

Self-Defense: What Does the Bible Say?

With recent shootings in public and in churches, the question of self-defense has been coming up lately. But first, let's be clear: What we are seeing today is not a gun problem; it's a moral problem called sin.

Vengeance Is Not Self-Defense

One Scripture often used to support pacifism and banning weapons is Proverbs 20:22 (NKJV), "Do not say, 'I will recompense evil'; wait for the Lord, and He will save you." But this Scripture is dealing with vigilantism, not self-defense.

According to Romans 13:4, one of the purposes of the authorities is to "execute wrath on him who practices evil." They are God's avengers, but we can be defenders.

Seek Peace when Possible

As Christians, I believe that we are to seek peace at every turn and not drape the cross with the flag. But what about self-defense as a last resort and biblical mandates to protect?

The Old Testament offers many examples, but what about the New Testament? It does as well. In Matthew 26:52, Jesus says to Peter, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Jesus didn't denounce the sword, but clarified its place. When we take premature, emotionally charged action, it may cost us our life.

Buy a Sword

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Later, Jesus adds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?” (Matt. 26:55b, ESV). If He had been a thief and a robber, the clubs and swords would have been justified. In my opinion, these Scriptures imply that weapons do have a place in society, although we must be careful.

Additionally, in Luke 22:36, Jesus said, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.” What is the context of this verse?

First, again I would err on the side of peace, but this isn’t always an option. One thing is certain: A sword was for defense. Earlier, Jesus had sent His disciples on a peaceful mission trip where they did not need these items, but now Jesus may be implying that self-defense may become necessary. He wants them to use wisdom and be prepared.

‘Love Your Enemies’ Doesn’t Mean ‘Hate Your Family’

Some may argue, “Didn’t Jesus say to love our enemies, and bless those who curse us, and do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute us?” (see Matt. 5:43-48.) Yes, but these references refer to personal assaults, offenses and character assassinations, not to self-defense or the protection of others. It is taking a quantum leap to believe that Jesus is saying, “Do good to those who are trying to maim or destroy you or your family.”

Jesus Didn’t Turn the Other Cheek

Paul tells Timothy that if “anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8, ESV). But if I protect my family, which is often a greater responsibility (if not equal), then I’m labeled a war-monger and accused of misapplying the Scriptures.

The Scriptures must be read in their appropriate context. For example, when Jesus was slapped, He didn't turn the other cheek. He said, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" (John 18:23, NASB). Although we are to err on the side of grace and peace, there is a time and a place for confrontation and protection.

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Forgiveness Is Not Passivity

I want to make it clear that I'm not advocating violence or aggression; I'm advocating scriptural consistency and continuity. Context is the key factor here. Forgiving is not being passive, and granting grace is not being gullible.

Are we called to guard our families spiritually, emotionally and financially but not physically? This makes no sense. However, my concern with the current gun debate is that we are buying into the fear narrative. A minimizing of sovereignty is directly related to a magnifying of worry.

Most Christians salute the sovereignty of God but believe in the sovereignty of man. –R. C. Sproul

A Glock for the Flock?

Many are prepared militarily but not spiritually, instilling unhealthy fear in their families. They are motivated by the fear of man rather than the fear of God. I hear much about Glock, Smith and Wesson and Remington, but little about brokenness, surrender and humility.

Every time God's people trusted in their weapons and armies, He called them to repentance. Our protection is in daily submission to Him. Psalm 121:1b-2 (NIV) says, "Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of

heaven and earth.” Our current trend beckons us to be very careful about whom or what we “worship” and in whom or what we place our trust.

Before we get a Glock for the flock and become pistol-packing preachers, we must be watchmen battling in the courts of heaven with prayer and fasting.

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Shane Idleman is the founder and lead pastor of Westside Christian Fellowship in Southern California. More can be found at , and free downloads of his books are available at . Visit him on Facebook and subscribe to his new podcast.