are called. By that time, it is often too late for them to help. In any case, self-defense is only needed when calls for help cannot solve the problem or protect from injury or death.

3. Doesn't the idea of forceful self-defense contradict Christ's command to love our enemies?

The simple answer is that the two issues do not affect each other. Parents still love their children even though they may have to correct them, and God loves us even when he may have to correct us (Hebrews 12:6–7). Loving our enemies need not stop us protecting ourselves from their aggression. There is an interesting historical explanation of this principle in the story of the theologian and missionary known as “St. Cyril of the Slavs” (AD 826–869). Cyril was asked “How can Christians fight and at the same time keep Christ's commandment to pray to God for their enemies?” Cyril replied:

Christ ... commands us to pray to God for those who persecute us and even do good to them, but He also said to us, ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’ (John 15:13). That is why we bear the insults that our enemies cast at us individually and why we pray to God for them. However, as a society, we defend one another (excerpted from *The Prologue from Ohrid* compiled by Bishop Nicholas Velimirovic, 1880–1956).

4. Isn't self-defense based on the idea of “an eye for an eye” that Jesus discredited?

Not at all. Jesus' rejection of the legal principle of *lex talionis* – “an eye for an eye” – has to do with retribution and revenge for harm done in the past. Jesus clearly showed that we should not seek revenge – as we also saw in the teaching of the apostle Paul (Romans 12:17–21), but that has nothing to do with trying to stop those who are inflicting harm on others at the time it is occurring.

5. If self-defense is biblically permissible, why does the New Testament not show the early Christians defending themselves physically?

Not all self-defense involves the physical use of force. The New Testament does show that early Christians, as a group, utilized various forms of self-protection such as fleeing aggression whenever possible. But the New Testament records overall currents

in the affairs of the early church, and in most cases it does not concern itself with individual accounts of physical threats or how they were handled. The fact that cases of self-defense are not mentioned does not mean they did not occur – just that they were not central enough to the story to be recorded. In fact, given the large number of Christians in the early church, it is unlikely that none of them were ever involved in instances requiring self-defense, but the fact that nothing is mentioned of this shows just as well that such situations were not regarded as wrong.

6. Doesn't the Government provide for our defense by means of the army and the police?

Romans 13:1–7 shows that a nation's government has the power to use physical force (“the sword”) to protect as well as to punish its citizens. But this does not discount personal self-defense. If a Christian sees no moral problem with a nation's military and police defending its citizens from physical attack, then there would seem to be no reason why it would be immoral for individual citizens to do the same. Unfortunately, in reality, in most situations in almost any nation in the world, the police cannot be present everywhere to stop assault and aggression when it occurs – they can usually only try to do what they can to discourage crime and apprehend the perpetrator after the problem has occurred. That is why the scriptures showing individual exercise of self-defense that we saw in Chapter 2 of this book are so important as they provide biblical evidence for the need for personal protection.

7. Isn't the solution to violence just peace?

This is a nice thought, but an unrealistic one. In the real world, nonresistance to aggression, like lack of punishment, invariably creates greater scope for an evildoer to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11; etc.). Just as the idea of peace – no matter how attractive it may be – does not stop nations attacking and invading other nations, so the concept of peace does not stop the aggression of individuals who reject and even despise peace. Just as it is necessary at times for nations to use force (as against the Nazi-perpetrated evils such as the Holocaust), so force is sometimes necessary to stop violence such as rape, injury, or worse, at the personal level.

8. Isn't preparing for self-defense – obtaining weapons or training – a lack of faith in God's power to protect us?

If this were the case, Jesus would not have instructed his followers to obtain a sword for possible self-defense (Luke 22:36). In Chapter 2 we read how Nehemiah 4 records the defensive preparations and precautions the Jews took when rebuilding Jerusalem while in physical danger of enemies who might attack them: “we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night” (Nehemiah 4:9 ESV). This does not show lack of faith on the part of Nehemiah and the Jews – in fact, just a little later Nehemiah recorded the command “Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!” (Nehemiah 4:20).

The warrior David exhibited the same attitude “I put no trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies” (Psalm 44:6–7). David had weapons and trained with them, but he trusted God for the outcome, just as he did when he defeated Goliath (1 Samuel 17:45–47). The larger answer to this question is that God always encourages us to do what we can for ourselves, and faith comes into play in trusting that he will help us with those things we cannot do.

A God-given Option

Hopefully, the previous pages have demonstrated that there is no real reason why the Christian need reject the idea of self-defense as both a rational and a righteous response to much of the evil that is in the world. But that does not mean that the use of force in self-defense is not without very serious moral responsibilities, and we will look at these in the following chapters of this book.

4. AVOIDING THE NEED FOR SELF-DEFENSE

Even though the Bible does not condemn self-defense and allows it under most circumstances, that does not mean self-defense is always moral and right. In this and the following chapters we will look at situations where the use of force in self-defense could still be immoral and wrong – and how we can make sure that we are staying within the bounds of what is right in protecting ourselves and others.

Essentially, the morality of use of force depends on three things and we will look at each in turn. In this chapter we look at the most primary aspect of the morality of avoidance – simply avoiding getting into a situation where the use of force might be needed. This is basic because if we engage in the use of force when it could have been avoided, we have clearly broken the law of loving our neighbor, and in most cases this will be a legally punishable situation as well.

Jesus Walked Away

Avoiding the need for self-defense is not always possible, of course, but in a great majority of cases we can avoid dangerous or potentially dangerous situations by staying away from them. In the Bible we read of Jesus avoiding areas where he might be threatened and although his situation was different from ours in many ways, it is no different in this aspect. For example, John’s Gospel tells us that over a period of time “Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him” (John 7:1 ESV). When Jesus did feel it was necessary to go into the potentially dangerous area, we are told that he went “not publicly, but in secret” (John 7:10).

It is important to understand that the avoidance of the need for self-defense is not just about avoiding potentially dangerous areas, however. It is also about avoiding potentially dangerous people and situations. We see this clearly in the life of Jesus who often slipped away when it became obvious that emotions were beginning to escalate, or people were beginning to show other problematic signs.

Consider the time Jesus slipped away from the people of his hometown when they became upset at what he said in their synagogue (Luke 4:28–

30), or the time individuals became angry at what he said in the temple at Jerusalem and “they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds” (John 8:59). We see multiple situations like these – where Jesus avoided conflict by simply leaving those who were becoming angry or upset.

As writer Gary Thomas demonstrates in his book *When to Walk Away* (Zondervan, 2019), Jesus frequently walked away from people when he realized that staying would lead to conflict. Thomas’ book includes an Appendix listing over forty instances in which the Gospels show that Jesus employed this principle in one way or another.

We see the same principle of avoidance being utilized by the apostle Paul. The book of Acts tells us that when the Jewish leaders in Damascus conspired against him, “Day and night they watched the city gates in order to kill him. One night, however, his disciples took him and lowered him in a basket through a window in the wall” (Acts 9:23–25 BSB).

Just as Jesus and Paul avoided going into or staying in certain areas that could have proved dangerous, so we can often avoid the need for self-defense through simple evasive action – shopping in a different part of town, choosing a different parking area, not going into deserted or potentially dangerous areas late at night, and in many similar ways. By simply modifying our lifestyle patterns, we can often avoid the need to protect ourselves. Even those who are trained and licensed to carry defensive weapons have a very difficult time justifying using them if they do not take normal precautions by avoiding areas or situations where there might likely be a problem.

This is a vital point to understand. Even when it is morally acceptable to protect ourselves and we have the legal right to do so, getting into a situation that could have been avoided is frequently both morally and legally wrong.

The Issue of Escalation

Even when we do our best to avoid potentially dangerous areas and people, we may still find ourselves in an unexpectedly contentious situation that could lead to our well-being or even our lives being threatened. That is why we should never forget a final and vital aspect of avoidance – avoiding situational escalation.

For example, we might be going through our day with no expectation of trouble at all – simply trying to get home on a cold snowy evening. But

if we suddenly lose control of the vehicle we are driving due to ice on the road and we run into someone else's car, our situation could suddenly change from being peaceful to being anything but that. In the age in which we live people are increasingly without self-control, and we see examples of "road rage" over even the slightest things. Dealing with an enraged driver who feels that they need to somehow get even for an accidental situation can become an almost instant matter of self-defense if we are not careful.

That is where the avoidance of escalation comes in. As Christians we always need to strive for humility and gentleness in our interactions with others, but if we suddenly find ourselves the object of enraged verbal abuse we need to be especially careful in how we respond. This principle is found throughout the Bible, but nowhere more than in the book of Proverbs. The proverb that tells us "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him" (Proverbs 26:4) applies directly to situations where we must not return angry speech with more angry speech. The proverb that says "A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath" (Proverbs 15:1 CSB) applies equally. In most courts of law, having refused to retaliate in kind as long as possible when we are threatened is a potent defense, and there is no doubt that this is also the morally preferable approach.

In the legal aftermath of many self-defense situations, even those who defended themselves against unprovoked and unwarranted aggression may find themselves in serious trouble if they escalated the situation in any way. This applies not only to verbal escalation, but also to situations where someone responds to aggression with a much higher level of force – as when a person unnecessarily defends themselves with a firearm, for example, when they are subjected only to verbal or other lesser threats.

Refusing to escalate a situation is one of the most important things we can do if we find ourselves in circumstances where conflict appears to be likely or unavoidable.

Avoidance Is Always the Best Defense

The principle of avoidance is more than simply reacting to situations that arise in our individual circumstances, however. It applies just as much in group settings. A case in point – and one of particular importance to many Christians – is that of whether guards should be employed to help protect worshipers in church meetings. Sadly, instances of attacks on

Christians gathered in churches are increasingly common – not only in cultures where believers are threatened by militant persecution, but even in relatively “safe” areas of the world. For example, in the United States violence against churches has greatly increased in recent decades. Armed attackers have increasingly targeted Christian churches due to hatred of the Christian faith, especially because churches are often seen as “easy targets.” Precisely because of this perception, many of the tragedies that have occurred could have been prevented or minimized by properly trained and equipped individuals.

Many people recoil at the idea of having any kind of guards – especially armed guards – in or around churches. But as Ed Stetzer, Billy Graham Distinguished Professor of Church, Mission, and Evangelism at Wheaton College in the United States, has recently written, in the modern world of terrorism, hatred of Christians, and the increasing mental instability of many, “the time is past for naivety about the need for security... in churches” (“How Christians can respond to this latest church shooting,” CNN.com, November 6, 2017).

Stetzer points out the urgent need for churches everywhere to develop strong relationships with law enforcement in their communities, to get guidance and help where appropriate from professional security services, to carefully train church staff and volunteers – especially greeters who may be the first to see trouble coming – and to provide wherever possible “visible deterrence” to discourage attacks. There is no lack of faith involved in taking such an approach, and it is ultimately yet another example of the avoidance that should be primary in all moral self-defense.

Once we have done everything we can to avoid the need for engaging in self-defense, there are still other things we can do to ensure the morality of its use. In the next chapter we will look at the second of these principles.

5. BALANCED SELF-DEFENSE

In the previous chapter we mentioned the importance of not escalating situations that might lead to defensive action becoming necessary. This basic principle of non-escalation also applies in situations where self-protection does become needed. If a Christian comes under physical attack and needs to act to block imminent harm to themselves or others, the need and the response should always be balanced. No court of law will find someone innocent who responds to minor affronts with a much more destructive response – especially a lethal one.

The principle of balanced response is well established in legal precedent, and it is a solid moral principle, also. Although the Old Testament law of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Leviticus 24:19–20 NLT) applied originally to issues of balanced legal redress, the principle of not overreacting in self-defense situations, of not going beyond the level of the threat, is both biblically sound and legally vital.

The Goal of Defense Is to Stop an Attack

At its most basic level no one – Christian or otherwise – should ever proceed to engage an aggressor with the intention to kill them. The goal of all moral self-defense is simply to *stop* the aggressor and the aggression. Attempting to do more than simply stop an aggressor is almost always based on anger and feelings of retribution and vengeance and is certainly not based in an attitude of forgiveness. Naturally, in situations where a person’s life is directly threatened, a lethal response may become necessary to stop a lethal attack – but a non-lethal attack should not be escalated beyond that point.

This means that the concept of “teaching someone a lesson” or similar vengeful approaches has no part in the Christian response to an attack on oneself or others. It means that while individuals have the moral right of self-defense, they are not morally empowered to exact punishment on others. That is the job of the legal systems of the world, and defensive action should aim to stop aggression and no more. This may not be easy for some to do as it is certainly true that in many cases the legal systems of the world do not always punish the aggression of wrongdoers when they are apprehended. In all too many cases, perpetrators are given a legal

“slap on the wrist,” even for repeated acts of violence, and then released to harm others.

Nevertheless, for the Christian, the situation is clear – the believer must not enter into attempted punishment or revenge. The Old Testament teaches this through many injunctions such as “Do not say, ‘I’ll do to them as they have done to me; I’ll pay them back for what they did’” (Proverbs 24:29), because God promises to judge the unrepentant guilty: “I will take revenge; I will pay them back” (Deuteronomy 32:35 NLT). The New Testament continues to teach this same principle without any change. For example, the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 12, “Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the LORD” (Romans 12:19 NLT).

In a situation where a Christian is able to successfully block aggressive actions against himself, herself, or others – so that a threat is no longer present – that is the time not for revenge, but to pray for our enemies (Luke 6:28). This verse is often seen in the abstract, as though it applies only to praying for those who *might* harm us, but it applies just as much, if not more, to enemies who *have* attacked us and who have been successfully resisted. In such circumstances we can and should pray that the enemies’ eyes be opened to see the wrong of their aggression and to turn from it. Sometimes aggressive individuals turn from their behavior simply because those they attacked do not use the situation for revenge when they have opportunity.

We see an example of this in the story of David’s treatment of the murderously jealous King Saul. When David was forced to flee into the Judean mountains after Saul attempted to kill him, David received a seemingly providential opportunity to kill Saul, yet he resisted the temptation and spared the life of the angry king. When Saul realized what David had done he said “May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me” (1 Samuel 23:21 ESV). We too can pray for our aggressors, that God would bring them to the same understanding, if we are merciful in simply stopping their attack rather than retaliating and taking our response further than necessary.

Balance in Threat Response

The principle of not counterattacking beyond the level of the original attack also means that the use of training and the selection of proper

defensive tools is of the greatest importance for moral self-defense. Many people who decide to carry a defensive weapon choose and carry only a firearm. This is not an illogical approach as a firearm can often be the best tool to stop an attack made with potentially lethal weapons such as clubs, knives, or other firearms. But it can be a mistake to carry only a firearm and thus only have the option of responding with a lethal weapon to what may be a non-lethal threat.

That is why armed police officers invariably carry other defensive tools on their belts in addition to their holstered firearms. Most armed police officers today also carry a baton or nightstick, a can of pepper spray or other chemical agent, and perhaps a taser or other electrical stun device. No police department considers officers so equipped to be too heavily armed – rather it is understood that they are simply equipped to respond to threats at multiple levels without escalating or making a situation a lethal one when it is not necessary to do so.

For the same reasons, the Christian citizen who chooses to carry a lethal defensive tool such as a firearm should, if possible, carry a non-lethal device in addition. Even from a physical, practical perspective, this is a sensible approach because firearms can and sometimes do malfunction and many are not as potent as people often think. So having a backup defensive tool is often wise. For the Christian, the option of a non-lethal response is also morally important.

In this context, we will briefly review some of the defensive tools that are available and legal to carry in *some* areas. (It is vital that a person know and understand the laws of their own areas before purchasing or carrying such defensive tools, as they may be illegal or require licensing in many jurisdictions).

Defensive Tools

When it comes to possessing defensive weapons, we read in the New Testament that the apostles owned short swords. On the night Jesus was betrayed, when he asked the disciples if they had swords, they immediately confirmed that they had two – which Jesus said was enough (Luke 22:37-39). This does not mean that two weapons were sufficient for the size of their group, but that they were enough to physically fulfill a prophecy Jesus had in mind (Isaiah 53:12). But Jesus did not chide the apostles for having weapons, and he must have been aware that some of the disciples were armed throughout the years he spent with them. In that

age, the short sword was one of the few portable defensive tools available to people, which is why that is what the disciples had. Today there are several tools that can be considered for personal defense.

Handguns are usually the first type of weapon people think of when it comes to personal protection, and they are certainly among the most powerful and commonly used defensive tools. Yet handguns are not without limitations and potential problems as defensive tools. Handguns are not as powerful or lethal as most people presume and are actually non-lethal about eighty percent of the times they are used in defense situations. This is not to downplay the seriousness or inherent danger of such firearms as potentially lethal weapons, but to stress that handguns are not the almost magical “manstoppers” often portrayed in Hollywood films. Also, the effective use of handguns – especially semi-automatic pistols – requires proper training, and this will be considered in the next chapter. Handguns are also strictly controlled in many areas and often require licensing to be legally carried, if that is even an option. Despite their limitations, where handguns are legal to own and carry they do represent the most potent self-defense tools that are available to private citizens.

Knives and other edged weapons should normally not be considered as defensive tools, as they are widely viewed as the weapons of choice of criminals and are often as tightly legislated as handguns, which are superior. Although potentially deadly, knives obviously have limited “reach,” thus increasing the danger to the user, as they could be wrestled out of a person’s grasp and used against them. Accordingly, knives require a good deal of training if they are to be utilized defensively. Experts agree that in most cases, for most people, knives are simply not a good choice for personal protection.

While the collapsible batons carried by many police officers are also available to civilians for carry where legal, these too are not usually a good choice for most personal defense situations as they can be heavy, have somewhat limited reach, and definitely require training to be used effectively. Batons are also potentially lethal instruments and are legally regarded as such in most cases.

Tasers and electric shock devices are increasingly common as self-defense tools as they are less than lethal (in most cases), have extended reach (in the case of tasers), and require relatively little training. Electric stun guns, although they may seem similar, are less useful as they have no reach, usually require unobstructed skin contact, and are often not very

effective. Where legal, tasers often represent a good and usually non-lethal choice for personal defense, though users should be sure to understand their dangers and to get instruction in their use (even if only through online videos) where possible.

Chemical sprays such as “Mace,” tear gas, and various form of pepper spray are probably the most commonly used self-defense tools. Simple to use and widely available, they are not without problems, however. Such chemical sprays can lose pressure over time and so must be checked periodically by “test firing” them – which in time also lessens the pressure and amount of chemical available. (Some sprays have additional pressurization systems or utilize non-pressure delivery methods, and these are preferable, though more expensive). It is also often difficult to use chemical sprays without the risk of “cross contamination” – getting the spray on oneself – especially in windy conditions or in enclosed spaces. However, a good quality pepper spray of reasonably large capacity (tiny keychain pepper sprays should be avoided) can be an effective primary defensive tool where nothing better is possible and can also serve as a non-lethal alternative to other weapons.

If nothing else is available, many everyday objects can be used to assist a person in a defensive situation. Even pens and rolled-up magazines have been successfully used as improvised defensive tools in many instances. That being said, many items advertised as alternative “self-defense items” are of questionable use and/or legality and most of these exotic or otherwise unusual items are better off avoided.

Finally, for those who have the health and strength to utilize it, training in martial arts such as karate, judo, hapkido, and kung fu is not necessarily at variance with Christian ideals and principles. Originally, many of these self-defense systems of unarmed combat were developed and taught as part of ancient Oriental religious systems. Today, most martial arts are taught and practiced more as physical training and athletic sports, but care should be taken in this regard. Some systems, such as aikido, may still retain their religious underpinnings and these might be best avoided by Christians.

Most martial arts are taught from a purely physical perspective, however, and modern forms such as Hawaiian Kenpo or the Israeli Krav Maga that blend techniques from various systems can provide especially helpful self-defense training.

There are also Christian dojos that teach martial arts while keeping the principles of Christianity in mind. Nevertheless, all martial arts rely on

contact with an assailant and despite Hollywood and competition stereotypes, they can be dangerous to employ against any kind of armed assailant. On the other hand, these arts can be lethal and knowledge of them may be considered a lethal responsibility in some legal situations.

Considering these alternatives, the Christian who chooses to legally obtain and carry some kind of defensive tool may be best served with a firearm, taser, or chemical spray device, though the limitations and dangers of all these tools should be fully understood and training obtained for them whenever possible. The principle of balancing threat with response should always be considered, and we repeat the wisdom of carrying a non-lethal defensive aid in addition to a lethal weapon if one is to be carried at all.

The Christian should also consider his or her motivation and approach in obtaining and carrying defensive tools. The same principle of valuing human life that urges us to protect ourselves and others – especially the weak who cannot protect themselves (Psalm 82:3–4; etc.) – should always compel us to seek a careful and measured response in any self-defense situation. We should always strive to have non-lethal options whenever possible. Simply purchasing a lethal weapon such as a firearm and relying on that alone as a defensive tool may lead us to feel forced to use a potentially lethal response when such is neither appropriate nor moral.

6. THE CAREFUL USE OF DEFENSIVE TOOLS

An armed gunman opens fire in a public gathering, shooting people at random. It may be half an hour or more before the police can arrive, by which time many more people may have been hurt or killed. In such a situation, even if we ourselves are armed and try to engage the gunman, there is a chance innocent people may be hurt by our actions if we are not both trained and careful. This fact leads us to our final moral consideration regarding the use of force by the Christian in defensive situations.

The responsibility not to endanger or hurt innocent bystanders by our use of force is a principle that is spelled out for us in no uncertain terms in the Bible. “If men who are fighting strike a pregnant woman and ... a serious injury results, then you must require a life for a life” (Exodus 21:22–23 BSB). Notice that this biblical law does not say “unless they were fighting in order to help others” or mention any other mitigating circumstance – it simply shows us that wherever force is being used, there is a serious responsibility to not endanger or harm those who did not initiate the conflict.

How does this principle apply in today’s world? In the example given above we mentioned that even with the best of intentions someone who uses lethal force without proper training or care can endanger others and legally endanger themselves. In other words, any Christian who chooses to legally obtain and carry defensive weapons has a moral responsibility to know how to use them safely and effectively. In the case of weapons such as firearms, this need can also extend to the safety of the person carrying the weapon defensively, or to their family members or others.

Every year accidents involving firearms (and other defensive tools) injure or take the lives of innocent individuals. This fact should not be viewed out of context because those same defensive weapons unquestionably protect and often save the lives of a great many more people; but every accident with a firearm or other weapon is one too many and is ultimately avoidable. It is our responsibility to make sure that any weapon we own or carry does not harm anyone unintentionally – ourselves or others. The need for security never excuses thoughtlessness or the careless endangerment of others.

The Responsibility of Training

That is why obtaining training is vital – preferably *before* an individual purchases a firearm or other potentially lethal weapon. Any person electing to own such a weapon has the responsibility to know how to secure it when not in use in order to protect the weapon from accidental or unauthorized use by children or others. Many trainers emphasize that in addition to securing firearms and other weapons so it is absolutely impossible for children to operate them, small children should be taught to immediately report to a parent or responsible adult if they find an unattended or unsecured firearm. This is all part of the responsibility every Christian must accept in choosing to obtain defensive weapons.

That responsibility also extends to knowing how to use the weapon safely – and in the case of firearms and tasers, knowing how to load and unload the device without endangering anyone. The old adage that a weapon should always be assumed to be loaded and never pointed at anyone or anything that is not an intended target cannot be restated too often. Those who forget this simple rule and others applying to firearms are the ones who accidentally shoot themselves in the hand or foot (or worse), or who accidentally shoot others.

Training is also vital when it comes to knowing how to effectively aim firearms and how to consistently hit intended targets rather than simply shooting and hoping for the best. Such an approach to defensive force is entirely immoral and we must never allow it in ourselves. It is also entirely unnecessary. Any country that has legally available firearms also has training organizations and training facilities. In the United States many firearms stores will provide basic training for those who purchase firearms and organizations such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) and others make quality firearm training easily obtainable. The NRA, for example, provides a course on self-defense in the home which covers legal and other aspects of firearm ownership as well as instruction in firearms use. Similar programs are available in many countries and can be found through internet searches or by asking at local firearms stores or police departments. In fact, many such courses are taught by individuals with law enforcement or other in-depth training. If instruction is not available locally, there is much good information online, though a person should use caution to ensure the information is from a reputable source.

If a firearm or other defensive weapon is to be carried, it is also wise to consider applying for and obtaining a concealed carry weapons license

(CCW) if one is offered in a person's country or state. Such formal licensing often comes with training and can be a good faith gesture on the part of the individual to act as a law abiding citizen even when such a license is not required. Another consideration here is that even where weapons may legally be openly carried, concealed carry – again where legal – is almost always wiser and better tactically as the weapon is not visible to potential assailants who may attempt to preemptively strike the openly armed individual or may succeed in wresting the weapon away from that person. When someone seeks out and obtains professionally taught instruction, such aspects of responsible weapons carry will be discussed and guidance given. For all these reasons, whenever possible the Christian should make every effort to get training in order to fulfill the moral responsibility of rightful use of weapons of any type.

Getting Training Is Not Wrong or “Worldly”

Some religious people feel that training with weapons is a wrongful or at best a “worldly” pursuit, but hopefully what we have said above makes a convincing case that this need not be so at all. In the absence of any scriptural evidence that defensive use of force training is in any way wrong, it is only rational to realize that such training saves lives and is thus just as desirable from a moral and spiritual perspective as it is from a physical one. In fact, the biblical evidence leans toward the acceptance of such training.

We already saw in Genesis how Abraham had men trained with weapons in his household (Genesis 14:14), and the book of Judges tells us that God even arranged certain circumstances “to teach warfare to generations of Israelites who had no experience in battle” (Judges 3:2 NLT). We also see the rightness of careful training regarding weaponry in the words of David – who praised God “who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle” (Psalm 144:1 and see Psalm 18:34; etc.). While David may have been primarily speaking about military training, the principle that training with weapons is not wrong can still be seen in this verse.

If we accept the need to get proper instruction – as anyone should who opts to utilize a protective weapon – we need only do a search online to find that there are hundreds of organizations that can provide responsible and professional training in the use of defensive weapons and avoidance of their misuse. Most of these programs are sensitive to moral issues and concerns.

In fact, a number of these training organizations and companies are run and staffed by believers – some, for example, by retired law enforcement officers who are themselves Christians. Some of these organizations even offer consultation and training to churches at no cost – simply as a way to help protect worshipers who might otherwise be extremely vulnerable in crisis situations involving active shooters. Obtaining proper group or individual training before it is needed rather than afterwards can help Christians become better able to help and protect one another and also minimize the chance of accidents involving firearms or other defensive tools.

Training Is Only the Beginning

Another point we must stress in this chapter is that while initial training with defensive tools is vital, it is still only one part of exercising the greatest care that we do not do inadvertent harm to others through the exercise of self-defense. Defensive tools – and especially firearms – require ongoing practice to ensure their safe and effective use. Many people think of firearms training as something like learning to drive. They see the need to get proper instruction in the laws and techniques of driving, but they fail to think about the fact that the act of ongoing driving after that basic instruction gives them necessary practice in driving carefully and safely. With firearms and other defensive weapons, simply receiving initial training then never practicing beyond that point can be a serious mistake.

That is why most armed police officers are required to qualify with their service weapons on a frequent basis – both to give them the practice to keep their skills operational and to serve as a check that they can still use their weapons safely and effectively. The Christian who elects to utilize defensive tools should likewise plan to practice with them as regularly as is practical – practice is another key part of careful use. Finally, Christians who carry a weapon for their own protection and the protection of others must always acknowledge the responsibility that comes with defensive tools each time the weapon is taken into hand. For self-defense to be ethical, our attitude is as vital as our skill set. We must put on a mindset of care and concern that is a vital physical shield for ourselves and all those with whom we come in contact. Only then will the use of defensive tools be moral and within the principles that are clearly taught in the word of God.

CONCLUSION

In the first half of this book, we saw that there is no biblical verse that prohibits the ownership or use of defensive weapons, and that, on the contrary, there is a great deal of evidence that the Bible accepts and approves the basic right of self-defense.

As a result, Christians need not feel that there is something wrong with protecting self, loved ones, or others who might need our help – even if it involves the use of weapons. The Bible certainly never forbids the Christian from owning a weapon, and there is nothing inherently unspiritual or “worldly” about owning a defensive weapon or knowing how to use one, any more than there is in owning and knowing how to use a glass-breaker, a fireman’s axe, or any other tool used to help people and potentially save them from harm or death. The fact that defensive weapons can be misused to hurt innocent individuals means no more than the fact that a fireman’s axe or a firetruck can also be misused to hurt people.

Nevertheless, the fact that it is not wrong to own weapons or to learn how to use them does not somehow do away with the Christian’s responsibility to do all things in love (1 Corinthians 16:14), to always keep the welfare of others in mind (1 Corinthians 10:24), and to be a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9) wherever possible. However, in the real world in which we live, acting in peace is not always possible (Psalm 120:7). That is why the second half of this book looks closely at how we can morally use force in self-defense.

In successive chapters we saw that the use of force in self-defense should always be considered as a last resort and in response to a real and present threat. Three vital principles were stressed: the importance of *avoiding* conflict and bodily harm of anyone whenever this is possible; the importance of *balancing* our response with the threat and not exceeding it; and finally, the importance of utilizing the greatest effort to *carefully* ensure that defensive weapons are used with the safety of the innocent always in mind.

Following these three key principles of Avoidance, Balance, and Caution – which can be remembered by the simple acronym A-B-C – means that if we do have to exercise the right to self-defense, we do so in a morally (and legally) justifiable manner that is in harmony with human laws as well as the laws of God.

Every Christian looks for the time when the peoples of the world “will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4). But until that time, in this present age of violence and evil, as believers we are not denied the right to use physical means of defense. Ultimately, we look to God for our protection and to supply our daily needs. But just as we can and should do what we are able to do to work for our physical needs, we can also do what we are able toward the protection of ourselves, our loved ones, and others who may need our help.

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