Are Christians Biblically Justified to Defend Themselves Using Lethal Force?
By: Baret Fawbush

Being a senior minister of a Christian church and a firearms instructor are two professions that seem diametrically opposed. I’m sure you can only imagine how often people ask me if Christians are Biblically justified to defend themselves. It’s difficult to find someone who wouldn’t look at a gun-toting pastor with a slightly awkward and puzzled gaze. “Didn’t Jesus say something about loving your enemies?” I often hear it quoted. Why, yes. He did. “Doesn’t the Bible say, ‘Thou shalt not kill?’” Why, yes. It does. We will talk about how to respond to such things at the end of this article.

So why is it that people think being a Christian means that you automatically have to be anti-gun and a pacifist? It’s not anyone’s fault that these false paradigms exist. It’s just bad information -- or might we say, information that was gathered based off assumptions instead of actual research. I’ve made that mistake before. But just as my pursuit of faith in Jesus came from adequate research and weighing of the evidence, so did my pursuit of the question of this article: “Are Christians biblically justified defending themselves using deadly force?”

I will try to make it as enjoyable as possible to read the answer to this question, tossing in stories and attempting an occasional joke. I hope you will find this article entertaining and informative, as it has been a moderate undertaking to write as well as it will be for you to read. Some may not find this on par with scholarly work. That’s fine. I tend to write as I would speak to someone, rather than following all the proper rules of composition. I will include as many references and footnotes as I can so that you may further your own research but if I don’t, please forgive me because in the Bible world, there’s a lot of common knowledge that I take for granted. Much as in the gun world, when we say, “Slow is smooth, smooth is fast,” no one quotes the originator of that saying because it’s a common phrase. In the Bible world, there may be things that are common to me, that are not so common to you. I will do my best to answer questions I suspect you may have. If I do not, you can always contact me (because Google may not be your friend).

There are two approaches I will present: The short answer and the long answer.

The goal of this article is to provide the Scripture support necessary for us to come to our own conclusions about using a firearm (or any other weapon) for self-defense that could result to someone’s death. It can also serve as a guide to help those who are not familiar with Christian Biblical principles to understand why, as a Christian, you may choose to carry a firearm.

Before we jump in, let me tell you a little bit about myself. I am not your typical, right wing conservative, Second Amendment T-shirt wearing patriot. I mean, I’m a patriot -- but I don’t base the right to bear arms for self-defense off governmental principles; I base it off Biblical principle. In fact, as a Christian, I understand that my
Master may ask me to put my “sword” back into its “sheath” (Matt. 26:52). Also understand that I am a professional scholar. It’s my job to research, formulate, write, and communicate ideas effectively. I have spent a lot of effort and money to acquire many pieces of paper that hang in charming frames over my desk to remind everyone how smart other people believe me to be.

I also hail from the Restoration Movement. Well... that’s what I say. I’d much rather just identify myself as a Christian who loves Jesus, not bound by any church or denominational influence. I believe in free will, and I believe in the authority of Scripture.

But enough chitchat. Are Christians biblically justified to defend themselves using deadly force?

**Short Answer:** Yes. (This first part can be a bit wordy, but stay the course and you will do well)

Before I can answer this, we must understand that Christians believe the Bible is “God-breathed” and that it is “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

So, before you cry your eyes out and respond with garbage like, “But that’s in the Old Testament and Jesus has done away with the law...” ask yourself, “Have I really studied my Bible and committed myself to understanding it?” Because if you are one of those Google warriors that just types “scriptures that support biblical pacifism” in your search bar, you’re probably not going to make it through the short version of this article without losing your mind. So, please read what I have to share. Think about it. Pray about it. And then respond.

**Unknown Intentions**

**Exodus 22:2-3** If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account.

When Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, God gave the people commandments. These commandments, or instructions, were the foundation of how the Israelites were to live, treat one another, and worship. They needed these instructions because they had spent their entire lives surrounded by a polytheistic culture infested with pagan idolatry in Egypt.

When Moses wrote the book of Exodus, he was actually building upon the principle of “image-bearing” (meaning man is made in God’s image) found in Genesis 1, which is later reaffirmed in Genesis 9 after Noah steps off the Ark. Much like Moses was communicating God’s principles to a new culture, so God was communicating new
principles to Noah, preceding and laying the foundation for Moses and the Israelite culture. “And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.” Genesis 9:5b-6.

What foundation does this Genesis text lay for us that we can build Exodus 22:2 upon? The foundation is that God has created humanity, humanity bears the image of God, and it ACTUALLY MEANS SOMETHING. It’s valuable. It’s so valuable that a person who sheds another person’s blood (through murder), is to have his own blood required of him (Interesting thought by the way: If the government killed every person who murdered children and innocent people, we’d have a lot less evil people -- just saying).

God designed humanity to have value. We are to value human life because God values it because we bear His “image”. I mean, God allows His Son Jesus to DIE on our behalf because of how much He loves us! But nevertheless, it’s from this foundation that Exodus 22:2 is built upon. And it presupposes a fundamental principle that never needed to be mentioned in the text: If a person is trying to kill you, you are justified in defending yourself.

*Where on earth do you read THAT Baret?!!*

Read it with me again.

*If the thief* (whose intentions are to steal and not to kill) *is caught while breaking in* (at night when it is dark and you cannot determine his intentions) *and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness* (you will not be held accountable for murder) *on his account. But if the sun* (which has yet to rise in the previous verse) *has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account.* (Because you killed a thief whose identifiable intentions were to steal and not to kill)

The text is talking about a thief whose intentions the homeowner DOES NOT KNOW. For all the homeowner knows in the dark of the night, it’s a murderer breaking into his home desiring to do him and his family harm -- in which case, what is the penalty for killing him? Nothing! Why? Because defending yourself with deadly force against someone who wishes to kill you is not a crime to God. Why? Because God values human life and He values justice. Right and wrong. Good and bad.

So the text gives us the principle of intentionality and EVEN justifiable means/grounds to defend yourself. Meaning that, if a person is demonstrating intent and the ability to kill you, you have the right, according to Exodus 22:2,3 to defend yourself because your life (and the life of your family) means something to God. Your property, however, is just stuff and no amount of stuff is worth taking a life. Back to the text: if the sun has risen (because Surefire wasn’t making 500 lumen torches back then) and a person can SEE and IDENTIFY that the intruder is a thief whose intentions are to steal and not to kill, then it is not justifiable to strike him
down. For all the homeowner knows, the thief may just be trying to survive. This is significant because the Jews believed it permissible to steal if it preserved your life (which brings me to my next point!).

The preservation of human life was one of the most sacred principles in all of Judaism. In Hebrew it’s called, Pikuach Nefesh (saving a life). If a person’s life was in danger, nearly all laws would be suspended except for three: idolatry, adultery, and murder.¹

So, if a dude held a gun up to your head and told you to steal bread or lie or cheat on your taxes in order to save your life, the Jewish principle of Pikuach Nefesh would say, “Save your life.” But if someone held a gun up to your head and said, “Cheat on your wife,” “Worship this idol or some other god,” or “Murder this innocent person,” you would surely rather die than break any one of those!* The rabbis have spent hundreds of years dialoguing with one another over this issue. For more on this ancient conversation, look to the Babylonian Talmud under Aboda Zarah 54 (I know that’s a mouthful).

* For a quick look at Pikuach Nefesh and how to pronounce it, check out the video below.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRsP-I96cfQ

We see Jesus practicing the principle of Pikuach Nefesh when he answers the Pharisees when they are trying to test his understanding of the law in Luke 14:5.

1 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. 5 Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” 6 And they had nothing to say.

Smooth move, Jesus. But to really grasp how serious the Sabbath culture is around this time period, you need to understand that keeping the Sabbath holy was one of the most honored commandments during Jesus’ day. So much so, that Jews would set markers a half-mile from their homes to ensure that they wouldn’t walk more than a mile on the Sabbath. Some rabbis taught that walking more than a mile would be considered “work” and therefore not honoring the Sabbath, because you do absolutely no work on the Sabbath. Period.

So for Jesus to join in on the conversation and insinuate that Pikuach Nefesh takes precedent over the Sabbath was a big deal. And it makes a lot of sense when Jesus says in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (A religion that REQUIRES you to take a day off every week -- yeah, I’m all about that.)

So let’s recap. We have Exodus 22:2 supporting self-defense and laying the foundation for Pikuach Nefesh. This then leads us to Jesus supporting the idea of
Pikuach Nefesh above one of the heaviest Jewish commandments of His day: honoring the Sabbath.

This, my friends, was the short answer. Quick and easy. And there are people out there who snap back, “Well, the Bible doesn’t explicitly say that we are permitted to ….” and I would tell them to read Exodus 22:2-3 again. But it needs to be understood that the Bible finds self-defense to be a common-sense issue. It’s never specifically brought up because of how obvious the answer is for the Jewish people. Another point that needs to be stressed is that the same God of the Hebrews is the God of Christianity. The same foundation laid for Jewish principles is the groundwork of Jesus’ ministry, life, and teaching. It’s highly unfortunate that people are just now starting to get back to the Jewishness of Jesus in their studies. Many are finding that the Gospels make a lot more sense the more you study first century Judaism. Having a solid understanding of first century Judaism is the basis of my understanding and interpretation of most of the Scriptures as well.

So what lies ahead throughout the rest of this article?

The following will be what Morpheus described to Neo in the Matrix as the “Red Pill.”

**Are Christians Biblically Justified to Defend Themselves?**

**Long Answer:** Yes.

In my mind, Christians are commanded to practice self-defense in the New Testament if they are a father or mother of a household.

But before we delve into that, let’s have a little conversation about justice and why God wants you defend the helpless.

So we know that God values Nefesh (Hebrew word): soul, life, personhood. Not only does He value human life, He also values tsadog, pronounced “tsaw-dak.” This Hebrew word is what we would call “justice” or “rightness.” We’ve all been on both sides of justice. For example:

Several years ago, I was pulling into a parking spot at the mall one afternoon as I headed into work. As I was pulling in, another car backed into that same spot from a completely wacked out direction (in relation to how parking spots are designed) and drove his back bumper into the side of my poor Jetta, knocking the side view mirror off! The dude is parked horizontally across the parking spaces and I’m like “What the heck, man?!?” as I watch him drive away.

Uh-uh.
My sassy, Abercrombie-dressed-self would not stand for such injustice as I ran after him, chased him down, and dragged him out of his ... OK, that part was made up. But, I did chase him down. The police later came and deemed both of us to be at fault because Princess Cupcake (the nickname he inherited from me) claimed that I had whipped into the space as he was trying to park there. The two police officers were of no use because they couldn’t determine a solid right or wrong in this situation. WHAT INJUSTICE! I’m a broke college kid ... broke BIBLE college kid (near destitute), with a jacked-up side door on my chick-magnet-VW-Jetta and now HOW ON EARTH AM I SUPPOSED TO SPIT GAME ON CAMPUS with a jacked up car? I tell you, it was unfair. Things weren’t right in the world.

And you know what this feels like.

Don’t you?

Justice is supremely important to God because it is a part of His nature. He is just. He is just because He is GOOD. Being good means that He is loving, merciful, and does what is right. He upholds Justice because that’s who He is.

AW Tozer described it best when he writes:

“It is sometimes said, ‘Justice requires God to do this,’ referring to some act we know He will perform. This is an error of thinking as well as of speaking, for it postulates a principle of justice outside of God, which compels Him to act in a certain way. Of course there is no such principle. If there were it would be superior to God, for only a superior power can compel obedience. The truth is that there is not and can never be anything outside of the nature of God which can move Him in the least degree. All God’s reasons come from within His uncreated being. Nothing has entered the being of God from eternity, nothing has been removed, and nothing has been changed. Justice, when used of God, is a name we give to the way God is, nothing more; and when God acts justly He is not doing so to conform to an independent criterion, but simply acting like Himself in a given situation. ... God is His own self-existent principle of moral equity, and when He sentences evil men or rewards the righteous, He simply acts like Himself from within, uninfluenced by anything that is not Himself.”

Proverbs 16:16 tells us that one of the things that “God hates” is the “hands that shed innocent blood.” God hates it. Strong words. He hates it because it is precisely the opposite of who He is.

What does this have to do with self-defense? Fantastic question. I’m glad you’re still paying attention.

I believe God has called us to be people who uphold the principles of God, and therefore, uphold justice.
Micah 6:8 “He has told you what is good, O man; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Psalm 106:3 “Blessed are they who observe justice, who do what is right at all times.”

Countless times throughout the Bible, God’s people are characterized as people who uphold and do what is just -- what is right -- and defend the widow and the orphan (Psalm 82:3). The widow and the orphan essentially allude to the type of people who have no one to protect them, i.e. those incapable.

Ephesians 5:1 encourages us to be “imitators of God, as beloved children.”
1 John 2:6: “Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

So if justice and doing what is right is important to God, it would seem that it would be important for us as well. As children who are portrayed as bearers of His image, being ready to do what is right, regardless of the act, is something we are always looking to do. If the man in front of you drops his wallet, return his property. If a child is crying because she has no food, feed her. If an older adolescent is beating a child, stop him. If woman is being raped, seek to stop it.

Now that’s not to say that we are to be judge, jury, and executioner. There is ample biblical support for the idea that government should be involved with capital punishment and due process. But there are instances in which we are to act when we know that we must preserve life. And that may seem like a complex idea to ponder, but really, it’s not. When a person is putting another person’s life in danger, we are to prevent that from happening -- even if it means that, in some instances, that attacker needs to be “struck so that he dies.”

This principle of “in the moment justice” is only amplified when we read Deuteronomy 22:23-27. In this text we are going to see three things that you will find particularly interesting:

1) Preservation of life and punishment if you don’t do it.
2) Rape is equated to murder and receives the same punishment.
3) “No one there to save her.”

**The Rape in the City**

Let’s look at the text:

23”If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her, 24then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor’s wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from
The text describes a “rape” that is taking a place. Forcible penetration upon another person and, within this context, it’s a helpless “virgin.” This likely means a young woman (probably under the age of 14) who has not yet “known” a man.

The text says that the woman is raped (against her will) and she does not cry out. First let us understand that rape, is not a good thing. It’s a dehumanizing act that reduces a person and eliminates her choice in the most intimate of ways. Stealing the virginity of a young teen during this time, who is in the prime age for marriage and child bearing (different culture than ours, get over it), is essentially devastating to the girl. The defiling of the girl prevents her from marrying anyone else because she is now damaged and unwanted as a wife. A rape in this time period would often force the victim to lead a life of prostitution or live as a slave. So, robbing the girl of her virginity is essentially killing her. There is much more we could discuss that goes into the damaging of her nefesh, but we won’t get into all of that now.

What’s interesting about this text is that it says the girl does not cry out. Why would she cry out? Fantastic question! She would cry out because, being within the city, she has the opportunity of being saved. She has the opportunity to defend herself against her attacker by means of a good man coming to her aid and attacking the bad man! Well, Baret, sounds like she needs to learn some Krav Maga! I couldn’t agree more, but cultural context suggest this is a 14-year-old (or younger) girl. Last time I checked, a 14-year-old girl doesn’t stand much of a chance against a grown man. I mean no offense, but women during these times weren’t warriors and they weren’t expected to be. They were mothers and housewives and that was what society understood them as. Today, we have self-sufficient women who can be super-mega-butt-kicking-femaleosaurus-lionesses out there, and that’s a good thing.

Let’s continue on with the rest of the text.

25“But if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lies with her shall die. 26But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. 27When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her.”

So you see, the text makes it clear: In the city, there is the opportunity for the first girl in the first scenario to be saved. In the country, the second girl doesn’t have the opportunity to be saved. Notice the difference though (and this is so important) -- the second girl WANTS TO FIGHT! She WANTS to do what is right even though she has no one to rescue her. Let that sink in for a moment and if you’re having trouble, read the text again.

So let’s get this straight. The first girl has the opportunity to be saved (in the city) and doesn’t elicit help. The second girl is in a place where no one can hear her and
still fights back, screams and cries out for help. In the case of the two girls, the girl who fights is the girl who should keep her life -- the other girl, according to God -- loses it.

Why? That seems like an awful outcome!

Well, keep in mind that God designed these laws around the person's heart. And if the woman who has the opportunity to be saved from her attacker doesn't take that opportunity, then she either wants it to happen, or she doesn't care. Either way, God says, "purge the evil from among you."

Fascinating. Those who fight back are seeking justice and are to be viewed as being in the right. Those who do not are in the wrong. What an interesting idea.

1) Preservation of life and punishment if you don't do it. (Verse 23-24)
2) Rape is equated to murder and receives the same punishment. (Verse 26)
3) "No one there to save her." (Verse 27)

What may be an even more interesting question to dive into is, "What if the person who rescues the rape victim strikes the attacker down so that he dies? Will he be held accountable for the loss of his life?" I'm inclined to say no, primarily because the punishment for the rapist is death.

Psalm 82:4 "Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

God wants you to fight against evil men doing evil things. He wants you to preserve your life against evil men. Whether that involves fighting against rape, murder, or some other form of injustice, God believes that those who have the power and the responsibility to preserve life ought to because He values nefesh.

But one must understand that it's not simply a matter of preserving life from evil people. It's also ensuring that people are not gouged by your ox(en). Exodus 21:28-29

28"If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. 29"If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death."

Keep your unruly oxen pinned up, Second Amendment community! This may sound kind of bizarre, because most of us don't have unruly oxen. But consider the following text in Deuteronomy 22:8 "When you build a new house, make a parapet (fence) around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof."
Today, we have laws of our land to ensure that if you own a pool, you need to fence it in. Why? Because you don’t want to be held responsible for the death of a child, for example, who wandered onto your property and into your pool. But it wouldn’t be your fault, right? After all, it was an accident. That’s right! But it was preventable, and if you have the power to prevent a child from drowning or falling off the roof of your home, you should indeed do everything you can to keep everyone safe while you enjoy those things. Why? Not because a law says you have to, but because you too, like God, value nefesh: Soul. Life.

We value life so much that we build fences around our pools, and we do things like lock our doors to ensure our children are safer at night. How is taking preventable measures of safety, such as carrying a gun, any different than building a fence or locking a door? Well, Baret, you’re not killing another person with the fence or the lock! You’re right. But I am preventing the death from happening at the cost of another life -- which, up until this point of our study, is permissible because of how valuable life on earth is to God.

But there is more. How much more, Baret? Much more.

**Carrying Your Sword to Work**

There has been a resurgence in American patriotism in the past several years. With that comes this popularized desire to carry firearms. It seems to be a recurring theme that pastors are being attacked in churches, violent crimes are taking place all across the nation against Christians and non-Christians alike, and mass shootings happen more and more often. The need to carry a firearm has become more prevalent than ever. But does the Bible describe God’s people ever carrying a weapon for self-protection? You’d be surprised.

Daily carry became an actual way of living for Israelites rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in 444 B.C. after the King of Persia, Artaxerxes, dismissed a considerable number of Jews to return back to their homeland from their captivity in Babylon. But you have to understand, this wasn’t in a time of war. These weren’t soldiers or law enforcement men returning home to build. These were people who grew up in Babylon, under captivity and slavery. They were common citizens of Jerusalem with families.

When these families returned to Jerusalem, they had old enemies -- clan and tribal enemies of different cultures who believed in different gods, mocked the Israelites and sought to do whatever they could to interrupt or halt the rebuilding of the city walls.

Nehemiah 4:7-10 gives us a little insight:

7But when Sanballat, Tobiah (great name for twins if you’re expecting any by the
way), the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. 8They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. 9But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

10Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.”

A little while later, in verse 14, Nehemiah seeks to encourage the people.

14After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

Fighting against men for our survival is necessary, especially if we believe we are living in danger and feel the need to be prepared to face evil of any kind. Nehemiah continues to give his account:

15When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work. 16From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah 17who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, 18and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked.

Does anyone reading this carry a weapon while at work? Yep, me too.

We live in a world where evil is lurking and ready to pounce, and our responsibility to our sons, daughters, wives, and homes is a duty God has instilled in each of us. We are to provide and protect against evil. This is exactly the world the Jews found themselves in. It must have been like trying to walk through bad parts of Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, or Oakland. Every day they were living in fear that this day could be their last.

Close out Nehemiah 4:22-24 with me,

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, “Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers by day.” Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.

Now let me give you a crash course in biblical hermeneutics to help clear some stuff up. There is a difference between prescriptive and descriptive text. Prescriptive means that the Bible is prescribing something for us to do. Descriptive means that
the Bible is simply describing an event that has taken place.

But we also must understand that this is the classic way of interpreting scripture. This is a way (referred to as the grammatical-historical approach) the rabbis certainly used when they interpreted the Bible, as well as the New Testament authors.

But from a Jewish perspective (which is important because most the NT authors were Jewish and Jesus was as well) there were primarily four ways of interpreting God’s Word. Donald E. Kurtis wrote a fantastic article that you should invest a few hours in (if you’re a biblical scholar or a Christian). I could give you references here and there and try to teach you Hebrew (only to fail miserably) and THEN point you Rabbinic studies which would have you digging through really big books for a very long time... or I can simply quote a lengthy piece from Kurtis here:

“(1) p’hat (“simple”)—the plain, literal sense of the text, more or less what modern scholars mean by “grammatical-historical exegesis,” which looks to the grammar of the language and the historical setting as background for deciding what a passage means. Modern scholars often consider grammatical-historical exegesis the only valid way to deal with a text; pastors who use other approaches in their sermons usually feel defensive about it before academics. But the rabbis had three other modes of interpreting Scripture, and their validity should not be excluded in advance but related to the validity of their implied presuppositions.

“(2) Remez (“hint”) -- wherein a word, phrase or other element in the text hints at a truth not conveyed by the p’hat. The implied presupposition is that God can hint at things of which the Bible writers themselves were unaware.

“(3) Drash or Midrash (“search”) -- an allegorical or homiletical application of a text. This is a species of eisegeisis -- reading one’s own thoughts into the text -- as opposed to exegesis, which is extracting from the text what it actually says. The implied presupposition is that the words of Scripture can legitimately become grist for the mill of human intellect, which God can guide to truths not directly related to the text at all.

“(4) Sod (‘secret’) -- a mystical or hidden meaning arrived at by operating on the numerical values of the Hebrew letters, noting unusual spellings, transposing letters, and the like. For example, two words, the numerical equivalents of whose letters add up to the same amount, are good candidates for revealing a secret through what Arthur Koestler in his book on the inventive mind called ‘bisociation of ideas.’ The implied presupposition is that God invests meaning in the minutest details of Scripture, even the individual letters.”

So, what do we make of all this wordy mumbo-jumbo? Quite simply, even if we have a descriptive text describing Nehemiah’s men and their daily carry rituals, it still lends support to the BACKDROP and the PARADIGM in which these Jewish men were honoring God with the lives they lived. It still reveals to us the constant theme of “saving a life” that we see continually throughout the Bible as one of the
foundational pillars that supports all of the human experience under God and in the range of his effective rule.

And then we come to another descriptive text found in Esther. The Jews were under threat of racial violence while in Persia’s Capital of Susa. The civil authority, King Ahasuerus, bequeathed the Jews with legal authorization to use lethal force in self-defense against any enemies they felt their lives were threatened by.

Esther 8:11-12: *By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives -- to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them.*

So what do the Jews do? They were given legal permission in the land to do some preemptive attacks upon violent threats and, under the permission of the government and under the principle to protect their lives, they carried out their legal and God-given freedom.

*Esther 9:1-5: ...the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. 2 The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people.... 5 Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction."

I believe it was John F. Kennedy who once said, “Those who make peaceful resolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable.” iv

I believe the same principle rings true in the Esther text. If you cannot live at peace with your form of government or the people who surround you and the threat of violence or the threat of life is imminent, violence (as made popular by the REFactor T-shirt) is sometimes the answer.

Now you must understand that I AM NOT advocating for being a violent person. I’m not advocating seeking the harm of others. I’m just sharing with you the clear biblical picture we get of the Jews who were living under constant oppression where the threat to their lives and livelihood was very real. A modern example of this social situation is the case of Christians living in predominantly Muslim countries. In some of these places, Muslims are targeting Christian churches, tossing acid upon women and children, and turning young orphaned daughters into sex slaves to be used and then discarded like trash.

This is not what the Creator had in mind. But because of sin and evil in the world, the devil is using all he can to ensure that fear and terror causes us to question whether or not God is in control and whether or not He is good.

There are MANY more descriptive texts in the OT that lend weight to our argument, but I will allow you the joy and opportunity of pursuing those areas of study for
yourself as we move to the New Testament.

**What is the Only Thing the Bible Commands You to Buy?**

This question hung above a sawed off, double barrel coach gun in a room where I received my NRA certification to become a lowly pistol instructor. And it got me to thinking, being the Bible scholar that I am. I came to the conclusion there in my mind, "Other than a sword, I’m not sure!" And I’m still not entirely sure as to whether the Bible commands everyone to buy any one thing -- but the story and the thought was interesting nonetheless.

Which brings us to our famous story of Jesus telling his Disciples to buy a sword before his capture and crucifixion. When I was a senior in Bible college, I took a class called “NT Seminar Presentation” where the students were to focus upon presenting a modern issue like “gay marriage” or “smokin’ the reefer” and ask the Bible the question as to whether or not something is permissible. I, of course, asked the question of this article, which allowed me to do months of research upon this topic.

During the class presentation, where you were being observed by 25 other Bible scholars, I stayed away from Luke 22:35-39 because I was so uneasy about the Messiah, the flesh of the living, invisible God, telling people to buy swords for the purpose of self defense. Ew. Yuck. What a horrible thought! Right? Or did I just chicken out because I was unsure of how, hermeneutically, I would be slain whilst standing in front of the class? (I think it’s the latter.)

Either way, I’m not even going to get into the debate now as to whether or not Jesus uses these swords as literal or figurative to fulfill prophecy or to promote self-defense. It truly is a difficult task. As a long-time bible scholar, this still boggles my mind. But I will yield and come to a safe approach to the text: Jesus was not using these two swords as a means for self-defense advocating for what was to lie ahead.

But the text does warrant a reading because it shows a glaring point everyone forgets to mention:

35 “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.’ 36 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. 37 For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me; “AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS;” for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment. 38 They said, ‘Lord, look, here are two swords.’ And He said to them, ‘It is enough.’”

They have two swords already. Probably James and John (the Sons of Thunder) had possession, along with Peter. Jesus had a number of interesting individuals in His crew, a number of whom were called “Zealots.” Zealots were radical Jewish nationalists who HATED Rome and were constantly seeking the “Messiah” because,
in their mind, the Messiah was the ticket to freeing the Jewish people from Roman occupation. You see their ignorance to who Jesus really is all throughout the Gospels.

But primarily, we need to understand that Jesus, as a Jewish first century rabbi, is the MASTER. And his disciples are the “slaves.” Meaning that if your rabbi told you to do anything, you did it. The dedication one had towards his rabbi was astounding, not only in the first century, but also today.

I heard a story from a preacher who visited Jerusalem where an old rabbi was walking around and went into a small bathroom. All of his talmidim (disciples) followed after him as to never miss an opportunity that he would open his mouth and teach. This is why the disciples have no problem leaving their fathers and mothers and their professions because learning from your rabbi meant everything (much like learning from Jesus means everything today, too).

So if there are already swords present, and Jesus were a pacifist, why did Jesus, as rabbi and master, allow these men to carry weapons for self-defense? If Jesus calls people to leave their father and mother, all their possessions, and their profession, then why not also ask them to also leave their swords? Why not have a lesson from the Gospel writers or from the words of Jesus saying, “No need for weapons, guys, Trust in me, and I’ll take care of you”? Those are interesting questions. But the questions go a bit further because now we have the scene in the garden of Gethsemane where the Roman guards and high priest’s men come to arrest Jesus. Luke 22:49: *When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”*

Judas plays his role, and Peter defends Jesus from capture (because how can the Messiah save us from Rome if he’s dead?).

*John 18:10: Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)*

Peter pulls out a sword and HACKS OFF the ear of the servant of the high priest. “Poor Aim Peter” is what we should call him, but we’ll let it slide, because heads tend to move when things are swinging at them. So now we have lots of blood and no more ear for that dude. Jesus then turns to Peter and rebukes him:

*John 18:11: Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’*

Keep in mind the “saving Messiah role” everyone thinks Jesus is going to play and the role he was sent to play “by the Father” are two different things.

Notice Jesus doesn’t say, “Drop your sword!” He doesn’t say “WHY ON EARTH DO YOU HAVE THAT?!” I kind of laugh when I think about that scene in the movie 8-Mile
with Eminem fighting a bunch of dudes and his slightly slow friend, Cheddar Bob, pulls out his mom’s revolver and starts swinging it around to gain control over the situation. Eminem’s character exclaims, “Where did you get that! Are you nuts!”

Unlike Eminem, Jesus is all-knowing and is not surprised that Peter has a sword or that he begins to use it. Jesus says, “put it away,” or “put it back in its place.” Ecclesiastes 3:3 tells us there is “a time to kill and a time to heal.” Jesus’ life was not being threatened at that moment. Nor are the disciples’ lives, despite what they may have thought. Jesus was in control. This scene in the garden shows us (in correspondence with a major theme throughout John’s entire narrative) that Jesus is in complete control of everything.

But then we come to this famous phrase Jesus uses when He rebukes Peter. People seem to use this line as if it’s the all-time pacifism trump card. It’s in Matthew 26:52: *Then Jesus said to him, ’Put your sword back into its place. For all who take up the sword will perish by the sword.’*

What does this mean? I believe Jesus is communicating that “If you live violently, you will die violently. If your profession is one in which you carry a gun every day (military infantry or LEO), your likelihood of dying violently increases. That’s it.

We don’t see any eternal punishment attached to this phrase. We don’t see Jesus saying, “If you don’t take the route of pacifism, you won’t enter through the narrow way.” Within its immediate context, we understand it simply as “If you live by the sword (and that’s your way of life), you will die by it.” Raise your hand if you’d rather die in your sleep when you are 90 years old. Most of us would put our hand up (unless you’re one of those Valhalla warriors). But for the warriors in our culture who defend us and do battle on our behalf, some of them meet that violent fate and we salute you. Some military service men and women make it home only to commit suicide years later after battling with PTSD and depression. We salute you for your internal battle that we have not experienced, and we pray for you daily.

Several men in the Bible lived by the sword and died by it. Examples that come to mind are Saul and Samson. King David, although he did not die by violence, would also be a mighty man of the sword to mention. In fact, even though David wanted the honor of building God a temple, God would not let him because of how much blood David shed by the sword (1 Chronicles 28:3).

The Bible is chalked full of examples of violent men who needed to be violent for the sake of justice and self defense, but they aren’t mentioned as men who are going to receive eternal punishment for their choice to “live by the sword.”

**Fathers and Husbands**

As if all of this Biblical evidence discussed thus far allowing the use of deadly force wasn’t enough, we have the role of fathers and husbands in Jewish literature to
explore. I could go deep and in-depth describing the cultural role behind Israelite fathers and husbands. However, for the sake of keeping you interested, we will simply look at what I feel is the Biblical evidence that suggests the man of the household has a DUTY to protect his family.

1 Timothy 5:8: “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Paul writes to his young disciple, Timothy, who Paul has left to govern a network of churches. In the fifth chapter, Paul gives instructions to Timothy concerning how to care for widows, the elderly, and servants and how to model this for the church. Keep in mind also that the eighth verse Paul writes is within the context of a family providing for widowed mother or elderly father. The context helps us understand that if people in the church can provide for their own family members, don’t put them in a benevolence program. Let the command of “Honor thy father and mother” be the driving factor behind family providing for family.

So what does this have to do with self-defense? Fantastic question. It primarily demonstrates to us an underlying Jewish trait. Similar to Pikuach Nefesh, if Christians don’t provide for the livelihood of their own family members with daily food, a place to stay, and clothing, Paul says that they have “denied the faith” and are “worse than unbeliever.” Holy cow, Paul! Strong words. But nefesh is important to God. The head of the household holds the authority and therefore, represents God the Father. The father provides for the sustenance of his family. That’s his job. Sustenance means to sustain and, within the context of people, it means to care for them and to keep them alive.

Primarily, the way I provide for my family is that I make money. I make money from a career so that I can buy goods and secure food, clothing, and shelter... and the occasional vacation (my wife would call that a need). I wouldn’t be considered (by today’s standards) to be a very good father if I loved my children and spent all the time that I could with them and my wife, and didn’t make any money and didn’t work to provide. Even if I was on some type of welfare system or inherited a billion dollars, my example as a father directly correlates with the way I provide for my family.

In this Timothy 5 text, it’s important for us to see the underlying assumption: If I provide for the food for my family, provide for the shelter, and take them to the doctor and lock the doors at night, how MUCH MORE is it my role then to protect them from physical harm from other people? Hopefully I am communicating well and this is not difficult to grasp. If I say that I love my family and provide for their needs, how on EARTH can I say that I love my family while I watch a man come into my home to rape and strangle my children and wife while I sit idly by asking God to intervene? I don’t ask God to magically allow food to show up on my doorstep. I don’t ask God to magically drop money in my bank account. So how on EARTH can I ask God to magically protect my family from evil?
Just like I expect God to give me health so that I can go to work and just like I can thank God for the skills and intelligence He bestows upon me so that I can work and thus provide, how is it any different when it comes to sustaining the nefesh of my family from evil men?

Let’s take this one step further.

Ephesians 5:25: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

What is love? The Greeks actually used four different words for love, and I wish we would do the same in the English language as well. Primarily because I can say, “I love my wife” and turn right around and say, “I love pizza.” The same love that I have for pizza is not the same love I have for my wife.

The Greeks picked up on this, and so they have four words that characterize our word for love. Each has a different meaning:

Eros: Intimate and romantic love or infatuation. When your teenage son comes home from school and says, “I’m in love,” this is what he means.

Storge: Familial love. The parental affection that a mother has for a child.

Philo: Brotherly love. A fist-bump-I-gotcho-back-brah, ride or die love.

Agape: Unconditional love. Regardless of how you make me feel at times, I’ll always act for your betterment.

When Paul says, “Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church,” he’s using “agape.” Love that lasts is not a feeling. Love is a choice. It’s a choice to do something or be something for another person that seeks and provides for the betterment of that person. Sure, you can say “I love you” all you want. But unless your words are met with action, you aren’t loving a person. You’re simply deluded or lying. John Mayer has a song in which the lyrics read, “Love is a verb.” Good man, that John Mayer.

Love has action behind it. It has force behind it. The source of those actions may be feelings that come and go, or it may be a choice. The choice to love means, “I’m going to do what’s best for you.” So, pray tell, how can I say I love my wife if I do not protect her? How can I say I love my children if I allow someone to kidnap them or beat them senselessly? I cannot. I must intervene because I am on the side of God. I am on the side of justice. I am on the side of love and, by God, I am on the side of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom is an interesting idea that came up a lot in Jesus’ preaching and
teaching. We don’t have time to dig into it now, but the Kingdom of God is a world where God is King and where people act like it. It’s the range of his effective will where what He wants to happen, happens. The Bible says that the Kingdom is here now and we can live and participate in a world where God is king right now. Jesus called it abundant life, eternal life, life everlasting because of the future Kingdom that is to come. If I allow people to do evil to my family, do I really communicate that I live in God’s kingdom where that evil doesn’t prevail?

And we aren’t just talking about self-defense. We’re also talking about food, water, and shelter. We’re talking about living where our neighbors do not go without. Where children do not starve. Where families do not die because the lack of clean water.

We’re talking about justice (again).

Periodically through Facebook, you will find teenagers acting tough, sucker punching elderly people of a different ethnicity. You will periodically see such forms of injustice and people who are there present holding an iPhone, recording or laughing, or idly standing by. And if you fish throughout the comments sections of these videos you will see people who are enraged because NO ONE is doing ANYTHING.

In the fall of 2015, I saw on Facebook, a black girl (between 16-24) beating the DAYLIGHTS out of this white mother. The mother had a 3-year-old boy with her and the boy began to cry and fight back against her mother’s attacker. The attacker turned and began to beat the little boy. Neither the cameraman nor the passers-by did anything. Tears began to swell in my eyes as I began to sob as I watched such injustice play out. The white mother then wrapped her arms around her little boy and she took blow after blow until finally the attacker was physically exhausted.

People, who do not intervene, in my opinion, are just as guilty as those who do evil.

**Hello From the Other Side**

Still, people will chime in, “Doesn’t the Bible say something about turning the other cheek and thou shall not kill?”

Why, yes, it does! We mentioned these questions at the start of our article and now we find a time to answer them. Arguing the “Thou shall not kill command” is pretty simple. Killing is understood within this context as murder. “Do not murder or shed innocent blood.”

That was a little too easy.

The turning other cheek part is easy, too, but there’s a little bit more we have to dive into because we want to be as true to what Jesus is saying as possible and also what
He’s not saying.

Let’s begin with Jesus’ famous words found in Matthew 5:38-47: You have heard that it was said, “AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.” But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

In order to grasp the meaning of Jesus’ words, it must be understood that Jesus is not giving us new laws or contradicting the old ones. To think and spout off such silly things demonstrates unfamiliarity with Jesus’ teaching and Biblical literature. If you are that person, forgive my coarse words and go do some study.

It’s obvious from the discourse on the hill (Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount), that Jesus is not being exhaustive in His lawgiving. Imagine if that was His objective. Imagine if He were indeed giving you every all-encompassing command for how to respond to everything and everyone, ever. Pretty nonsensical, eh?

Rather, we are to understand Jesus’ words as a describing the TYPE of person who lives in God’s Kingdom acts.

**Caution! Slight Rabbit Hole**

Action, fulfilling a command, apart from the heart means nothing. So, I can do what Jesus tells me to do, but with the wrong attitude or with an evil heart. Imagine if I were to walk into a bank. Looking around, I decide that it is a crime of opportunity and I’m going to rob the bank. But a door opens to my left and out comes a security guard, armed with a gun. “Rats!” I think. Just because I walked away from the bank that morning without robbing it, doesn’t mean that God is impressed with my ability to keep the commandment of not stealing. To Jesus, everything is a heart issue. Once the heart is changed, actions will spill forth.

Jesus put it like this, in Matthew 7:18-20: “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

A person’s good heart will bring forth good things. And within the KINGDOM, which is the context of Jesus’ sermon on the hill (as it relates to turning the other cheek), the type of person Jesus is describing is the type of person who will respond
according to a world where God is king, as oppose to the “old kingdom” prescribed by the Scribes and Pharisees that were Jesus’ contemporaries.

**Back on track**

Jesus’s words simply stand in stark contrast with the religious leaders of His day. They had taught from a disposition that was from a legalistic perspective, meaning “do this, don’t do this and you’ll get to heaven.”

WITH ALL OF THIS IN MIND, let us re-read Jesus’ words and let us understand that Jesus gives four illustrations (yes, illustrations -- examples) to clarify Jesus’ point on *lex talionis*. *Lex talionis* is Latin for “The Law of Retaliation.” And if you look at all of these examples Jesus gives, you’re going to notice a judiciary setting behind each of them: Slapping someone, being sued, being required by law or court order to perform a task, and the loaning of money.

What should be emphasized here is that, for the sake of repairing relationships and living our lives in love towards other people, instead of seeking compensation for the wrong done to us by other people, the **Kingdom heart invests in the relationship, not in the compensation that we can receive from it.** Essentially, I believe that Jesus is asking us not to damage relationships and peace for material things, money, or compensation. But let us suppose that I’m WAY off base. Let us assume that Jesus had none of the following in mind and let us navigate through the text.

*You have heard that it was said, “AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.” But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

Jesus, again, is referring to the old dikaiosuné (righteousness) of His people’s day and specifically, He is referencing the law in the Old Testament from Exodus 21:24. This law was not given to God’s people to foster vengeance (Leviticus 19:18) but instead was given provide God’s people with a judicial formula for punishing offenders. This also helps God’s people from escalating their anger, which is what anger does -- it feeds off of more anger (this will be an important point to keep in mind shortly).

Slapping a person. When was the last time you were slapped? Pretty painless, right? I’m sure it wasn’t an all-out attack, but it was due to some insult you gave or some offense that was taken. But the reason for a slap is to shame the other person for what they’ve said or what they’ve done. Not to do irreversible bodily harm or death. Slapping is a way that we communicate disgust with a person when mere words could not communicate in that moment like a strike on the face could.

In the first century Jewish world Jesus lived in, shaming was a big deal. The culture was that of shame and honor and both were held in such high regard that great
shame would lead someone to suicide (Judas Iscariot, for example).

Either way, the Greek language here in Matthew 5:39 for slap is the Greek word *rhapizei*. It refers to a sharp slap. In the Gospel of Luke, a different Greek word is given, but refers to the same thing. A sharp, quick slap. It is not a punch or a blow to the face meant to seriously harm someone, but simply a slap to wound the ego.

Instead of striking another person back because of your wounded ego, the Kingdom heart that Jesus calls us to have is to be reflected by the TYPE of person who makes themselves vulnerable to public ridicule for the SAKE of the offender. Why? The late Dallas Willard had some fascinating words from his book, *The Divine Conspiracy* that explain this best (stay with the lengthy quote for the sake of the point):

"What actually happens when one derives one’s response from the reality of the kingdom is that the dynamics of personal interaction are transformed. What does the person (attacker) do who has been offered the other cheek? Or perhaps has now slapped it? Keep on slapping? For how long? And then what? We must always be alert for acceptable ways of removing ourselves from the situation... Our tormentors, no doubt, count on our resistance and anger to support their continuation of evil that is in them. If we respond as Jesus indicates, the force of their own actions pulls them off their stance and forces them to question what kind of people they really are... the justification of their anger and evil that they were counting on has been removed. As anger feeds on anger, so patient goodness will normally deflate it."

I cannot tell you how many times in my life I have been confronted with anger, but when I meet that anger with gentleness, it immediately deflates the opposition’s wrath. It is easy to return anger for anger in these situations, but that would seem to demonstrate that the attacker was in control of our emotions, when they are not. We are in control of our emotions. The type of person Jesus is describing is the type of person who sees a situation for what it is because of their elevated perspective. They live in God’s world and God’s kingdom and it’s from that disposition in which we live to serve our fellow man.

People often get tripped up by the fact that Jesus, in these examples, is not giving us new law but He’s giving us examples of how the Kingdom heart acts itself out in expressions of love. Imagine if Jesus, in the following examples, were giving us an exhaustive list of everything the Christ follower was suppose to do? That would be kind of cumbersome would it not? The fact of the matter is, like mentioned before, Jesus is using the common understanding of God’s law applied in His day (by the Pharisees and Sadducees) and contrasting that with the Kingdom heart (how to live under God’s reign and rule right now). One could look at these examples Jesus gives as the following paraphrase:

"Under the way you have been taught, it might be acceptable for you to shame your offender who slapped you with another slap. But you know, living in God’s kingdom
where mercy reigns, turn the other cheek. Why? Because it demonstrates that you are in control of your emotions. It demonstrates that you have an elevated perspective over the person and why they slapped you to begin with.”

So does this passage (so far) teach us to be pacifists? Uhh... no. It teaches us to be the type of person that has the higher perspective and deflates a situation by not feeding into the anger of the other person. A perspective that is often not preached along this text is asking the question, “What did the person do to get slapped anyway?!”

Maybe you are to turn the other cheek not because you’ve been wronged, but because you were the one doing the wrong. Maybe it’s because you deserved the slap? And if you did, how should you respond? I love Willard’s perspective, and I don’t mean to take away from that or the common paradigm in which this text is interpreted (because its absolutely applicable). But can we not also ask, “Am I to use the time it takes the other cheek in order to ask, ‘What have I done to deserve it?’” (Just a thought, don’t go crazy me for thinking outside of the box).

And would you believe it, this outside the box thinking is only supported when we see the rest of what Jesus has to say concerning the rest of His examples:

And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. (Presumes that you’ve done something wrong to be sued)

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. (Presumes that you are under legal obligation to work for someone else and applies to the Roman Law in effect over the Jews during this time to serve Roman officers by carrying their pack as far as they need)

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Presumes social and family obligations where the goal is the honor those obligations instead of coping out and claiming that money is to be used and dedicated to God -- which was an interesting tradition that Jesus debates again in Matthew 15:1-5)

So these are examples, not laws that Jesus gives us. Grant it, there may be times where you, in fact, do need to turn the other cheek. How often do we superimpose this very literal usage of what Jesus is saying onto someone who said something bad about us behind our back, and we decided to “turn the other cheek”? Or not repaying someone for the wrong they did to us when they drove into the side of our Jetta?

These are principles that bleed from the Kingdom heart of the Christ follower. They are not end all be all formulas that we thrust into every social occasion while we live. Surely if you were to ask Jesus, “Jesus, what about the woman who is being beaten senselessly by her drunk husband week after week? How many times should she continue to turn the other cheek?” If you can hear Jesus answering anything else but, “A relationship no longer exists and divorce may be the best option,” then you
may just be a pacifist. Which is OK. I don’t find anything wrong with choosing that route. But if danger were ever to come, I don’t imagine that person could live consistently and faithfully to God in that circumstance. Which again, is OK. I don’t live consistently and faithfully under God’s range of His effective rule daily. I want to. I pray to. I strive to. Ultimately, I rely on the grace of God every day and I see that no different for the pacifist.

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” The first part is Scripture that Jesus quotes. The latter “hate your enemy” is not part of the OT. In fact, it’s apart of the tradition of the Jewish people.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.

Let us be all about that. Let us be people who are continuing with that elevated perspective over our enemies. Let us be the people who, even though we have people who hate us, we would do whatever we could for those people.

Because of this passage and the teachings of my dad, I have developed three rules for living:

1) Don’t say something behind someone’s back that you wouldn’t say to their face.
2) Don’t take any crap from anyone (I’m not sure that you will find that in the Bible, but the idea is to honor and respect yourself).
3) Always do whatever you can to make the people around you successful (enemy or not).

Within the “gun industry” I have developed a number of “enemies” who have given me wonderful opportunities to apply these three rules. There are people (believe it or not) who hate my guts so much that they would crack a smile and have a beer if they found out a student accidentally shot me in the face during a class. I have people who persecute me with slander, defamation of character, libel, spreading rumor and lies, developing propaganda, and the occasional meme against me. There are people who are actively trying to hack my website, phone, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube accounts all because… well, who knows. But when I’ve learned of people who have had serious issues with me, I’ve contacted them to ask, “What can I do for you?”

You’d be surprised how often your enemies become friends quickly when you lavish them with love (remember, love is a verb). And when you pray for people, they are
always on your mind. It’s that elevated perspective we talked about before. When I actively try to make your business successful and have you on my mind to elevate you and look out for “your own interests” (Philippians 2:4), I’m not going to have an enemy for too much longer.

Isn’t that the goal? We know that “in this world we will have many troubles,” Jesus says. But do you think Jesus would rather have us restore and establish relationships through love, rather than through hate? Me, too. I think this because this is the story of the Gospel. This is the story of the cross. This is the story of God, while we were enemies and still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8-10).

I sincerely do not believe that Jesus is telling us to “love our enemies over our family.” I don’t not believe that Jesus would rather us die for the sake of our enemies because of the pacifist argument of, “well we know where we are going in the end...”

Could I be wrong? Could Jesus be completely opposed to self-defense? Absolutely. But given the rest of the Scripture and the spirit of it, I don’t see how Jesus can be described by John as, “The word became flesh,” (John 1) and stand in opposition of several texts permitting self-defense in the Bible.

Jesus has come to “fulfill” the Scriptures. I don’t imagine, nor do I see any contradiction in Jesus’ words in the NT, to be in direct and utter opposition to the words of the OT. In fact, all Scripture is “God breathed,” and Jesus believed this as well. And if Jesus believed that Scripture comes from God and taught that, “not one jot or tittle will pass away,” should we not look at Jesus’ endorsement as strengthening the spirit of the texts used earlier in our findings on self-defense?

**Paul’s Preservation**

We now move briefly to a central figurehead of the NT, the Apostle Paul. He wrote more about the theology of Christ than any other Apostle and to this day, we are still trying to come to grips with his words and experiences. The Book of Acts, written by Luke, describes in interesting detail how Paul found himself preserving his life even though he knew that God has set him apart for ministry to the Gentiles. Let’s read a little bit of the story of Paul in Damascus and see if this helps us understand a little bit more about the Jewish mindset of nefesh, and how important it is to safeguard it, so far as it depends on us. **Again, we aren’t looking at prescriptive texts that tell us how we should act. We are looking at texts that describe the nature of Paul and the truth principles we can extract from these stories that Luke describes in Acts.**

**Acts 9:19-25**

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving
that Jesus is the Messiah.  
After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

Paul, even though he surely had a wonderful opportunity to become a martyr for the sake of our Lord, decides is best not to go to the point of death in order that these people could see the love of God. Quite frankly, God has already done that to the utmost degree through His Son Jesus. But regardless, Paul learns of his enemies’ plans and seeks to remove himself from the situation.

There is a lot to be said about removing yourself from the situation and creating distance between you and your enemy in self-defense. (Jesus does this a couple of times when His life was in danger.) In fact, one of the greatest tools to self-defense is situational awareness. Preventing a situation from happening by being someplace else or removing ourselves from a situation if at all possible is one of the elements to situational awareness.

Are there other examples of Paul using his legs to get him someplace else for fear of his life? Why yes there are!

Acts 14:1-7
At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the gospel.

And again in Acts 17:13-15 Paul is in Berea:

But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

Paul is our shining example of what it means to keep your ear to the ground. Now grant it, we don’t find Paul whipping out his sword slashing at his attackers even when Paul is being beaten in Acts 16 (which is a fantastic read about a prison break that didn’t happen, a suicide that didn’t happen, and a earthquake that caused it all).
Paul preserves his life and the life of his companions by acting intelligently and decisively. He is an intelligent man who knows about the escalation of anger. He knows what a shameful beating is like from a riotous mob because he had been on the giving and receiving end of both. But he also knows what it’s like to have his life threatened and to breathe murderous threats. And when that happens, he removes himself from the situation. Notice how we don’t read any stories about Paul praying for God’s deliverance amidst these situations. We don’t see Paul contemplating what actions that may or may not jeopardize his life taken before the Lord in prayer.

For Luke, this would have been a perfect time to insert Paul’s conversation to pacifism. Indeed, Paul was a murderous, Jewish zealot on his way to become high priest as he killed and imprisoned followers of “the way” before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He was one of the greatest Jewish patriots of his day. This begs the question: Where is the great note marking Paul’s pacifistic reversal at his conversion? If violence and killing were his way before, where’s the author’s inserted note that because he’s a Christ follower now, he is pacifist because God got a hold of him? Now, I’m not suggesting we base our entire self-defense argument upon this very flimsy question that Luke didn’t care to highlight. All I’m asking is, wouldn’t that be an interesting point of contrast to insert somewhere throughout the life of Paul to demonstrate Paul’s radical conversion to pacifism (assuming that’s what Jesus wants from us).

**What I’m Not Saying**

I’m not of one to believe that Christians should be hit men that go out looking to slay child murderers, rapist, and human traffickers... although that would be lovely. I believe sincerely that all Christians should be at peace with one another “so far as it depends on you” (the Scripture says). I believe we are to be people who de-escalate situations with our gentleness and never repay evil for evil. This is in line with Scripture. But I also believe that there are people who seek to cross a line that severs the peace and possibility for a future relationship with their violent and evil choices. If God wishes the attacker to come to repentance in his life here on Earth, I promise you the Holy Spirit will intervene in that situation. One could easily counter from the opposite end that same argument but they only find themselves arguing the same point we combated earlier about God magically putting zeros on the end of our welfare checks that God signed and put into our mailbox.

**Keep Your Powder Dry**

Ultimately, what it comes down to is this: Jesus calls us to love one another, to care for each other. Indeed, there maybe circumstances when the way we demonstrate love is by protecting the innocent from evil. “Greater love hath none than this: that one would lay down his life for his friend.” The moral dilemma faced when deciding to take a life is solved, in my Christian perspective, by considering what is the lesser of
two evils: allowing innocent blood to be shed (or an innocent person to be damaged/violated) when you have the power to stop it, or shedding guilty blood?

Could there be scenarios in life that are not so black and white when it comes to self-defense? Absolutely. All we can do is act as justly as possible, being alert always. As Christians, we have to allow God to govern our hearts and strive to be like Christ every day so that we have the best chance of judging a difficult situation with wisdom and clarity.

Oliver Cromwell was reported to have said it best at the Battle of Edgehill in 1642, “Trust in God, my boys, but keep your powder dry.” vii

I believe this to be fantastic advice for us today. Our trust is not in Glock or the AR-15. We don’t place all of our trust in these tools to protect us from evil. We don’t cling to these as our safe havens of security. We place our trust, our confidence, our unwavering hope in God the Father who is Creator of all things. But we also keep our powder dry. What an interesting phrase.

If you are unfamiliar with how a muzzleloader works, gunpowder is pour down the barrel of the gun preceding the wad and ball. If the gunpowder got wet it meant your gun wasn’t good for doing anything but striking your enemy with. Keeping your powder dry has been a phrase use to symbolize preparedness, keeping an eye over your provisions, and always being will to fight the good fight if necessary. But let us not just use this phrase as something clever and cool to communicate our edgy historical side. Instead, let us adopt the phrase as the foundation for those of us who choose to chary a firearm for self-defense. Let us be a people who are always on the side of right, who always rely upon God the Father through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to be men and women who live as people who would “fear no evil” because our trust and confidence is ultimately in God.

“Trust in God, my boys, but keep your powder dry.”

1 Barry L. Schwartz Jewish Heroes, Jewish Values: Living Mitzvot in Today’s World

iv Address on the first Anniversary of the Alliance for Progress.
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v Longman, Garland The Expositors Bible Commentary: Matthew & Mark Pg.189
vi Willard, Dallas The Divine Conspiracy Pg. 180