

## **Justified Killing in the Bible**

A discussion with Bill Fortenberry

The following conversation was initiated by a request that I present a biblical perspective on whether it is ever acceptable to take the life of another human being.

### **Bill:**

**I.** Capital punishment was established by God for all mankind not just as part of the Law.

*He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. Gen 9:6*

**II.** The one carrying out the sentence of capital punishment is not guilty of punishment. He is acting as an agent of the government and of God. This particular part of the law was stated to apply to all generations which includes both Old and New Testament times.

*The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him... But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood... So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings... Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death. (Num 35:19-31)*

*For 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. (Rom 13:4)*

**III.** Those who allow someone else to die as a result of their negligence are just as guilty as if they had done the killing themselves.

*But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death. (Ex 21:29)*

**IV.** Killing in defense of one's home is justified in the eyes of God.

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

**V.** Jesus Himself told his disciples to buy swords.

*He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. (Luke 22:36)*

**Daniel:**

Finish the context of Luke 22. Out of the 12+ they had two - Jesus said that was enough. When they tried to use those same swords, Jesus said that those who live by the sword will die by the sword and told them to put the swords away. He then went so far as to heal the man who was wounded in the Disciples attack. I believe that Jesus was setting up the miracle of healing the servant's ear. He was drawing attention to the act of healing and refusing to fight. Interesting that for three centuries after Christ, Christians were exclusively non-violent. It wasn't until Constantine that Christ and violence mixed.

**Bill:**

I find it very interesting that you chose to object to the verse which is the least necessary to prove my position. The preceding verses are the proof; the passage in Luke is simply confirmation that the proof was correct. Points I - IV demonstrate that a) capital punishment is to be carried out by man, b) that the man carrying out the punishment is held guiltless, c) that failure to prevent the death of innocent people is tantamount to murder, and d) that killing someone in the act of protecting others is justified.

Jesus' statement in Luke 22 and His subsequent actions are consistent with the above reasoning. Verse 37 explains that Jesus told His disciples to buy a sword because of the change in attitude that the people of Jerusalem would have toward Him. This is further evidenced by the other items mentioned in verses 34 - 35. Jesus reminded the disciples that the last time they left Him they did not need to take any provisions with them because the people met all of their needs. He then informed them that this time would be different. Jesus would soon be considered a blasphemer, and His followers would not be welcome among the common populace. Therefore they needed to gather their own provisions and buy swords. The implication is that the sword will be needed to protect the bearer of the purse. This is consistent with the principle of self defense in Exodus 22:2.

As for Jesus' response to Peter's use of the sword, let me point out that His warning about dying by the sword is simply a restatement of Genesis 9:6. As such it is subject to the two exceptions given in Exodus 22:2 and Numbers 35. Peter's actions against the servant of the high priest did not fall under either of these two exceptions. The band of men had not made any attempt to harm Jesus at this point. They had simply approached Him and His disciples in a public place. The disciples had asked Jesus if they should attack with the sword, but Peter acted without waiting for a response. When Jesus healed Malchus, He gave the rest of the disciples the answer that Peter had not waited for. He told them, "Suffer ye thus far," or in other words, don't use your swords yet. It is also important to note that Jesus did not tell Peter to get rid of his sword; He simply told him to return it to its place. This statement implied that there would be a time later when they would need to use the swords—that time just hadn't come yet. The passage conveys the idea that great discretion must be used when applying lethal force, for the penalty for wrongful use of a weapon is very great indeed.

**Daniel:**

vs. 38 limits the swords that Jesus allowed to be purchased. Numbered among the transgressors was a quotation from Isaiah 53:12 referring to his death on the cross, not the reaction of the city of Jerusalem..

**Bill:**

No, Jesus' statement that two would be enough no more limits the amount allowed to be purchased than my concession that a grade of 70% is enough to pass the class places a limit on my desire for my students to exceed that amount.

You are also incorrect in making a distinction between Jesus' death on the cross and the change in attitude among the Jews, for it was the reaction of the Jews that put Him on the cross not the other way around.

**Daniel:**

so you think the martyrs should have fought back? that Peter, Paul, Stephan, James and the others should have tried to kill their persecutors?

If there was another time for the disciples were supposed to use weapons, why do we never read of weapons being used by the disciples?

Here are a couple of notes on the practical things that haven't been addressed yet....A note on the hypothetical situations: has anyone who has posted, besides me, carried a concealed firearm? (I carried a concealed, high capacity Glock 23 (.40) for two and a half years)

Other situations you might be tempted to use your gun. Would you attempt to kill the subject if:

You are in the bank when it is held up by a masked man

You stop for gas and while you are in the store to pay, the guy in front of you demands all the money in the register

A masked man in a dark alley demands your wallet

Jesus said it is enough - it is sufficient - there was no need to purchase more swords. To say that they went out and armed themselves would be arguing from silence.. God saw fit to record that two swords were there. One was used.

**Bill:**

Most of the martyrs that we know about received a trial before they were killed. The Bible does not justify the use of deadly force to prevent yourself from being arrested. We have no actual records (just an occasional legend) of early martyrs who might have died in a home invasion. Likewise, the Bible does not inform us of any instances in which a Christian might have rightfully used force in accordance with Exodus 22:2.

As for your own hypothetical situations, the use of deadly force would be justified in each situation according to Exodus 22:2.