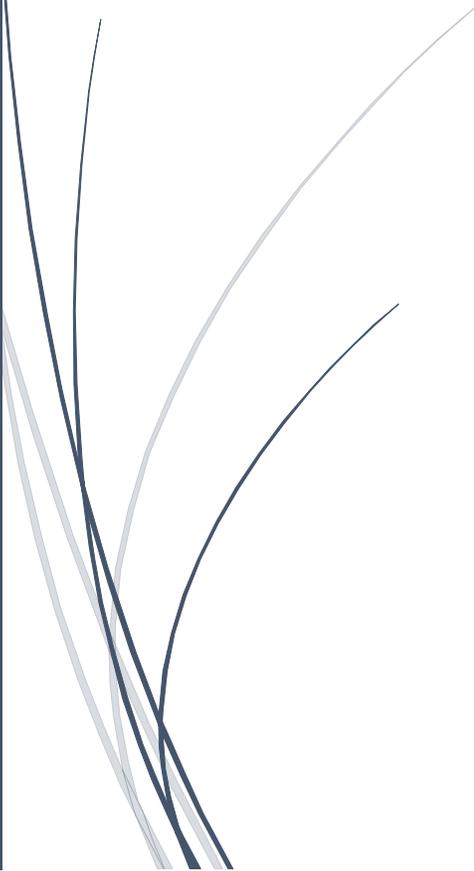




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# The Biblical View of Self-Defense



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# The Biblical View of Self-Defense

## Introduction

This study examines the Biblical view of self-defense. We're looking at questions such as, Is it right to employ lethal force to protect the life of yourself and others? Is it right to take measures that might **kill** an attacker who is wrongfully threatening your life or the life of another?

Self-defense here is defined as "protecting oneself from injury at the hand of others." Self-defense is not about taking vengeance. Self-defense is not about punishing criminals. Self-defense involves preserving one's own health and life when it is threatened by the actions of others. When we speak about using potentially lethal force in self-defense, we're talking about using weapons to protect ourselves and others, even if the weapons used could kill the attacker.

Now why in the world would we take time to look at this subject? First, as Christians, we want to know how to apply the Bible to current issues in society. We live in a country with approximately 250 million guns and approximately 300 million people. Furthermore, in our country, it is estimated that law abiding citizens defend themselves using guns approximately one million to two million times a year. Almost 200,000 people in this state alone have a legal permit to carry a concealed handgun. What does the Bible have to say about that many guns actively being used for self-protection?

We live in a time where the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, current possibilities of economic and societal collapse, and crime have people buying guns and ammunition in large quantities for self-protection. What does the Bible say about that? What does the Bible say about so-called "assault weapons"?

As always, we want our hearts and minds to be ruled and informed by Scripture -- not by our emotions, not by our experiences, and certainly not by the World. And because the Scriptures have much to say about this topic, it is relevant and worth examining in the Church.

The focus of this study is specific. I am not dealing with whether lethal force can legitimately be used in wartime. I am not dealing with capital punishment. I am not dealing with Biblical principles involved in the American Revolution or the War Between the States.

This study is organized in five sections. First, we will look at the Biblical obligation to preserve life. Secondly, we will look at the Biblical view of bloodshed. Thirdly, we will look at passages dealing with the application of lethal force in self-defense. Fourth, we will look at what the Bible says about possession of weapons and skill in using weapons. Finally, we look at limitations and warnings about self-defense.

## The Biblical Obligation to Preserve Life

We begin by first looking at the Biblical obligation to preserve life. The Bible clearly teaches that we must *preserve* life--our own lives and the lives of other people. 1 Corinthians 6:19f teaches that our bodies are not our own. Rather, our bodies belong to God. Our bodies are His property and so we are not permitted to treat or destroy them as we please:

<sup>19</sup> *Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own;* <sup>20</sup> *for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body. (1Co 6:19-20 ASV)*

Not only are we to take care of our bodies and the life contained. We have an obligation to preserve the body and life of other people. Psalm 82:4 even cites an obligation to protect those who are in danger:

*Psalm 82:4 Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.*

Consider also Proverbs 24:11, which indicates we have a duty to preserve the lives of those who are harming themselves:

*Proverbs 24:11 Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.*

Ezekiel 33 is a well-known passage:

*Ezekiel 33 "... 6 'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.'*

If you know danger is coming to others, and you deliberately fail to warn the others of the danger, you are guilty of harming the victims. This is not to say that you can make people heed your warning. The surrounding verses also say that if the people refuse to heed the warning of the watchmen, the watchman is not guilty if they are harmed.

We also see principles in Mosaic law teaching that if we fail to guard the lives of others, we are guilty. In Deuteronomy 22:8, if someone falls from your roof, and you failed to install a safety fence around the edge, you would be held liable for the death of that person. Likewise, in Exodus 21:29-31, if a man has an ox which is prone to harm people, the owner is held liable if he fails to confine it and the ox harms or kills others. If the ox *harms* someone, the negligent owner is fined. If the ox *kills* someone, the negligent owner is to be *put to death*.

The principle could hardly be stated more forcefully: you must protect your life and the lives of others.

## The Biblical View of Bloodshed

So, we see we have a Biblical obligation to protect life. Now let's look at the Biblical view of bloodshed. When we come to this topic, we enter an area that requires cultural re-calibration. As you read through the Old and New Testaments, it's very clear that real blood, from animals as well as humans, has a significance not recognized in modern American culture. We must adjust our perception of blood to fit God's view of blood.

Let's look at some relevant passages and contrast them with what our culture thinks about bloodshed.

### Genesis 9:5-6

*Genesis 9:5-6 5 And surely your blood, the blood of your lives, will I require; At the hand of every beast will I require it. And at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, will I require the life of man. 6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: For in the image of God made he man.*

These words come in the days of Noah. This is **pre-Mosaic** law. Don't think this is obsolete thinking from the Mosaic law.

If a man was killed, the man or beast who caused the death must pay with his/its own life. God says here, "I will require the life of man." Killing or bloodshed was not always wrong. But when it was wrong, the penalty was ultimate.

We learn here that there is sanctity to spilled blood. Why? Two reasons:

1) Life is precious, and the life is in the blood. When blood is shed, something precious is lost. You might not think blood is precious. We tend to consider blood to be just a "bodily fluid". It is, however, precious to God.

2) An attack on man is an attack on the image of God. At a trivial level, you're messing with sculptures in God's art studio. In God's view of bloodshed, it is not merely a physiological event, but it is an assault on the divine image. Why is murder punishable by death? It says, "For in the image of God made He man."

## **David**

We learn more about God's view of bloodshed from David. David is a man who loved God and who was loved by God. God raised him up to defend Israel. God sent David to physically fight to defend Israel. When David killed Goliath and Philistines in battles, it was at God's command. They were *righteous killings*. Now, with that understanding, let's look at a few passages:

*1 Chronicles 28:3* "But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you have been a man of war and have shed blood.'

*1 Chronicles 22:8* But the word of Jehovah came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.

David wants to build a house for the Lord. This is a good desire. But God says, "David, you are disqualified from doing this." Why? Not because of the murder of Uriah. Not because of his adultery with Bathsheba. It is because of the wars, and because David had "shed much blood upon the earth in my sight." David had killed men in the sight of God, and that disqualified him from this spiritual service.

But wasn't David obeying God in engaging in these wars? Yes. Did David sin in shedding this blood? No. But shedding blood is so significant to God that David was unfit to for certain "ministries".

Killing someone is not a light thing. Our culture casually depicts killing. In television, movies, and video games, killing, whether it is legitimate or illegitimate killing, is portrayed with such a frequency that most people are relatively desensitized to it.

Here is the bottom line: Shedding blood, taking the life of another, is a big deal. Your life is forfeit if you wrongfully take the life of another. Even if you take life in a permitted manner, it is serious enough that it can disqualify you from certain types of spiritual service. Even if you are the "good guy", you are "marked" in the eyes of God. I didn't say you are guilty. I am merely showing that God viewed Godly David differently because David had killed men (though righteously).

Bloodshed must have the same significance to us. It is never a light thing, even if you are in the right, even if you do it righteously.

As we move on, I want to ask this question: Does the believer have an obligation to resist evil and to protect life? Think about it.

Having looked at the obligation to preserve life, and the Biblical view of bloodshed, let's now look at passages dealing with self-defense and the use of lethal force.

## Old Testament Passages on Lethal Force and Self-defense

We start in the Ten Commandments.

### ***Exodus 20:13***

*Exodus 20:13* You shall not murder.

Murder is wrong. This means the premeditated killing of others is wrong. Killing in a fit of emotion is also wrong and is prohibited here. But as we will see later, accidentally taking the life of another is wrong. We must do all that we can to avoid it and stay as far away as possible from taking life.

Having stated this prohibition, let's look at some of the qualifiers to this prohibition.

### ***Leviticus 24:16-17***

*Leviticus 24:16-17* <sup>16</sup> 'And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death. <sup>17</sup> 'Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.

From verse 17, we see that "killing" was a crime requiring capital punishment. "Killing" here is defined above. But note that not *all* killing is wrong. In the immediately preceding verse 16, there were times (such as in civil judgments) in which "killing" was commanded and sanctioned. Blasphemers were to be killed. Likewise, in verse 17 itself it commands that "whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death." So we already see two qualifiers to the command "thou shalt not kill."

Killing a man in capital punishment for murder or blasphemy was permissible.

We saw earlier in the examples of the ox and the roof that if you caused someone's death through your negligence, you were also deserving of capital punishment. So, killing a man for causing negligent death was permissible.

### ***Exodus 21:12-15, Numbers 35:6-34, and Deuteronomy 19:1-13***

Exodus 21:12-15, Numbers 35:6-34, and Deuteronomy 19:1-13 give further qualifications to the prohibition to kill. Here the Lord deals with accidental killing where there is no negligence.

God defines accidental killing this way in Deut. 19:4: "...whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past...". It even gives an example: "as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies".

These passages establish the cities of refuge. If you are not familiar with the system described here, I commend it for your study.

God says here, if you commit unintentional killing--that is, if you accidentally kill someone, and it is not motivated by anger or hatred, and there is no negligence involved--then your life is forfeited. You are guilty of killing and could be put to death by the avenger of blood, but there is a way of escape. If you committed accidental killing, and there was no negligence, you would **not** be put to death if you fled to one of the designated cities of refuge.

This is like house arrest. In fact, it is stronger than house arrest! Number 35:25ff says that if you wander out of the city of refuge, you may be put to death if the avenger of blood finds you. The person guilty of accidental killing had to stay in a city of refuge until the death of the high priest. Then he was free to return home. (By the way, this is a beautiful picture of Christ's work—Christ, the city of refuge in whom we must remain hidden! And Christ is the high priest whose death takes our guilt and sets us free.)

It shows that killing someone accidentally, with no malice, without negligence, made your life forfeit. It was almost as serious as murder in God's eyes. God makes a merciful provision, but it did not remove the fact that you were worthy of death for unintentional killing.

Premeditated, intentional killing, as well as killing in passion, was absolutely forbidden. Such a one had no protection in the cities of refuge and was to be handed over and put to death (Ex. 21:14f, Deut. 19:11ff, Num 35:16ff).

This far, we see that killing someone out of 1) hatred, 2) negligence, or 3) sheer accident were subject to capital punishment. In the case of sheer accident without negligence, God established a network of cities of refuge which made merciful provision to spare the life of the killer. With that important background, let's look at passages speaking about victims of crime.

## **Exodus 22:2-3**

*Exodus 22:2-3* <sup>2</sup> "If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. <sup>3</sup> "If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed.

There are two cases here. In the first case, if someone breaks into your home at night, and you kill him, you are not held guilty of murder. You are not deserving of capital punishment. You do not need to flee to a city of refuge to preserve your life. The understanding is that at night, it is dark, and if someone has invaded your house, they do not announce if they are there merely to steal jewelry and tools. In the dark, you have no way of knowing if someone is coming to kidnap, to rape, or to murder. You are thus blameless if the criminal is killed in that situation. The passage does make it clear that if a man is breaking in at night with the intent of theft *or worse* (rape, murder, kidnapping, etc.), the defendant can righteously defend himself with lethal force to prevent the commission of the crime).

In the second case, it says "if the sun has risen on him", and you kill the intruder, you are guilty of his bloodshed. The understanding is that in daytime, there is light, and you can discern the intentions of the home invader. The crime in question here is theft ("if the **thief**"). It is not legitimate to kill someone who is merely stealing your property. In creating civil laws, we see here that not all crimes are worthy of death.

In the daytime, it is assumed that the intention of the intruder can be discerned. If he is a thief, he may not be killed by the defendant. However, if the intruder is there to commit a different crime—assault, murder, kidnapping, rape, etc.—different laws/rules would apply. Though the

crime of theft is not worthy of death, kidnapping was worthy of death (Exodus 21:16, Deut. 24:7) as was murder.

Matthew Henry writes: "...if it was in the day-time that the thief was killed, he that killed him must be accountable for it, unless it was in the necessary defense of his own life. ... We ought to be tender of the lives even of bad men; the magistrate must afford us redress, and we must not avenge ourselves."

Now let's look at two examples of defending your own life against murderers.

## ***Nehemiah 4:8-23***

In Nehemiah 4, Israelites have been sent back from captivity to rebuild Jerusalem. They were rebuilding their lives with the sanction of the civil ruler, King Artaxerxes. This was not a wartime scenario. It was closer to a racial integration scenario where racists wanted to kill them. Think of the KKK threatening black homeowners and students. They are surrounded by people who hate them and want to kill them.

These were citizens, not soldiers. Nehemiah 4:13 says that people stationed "people by families" around the city. These were not trained soldiers or law enforcement officers. They were merely concerned residents and settlers—citizens, not professional soldiers or law enforcement agents.

Note that these families were *armed*, with "their swords, their spears, and their bows." This is a situation where they are willing to apply lethal force to defend themselves.

Let's briefly discuss swords, spears, and bows. Swords and daggers killed Ehud, Amasa, and eighty priests. At longer ranges, we know bows and slings killed men like Goliath, King Joram, and King Ahab. Spears killed men like Asahel, Absalom, the Israelite man and the Midianitish woman, and many others. These are handguns, shotguns, and rifles. These are implements of lethal force. In fact, at close range, a sword is more deadly than a handgun. These ancient weapons are as deadly as their modern counterparts.

Note that they are carrying these weapons for personal defense and civil defense, and that these are "assault weapons", namely, the same types of weapons that armies would use for offensive purposes. And why wouldn't they want assault weapons (for those weapons are the most effective weapons for defending oneself)? Why would you not want to use the best tools available for the task at hand?

Against what are they defending themselves? The crime of unlawful, racist murder. Hate crimes. They are defending their lives and their homes. Nehemiah 4:14 specifically says, "...fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." It is good and right to defend your family, even using lethal force weapons.

One final observation: In self-defense, these citizens did not merely own weapons. Rather, where they perceived a risk of harm to their persons, they carried their weapons with them, as many people legally carry weapons with them today, for the purpose of self-protection:

*Nehemiah 4* <sup>17</sup> *Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. <sup>18</sup> As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. ... <sup>21</sup> So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared. ... <sup>23</sup> So neither I, my brothers, my servants,*

*nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water.*

If you live somewhere where you have reason to be concerned about crime, this would be similar to legally carrying a weapon to defend your family, even when running daily errands to the store.

## **Esther 8-9**

The final Old Testament passage we examine is in the book of Esther. Here we have a historical example arranged by Divine Providence. In this account, the Jews are under threat of racial violence. The civil authority, King Ahasuerus, grants them legal permission to use lethal force in self-defense:

*Esther 8:11-12* <sup>11</sup> *By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives -- to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions...*

So, they have legal sanction to "protect their lives" using ultimate force, much as we do in most parts of this country. They are allowed to "kill and annihilate" in order to "protect their lives." Now, as people under obligation to obey God, not just stay within the civil laws of Ahasuerus, what do the Jews do with this legal freedom?

*Esther 9:1-5* *...the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. <sup>2</sup> The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people... <sup>5</sup> Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction,*

We see that given legal sanction to defend their lives with lethal force, they do not choose nonviolence. Rather, as it says in verse 11, to "protect their lives", they use the "sword" (verse 5). Here is another example of widespread use of weapons in self-defense—a non-wartime, nonlaw enforcement scenario.

## **New Testament Passages on Lethal Force and Self-defense**

At this point, you may be thinking this is all relegated to Old Testament principles and thinking. Let's turn to some passages in the New Testament dealing with lethal force and self-defense.

### **Buying and carrying a sword**

*Luke 22:35-39* *And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" So, they said, "Nothing." <sup>36</sup> Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. <sup>37</sup> "For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end." <sup>38</sup> So they said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." <sup>39</sup> Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him.*

Here's the context. Picture this. Jesus and his disciples have just had communion. They are about to go to a time of prayer in the garden. Jesus says these words to His disciples, and it's as if they are saying, "Look what we have with us, Lord. Two guns!" Jesus responds, "It is enough."

If you read commentaries on this passage, there are a number of questions which are not clearly answered. There are questions about the applicability of this passage, of the intent of Jesus, of the meaning of His response.

Whatever your interpretation of this passage, there are a few broad-stroke observations we can make about this passage.

1. Jesus expected them to have swords and anticipated a time when those without swords would need to acquire them.
2. Among eleven disciples, they *did* have two swords--in almost a 1:5 ratio.
3. Jesus expected them to carry the swords on their person as they traveled from the city to the garden prayer meeting.

It is difficult to make absolute claims beyond these observations, but the observations themselves have significance. Namely, among those closest to Jesus, some carried personal weapons in His presence *with His consent* to communion and to prayer meetings. We cannot make absolute claims as to the reasons, right or, wrong, for the carriage of these weapons. Perhaps it was in anticipation of trouble from the Jewish leadership. Perhaps it was protection against mere robbers. Paul in 2 Cor. 11:26 cites the "perils of robbers". Though there are questions we can't answer, we do know they possessed these weapons, that they carried these weapons, and that Jesus knew and consented. Furthermore, Jesus spoke of some time, present or future, when disciples would need to acquire personal weapons, even more urgently than garments.

## ***The Garden of Gethsemane***

Now, the next passage we come to follows these events. Jesus and the disciples are in the garden, and the men come to arrest Jesus. At least two of the disciples are armed, with the knowledge and consent of Jesus. Here is the question: Will they use the sword against the armed multitude which has come against Him? Let's look at the three passages which recount this event.

**Luke 22:49-53 (NAS)** <sup>49</sup> *And when those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"* <sup>50</sup> *And a certain one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.* <sup>51</sup> *But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this."* *And He touched his ear and healed him.* <sup>52</sup> *And Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as against a robber?"* <sup>53</sup> *"While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."*

**Matthew 26:51-56** <sup>51</sup> *And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.* <sup>52</sup> *But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."* <sup>53</sup> *"Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"* <sup>54</sup> *"How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"* <sup>55</sup> *In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me?" I sat daily with you,*

*teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. <sup>56</sup> "But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."*

**John 18:10-11** <sup>10</sup> *Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. <sup>11</sup> So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"*

In these three passages, you get a sense that Jesus is saying, "Though we have a right to employ our swords in defense of this unrighteous arrest, we are intentionally putting aside our lawful right, and I am allowing myself to be taken without resistance." See how this is expressed: "Lord shall we strike with the sword?" "No more of this." "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." "Put up your sword... or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father... all this was done that the Scriptures...might be fulfilled." "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup...?"

Why Christ tells Peter to put up the sword:

1. Christ is willingly laying down His life, though He has the right to use sword and angelic legions to deliver Himself from this unjust arrest (Luke 22:51, John 18:11).
2. Those who are quick to resort to violence will die by violence (Matt 26:52). The Lord hates the one who "loves violence" (Psalm 11:5).

The sword is not always the appropriate response, especially in persecution for Christ.

There is greater protection than swords.

## **Possession of weapons and skills with weapons a good and useful thing**

Having looked at a number of passages that deal with weapons and self-defense, let's spend a little time discussing Scripture's view of owning weapons and being skilled in their use. The imagery of weapon use and skill at weapons use is often employed in Scripture, and it is often portrayed as a positive or desirable thing. The Lord's might is something good, and it is often depicted using martial terms (Zec. 9:14, Psa. 7:13, 18:14, 21:12, 64:7, Hab. 3:11, Deu 32:42, 2 Sam 22:15). The Scriptures are a sword (Eph. 6:17; Heb 4:12). A sword comes out of the mouth of Christ (Rev. 1:16, 2:16, 19:15).

Possession of weapons is never discouraged in Scripture. In fact, in 1Sam 13:19ff, it is negatively reported that no spears or swords were found in Israel because of the Philistines:

**1 Samuel 13:19-22** <sup>9</sup> *Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears."... <sup>22</sup> So it came about, on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son.*

Let's look at two verses from the Psalms:

**Psalm 144:1** *Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight:*

**Psalm 18:34** *He teaches my hands to make war, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze*

Skill and ability to use weapons here, whether literal and/or metaphorical, is positively portrayed in these verses.

Further, we have accounts of David, not a soldier, not a law enforcement officer, but a youth, employing ranged weapons skillfully (with God's help) against bears and lions. This is domestic use of lethal weaponry, non-military use, with non-military training. The weapons used by young David are not "kiddie" slingshots. They are powerful enough to kill a bear and lion--in today's market, we're talking about a .44 magnum, not a .22, in the hands of someone too young to be in the army.

We might be tempted to think that was just for dealing with animals that could threaten sheep. But aren't *humans* worth even *more* protection than sheep?

We understand that according to Scripture, in matters not of worship or church government, whatever is not forbidden is permitted. I'm not making a claim that ownership of weaponry for the purpose of self-defense is *required* of the believer. It is not required, but it is *permitted* by Scripture.

## Warnings

Now, let's conclude with some warnings.

### ***Trusting in the sword***

First of all, it would be a mistake to leave this class trusting in the sword. Guns, knives, weapons... these are mere tools, and none of these things can guarantee protection, any more than owning a fire extinguisher guarantees that your house won't burn down.

*Psalm 44:6-7 For I will not trust in my bow, Nor shall my sword save me. 7 But You have saved us from our enemies, And have put to shame those who hated us.*

We see in Nehemiah 4:14 that the people were armed and willing to use their weapons, but they were also trusting in the Lord:

*"Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.... <sup>20</sup> "At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."*

Do not put your trust in weapons. They are tools that are *useful*, but they are only dead, inanimate *tools*, at the end of the day.

*"...the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's." (1Sa 17:47 NAS)*

### ***Improperly resorting to the sword***

Secondly, beware of improperly resorting to the sword. I would hope the passages dealing with the shedding of blood impressed on you the narrow limitations for when it is proper to employ lethal force. It is never to be in hatred, never in revenge, never in jealousy. David in his pride nearly murdered Nabal, but Abigail restrained him. David would have killed Nabal...and regretted it.

*1 Samuel 25:32 And David said to Abigail, Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me: <sup>33</sup> and blessed be thy discretion, and blessed be thou, that hast kept me this day from bloodguiltiness, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.*

Employing potentially lethal force out of anger, hatred, jealousy, or revenge is always wrong and is condemned by Scripture.

Here is a warning: If you find that you have anger or self-control problems, owning weapons is unwise. The believer is to be "not soon angry, no brawler, no striker" (Titus 1:7). Lamech is an example of someone who should not own weapons (Gen. 4:23f).

When you are insulted or cursed, when your wife or your mother is insulted or cursed, you are not to resort to violence.

*<sup>27</sup> But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you. <sup>29</sup> To him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and from him that taketh away thy cloak withhold not thy coat also. <sup>30</sup> Give to every one that asketh thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. (Luk 6:27-30 ASV)*

There are a lot of great virtues depicted in the classic westerns. The propensity to break into fistfights or gunfights when honor is insulted is *not* a virtue. The Lord, not you, is to take vengeance and set things right. An insulting slap in the face is something you can suffer as a Christian.

What if you are badly wronged? What if your wife or daughter is badly wronged? You must stop an attack that is in progress, but afterwards, you must not seek revenge. There is no room for vigilantes.

**Rom 12:19** *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

## ***A wrong admiration for the "man of violence"***

Thirdly, do not admire the "man of violence".

*Proverbs 3:31-32 Do not envy a man of violence, And do not choose any of his ways. <sup>32</sup> For the crooked man is an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright.*

Those who resort to violence rather than Godliness are not to be admired. There are many similarities between David and Joab. Both were skilled at killing men, and both had killed many men. Were they both men of violence? Here is the difference: David, first and foremost, sought the Lord, trusted the Lord, and loved the Lord. Why didn't he do violence against Saul? It wasn't because Saul was his father-in-law. Rather, it was because Saul was the *Lord's* anointed. It was because of David's regard first for the Lord that he would not resort to violence.

On the other hand, Joab, over and over, resorted to the sword to deal with problems. Joab was a man of violence.

*Proverbs 1:16 For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood.*

*Romans 3:15 Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

Earth was destroyed in the day of Noah because "the earth was filled with violence" (Gen 6:11ff). God hates violence. There is a narrow scope in which it is applied righteously, but it is only because of sin that such skill is necessary.

Beware of influences in your life which would encourage admiration of a Joab rather than a David.

## ***Perspective***

Fourthly and finally, keep the right perspective on this. Though we see sanction and even a qualified directive from Christ to possess personal weapons, we must remember three points. First, in the remainder of the New Testament, we have no further examples of believers taking up the sword. Secondly, the emphasis in the remainder of the New Testament is decidedly *not* geared toward the issues of physical self-defense or righteous use of lethal force. Rather, we see more emphasis on Godly living, suffering affliction and persecution for Christ, and grasping the precious doctrines of Christ and the Gospel. Thirdly, possession of weapons and acquiring the skill to use them in self-defense is permitted but not *required* by Scripture.

Believers should be conscious that personal self-defense is legitimized by the Scriptures, just as the use of construction tools, cooking tools, transportation tools are legitimized by Scripture. And these matters of self-defense should hold in our minds and in our affections the same position as those other legitimate, but transitory, matters.

The tendency in some circles is to make the topic of self-defense of *primary importance*. Though heavenly beings do battle and render judgments with the sword, in the perfection pictured in both the garden of Eden and in the Heavenly city, the *primary* activities are fellowship with God, fellowship with His people, singing in worship, and living in peace.

*That* is our destination.

