

Avenging Ourselves, Self-Defense, and Subjection to Authority – Part 2, Self-Defense

Defense of self, others, private property, and country fundamentally differ from avenging acts because they involve no anger, enmity, hatred, or wrath. Also, successful, defensible actions precede any retaliatory ones because they are an instant reaction to: 1. The independent or gang-related illegal acts of violence. And, 2. The assaults by foreign military powers.

The word of God never justifies the use defensible measures against those powers which God has ordained to be over us. (Ro.13.1, 2) Because lawlessness is abounding in our land it is necessary for Christians to understand what the Bible teaches about self-defense so that we honor Christ in all that we do.

Self-defense has long been understood in all of human society. As a matter of fact, it was understood that at least some of the disciples *always* carried a sword with them as they ministered to others in the name of Christ. Consider the text of Lu.22.36.

Lu 22:36 Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.

The issue of a sword in this verse is stated negatively. The implication is that there are *some* of the disciples which did *not* possess a sword. On the other hand this also tells us that *some* of the disciples did. Here, while Jesus did not compel them all to have purse or scrip, He did compel those which did not have a sword to buy one. Why? Not to oppose authorities, but to stand against the unlawful actions of an individual or a mob. You know, there are bad people that just do bad things to people. It doesn't matter if they are Christian or not. Bad things happen all of the time to unbelievers. However, Christians receive a double-portion. And as we shall see, individual and gang/mob-related actions to injure others can be withstood. So the importance of this topic is clear.

There is nothing unchristian, unspiritual, dishonorable or sinful about those defensible acts which fall within the parameters of Scripture. In some self-defense is about as natural a response as one would fight against drowning in a body of water. It is natural response to preserve life in the face of *grave danger*. For Christians self-defense is no less a spiritual response than loving your neighbor as yourself because it is grounded upon the word of God. However, because of the prevailing influences in the world about us and our ignorance of the doctrine of Christ we might think otherwise. We are unsettled and uncomfortable with the whole idea. But Christ never taught *against* it. But did He encourage it?

Self-defense is a response to the initiation of an unlawful, independent or mob-related threat. That we are Christians has nothing to do with whether we should defend ourselves. Every society, not just Christian societies, opposes these unlawful acts of violence with laws that also empower the public. No one may come at will to another to rape, beat, plunder, and murder without the reasonable expectation of resistance. Jesus' words in Mt. 5.39, *resist not evil*, are in the context of retribution because an injustice has been suffered. If this portion of Scripture is to be interpreted outside of that context Christians have no rights to resist any evil act at all. Stop locking the doors and windows to our houses. Stop locking car doors. Let whoever will to come and seize our property, take our houses, our cars, our

Avenging Ourselves, Self-Defense, and Subjection to Authority – Part 2, Self-Defense

children, our wives, and everything else. But the Bible supports the right of all humanity to defend themselves against these kinds of threats. Now, civil authorities may regulate what means its citizens might employ in self-defense, but the right itself is universally understood. Those means might be with a police force, military power, individual bare hands, rocks, arrows, knives, swords, boards, or guns. It stands to reason that the more capable the citizenry is to defending itself against illegal acts of violence the more law and order there will be in the land. First, the Bible teaches us that we have a personal responsibility to protect ourselves.

*Ge 4:23 And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt.
24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.*

Lamech's argument is this: since the LORD promised a seven-fold punishment against any man that would avenge Abel's murder by Cain, so he should receive a *seventy and seven fold* protection. The killing of this man was justified. Lamech's act was defensible.

When Jesus sent out the seventy He told them to go out with only bare essentials. (Lk.10.3-4)

*Lk.10.3 Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.
4 Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way.*

But, in the very night of his betray and arrest He said this to His little flock:

*Lk.22.35 And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing.
36 Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.*

What was the purpose for the sword? In Scripture it was wielded by both the civilian and the soldier for offensive and defensive purposes. There are some which say that our Lord Jesus instructed the disciples to buy a sword because He would teach them a lesson about bearing arms. (cf. Lk.22.48-52) And a lesson was learned. Jesus did tell Peter to sheath his sword. It was wrong for him to oppose God's ordained authority. (read Part 3) But the truth is, not only did some of the disciples always carry a sword with them as they went through the cities and villages of Israel, but Jesus, just before His crucifixion, compelled those which did not own a sword to buy one. (also see Lk.22.38, 49; Jn.18.10) The only reasonable conclusion is that the sword was for personal and corporate self-defense against the unlawful, independent or mob-related acts against us. God forbid that we think for a moment that Christ is establishing a militant church. He never merged His precious body with any of the powers of civil government to form a *state-church* entity during his earthly ministry. Nor should we do so. So let us consider the sword in the proper context of a biblically sanctioned, defensible act.

In the missionary travels of the apostle Paul he faced many dangers. One of those dangers was the danger of *robbers*. Scripture does not say that he was robbed, but that he was in perils of robbers.

Avenging Ourselves, Self-Defense, and Subjection to Authority – Part 2, Self-Defense

*2Co 11:26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, **in perils of robbers**, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ...*

What did Paul say? Not every voyage was met with shipwreck, but a number of them were doubtless life-threatening. Not every threat by his countrymen was met with beating, and not every peril in the cities met with arrest, but some did. And yes, he *might* have been robbed on occasion, but the true sense is that Paul and those with him might have been successful in defending themselves against these criminals.

Briefly consider the events recorded in the book of Esther. Here, there is a wicked man close to the king, that deceives him into thinking that there is a rebellious people (the Jews) in the empire that should be destroyed. So the king signs an edict which is irreversible, that would have them all killed at a certain time. (Es.3.8-13; 8.8) Word of this comes to Esther, and through a course of events she reveals how that this wicked man had deceived the king about this people. (Es.7.2-6) So, the king signs another edict granting to these same citizens the right to protect themselves from those that would harm them. (Es.8.9-12) The edict gave the Jews the right to defend themselves against eminent danger! Notice, *Es 9:16 But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey ...* The clause 'stood for their lives' means that the Jews defended themselves against their enemies. Many thousands of the Jew's enemies died as a result, and rightly so. (Es.7.10, the wicked man, Haman; 9.10, his ten sons; 9.15, 300 men, 9.16, 75,000)

Second, we have the right to protect ourselves, others, and personal property. Jesus our Lord describes the danger that thieves and robbers poses to others. *Jn.10.10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy ...* He instructed Israel over 2,000 years earlier about how to deal with criminals like this.

Ex 22:2 If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.

3 If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

When a thief came, whether day or night, and was killed *during* the commission of that crime, that death was justified. It was the result of a defensible act for self, others, and property. This was not in any way a retaliatory act. This defensible act was as right for the children of God in the Old Testament as it was for the children of God in the New. Is there any government in the world which denies its citizens the right to defend themselves in situations like this? The word of God supports these defensible acts.

The text tells all that we need to know. It didn't matter if the criminal broke into a house, a tent, a barn, a synagogue, the Temple, a market or a church building. It didn't matter if the victim was a male or

female, unmarried, married, has children, is alone, or with family, friends or complete strangers. The danger remained the same. Defensible acts of this kind are sanctioned by the word of God.

Now, if that thief succeeded in his crime and was later discovered with the stuff then his life is protected. It would be wrong to render personal retaliation. Now let the *justice* system do its work. This criminal should be compelled by law to make restitution, and if cannot make restitution then, under Moses' law he was to be sold into servitude until his victim is restored.

Third, consider our responsibility to come to the defense of others. In the book of Genesis chapter 14 we learn that Abraham had a nephew named Lot. One day Lot was taken captive by an armed force of city-kings. Abraham immediately assembled his forces to rescue his nephew. He took 318 *armed and trained* servants (v.14), and slaughtered Lot's captors and rescued his nephew from them. (vss.15-17) Abraham was prepared against a time of trouble, so that if it came he could meet it effectively.

In the final days of the reign of king Saul, not only was David fleeing from the unjust wrath of Saul against him, but he suffered assaults from the enemies of the Jews as well. In one instance, David and his men's came to Ziklag in the southern area of Israel because their families had been brought there. But the Amalekites had come and destroyed the city and taken David's wives, and the wives and children of the men that followed David. In great distress David besought the LORD to know what he should do. The LORD answered, *Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.* David, not a king, but a citizen of Israel, assembled 400 men and went and smote the Amalekites, and rescued their families and recovered all of their stuff, and more. This account is found in the book of 1Sa.30.1-20.

Yes, we are our brother's keeper. And like this that we see in Abraham and David, Solomon, the wisest man apart from Christ, said that we must not stand idly by while others come into harm's way. The LORD demands we do something to help.

*Pr 24:11 If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain;
12 If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?*

Every man and woman ought to be prepared against times of trouble. We store water and food in the event of some catastrophe. We take defensive driver's courses to prepare us against various dangerous driving situations. And as a matter of course in this life we ought to receive some training so that we can defend ourselves, our loved ones, our neighbors, and their property. Do all that is within our right as citizens to be able to defend others whether we have to use boards, rocks, arrows, knives, swords, guns, or our bare hands to do it. Scripture never discourages the possession and proper use of weapons. (Ps.18.34, *He teacheth my hands to war ...*; 144.1, *Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight ...*) And it is reasonable to conclude that if the righteous do not possess them then only the wicked will. (1Sa.13.19)

Fourth, consider what the Bible says about standing for the defense of our country. There are two texts of Scripture which touch on this point very well.

1. David, not a soldier, but a young lad and a keeper of his father's sheep, was sent by his father to the camp to see how his brothers were faring. While there, Goliath came forth and blasphemed God and posed a grave threat to Israel. So, through a course of events David met Goliath on the battlefield alone, and he killed Goliath to defend himself, his family, his tribe, and his nation. (Read 1Samuel chapter 17)

2. One day Roman soldiers asked the Lord Jesus what He would have them do. (cf. Lk.3.14) How would Christ have them conduct themselves? These are soldiers: men, trained for lethal combat. They were the *sword* of those who were in authority. (Ro.13.4) In the line of duty, when they killed it was not an act of vengeance or murder. Jesus said to these men, *Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.* The word violence is the translation of a Greek compound word which means to *shake through*. In contemporary English jargon this is called 'a *shake down*.' Jesus *never* condemn these men for being soldiers. He did not condemn them for killing another in defense of their country. But He did instruct them against the abuse of their *power*. They were not to abuse others in the commission of their duties. Thank God for our soldiers! Thank God for our soldiers that know Jesus Christ! How they can help their comrades mindful of their service before the eyes of God.

While we are at this place it might be helpful to ask the question, 'Was Jesus a pacifist?' A pacifist is defined as 'opposition to war or violence as a means of settling disputes; **1** *specific*; refusal to bear arms on moral or religious grounds **2** an attitude or policy of nonresistance.' It should be obvious that Jesus' communication to these soldiers shows that He was not a pacifist. Had He been a pacifist he would have said far more to these soldiers than this, but He didn't. Though Jesus was a man of peace (Is.9.6, called *prince of peace*; Mt.21.5) he was also a *king*, and a leader or captain of a great host which fought and will fight at His command.

Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

Jesus threatened kings with death. (Ge.20.3) He destroyed armies. (Ex.14.14: *The LORD shall fight for you ...*; Ex.15.5; Is.37.35-37, Sennacherib and the army) He is called captain of the LORD's host. (Jos.5.14, 15). The Lord Jesus used parables which related his power over the enemy.

Lu 19:27 But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.

Lk.11.21 When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace:

22 But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.

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To conclude this topic on justifiable, defensive acts, citizens of every society are afforded this right. The very idea is founded upon the word of God. We may oppose the illegal, independent or gang-related acts of violence or the forces of a foreign military power. What means we may use to defend ourselves is governed by those in places of authority. We must act within that parameter.

Though the world is ignorant of this truth and we might take it for granted as the people of God, those societies with the best laws are the ones patterned most closely to the word of God. The word of God gives every *soul* that will do right, from conception to the day of death equal protections. All injustices will be judged in the day of the coming of Jesus Christ.