

## **CHAPTER 25**

### **HOW FAR CAN WE GO IN RESISTING THE WICKED? CAN WE EVEN USE FORCE?**

*Blessed be the Lord, my rock,  
who trains my hands for war,  
and my fingers for battle;  
Psalm 144:1 (RSV)*

*<sup>7</sup> And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. <sup>8</sup> Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.*

*Leviticus 26:7-8 (RSV)*

*<sup>14</sup> And I looked, and arose, and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."*

*Nehemiah 4:14 (RSV)*

*<sup>35</sup> And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." <sup>36</sup> And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one.*

*Luke 22:35-36 (NASB)*

*<sup>49</sup> When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup> But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him.*

*Luke 22:49-51 (NASB)*

*<sup>15</sup> And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons*

*Mark 11:15 (ESV)*

*<sup>22</sup> You shall not fear them; for it is the Lord your God who fights for you.'*  
*Deuteronomy 3:22 (RSV)*

*<sup>3</sup> Know therefore this day that he who goes over before you as a devouring fire is the Lord your God; he will destroy them and subdue them before you; so you shall drive them out, and make them perish quickly, as the Lord has promised you.*

*Deuteronomy 9:3 (RSV)*

*"When you go forth to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people, <sup>3</sup> and shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, you draw near this day to battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint; do not fear, or tremble, or be in dread of them; <sup>4</sup> for the Lord your God is he that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.'*

*Deuteronomy 20:1-4 (RSV)*

<sup>13</sup> *When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood before him with his drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?”<sup>14</sup> And he said, “No; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and worshiped, and said to him, “What does my lord bid his servant?”<sup>15</sup> And the commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, “Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.*

*Joshua 5:13-15 (RSV)*

*He trains my hands for war,  
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.  
2 Samuel 22:35 (RSV)*

### **Can we use physical force, or even weapons, to resist the wicked?**

This chapter addresses an area of confusion for many Christians, which is whether we can use physical force to resist the wicked. Some believe we can’t resist them at all, by any means, because of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore they become pacifists. Even if violence doesn’t come into it, many feel uncomfortable about sacking bad staff, expelling wicked people from churches or resisting the wicked in general. So, we need to look closely at what Jesus said:

<sup>38</sup> *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’<sup>39</sup> But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;<sup>40</sup> and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well;<sup>41</sup> and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.<sup>42</sup> Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.*

<sup>43</sup> *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

*Matthew 5:38-44 (RSV)*

At first sight, it may seem that Jesus is forbidding all resistance of the wicked, at any time, whatever they may do, and that we should just pray for our enemies, without doing anything to stop them. The question is in what circumstances, if any, are we meant to take this approach? Is it always applicable, or only in certain situations? We need some clear answers, or this whole book could be said to be in disobedience to Jesus’ words, because I am advocating that we *should* resist the wicked.

To get a clear understanding of Matthew 5: 38-44 we must read it alongside the many other passages in Scripture which deal with resisting the wicked, and hold them all in balance at the same time. We must not read Jesus’ words in Matthew chapter 5 as if that was all He ever said on this issue. It must be interpreted alongside everything else that He said and also what the prophets and apostles said, both before and after. But seeking that balanced overall understanding is not easy. There are many such passages and some appear, at first sight, to be saying contradictory things.

For example, in Luke 22:36, Jesus Himself *commands the disciples to buy swords*. Moreover, He said that *after* what He said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Therefore, we cannot say that the command to buy swords was revoked, or even modified, by what He said there. On the other hand, neither can we say that Luke 22:36 revokes, or even contradicts, Matthew 5. There is no contradiction. The different things that Jesus says in Matthew 5 and Luke 22:36 are all consistent, provided we understand them correctly and in their proper context.

That is not just the immediate surrounding passages, but the whole of the rest of the Bible. Taking that broad and balanced approach makes interpretation harder, but that is the way it has to be if we want to understand Scripture correctly. So, we will firstly go right back to Genesis and see what the Bible has

to say about resisting the wicked, and especially about using force. Then we will look at various later passages, both before and after the Sermon on the Mount.

**After the Flood Noah was commanded to execute murderers, but that must have been done by private individuals, as there was no state.**

From the Flood, until the Tower of Babel, there were no nations or governments and the whole human race had one language. There may have been local forms of government, but if there were, we aren't told anything about them. It would seem that, all over the world, people governed and protected themselves. They took personal responsibility for enforcing the law and punishing offenders, including executing murderers. At least to begin with, private individuals were responsible for all of that, as there were no governments, police forces or Courts. Here is what God commanded Noah:

*<sup>5</sup> For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. <sup>6</sup> Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.*

*Genesis 9:5-6 (RSV)*

The covenant God made with Noah affects the whole human race, not just the Jews. It is not part of the Law of Moses. Therefore the command to execute murderers applies worldwide, even today, as it has never been revoked. Given that in the early centuries after the Flood there were no nation states, and no prosecuting authorities, the executions would have to have been done by private individuals, as in the 'Wild West' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So there is no basis for arguing that, under the covenant made with Noah, there was any duty *not* to resist the wicked, or not to use violence, or even lethal force.

**The approach taken in the Law of Moses to self-defence and capital punishment**

Let's now move on many centuries in time and consider the position under the Law of Moses, or the 'Mosaic Covenant.' Unlike the covenant made with Noah, which is *still fully in force*, and which applies to *all mankind*, the Law of Moses only applied to the Jews. More importantly, even for them, it ended when Jesus died. Even so, we still need to examine what it had to say about self-defence, capital punishment and resisting the wicked in general. That will provide us with valuable guidance as to God's general attitude and approach.

Let us begin with the sixth commandment, in Exodus 20:13, which is correctly translated, in the ESV, as "*You shall not murder*". Many still assume that that prohibits killing of any kind, or for any reason. That confusion partly arises because the King James version of the Bible wrongly translated the verse as "*Thou shalt not kill*". However, the Hebrew word used clearly means to 'murder', not 'kill'. Therefore what is being forbidden is only unlawful, unjustified killing, not killing itself.

It doesn't prohibit killing which is done in war, self-defence or for capital punishment. On the contrary, those forms of killing are expressly authorised, and even positively required, elsewhere in the Bible, especially within the Law of Moses itself. Therefore, the Bible provides no basis for pacifism, or for the abolition of capital punishment, unless you deliberately choose to misinterpret verses like Exodus 20:13. We have already seen that God directly commands capital punishment for murder.

The Bible is even clearer in sanctioning the killing of enemy combatants in war, because God frequently commands the Israelites to fight. Let's look therefore at a passage which deals with self-defence, which is more likely to be of relevance to most of us. It concerns Nehemiah, whom God instructed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. While his men were working on the wall, they kept weapons in their hands, or close by, to use in self-defence if they were attacked:

<sup>21</sup> So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn till the stars came out. <sup>22</sup> I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day." <sup>23</sup> So neither I nor my brethren nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon in his hand.<sup>1</sup>

*Nehemiah 4:21-23 (RSV)*

**What did Jesus mean in the Sermon on the Mount when He said to "turn the other cheek" and does that instruction apply at all times, or only in certain circumstances?**

Many have felt that Jesus' words in Matthew 5 require them to adopt a pacifist position. They won't fight for their country in war, or use violence to defend themselves, or even their families. If the Bible contained nothing other than the Sermon on the Mount, and if Jesus and the apostles had never said anything afterwards, a pacifist stance could conceivably be justified by that passage. But the Bible does say other things and, in particular, so does Jesus Himself. Let us now look at Luke 22: 35-36, a passage which few people ever notice, and on which few sermons are ever preached.

It is where Jesus tells the disciples to go out and *buy swords*. Furthermore, He doesn't merely *allow* them to do so. He positively *commands* them to buy one. What is more, that order is given to *all* of them, not just to a select few. Thus it cannot be explained away as an exceptional arrangement, which only applies to a minority of people. Therefore, we have to interpret Matthew 5 in the light of Luke 22, which came *later* than the Sermon on the Mount. We know that for sure because Luke's gospel is specifically stated to be in chronological order.

Whatever Jesus meant in the Sermon on the Mount, it is evidently consistent with the command for every disciple to buy a sword. We can't just ignore one or other of Jesus' instructions and focus solely on the one we prefer. We must find out exactly what Jesus meant, on each occasion, and how these apparently contradictory instructions can be reconciled. The first point is that the command to "turn the other cheek" is given in the context of how one is treated as a Christian. In particular it is about what is done to you in the course of your evangelistic ministry.

Therefore we know immediately that we may not promote the Gospel by force, or impose it on others. Moreover, when we are insulted and mistreated in the course of our ministry, or simply for being a Christian, we are to respond graciously, not aggressively. The reference to turning the other cheek is primarily about being *reviled and abused*, rather than any all-out *physical attack* upon us. To slap a person on the cheek was an insult and was a way of showing contempt and disrespect. It wasn't an attempt to kill, or even to injure.

Therefore, in choosing that very minor form of assault as His example, Jesus was staying within the context of abusive and insulting behaviour towards us. He was not speaking about full-scale physical violence, which is intended to kill or injure. Indeed, it is quite possible that Jesus had in mind the episode from 2 Chronicles, where the prophet Micaiah was abused in that very way by Zedekiah, one of the false prophets, whom he was opposing and rebuking:

<sup>22</sup> Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; the LORD has spoken evil concerning you." <sup>23</sup> Then Zedeki'ah the son of Chena'anah came near and struck Micai'ah on the cheek, and said, "Which way did the Spirit of the LORD go from me to speak to you?"

*2 Chronicles 18:22-23 (RSV)*

When Micaiah was insulted by being slapped on the cheek, he did not respond with violence. He answered the false prophet, and the King, with some very direct words but he did not fight back *physically* in response to that provocation. If we are insulted and mistreated *for being Christians*, Jesus does not want us to fight, but to show forbearance and to love, and pray for, those who hate us.

However, it does not follow that He wants us to accept *full-scale violence* being used against us. Otherwise, Jesus would not have subsequently commanded all the disciples to buy swords.

On the rare occasions when Luke 22:36 is mentioned at all, the usual explanation is that Jesus told the disciples to buy swords to guard against wild animals, not people. But that cannot be right. Firstly, no mention is made of wild animals. Secondly, there were no wild animals in Israel anyway. The lions and bears that King David fought 1000 years earlier had long since disappeared. Thirdly, when Jesus sent the disciples out on an earlier evangelistic campaign, in Luke 10 and Mark 6, He *didn't* tell them to bring swords. But He surely would have if wild animals had been the reason for the swords:

***<sup>1</sup>After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road.***

***Luke 10:1-4 (RSV)***

Moreover, when instructing the disciples in Matthew 10, Jesus tells them they are not even to bring a wooden *staff*, of the kind used for self-defence, let alone to carry swords:

***<sup>9</sup> Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food.***

***Matthew 10:9-10 (RSV)***

Thus, on that occasion, Jesus did not think they needed any weapon at all to defend themselves, *not even a staff*. That was possibly because they were only preaching within Israel itself and the potential risk was only slight. Yet, when He spoke to them later, in Luke 22, He did tell them to bring swords on their future trips. What is more, He did not limit that instruction to any particular trip or location. The command is across the board and appears to apply to *all the disciples and all occasions*:

***<sup>35</sup> And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." <sup>36</sup> He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one.***

***Luke 22:35-36 (RSV)***

What then is the purpose and meaning of a sword and what does it signify? It is plainly intended only to be used for *self-defence*, not as a weapon of *offence*, because the Gospel has to be spread by preaching, not by force of any kind. Indeed, we may not even use manipulation or deceit, let alone violence, as a means of bringing people to faith. Nevertheless, we are quite clearly looking at the swords being used to *fight* with, because a sword has no other use.

Jesus wasn't referring to pen knives, scissors or cutlery. He said swords, and He meant swords, not any other kind of sharp instrument, for which we might possibly have a non-violent use. Therefore, anybody who argues for pacifism, whether on the basis of Matthew 5 or otherwise, must explain why swords are needed at all. They must also explain why Jesus made it *mandatory* to go out and buy one, rather than leave it up to each disciple's discretion to choose whether to do so.

**Peter was carrying a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane, in Jesus' presence. That is why it was there, already on his person, for him to use on Malchus.**

Actually, Jesus must have already instructed the disciples to carry swords, even before the command that He gave in Luke 22:36. That must be so because when He made that statement, in the Garden of Gethsemane, at least two of the disciples *were already carrying swords*. What's more, they were doing so *in His very presence*, without being rebuked for doing so, and without appearing to have any

expectation of being rebuked. Would you carry a sword, or a loaded gun, in the immediate presence of your boss if you had any reason at all to suppose that he would disapprove?

Indeed, would you carry a weapon of any kind unless your boss had already expressly authorised it beforehand? We can't be absolutely certain that Jesus had already given them instructions, because it does not say so. However, it surely makes no sense otherwise. Note the open and confident way in which Peter points to the two swords and offers to use them. He clearly doesn't sound like he expects even to be questioned as to why he is carrying a weapon, let alone told off for doing so:

***And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough."  
Luke 22:38 (RSV)***

If the above verse is ever referred to, preachers focus on the second part, where Jesus declines Peter's offer to use the sword and says "*It is enough*". The usual conclusion is that Jesus opposes all violence *as a matter of principle* and is forbidding the use of swords *in general*. But that is to misunderstand the passage. All that Jesus was declining was the use of violence *for the purpose of preventing His crucifixion*. He knew that, for our sake, it had to go ahead. We cannot deduce anything further than that from His words to Peter. However a sword was then used, contrary to Jesus' instructions:

***<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him; <sup>48</sup> but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" <sup>49</sup> And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup> But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. <sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."***

***Luke 22:47-53 (RSV)***

If we look at the parallel passage, in John's gospel, we see that it was Peter who used the sword:

***<sup>10</sup> Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. <sup>11</sup> Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"***

***John 18:10-11 (RSV)***

When these two passages are taught in churches, the same misguided conclusion is often reached, that Jesus opposes *all violence*. However, no such statement is made by Jesus, or even implied, in any of the gospel accounts. Jesus' reason for not wanting Peter to use his sword, on this occasion, is that what is about to happen next must go ahead. So the instruction not to defend Him was specific to that particular situation, not to all situations. We might make a similar point today if, in a hostage situation, a senior police officer was to instruct his men not to open fire.

We could not deduce from that instruction that he is a pacifist and opposes all use of force, at any time, or in any circumstances. We would realise that he just means that they should not fire at that moment, or on that occasion, or until he orders otherwise. Indeed, as in Gethsemane, the very fact that the senior officer allowed his men to carry firearms in the first place, and to be present at the scene, means that he does not oppose firearms in general. Note also that, in John 18:11 above, Jesus says to Peter "*Put your sword into its sheath...*" He did not tell him to *get rid of it*, or throw it away.

Neither did He say anything to object to him either *owning* it or *carrying* it. That is very significant, because to put the sword back into its sheath means that Peter would be *continuing to carry it*. Jesus would never have authorised the continued carrying of a sword, even inside a sheath, if it was wrong or sinful, in any way, for him to do that. If Jesus had objected in principle to Peter carrying a sword He

would, instead, have said something like “*Take that sheath off and get rid of it altogether. You shouldn’t be carrying any sword.*”

Moreover, the very fact that Peter had a sheath for his sword, which would be attached to his belt, would have made it obvious to everybody, not just to Jesus, that he was carrying a sword. Yet, as we saw earlier, Jesus said nothing to object to him doing so. Accordingly, the passages in Luke 22 and John 18 cannot validly be used to argue against the use of force in general, or even lethal force. That is not what those passages are about. They both actually provide powerful arguments *in favour* of the use of force, in appropriate situations and appropriate ways.

Why then did Jesus give the command about buying swords at that time? Perhaps it was because He was mindful that, very soon, they would not have Him physically present with them. Or, maybe it was because they would soon be going outside of Israel, to hostile Gentile nations, where they would face many new dangers? It could be that any or all of those considerations caused Him to speak at that moment. Who knows? Whatever his precise reasons were, the operative point, which there is no getting away from, is that this is what He then said:

***He said to them, “But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one.***

*Luke 22:36 (RSV)*

If Jesus had any objection, in principle, to the use of violence and, in particular, to the use of lethal force, He would never have said those words. He would either have said nothing at all, or He would have said something else, but He wouldn’t have commanded them *all* to buy swords. Moreover, on the issue of whether it is wrong in principle for men to serve as soldiers, and thus to carry weapons and use them, consider this rarely-mentioned passage from Luke 3. Crowds are gathered around John the Baptist. He had been preaching repentance and telling the people to “*bear fruit that befits repentance.*”

In response to this, people of different types and occupations, such as tax collectors and others, approach John the Baptist and ask him what they need to do in order to repent. Then some *soldiers* come to John and ask him what *they* ought to do. If John had any objection, in principle, to them being soldiers at all, or to carrying weapons, or using them, he would surely have said so. But he doesn’t. He merely gives them this very limited advice as to how they should conduct themselves *while continuing to be soldiers*:

***Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”***

*Luke 3:14 (ESV)*

If a prostitute, abortionist or pornographer had asked John what they need to do in order to repent, he would have told them to stop doing what they were doing and seek another career. But John the Baptist plainly had no objection to the concept of being a soldier or to them bearing, or even using, arms. If he had, then his words would make no sense. Also, by telling soldiers to be content with their wages, it plainly follows that he did not consider it sinful to earn one’s wages by being a soldier.

Neither is it sinful to be in the army, or to do the things that soldiers have to do, including using lethal force. If it was, John would have said so, because he was not known for being shy or timid or for not speaking his mind. It was rebuking Herod Antipas for his adultery that led to John being imprisoned and executed. Moreover, it is also clear that John envisages that those soldiers will *continue* to carry weapons, because he tells them not to rob anybody by violence.

They would not be able to rob anyone in the first place unless they had weapons. Thus what John is warning them against is not the *possession* or *use* of weapons. He means their *illegitimate* use as a means of robbing passers-by and forcing them to hand over money. Therefore anybody who claims

that it is inherently wrong for a Christian to serve in the military has John the Baptist to contend with. They would need to explain away his words, both what he does say and what he doesn't say.

### **What about the use of force by a person who works for the State as a soldier, police officer or other such role?**

narrower point is whether it is at least legitimate for a Christian who works as a *servant of the State* to use force. What if the person confronted by violence is not engaged in Christian ministry or being attacked for their own faith? What if he is a policeman or soldier with a job to do on behalf of the State, by which he has been validly appointed? He clearly can use force, even lethal force, if the need arises, to fulfil his lawful duties. Firstly he is authorised by the State but, far more importantly, the Bible also endorses that. Apostle Paul addresses this point directly:

*<sup>1</sup>Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup>for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer.*

*Romans 13:1-4 (RSV)*

This not only applies to pagan soldiers working for the Roman Emperor, but to all law enforcement officers, whether they are Christians or not. God wants order in civil society, but that will inevitably involve resisting, fighting, and even killing, the wicked. There is no other way. I remember an incident when I was a brand new recruit as a police officer. We were on night shift and a 999 call came through. A man had stolen a caterpillar type digger, used for demolition and construction work, and he was driving it into walls and buildings.

He had some kind of grudge against the local council and was venting his anger. It was a dangerous situation to deal with, as his vehicle was huge and no police car could stop it. If we had been in the USA, we would probably have shot him. But we were in the UK, where the police aren't armed. We would therefore have had to radio for an armed officer to come which, in those days, would have taken about 30 minutes. It is quicker these days. At that point a constable called Gerry, who was a strong Christian, had an idea.

He picked up a cluster of wall bricks, held together with cement which had come from one of the walls the man had demolished. Gerry was big and was actually the police heavy weight boxing champion for the county. He then asked the Inspector if he could throw the cluster of bricks at the window of the driver's cabin and the Inspector told him to go ahead. So, Gerry threw it at high speed and it smashed through the screen and hit the driver on the side of the head. I saw his head reverberate from the impact. It was a direct hit and stopped the man driving any further.

Then a number of officers climbed onto the digger and pulled him out, while he was still dazed. The question is was it legitimate for Gerry to throw that cluster of wall bricks at the man's head? There was every chance that it could kill him. Yet, the only realistic alternative was to let that deranged maniac carry on. If so, any number of other people could have been killed, whether members of the public or police officers. Some might criticise Gerry, but I thought he did exactly the right thing and that the Inspector was absolutely correct to authorise it.

### **What about using force to defend another person from violence being used against them?**

Before we look more deeply at the issue of using force for self-defence, let's consider what the position is where it becomes necessary to use force to protect *another person*, rather than yourself. My own



conviction is that this is clearly legitimate, at least biblically. However, you need to be aware that *the legal position in your country may not reflect that*. We shall look at that a little more closely below. At any rate, at least biblically speaking, defending other people would be one of the purposes of the ‘sword’ that disciples are meant to carry, as per Luke 22:36.

If anything, using force to defend another person is even more obviously appropriate than using it to defend oneself. From a theological perspective, as opposed to a legal one, I would agonise far less over that than about protecting myself. Even what Jesus said in Matthew 5 would not, in my view, prevent us resisting the wicked *on behalf of another person* who is being attacked or injured. That said, the above points are largely academic because, 99.9% of the time, the way in which any of us resist wickedness, and wicked people, is not by means of violence anyway.

I was a policeman for three years and, even in that job, the use of violence on my part very rarely came into it. Even for me, let alone for a member of the public, 99% of the resistance that I put up against wicked men in those days was not by physical force. It was done in a host of other ways and mainly involved law, procedure and the use of authority. Whenever I arrested a person I generally just used words alone, and the power of my uniform, without any physical force. I told them the position and calmly told them to come to the police station with me.

It was rare to have to wrestle them to the ground and force them into handcuffs, contrary to the impression given by TV programmes, which tend to sensationalise the job. Likewise, where we encounter wickedness in daily life, we are meant to resist it in a multitude of different ways, depending on all the circumstances. Most of these responses will not involve any violence. So, even if you are a pacifist, we need not get bogged down in a debate about the rights and wrongs of using physical force, because such things hardly ever arise, except on the TV.

In real terms what we are usually talking about is making yourself into a non-violent obstacle in the path of wicked people, whether at work, in the church or anywhere else. When I ran a law firm I took very seriously my duty to watch out for and resist workplace bullying. However, I never needed to hit anybody to achieve that. Yet, if I had somehow needed to use force, I believe it would have been justified, at least biblically, if not in terms of the criminal law or employment law of the UK.

### **An incident where I had to prepare myself to use force to protect my son from a violent attack**

What about the rights and wrongs, at least theologically, of using physical force to defend a friend, a family member, or indeed any other person? I remember an occasion when I took my son to a football match, away at Charlton Athletic. After the game we took a bus back to the car park. The bus was crowded and we could not stand together so my son, who was aged 15, had to stand several feet away from me. I then noticed two young men in their early twenties standing near me. They were Charlton fans and were discussing my boy. It was clear they intended to attack him.

He was unaware of all this, as he never heard any of what they said about him. I had about five minutes to get ready for what I expected them to attempt to do and to plan my response. I chose not to say anything, either to the two men or to my son, because I wanted to keep the element of surprise. I did not want to alert them to the fact that I was with him, as I wanted them to be unprepared for my intervention. I also knew that any attack would probably take place after we got off the bus, not while we were still on it. All buses have CCTV cameras and they would not want to be filmed.

As the bus pulled up at each bus stop I waited to see whether they would get off or whether they really were waiting for my son to get off first. It became ever clearer that the latter was the case. They did not get off at any of the stops and also continued to whisper to each other while looking at my son. Eventually we arrived at the bus stop before the one where we needed to get off. At that point I moved over to the exit door where my son was already standing. I then indicated, solely by eye contact, that we were getting off, as I did not want to be heard to speak to him.

I waited for the other passengers to get off, and on, as I wanted the doorway to be clear. Then my son and I quickly got off. As I had expected, the two men got off immediately after us. As soon as they were off the bus, I grabbed my son and pushed him back on. Then I got back on myself and stood in the doorway, to stop the two men getting back on. By this stage, they had realised that we were together and they began to threaten us. But I simply waited in the doorway, the one in the middle of the bus, not the one at the front, and waited for them to try to get back on.

I was ready to hit the first one who tried it. I have a strong punch and a good kick too, as I used to do karate when I was a teenager and got half way to black belt. So, I wasn't planning to go easy on them. I fully intended to hit very hard and, if need be, to seriously injure them. By altering our positions, so that they were now on the pavement and I was on the raised platform at the entrance of the bus I gained a further height advantage of about 18 inches. It also meant I had the doorway covered, such that it would have been difficult for both of them to get on at once.

Whichever of them did come at me would have to face the obstacle of stepping up onto the bus in order to get on. That would give me a fraction of a second when they were exposed and in an awkward posture. I was determined to take full advantage of that. They could see they were at a tactical disadvantage, and would be vulnerable when boarding. They probably also sensed how resolute I was and they must have known that the first one to try it would get injured.

My intention was to punch hard at the nose. It breaks easily, causes a lot of pain, and can end a fight quickly. I calculated that I would probably only need to hit the first one and then the other would back off. Thankfully, while the two men were edging forwards, the bus driver suddenly closed the doors. As the doors were closing, the larger one lunged forwards, but was too late. So he began to punch the windows and shout.

I have deliberately been explicit and have set out frankly, without any euphemisms, exactly what my intentions were. Many would find it shocking to hear someone speak of intending to break a person's nose and say that it "*doesn't sound very Christian*". Some might object less if that injury was the unintended, accidental consequence of my defending myself and my son. But for it to be my conscious intention may be thought to be going too far. It is not what one usually hears in church. However, it ought to be, because it is a real issue and needs to be faced and prepared for.

Being prepared is important. The incident I faced was slow in its build up and I had several minutes to form a plan and get ready. I was also able to get clear in my own mind what I could legitimately do and how much force I should use. However, that is not the norm, as such crises are usually sprung upon you without any warning. One moment you may be out shopping, and the next someone is mugging you, or your wife, or attacking your child. In that split second there is no time to do a Bible study to work out your position on the ethics of self-defence, or to cross refer Matthew 5 with Luke 22. You need to have your theology already worked out in advance.

Then, if and when the moment comes, you can spring straight into action without any delay and without an agony of indecision and uncertainty. You need to know, *at least biblically*, if not legally, that where you or another person are threatened with death or injury, you can respond with *whatever force is necessary* to stop it happening. That force might only need to be at the lower end of the scale and involve only punches or kicks. However, it can sometimes be much worse than that and a situation could arise where you have no realistic alternative but to injure, or even kill, the attacker.

**However, be acutely aware of the law on self-defence and defence of others in your country. Legal systems vary and in the UK the legal defence of 'self-defence' is shrinking fast.**

When I speak of self-defence I am referring to it from a *biblical* perspective and am only saying what *God* allows us to do. That may, or may not, coincide with the criminal or civil legal systems in your jurisdiction. In the United Kingdom the legal defence of 'self-defence' when faced with a charge of

assault, or even murder, was well-established and used to be widely understood. However, in recent years, with the rampant growth of political correctness and rights-based thinking, that legal defence has been severely weakened.

Therefore it may not now be available to you, even in circumstances where it once was. Thus, if you are going to defend yourself, or your family, as the Bible permits, you must face the fact that the police and courts may not approve. They may not see it as a valid defence to a charge of assault that is then brought against you, even if God does. When I was a policeman in the mid-1980s, and even in my early years as a lawyer, a person defending himself or others from an attacker would not have been prosecuted unless his response was grotesquely disproportionate and/or unreasonable.

That is no longer the case. When there is a fight, prosecutors will look at prosecuting both the attacker and the defender and sometimes only the defender. That is how absurd the position has become, due to political correctness. It has no place for concepts like right and wrong, and only thinks in terms of 'rights'. Even then, it is the supposed rights of the criminal that are prioritised, not the victim or bystanders. So, you have to be very realistic and assume that if you do defend yourself, or your family, you may not receive the support of the legal system afterwards.

Indeed, you may well be prosecuted for your response,, even if the assailant is let off. If you and the attacker are both prosecuted, the sentence given to you for using what they deem to be "excessive force" to defend yourself may be more severe than what he gets for attacking you. That may be the case even if you have no previous convictions and he has many. Nevertheless, the practical reality is that it is still necessary to defend yourself and your family, no matter how absurd the law may have become.

Therefore, if you agree that self-defence is necessary, and that the Bible permits it, then go ahead. But do so with your eyes wide open as to how it may be viewed afterwards by the police, prosecutors and courts. Their values and thinking are diverging ever farther away from God's. One of the key things they will look at is whether you used a weapon and, if so, what kind. If it is anything which is ordinarily intended to be used as a weapon, it is increasingly likely to be viewed as excessive.

So, in the UK, to carry a gun or a knife is illegal and would automatically lead to prosecution. Thus, if you wish to carry or use a weapon, make sure it is something which isn't ordinarily used or viewed as such. You may have to be imaginative. For example, keep in your bedroom, hallway or car various innocuous items which are not ordinarily thought of as weapons, but which can be put to such use if need be, such as a walking stick. Another good idea is a can of strong wasp killer. That can be more effective than pepper spray and is less likely to be viewed afterwards as a weapon.

The nearer it is to being a weapon, the more the authorities will disapprove of its use, or even its possession, at least in the UK. It will differ in other jurisdictions. When I was in Israel recently, there was a campaign of knife attacks by Arabs on Jews. So I carried a walking stick wherever the tour group went. Some other men copied my idea so we were ready, if the need arose, to respond to a knife attack. Yet, we were breaking no laws because all we had were walking sticks, which we were entitled to carry, albeit that, privately, we had a different purpose in mind for them.

The best thing is to obtain at least some basic training in self-defence and in how to use your fists, feet, elbows and knees as weapons. Their use will attract less criticism than the use of any object, even if it is not a conventional weapon. They also have the added advantage of always being with you, wherever you go. Enquire into this kind of training and prepare yourself as best you can. Then, if an attack occurs, your skills will be ready, as well as your theology.

### **What about the use of firearms by private citizens, even with the intention of killing the assailant?**

What is the position, at least in God's eyes, about the use of *lethal* force by a private citizen, such as by the use of firearms? In the UK the question is largely academic, as firearms are so heavily regulated.

One needs a licence just to own them. Even then, they need to be kept locked away in a cabinet at home. Therefore they are unlikely to be accessible quickly enough to use in an emergency anyway. The reality is that if you did ever use a gun to wound or kill a violent burglar or rapist, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service would be likely to prosecute you.

They will be extremely reluctant to be persuaded that the use of a gun in self-defence is ever reasonable. In theory it can be, and that argument was accepted much more readily in the past. However, it is far less likely to be considered reasonable today. If you live in another legal jurisdiction, such as many states in the USA, the position may be very different. Then the question of whether you should own, carry and potentially use a firearm becomes a live issue. I met a man in 2014 who opened my eyes to all of this. His name was Josh and he came from Minnesota.

He owned licensed firearms and also obtained a licence to carry a concealed weapon on his person, more or less all the time. Therefore he had a handgun immediately accessible wherever he went, at work, driving, shopping and so on. He was a strong Christian and saw it as an aspect of his ministry to carry a weapon to defend others, should the need arise. He had also discussed this with his employer and he was happy for Josh to carry a gun while at work.

His boss saw it as a benefit for the business and its other employees. Due to the UK's very different culture, many British Christians would struggle to see how Josh carrying a gun could be something which God would ever approve of, or see as a service to the community. However, it made perfect sense to me and I thoroughly approved of him. In Israel, vast numbers of civilians carry guns routinely. Anyone who used to be an officer in the IDF is allowed to carry a weapon. So are security guards and various other authorised persons.

That adds up to a high percentage of the civilian population, not to mention all the serving soldiers and police who are out and about, whether on or off duty. Any terrorist, or common criminal, knows that he is likely to be resisted by some bystander walking or driving nearby. By contrast, in the UK, where only criminals and terrorists carry guns, there is almost never anybody nearby who can defend the public from the assailant. Therefore the terrorist or robber has it all his own way.

The USA is somewhere in between. Although most people don't carry a gun, there are enough who do to pose a serious threat to those with wicked intentions. Someone might object that the very possession of firearms is the problem and that reducing the public's access to them would reduce violence. There is some merit in that argument, because guns can, and do, end up in the wrong hands. But the overwhelming likelihood is that they would anyway. The real issue is whether the right-thinking element of the community should carry arms *as well*, because the wrongdoers already do.

Those evildoers don't spend any time agonising over whether God approves. They only care about whether there is anybody to resist them. Therefore the possibility, or likelihood, of coming up against an armed citizen is a deterrent to wrongdoers, and even to terrorists. But even if it isn't, it is at least a way of stopping them at an early stage, before they go on an extended shooting spree. The first time I visited En Gedi in Israel I saw a group of primary school kids on a school trip. Some of their teachers, including women, had automatic rifles hanging from their necks.

It was a strange sight, but it was right and necessary. Moreover, it seems to be working. Israel is surrounded by millions of vicious enemies and also has many hate-filled Muslims living within it. Given the circumstances, their approach keeps the levels of violence surprisingly low, such that I have always felt safe walking the streets in Israel. That said, the primary issue is not whether the carrying and use of guns is effective as a deterrent. The real question is whether the Bible *permits* us to use force, including weapons if need be. I personally believe it does.

## **Why did Jesus Himself use physical force when dealing with money-changers in the Temple?**

Some may still be unconvinced, and feel that Jesus' words in Matthew 5 forbid any form of force, or indeed any resistance to evil whatsoever, violent or otherwise. If so, they would need to address the issue of Jesus' own conduct when He drove the money-changers from the Temple and knocked over their tables. That doesn't sound either peaceful or passive. It was direct action and it also involved the use of force to make them stop what they were doing. However much we might try to tone down this incident, the inescapable fact is that Jesus used physical force:

*<sup>15</sup> And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. <sup>16</sup> And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. <sup>17</sup> And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." <sup>18</sup> And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.*

*Mark 11:15-18 (ESV)*

Some may argue that the incident in the Temple cannot be used as a precedent and that Jesus was doing something which only He was allowed to do. But where is the authority for that? The Bible doesn't say so. It would be pure supposition. Certainly, Jesus was the only one who could call the Temple His "Father's house". But that is not the issue. The question is whether we can use force in opposing or apprehending those who do wicked things. The place where those wicked acts occur is not the issue. Jesus' actions on that day were entirely consistent with His teaching.

They had to be, because He was always consistent with his own nature and with God's Word. Any inconsistency would have been sin, and He never sinned, so we can rule that out. Therefore His actions did not contravene either the Law of Moses, which was still in force at that time, or His own words in the Sermon on the Mount. It follows that when in a similar situation, a Christian can use appropriate force to prevent something wicked, even if it is not a threat to anybody's life or safety. Therefore we are entitled, in certain circumstances, to act as Jesus did on that day.

## **What about Jesus' own use of force, and even weapons, in His roles as "LORD of hosts" and "Commander of the army of the LORD"?**

The incident with the money-changers was during Jesus' earthly ministry and involved only limited force. However, one of Jesus' many titles is the '*LORD of hosts*', which means the '*LORD of armies*'. It is a military title like 'Field Marshal' or 'Commander in Chief'. It therefore makes Jesus a military figure. That is an aspect of His role which few ever consider. It doesn't fit the usual image of Jesus and would make some uncomfortable, as it is not how they like to think of Him. Let's look at a few passages where Jesus' title, 'LORD of hosts', is used. This one is from Isaiah:

*<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government will be upon his shoulder,  
and his name will be called  
"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."  
<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom,  
to establish it, and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and for evermore.*

*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*  
*Isaiah 9:6-7 (RSV)*

This next passage, from Zechariah, shows the LORD of hosts directly engaged in military action, protecting the people of Israel:

*<sup>14</sup> Then the Lord will appear over them,  
and his arrow go forth like lightning;  
the Lord God will sound the trumpet,  
and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.*  
*<sup>15</sup> The Lord of hosts will protect them,  
and they shall devour and tread down the slingers;  
and they shall drink their blood like wine,  
and be full like a bowl,  
drenched like the corners of the altar.*  
*Zechariah 9:14-15 (RSV)*

Also, in the book of Joshua, we see that ‘the Lord’, or the ‘Lord God of Israel’, fights for Israel:

*<sup>14</sup> There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel.*  
*Joshua 10:14 (RSV)*

*<sup>40</sup> So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded. <sup>41</sup> And Joshua defeated them from Ka'desh-bar'nea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. <sup>42</sup> And Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel. <sup>43</sup> Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.*  
*Joshua 10:40-43 (RSV)*

In Jeremiah it is made clear that the LORD of hosts is the King, and we already know that the King of Israel is Jesus:

*“As I live, says the King,  
whose name is the LORD of hosts,  
like Tabor among the mountains,  
and like Carmel by the sea, shall one come.*  
*Jeremiah 46:18 (RSV)*

Many other passages also use this title, ‘the LORD of hosts’. Therefore this description of Jesus in military terms or, to be more precise, of the Second Person of the Trinity, is a consistent theme. However, let’s now see an even more explicit passage where the Second Person of the Trinity makes a pre-appearance on the Earth. In this case He is described as “*the commander of the army of the Lord*”:

*<sup>13</sup> When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood before him with his drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” <sup>14</sup> And he said, “No; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and worshiped, and said to him, “What does my lord bid his servant?” <sup>15</sup> And the commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, “Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.*  
*Joshua 5:13-15 (RSV)*

This military figure, with a drawn sword, is the Son of God Himself in a pre-appearance. He is clearly not a mere angel, because Joshua *worships* Him and is not told to stop. He certainly would have been

told to stop if it had only been an angel, as they never permit anybody to worship them. By contrast, this Person actually encourages Joshua to do so. He even tells him to take off his shoes, as he is standing on holy ground, because God Himself is present. He would not be told to do that if the “Commander of the army of the Lord” was only an angel.

The point of all these passages is that Jesus is clearly *a military figure*. He would never be the Commander of an army if there was anything inherently wrong or sinful about the use of military force. Blasphemy, idolatry, lust and all other forms of sin are always wrong, regardless of who does them or when or why. Therefore there are no circumstances in which Jesus would ever engage in them. However, that is evidently not the case with military force and capital punishment.

In the book of Revelation we again see Jesus as a warlike military figure. We would never see Him carrying a sword, let alone using one, if there was anything intrinsically wrong or sinful about doing so. There are times when God wants the wicked to be fought against, and even destroyed without mercy, because their evil is so great that they simply have to be wiped out. The classic example of this is Joshua’s campaign against the Canaanites, all of whom had to be destroyed:

*<sup>19</sup> There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; they took all in battle. <sup>20</sup> For it was the Lord’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed, and should receive no mercy but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded Moses.*

*Joshua 11:19-20 (RSV)*

Consider also this passage from Isaiah which speaks of what will happen when Jesus returns and how He Himself will confront, and kill, the wicked:

*<sup>15</sup> “For behold, the Lord will come in fire,  
and his chariots like the storm wind,  
to render his anger in fury,  
and his rebuke with flames of fire.  
<sup>16</sup> For by fire will the Lord execute judgment,  
and by his sword, upon all flesh;  
and those slain by the Lord shall be many.  
Isaiah 66:15-16 (RSV)*

### **Apostle Paul’s statements in relation to the use, or non-use, of violent force in self-defence or for the defence of others**

I believe it is legitimate, at least in God’s eyes, to use physical force, and even lethal force, in self-defence or to protect another person from injury or death. However, let us now consider what apostle Paul has to say about the right way to respond to mistreatment, cursing and even persecution. Paul’s words are reminiscent of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He tells us to bless those who persecute us:

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.  
Romans 12:14 (ESV)*

Paul goes even further and tells us not to avenge ourselves and that when our enemy is hungry, we are to feed him and, if he is thirsty, to give him a drink. This is partly a metaphor, but is also to be taken literally in appropriate circumstances. The point is that a Christian has to overcome evil with good. Therefore, wherever possible, we should avoid force and seek to bless our enemies, especially if the persecution is not physical but takes other forms:

*<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> 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." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

*Romans 12:17-21 (ESV)*

Nevertheless, what Paul says must also be read alongside what Jesus says in Luke 22, just as Jesus' own previous statements in the Sermon on the Mount need to be. So, as we saw earlier, nothing that Paul says about blessing our enemies precludes us from using force in self-defence when physically attacked. Neither does it prevent us from generally resisting the wicked, by non-violent means, when we face other forms of non-violent attack. It all depends on the circumstances.

### **Apostle Paul caused, or helped to cause, the temporary blinding of Elymas the magician.**

To illustrate this point about how Paul's words in Romans 12:14-21 do not preclude us from resisting the wicked, and even using force to do so, let us consider this strange incident. Paul came across a false prophet called Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas. He was causing all sorts of problems through his wickedness. However, Paul opposed him, and very dramatically too:

*<sup>6</sup> When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. <sup>7</sup> He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup> But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. <sup>9</sup> But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup> and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? <sup>11</sup> And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.*

*Acts 13:6-11 (ESV)*

If the Sermon on the Mount, and/or Paul's own words in Romans 12, meant that we must never do anything to resist the wicked, then Paul would not have acted as he did with Elymas. Admittedly, Paul didn't personally use physical force, but he did still resist Elymas. Or at least he was used as the channel through whom God resisted him, even to the extent of making him temporarily blind. By any standards, what Paul did has to be classified as 'resisting' Elymas. That shows that Jesus' words, and also Paul's, need to be understood in their proper context and not interpreted too broadly.

### **How does forgiving others fit in with the use of force and is there a contradiction?**

Some might ask how all this talk of using force can be reconciled with what the Bible says about our duty to *forgive* others. I have written some detailed chapters in my Book 2 about forgiving others and what it does, *and doesn't*, mean. I would refer you to those for a thorough discussion of that subject. In brief, the position is that forgiving others is not an emotion or a feeling. It is essentially a decision of your will. You are to choose not to harbour bitterness, take revenge, or act as if you were that person's judge (*kree-tace*). That role is reserved to Jesus alone.

He will judge them in the end, and take any necessary vengeance. In the meantime, it is not for us to usurp Jesus' unique position as Judge of all mankind, or to decide what punishment people deserve. Neither are we entitled to engage in bitterness, hate or rage towards them. Even if we were, it would still be a bad idea, because such emotions are deeply damaging to us. For all those reasons, we are



commanded to forgive others in the sense of releasing them from our lives and letting Jesus judge and punish them, instead of us doing so.

I liken it to how a judge *'recuses'* himself by stepping aside and transferring a case on to the list of another judge if he has reason to think that it is not a suitable case for him to deal with. That might occur where he knows the Defendant personally, or has some conflict of interest. Such a judge then steps aside and lets another judge hear the case and decide what to do. That is, essentially, what forgiving others is all about. However, forgiveness does not necessarily involve anything other than, or more than, that.

For example, contrary to what many assume, forgiveness does not mean that we also need to be reconciled, or resume a relationship with the wrongdoer. Neither does it mean that we should trust him, go on holiday with him, treat him as a friend, or lend him our lawnmower. All of those things might, or might not, occur after we have forgiven a person, i.e. after we have *'recused'* ourselves. But they need not necessarily do so and they are not part of the definition of forgiveness. They are separate, additional things which may, or may not, arise later, *after* we have forgiven the wrongdoer.

Likewise, to forgive another person for what he has done, or is still doing, does not necessarily require us to refrain from defending ourselves or our family, church or business from him. Such defence or self-defence does not contradict, or render illegitimate, any forgiveness on our part. So, to use an example from the context of criminal law, we can defend ourselves against an attacker to whatever extent is reasonably necessary and yet still hand him over to the police and courts for them to judge him thereafter.

Indeed even before, or during, that use of force in self-defence you can have already forgiven, and still be continuing to forgive, the assailant. You may have genuinely forgiven him but you are, quite rightly, preventing him from causing any further harm to yourself or your family. One of the greatest causes of difficulty in the area of forgiving others is the confusion that people feel about the definition of forgiveness. In particular it is a result of all the other things which they wrongly imagine to be contained within forgiveness, or which they mistakenly think must accompany it.