

## D-LIFE BOOT CAMP

Training for a lifestyle  
of discipleship.



# Keeping it Real

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Pastor Dale L. Crawley Sr.

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20*

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# Self-Defense

## A. What is self-defense

The Merriam-Webster.com dictionary defines self-defense as, "a plea of justification for the use of force or for homicide" or "the act of defending oneself, one's property, or a close relative". We will discuss biblical views on self-defense against physical attacks or moral attacks and if the use of weapons or not is Biblical or not. There are three important questions to answer:

1. Is it ever right for Christians to use physical force to defend themselves against physical attack?
2. Is it right to use a weapon if available?
3. Is it right for a Christian to own a gun?

## B. Biblical Teaching

**1. Jesus Did Not Prohibit Self-Defense.** Sometimes people think that Jesus prohibited all self-defense when he told his disciples that they should turn the other cheek. Mat 5:38-39, *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also'".*

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But Jesus is not prohibiting self-defense here. He is prohibiting individuals from taking personal vengeance simply to “get even” with another person. The Greek verb translated as “slaps” is *rhapizo*, which refers to a sharp slap given in insult (a righthanded person would use the back of the hand to slap someone “on the right cheek”). So the point is not to hit back when someone hits you as an insult. The idea of a violent attack to physically harm or even murder someone is not in view here.

In the context of Matthew 5: 38-39, several of Jesus’s other statements give *examples* of how Christlike conduct will look, but they are *not absolute commands* to be obeyed in every situation. For example, Jesus’s statement “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you” (Matt. 5:42, just three verses after the passage on turning the other cheek) cannot be obeyed in every situation, or a persistent beggar could bankrupt any Christian or any church just by asking.

**2. Other Passages of Scripture Encourage Escaping from Danger.** Elsewhere Scripture shows that it is right for Christians to try to avoid being harmed by a violent attacker. For example, when King Saul threw a spear at David, David dodged the spear and escaped: 1 Samuel 19:10, “*Then Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away from Saul’s presence; and he drove the spear into the wall. So David fled and escaped that night.*”

David did not simply “turn the other cheek” –that is, he did not hand the spear bear to Saul and say, “Try again!” After this incident, the next several chapters of 1 Samuel show how Saul continually sought to kill David, but David repeatedly eluded Saul’s grasp.

When King Aretas attempted to capture him in Damascus, Paul escaped: 2 Cor. 11:32-33, “*In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to take me into custody, and I was lowered through a window through the wall in a rope-basket, and I escaped his hands.*”

Jesus also escaped from an angry crowd at Nazareth that was trying to throw him off a cliff: Luke 4:29-30, “*and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they*

*led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.*

### **3. Some Passages Encourage the Use of Force in Self-Defense.**

**a. Self-Defense in a Court of Law:** The moral rightness of defending oneself in legal matters is clearly supported by several biblical examples dealing with a court of law. These do not involve the use of physical force, but they do lend support to the idea that some kinds of self-defense are morally good.

- Peter and John speaking boldly, when they were accused of wrongdoing by the Jewish Sanhedrin – Acts 4:5-22
- All of the apostles who were arrested similarly defended themselves before the Sanhedrin – Acts 5:27-42
- Stephen did the same before his martyrdom – Acts 7

The apostle Paul defended himself numerous times.

- He spoke in his own defense to the city authorities in Philippi – Acts 16-37
- To the Roman tribune in Jerusalem – Acts 21:27-39
- To a hostile Jewish mob in Jerusalem – Acts 22:1-21

### **b. Old Testament Passages on Self-Defense against Physical Attack:**

Although the laws of the Mosaic Covenant prohibited murder Ex. 20:13, they did not prohibit striking and even killing a person who broke into one's house in the middle of the night, in darkness. Presumably in the dark of night, the homeowner would not know if his very life and the lives of his family members were in danger. But if the homeowner defended his home during the daytime, he was not allowed to go so far as to kill the intruder: Ex. 22:2-3, "If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, *there shall be* no guilt for his bloodshed. If the sun has risen on him, *there shall be* guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft." During daylight hours, there would more likely be witnesses, so the thief could be caught and punished.

This law is found in the Mosaic covenant, and therefore it does not directly require our obedience under the new covenant. But we can still gain wisdom from such it (see 2 Tim. 3:17). The substance of this law does not concern matters unique to Israel, such as regulations for worship or details about Jewish rituals, sacrifices, and purity laws. Rather, the subject matter concerns the human situation generally. Therefore, we may conclude that it teaches us that God recognized then, and apparently would still recognize today, that there is a legitimate kind of self-defense with the use of force.

**c. Old Testament Passages on Defending Others against Attack:** Some passages in the Old Testament assumed that a righteous, godly citizen in Israel should fight back against a wicked person who attacked someone weaker, such as a young woman or child. Here is the law concerning a rape that occurred in the open d.country: Deut. 22:25-27 - *“But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter. For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her.”* This passage assumes that anyone fought off the attacker.

**d. Jesus’s Teaching about Having a Sword:** Near the end of his life Jesus seemed to encourage his disciples to keep swords for self-defense: Luke 22:36-38 - <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 [a]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.”*

People commonly carried swords at that time for protection against robbers, and apparently at least two of Jesus’s disciples, who had been with him for three years, were carrying swords, and Jesus had not forbidden this. Although many interpreters understand Jesus to have been speaking about swords in a

metaphorical way (meaning the disciples should be armed spiritually to fight spiritual enemies), this is not a persuasive interpretation, because in this context the moneybag and knapsack are both literal, and the swords that they showed him were literal swords. If Jesus meant a literal moneybag and knapsack, then he must also have meant a literal sword.

### **C. Is It Right for a Person to Use a Weapon For Self-Defense?**

If it is morally right either to flee from physical danger or (depending on the circumstances) to fight to defend oneself or others from attack, then the use of a weapon would also seem to be morally right. Sometimes a person being attacked will simply use what is a hand, whether a club or some other heavy object, or perhaps a kitchen knife. The householder defending his family against an intruder by night in Exodus 22:2 would likely have used some kind of weapon, because striking a person with one's bare hands would not ordinarily cause death.

The passages about swords discussed in Luke 22 and Matthew 26 give significant support for the idea that Jesus wanted his disciples to have an effective weapon to use in self-defense. Most of the time, merely carrying a sword would deter a criminal, who would not want to risk being harmed in an attack. The sword would also enable a person to defend someone else, such as a woman, a child, or an elderly person, who might be under attack from someone stronger.

### **D. Is It Right to Use a Gun for Self-Defense?**

**1. Arguments in Favor of the Use of a Gun for Self-Defense.** If the Bible authorizes the idea of self-defense is general, and if Jesus encouraged his disciples to carry swords to protect themselves, then it seems to me that it is also morally right for a person to be able to use other kinds of weapons for self-defense. Today that would include the use of a gun (where the nation or state allows this) or other weapons, such as pepper spray, that would deter an attacker.

However, just as Christians who have money should not trust in their money but in the Lord Ps. 62:10. And just as Christians who live under good governments should still place their trust in the Lord for protection, not in their governments. So, also

Christians who decide to own a gun should still trust the Lord and not give in to the temptation of trusting their guns rather than the Lords

## **E. Conclusion**

The Bible emphasizes peacemaking, and it's important for Christians to reflect on how their choices align with that calling. In addition to Matthew 5:9, other scriptures like James 1:5, encourage wisdom and discernment, which reminds believers to seek guidance from God.

While the Bible doesn't explicitly forbid weapon ownership, it does promote love, compassion, and the pursuit of peace. A Christian contemplating such a decision should consider not only their personal safety but also the broader implications for their community and how it aligns with their values of love. Engaging in prayer and seeking counsel from fellow believers can also provide clarity.

Also, 1 Corinthians 10:23 highlights the importance of ensuring that our actions are beneficial and constructive. When considering weapon ownership, a Christian should examine their intentions: Are they seeking to protect themselves or others? Are they pursuing activities like hunting that provide sustenance, military or law enforcement or self-defense?

Romans 13 emphasizes the importance of respecting governing authorities as part of God's order. Christians are called to abide by local laws, including those regarding weapons, as a demonstration of their commitment to order and justice. Praying for leaders, as highlighted in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, is also crucial.

Ultimately, owning a weapon isn't inherently sinful, and in some situations, it can serve practical purposes such as self-defense, hunting, or fulfilling duties in law enforcement or the military. However, it's essential for Christians to reflect on their motives and ensure that their intentions align with their values of love, peace, and stewardship.

