

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
Self Defense



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Self-Defense



How should we think about the broad topic of self-defense? It involves some action from us to prevent harm and defend the safety and life of oneself. The Bible does encourage us to engage in self-defense to protect our loved ones and ourselves. The legal code in most countries provides the justification for the use of self-defense.

Many of the principles we discuss here overlap with previous booklets. For ex-

ample, the booklet on *A Biblical View on Just War* provides some principles that nations must consider before using force and going to war. Obviously, some principles that apply to a nation-state are different than principles that apply to an individual. But there are some similar and overlapping principles. The booklet on *A Biblical View on Criminal Justice* also provides some key principles that clarify when self-defense is justified.

Two Categories of Self-Defense

Discussions about self-defense can be divided into two categories: unarmed and armed. Unarmed self-defense techniques usually involve some type of martial arts. Although certain martial art moves can hurt or even kill an attacker, the primary focus is on defense. How can you escape the dangerous situation whether threatened with hands, a stick, a knife, or a gun? Ideally, a person would want to avoid a threatening situation. Staying away from dangerous areas of town and having proper security in your home are ways to protect your family and yourself. But

when threatened, self-defense is legally and morally justified.

Armed self-defense can be divided into two sub-categories: physical objects and firearms. The physical objects can range from specialized equipment like pepper sprays or tasers to everyday available objects like a baseball bat or a key ring. In nearly every locality, no license or government permission is needed to carry any of these items.

On the other hand, governments have often required that you obtain permission to carry a firearm (or even a large knife) on your person. A discussion of our constitutional rights can be found in the booklet *A Biblical View on the Second Amendment*. Instead, let's consider the argument for the use of firearms in self-defense.

Firearms Used in Self-Defense

The justification for the Second Amendment is two-fold. First, it protects an individual's right to self-defense. Second, it protects citizens against state tyranny.

That second argument is well established merely by the history behind the American Revolution and the writing of the Second Amendment.

The “shot heard round the world” at Lexington (and later battle at Concord) was over the desire of the British troops to confiscate the guns the colonists had stored. When the Bill of Rights was drafted, James Madison and George Mason borrowed a phrase that people have a right “to keep and bear arms” from an earlier declaration of rights.

Most proponents of gun control will acknowledge the value of firearms for self-defense. And that is enough to reject the idea that the Second Amendment only applies to muskets and flintlock pistols. Any intruder today will have firepower much greater than what was available to an 18th-century colonist. In fact, it is quite likely that the robber or mugger will have a semi-automatic handgun or a semi-automatic rifle.

That is one reason why most police no longer carry revolvers. Police officers want

to have a gun that has a high-capacity magazine. Why? Because that is what bad guys usually have. They want to have in their hands enough ammunition and firepower to counter what will be in the hands of a criminal.

If the government is serious about allowing citizens to protect themselves, it cannot justify limiting the guns and ammunition that a law-abiding citizen would need to counter a threat to them. Moreover, you cannot just ban or restrict an AR15 without affecting all other rifles that use high-capacity magazines. And those same types of magazines are also found in other handguns and rifles.

If you also ban these firearms, you are just left with revolvers, pump-action shotguns, and bolt-action rifles. A law enforcement officer or a homeowner with these few weapons would be outgunned by any criminal.

The Second Amendment is about more than just self-defense. It also was intended to be a check against tyranny. But even if you only believe the Second Amend-

ment was about self-defense, you can see the difficulty in banning or restricting semi-automatic rifles if you really are serious about allowing citizens to protect themselves from robbers, muggers, and terrorists.

Crime and the Need for Self-Defense

When you face a threat, your first response should be to call law enforcement. But that may not be enough to neutralize the threat to your family or you. On my radio program, I often say, “When seconds count, the police are just minutes away.” In many situations or locations (e.g., rural America), you are the first line of defense.

It may surprise you to learn that the courts have ruled that police have “no specific legal duty” to protect citizens (*Warren v. District of Columbia*) although they may have a general “public duty” to do so. In fact, in one Supreme Court case (*DeShaney v. Winnebago County*) the justices ruled that police have no specific obligation to protect.

These rulings serve to protect law en-

forcement from various lawsuits, but they are also a reminder that each of us should take seriously our responsibility to protect others and ourselves. This is not a justification for vigilantism. We are to obey the government (Romans 13:1-7) and those in law enforcement, but we also have a personal responsibility.

One reason why we need to think about self-defense is due to the rising crime rate in this country. Recently one researcher found that 51 of the 57 largest cities in America saw increases in homicides. When you add other forms of crime to those statistics, you can easily see why we need to be serious about protecting ourselves and our property.

Why is this happening? Certain elected officials are not willing to prosecute and punish violent offenders. It may surprise you to know that most violent crimes are perpetrated by a small and predictable number of offenders. More than half (56%) of all murders occur in just two percent of the counties of the nation. In my booklet on criminal justice, I documented the

work of criminologist Marvin Wolfgang, who compiled arrest records for males born and raised in Philadelphia. He found that just seven percent in each age group committed two-thirds of all violent crime.

Another reason for the increase in crime is due to releasing violent offenders under ill-conceived bail-reform policies. These changes in policy affect which criminal defendants will be released back into society while awaiting trial. Increasing the percentage of offenders eligible for pre-trial release endangers everyone in society.

And a third reason for the crime increase has come from demoralizing and defunding police departments. Americans are significantly under-policed, especially in urban areas where many of the crimes take place. Changing regulations also hamstrings law enforcement officers trying to do their job in the community.

Can a gun stop a crime? Many elected officials dismiss the idea that one way “to stop a bad guy with a gun is with a good guy with a gun.” Yet the statistics

demonstrate how significant just displaying a firearm can be as a deterrent. Almost every major study on the issue has concluded that Americans use their firearms to defend themselves and others between 500,000 and several million times a year. John Lott (who has been on *Point of View* numerous times) estimated that Americans use guns defensively about two million times a year.

Biblical View of Self-Defense

Do Christians have a right to self-defense? Should Christians even own a gun? These are questions Christians have asked for centuries. Here are a few biblical principles about self-defense.

First, we must begin with the right to life. Humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Humans are valuable and therefore should be protected from evil people. That is not only the role of government (Romans 13:1-7) but also our role in society. We may wish that the government would always protect us, but sometimes we must act on our own for reasons already described.

Second, we are also commanded to protect the weak and vulnerable. We are to “rescue the weak and the needy, deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:4). Proverbs 24:11 calls for us to “Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.” We are called to intervene to prevent harm and bodily threats.

Third, the Old Testament provides numerous examples of believers defending themselves. Exodus 22:2-3, for example, teaches that we are permitted and encouraged to defend our homes. In Nehemiah 4:16-18, we read that while the city was being rebuilt, the men divided the labor in such a way that some took up spears, shields, and bows while others worked. Those who carried the loads or built the wall did so with their weapon readily available.

Fourth, Christians who teach about self-defense often point to a passage in the Bible where Jesus instructs his disciples to sell a cloak and buy a sword (Luke

27:36). In the context, it makes sense. The disciples are about to leave the Passover dinner and will soon be traveling to various towns proclaiming the gospel. Jesus tells them to carry a sack and money bag and to buy a sword. Their traveling will become more perilous.

Finally, we should seek peace whenever possible. Jesus says in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” He is encouraging us to be “peace-makers.” Paul also addresses the attitude we should have in Romans 12:18-19 – “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Additional Resources

Kerby Anderson, chapter sixteen, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, Thomas Nelson, 2005.

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Criminal Justice*, POV booklet, 2019

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Just War*, POV booklet, 2022.

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on the Second Amendment*, POV booklet, 2018.

John Lott, *More Guns Less Crime*, third edition republished, 2019.



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