

Christians and firearms, a Biblical perspective. May a Christian defend himself by using deadly force?

Sermon by Ed Kelleher preaching at assembly of West Columbia church of Christ, Sunday 11AM March 3, 2002, West Columbia, South Carolina. The sermon follows this text, but there are some additions and deletions from this outline in the sermon audio tape/file. It would be best to read these notes as you listen to the lesson.

Note: [read the scripture from Bible (KJV used)]

Good morning, thank you for being here.

[2 Peter 1:3] "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and Godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue"

I've preached and taught in Russia and in prisons, to people I'll likely never see again. You know what I try and get across to people that I might only have a few minutes with? That the Bible is God's word. It has the answers we need. In it, God has given us **all** things we need for life, spiritual life that is, and Godliness. We'll find them if we diligently seek for them.

My lesson this morning is based on that belief, that the Bible is completely sufficient for all our spiritual needs. I'm not here to say, "This is the way it is". But, rather, "This is what the scripture says about this". Thus, I'll *read* the scriptures, rather than quote them (or misquote them) from memory so your faith will be in God's word, and not mine. I make mistakes and might misspeak. God doesn't.

Well, there are several ways Christians might be involved with **firearms**. They might **sell** them as a business endeavor. They might use them **recreationally** or for **hunting**. They might use them on the **job** as policemen or soldiers. They might have **nothing** to do with them, or they might use them for **self-defense**. It's this latter usage I'd like to consider this morning since it applies to all of us.

May a Christian defend himself by using deadly force, a firearm? When we think of Bible commands like, "Thou shalt not kill", "Love your enemies" and "Turn the other cheek" we might have a difficult time answering that question. **Or**, we might have difficulty reconciling our actions (having a gun), with our beliefs and that split, our not being convinced what we're doing is right, is **dangerous** to our faith. It's a chink Satan can work on to break our faith. We need to **know** the answer to this question so we can do what God wants and not leave any opportunity for the devil.

So you're not in suspense, I believe the answer is **Yes!** A Christian may use a firearm to defend himself and others without condemnation from God. As I said before though, don't believe what I say, but do believe what the Bible says.

First off, it's important to realize that God has created us for a **reason**, a purpose. Our duty is to **fulfill** God's reason for creating us. Briefly, and this is another whole series of lessons by itself, God wants us to choose Him freely as our God and then to grow spiritually to the point where our souls are best suited to be with Him for eternity. That is, in Godliness. How do we do that?

[Hebrews 5:14] "Strong meat belongs to them who are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil".

God tells us how we grow, by wrestling with good and evil, exercising our senses. Which BTW, answers the age-old question, "Why is there evil in the world" - it's there for us to discern and wrestle with and overcome and become better as a result.

But, besides evil being there for our exercise, it can also harm and kill us. This is something we need to **defend** against. This death can be spiritual. In the way Adam and Eve died when they ate of the forbidden fruit. They didn't keel over dead physically, but they **did** die spiritually, as far as God was concerned – they had sinned. And, that's it, game over! That spiritual death by sin is by **our** choice. It is what Satan wants for us.

But, Evil can also cause our **physical** death. As it did the martyr Steven (Acts 7:58,59), and as it did Jesus on the cross. Now, **physical** death **is** important because our spiritual soul won't grow or develop anymore after that. Our soul will be judged on what it is at the time. Will we be ready? We choose to **sin** and this causes our **spiritual** death. Is this **physical** death a matter of our choice also?

We might say, "Well it's in God's hands. When He decides it's time for us to die, it's time" and that's true. But, I believe that God is merciful and as long as we are diligently seeking and growing, He'll give us the time we need to get right. But, does that mean we can party and sin now, and take care of it later? Should we try walking across the Interstate or sky diving without a parachute? No, we can't **test** or try God this way. Satan tried to get Jesus to do this, to cause Him to sin:

[Matt 4:5-7] "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, ⁶And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. ⁷Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

If it was wrong for Jesus to **test** God, it's wrong for us also. We need to take what actions are necessary to **protect** the lives God has given us, because they're His lives, not ours. We have our lives in order to fulfill God's plan for us, we need to take care of them. We need to fasten our seatbelts when we drive. Taking unnecessary, avoidable, preventable risks is testing God, and it's wrong, it's sin - it's what Satan tried to tempt Jesus to do!

Evil might try to take our physical life **before** we've completed God's purpose for us. Someone might try to harm us or our family. I believe we should attempt to protect the lives God has given us. But, how do we reconcile this with, "Resist not evil and Turn the other cheek"? Let's see.

The first thing we ever put on our sign out front of the church was this scripture:

[John 15:13] "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Obviously, Jesus was the best and greatest example of this. And it says in 1 Peter 2:21 we're to follow Jesus example. Should we then say to our friends, "Hey watch this!" and go throw ourselves down on the Interstate? Should we let anyone take our life who would? No, look back a little and see the **context** of Jesus' words:

[John 10:17,18] – “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. ¹⁸No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

Letting our life be taken from us is **not** the same as our laying it down. There are those evil ones who would try to take it. Look a little earlier in the same chapter:

[John 10:10-13] “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly. ¹¹I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. ¹²But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. ¹³ The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.”

Jesus acknowledged there was **evil**, it would come to steal and kill, and it needed to be guarded against. That was the **job** of the shepherd - to **resist** those that would **steal or kill**. This is dangerous. He said those that loved were the best ones to guard the ones they love and that it was the risk of their lives protecting others that proved that greatest love.

Is there something we should protect at the risk of our lives? Again, Christ is the example:

[Eph 5:25] “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; “

Husbands love your wives. This is compared to Christ's love for church - He gave himself for it, He died for it. Husbands, give yourselves to protect your wives.

[Eph 5:28,29] “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. ²⁹For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church”

We are to cherish and nourish and support our spouses. To give them what they need to grow themselves. Why has God put us here? This is one reason, one thing we are to do. And by extension, we need to protect the **product** of that union – the **children!**

If we are to nourish and cherish our wives and children, that means also protecting them from harm. And also protecting ourselves, else who is to nourish and cherish them?

On the one hand the command, "Love your wife, cherish and nourish her". On the other hand the command "Thou shalt not Kill" and "turn the other cheek". Are those mutually exclusive or contradictory commands? No! Any apparent contradiction is due to our misunderstanding. Let's work on our understanding:

[Rom 13:9] "**Thou shalt not kill**". Old Testament command, but repeated here in NT. So what about policemen and soldiers? Must they quit?

No, "Do not kill", means "Do not Murder". Do not kill with criminal intent, unlawfully, without God's sanction. What has God sanctioned?

[Rom 13:1-4] “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. ²Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. ³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: ⁴For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

He said governments are from God and they bear not the sword in vain. Like a firearm, a sword is deadly force; its only use is to kill. It's a power sanctioned by God, for use by His ministers.

What about soldiers? In Acts 10 we read of Cornelius, a man God so loved, he was the first of the gentiles to be taught, yet he was a Roman centurion and no stranger to the use of the sword. Soldiers heard Jesus and became his disciples:

[Luke 3:14] “And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages. “

To soldiers upon their conversion, he didn't tell them to quit, but to be content with their wages. But, the soldiers were told to do no violence! Well, what's the job of a soldier? Violence! No problem. The Greek word in the original text is *dissaio* (dee as eye' o). It means to shake strongly, to cause to fear, to **intimidate**. In other words, soldiers aren't to unrighteously cause the honest men to fear. They aren't to swagger about, bullying people. They aren't to extort or shake people down for money. The soldier's violence was only justified against the criminals and enemy they were sent against.

These are government agents. But, what of us **individually** protecting what God has given us? Look at the 12 apostles; they had faith - and swords!

[Luke 22:35, 38] “And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. ... ³⁸And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough. “

These were the TWELVE! The closest disciples to Jesus. Ones who had AMPLE demonstration that God would provide. They were there for the miracle of the loaves and fishes, they had faith God would provide. Jesus asked them if God had NOT provided for them when Jesus had sent them out without purse or scrip or shoes, and they said, "No, we were fine". But, what did they have among them? Two swords. Why? They trusted God to take care of them, BUT they realized they had a responsibility to protect themselves against evil also. And Jesus condoned this!

He said, "It is enough". He didn't say, "Swords? Swords kill people! Get rid of them!" Jesus condoned their having swords. He did then, he does now.

Yes, God has a use for the sword, even in the New Testament dispensation. We can use it to defend ourselves but not to murder, not to take vengeance or to exact punishment these latter items being reserved to God's ministers. This is a **change**, one of many, from Old Testament. Look at Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus is comparing OT to NT point by point. One of those points was **vengeance**.

[Mt: 5:38] “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:“

Eye for an eye, the OT had the idea of vengeance, of a person exacting his **own** punishment on another. The Jews loved to follow that part. They carried it to the point of vindictiveness. Jesus had to dissuade them from this now. So, Jesus continued in the **next** verse.

[Mt 5:39] “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. “

Turn the other cheek, the context STILL is that of taking vengeance, an "eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth". The idea is **not** to prohibit self defense, but from our going further to the exacting of vengeance or punishment, to not have the spirit of vindictiveness. These are to be left to God and his ministers to mete out. The laws of our civil society recognize this distinction today – we have a right to protect ourselves but not to go further to punish or for vengeance.

To "**resist evil**" here means to prove that it is wrong, to overcome and punish it. Again, that's not our place, but God's and his appointed ministers (government). We leave it to him, we "**turn the other cheek**" and let God's ministers take care of the punishment.

To "resist not evil" doesn't mean we meekly go along with it. We use what we have to protect what God has given us. When tempted by Satan, Jesus **resisted**, his answer continually was, "It is written ...". Jesus used God's word to resist the devil. Satan wanted to **kill** Jesus spiritually by having Him sin. Jesus resisted, so can we.

Now, we are supposed to turn from evil and avoid it, but sometimes that's not possible.

[Rom 12:18,19] “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord “

Live peaceably, vengeance is mine, the Lord acknowledges we may **not** be able to live peaceably. We must not seek trouble, we must try to avoid trouble, but some trouble may look us up. And he goes on to say, don't avenge yourselves, don't punish them, don't have wrath, I'll take care of them. But He **didn't** say; don't protect yourself or your loved ones.

We must remember that God created us, for a reason. We belong to Him. We have to please and serve Him, and not ourselves. And that means **fulfilling the duty** he has given us.

He has put us here to grow. To wrestle with good and evil and to achieve spiritual maturity. That is God's purpose and plan for us. If we choose **not** to follow His plan He won't be pleased with us. [parable of talents] Neither will He be pleased if we let someone **keep us** from completing the task God has put before us **when** we have the power to prevent them - but don't. We **must** protect ourselves, and those given us, in order to fulfill our duty to God. He's given us families to love and take care of and to teach and nourish and raise up. God expects us to **value** and **respect** these gifts. If we don't think much of what God has given us, if we don't provide for and protect them, He **will** be angry with us:

[1 Tim 5:8] “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel “

So, if we are to be wise and understanding what God's will is for us (see Ephesians 5:15) how should we understand "Do not Kill"? We'll understand it as not to murder, not to kill unlawfully, but **not** to prevent our protecting what God has given us.

Will we understand "Turn the other cheek" to mean not to resist evil at all, but to meekly surrender everything without a fight? No, we'll understand it to mean we should not act aggressively and to not exact our own vengeance and punishment. We should act, not to please ourselves, but instead **only** to protect what God has given us. We might **want** to shoot somebody, but **anger** and **wanting to punish** or take vengeance on someone have **NO!** part in a righteous person. Not in civil law, not in God's law!

Consider suicide. It's wrong because it's self murder, we're taking the life that God gave us. Well what is it if we let someone else put a gun to our head and pull the trigger without our trying to stop it? It's just as wrong.

The Lord wants us to fulfill His purpose for our being here. If we don't fulfill our purpose by ignoring it, **or** by letting someone keep us from it, God won't be happy with us. Again, let's look at Jesus example. Did he resist evil? Yes He did!

[John 18:22,23] “And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? ²³Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?”

Jesus rebuked his captors when they struck him. He resisted them! Why? Why not say, "Thank you sir, may I please have another"? Because they were trying to take his **righteousness** from him, accuse Him of sin and tar him as a common criminal in the eyes of others.

Jesus' **innocence** was essential, he could not let it be taken from him and still fulfill God's purpose for him - to be a sinless sacrifice for our sins. Therefore Jesus resisted the taking of His righteousness. By the same token, when others try to take from us the gifts God has given us that are necessary for our fulfilling God's purpose, we **must** protect them!

We have the responsibility and **duty** to protect the gifts God has given us. That includes our wives and families. That includes ourselves.

This is such a basic and fundamental truth, this concept of self defense: physically resisting those who would steal or kill, that Jesus used it as an example in a parable:

[Mt 24:43] “But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.” [oops, wrong reference in sermon]

The goodman of the house would have used **force** to stop the thief if necessary. Jesus wasn't condoning an unrighteous action here.

So, why **didn't** Jesus resist the taking of his **life**? Good question! Good answer too!

[John 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 kingdom was heaven, not earth. His purpose was to **die** on the cross, the sinless sacrifice for our sins and **leave** this world, not stay in it. Otherwise as he said, his servants would fight. Would they have? Yes! Would they have been RIGHT to have fought? Yes!

We saw earlier in Luke 22:35-38 that the apostles had swords and that Jesus condoned this and thought it necessary. The apostle's job was to **stay** in this world, and preach the Gospel, something they could **not** do until Jesus died and was resurrected! They were **out** in the world, just as we are to be out in the world and not hiding. They had a mission to perform and they needed to protect themselves if necessary so they could, thus they had swords. Paul talked of the hazards he faced that impeded him:

[2 Cor 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 “

Paul talked of being in perils of robbers and perils of his own countryman and he was **not rejoicing** about them. He was **not** saying, “Hey Great! I can lay my life down!” They were to be **avoided**. They could keep him from doing what God wanted him to do. He needed to protect **against** that.

Do we protect those God has given us to care for? Or do we leave them to be ravished and abused by any who care to do so? Do we protect ourselves and our ability to fulfill God's plan for us, or do we throw the precious gifts God has given us to the first dog that comes sniffing by.

Yes, God condones our defending ourselves, and with deadly force if necessary. The apostles and soldiers of that time weren't carrying **sticks**. They were carrying the most effective personal weapon of the time -- a sword. A firearm is today's equivalent of the sword.

NOT CONVINCED?

Still not convinced? Very well, God has given us an **important** principle:

[Rom 14:22,23] “Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. ²³And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.“

If we think something may be wrong to do, it **is wrong** for us to do it, because then it is **not** of faith. Don't think a Christian should own a firearm? Well then please! **Don't** own one!

I've tried to give some justification from God's Word for a Christian to defend himself and his family with **deadly force** if necessary. I believe we can do so out of faith, not trusting in our **own** justifications. Not doing what I **want** to do, but what I **must** do and am required to do of God. But please, if you **can not do so confidently, in faith** that you are doing the right thing, please **don't** have a firearm until you study to obtain that

confidence. It's much better that we die physically and be saved spiritually, than the other way around, as the Lord said:

[Mark 8:36] “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

Well, should we all buy guns and go armed? How many of the 12 apostles had swords? Two. Why didn't they all? People are different. Some are weak, some are strong. The Lord said so:

[Rom 15:1] “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves “ Who is strong and who is weak? The ones who choose to be armed, or those who choose not? I don't know. Peter was one of the two that had swords. Was Peter weak or strong? Why, Yes! ☺ Peter was both weak and strong.

[Rom 14:2,3] “For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. ³Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him “

The Lord, through Paul, tells us how we are to consider and treat our brothers and to **not** judge them. **Weak or strong isn't the issue**, it's that we act by faith.

And if our faith is less than perfect? We can trust God to be merciful and let us find the Truth if we honestly and diligently seek it.

[Matt 7:7] “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: ⁸For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened “

God has given us great and precious gifts. We need to value them and protect them and use them to fullest and to the best of our ability.

But, the **greatest** gift God has given us is the gift of His Son, Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

[John 3:16] “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

[Invitation]

[End]

This is an original work by Ed Kelleher. Feel free to use it to the glory of God.

If you believe the Bible is God's word and the **only** instruction manual He wants us to use today, we invite you to come visit because that's what we believe too.

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