

Towards a Christian Theology of Self Defence

*And it's Role In
looking After
Those Around Us*

By Richard Roper



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Acknowledgements

I would like to declare from the out set my indebtedness to Bob Orlando, John R. Himes and Dr. Michael Willett. Although I wrote this paper for my own satisfaction to try to clarify the issues in my mind. To that end I have tried very hard to make it my own work. However any person who takes the time to read any of their work will see the influenced.

Whilst they may not agree with everything I say here, I would also like to thank my teachers from Melbourne Bible Institute who helped equip me to be able to approach this work. Of those, one in particular Mr Bill Leng, a mentor who has some how managed to keep in contact with me all these years, willingly gave his time to review my work.

I would also like to acknowledge all those who helped me edit this paper including and especially my wife who's encouragement I always rely on.

A Word Before I Proceed

This is not an attempt to convince anyone that they are wrong if they believe they are called or required by God to be a pacifist. Nor should it be used in that way. The apostle Paul is emphatic that we have no right to try to argue against another's conscience (1 Cor. 8:12, Rom.14:1). If someone is working through their own position or they are questioning ours then they are free to present information as they understand it. Any more than this and we are required to, as Paul says, "keep what you believe about the matter between you and God" (Rom.14:22a).

I make no apology for my position and I am quite comfortable with the practice of my Martial Art and its application to Self Defence. To the point that I, for many years did not even think I had a need to say anything to those who disagreed with me.

The only reason I have written this paper is because of the number of times other Christians felt the need to try to compel me to give justification. Even to the point of, disconcertingly having to defend my Junior students against over zealous adult brothers and sisters. In the end it just seemed easier to write this paper. Even then I have procrastinated many years in bringing it to this state of publication.

At least now, rather than handing out a paper copy where necessary I can point to the download.

But most of all, I hope that my thoughts will be helpful to other Christians wrestling with this issue.

Notes: About Terms and The Use Of The Old Testament References In This Paper

The word "Defence and Defense" are used interchangeably. Defence is the Australian Spelling and Defense the American. I tend to prefer the Australian but sometimes the spell checker wins.

I have tried to apply the following criteria in the use of the Old Testament:

With any use of Old Testament references as supporting argument, care must be taken not to use actions or words of characters that are not supported by a general command of God. This is to avoid the risk of interpreting something as Gods Will, that may have been later outlawed by God as His universal will for His children. For example when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac it was lawful because it pre-dated the 10 commandments. But as we have the 10 commandments the action is not lawful for us today.

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My Purpose In This Paper About Self Defence

In the following I will make no attempt to resolve any controversy.

Resolutions to most of the questions that I will pose, are far too diverse and complex to tackle comprehensively in this paper.

My only purpose is to introduce my own thoughts on the subject of self defence, in relation to those arguments against it. I wish only that my own position may be understood. As the apostle Paul said to the Romans ... "each one should firmly make up his mind" (Rom.14:5).

I do not claim that what I have to say is in any way completely free from flaws (1 Cor 10:12). However happy is the person who does not feel guilty when he does something he judges to be right (Rom.14:22b) and I am indeed at peace with this position at this time.

I intend to show that whilst there is a clear imperative on those of us who follow Christ to be people of peace, the New Testament is short on the details on how to handle much of the violence, particularly mindless violence in our society. Whilst I hold firmly, that we cannot advance the Kingdom of God with violence, we are only given hints as to what we should do about violence in any other context. These hints, I believe, are strong enough for the passive Christian to surely have to recognise that those of us who are more warrior like, are not outside the grace of God.

That is, just as some Christians may be led by their conscience never to fight at all, so others in some situations are lead by their conscience, to stand and fight; so long as they remain inside certain boundaries and still remain faithful to the message and mission of Christ.

How I will proceed:

It is easy to make a case for all kinds of martial action using the Old Testament and few if any would suggest otherwise.

I will therefore start my exploration with Jesus and the New Testament because what He has said and the way that it is interpreted is were all the difficulties start.

I will then gradually open up the discussion to the Old Testament as it contextually relates.

The Self Defence Controversy – Stating The Problem

I think that the case for and against self defense is far too often grossly over simplified and frankly that is, in my view, one of the main reasons that it is so controversial.

I have heard opponents of self defence put forward the passage, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek..." (Matt. 5:39) as though it were the only argument and that it demolished all other arguments.

I have also heard the proponents of self defence use, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit..." 1 Cor. 6: 19) in the same way.

But both arguments when used as simplistic answers can be countered with Jesus questioning before his crucifixion (Jn.18:23 &19:1). He was struck and even though he had the power to defend himself, he chose not to but far from turning the other cheek, he took the guard to task by saying "why do you strike me".

Oversimplification is an easy enough trap for any of us to fall into. However, even if we all agreed not to oversimplify this issue, it would still be much more complex than most are willing to admit.

For example:

- Should Christians allow themselves to be attacked, abused or raped in mindless acts of violence?
- Should Christians allow others to be attacked, abused or raped in mindless acts of violence?

When people are oppressing or have oppressed others, justice usually requires that we take some sort of action. This will mean that the oppressors will experience some form of restriction or punishment. The OT is very strong on our responsibility to establish justice - God is e.g. "a lover of justice" (Ps. 96:13, Ps.95:11).

- But when confronted with oppression what action should we take?

Any oppressor who is restrained in anyway will very likely resist.

- What is the correct Christian response to such restraint?

The Old Testament actually requires that we protect the weak (Pr. 2:11-12). An intruder under Jewish law could be killed, without legal consequence (Ex. 22:2). Women are required to put up resistance and scream when they are threatened with rape (Deut.22:23-27). But the New Testament seems to have an imperative that we be a people of non-violence in a violent world (Matt.5:38-48).

If that is so, just how far should we take this reaction?:

- What if I was with someone else, my wife and child perhaps and I was sure that turning my other cheek would result in serious damage to me, leaving them in danger?
- What if you are confronted with bullying or just plain abuse of power?

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- What if you were convinced that a work that you knew was God's work would be destroyed?
- Can a Christian be a member of the Police Force or the Military and still be a Christian?

These are some of the questions that all Christians at some time in their lives may have to confront.

God Allows Violence And It Is Controversial – A Context Of The Debate

That God allows violence in society is a given. But that God allows violence to be perpetrated on His children is often ignored or trivialised.

There are those that hold that it is inappropriate for a Christian to respond to violence no matter what the consequence. They hold that Matt.5:38-48 is a clear directive that Christians are to take all forms of violence passively.

- In the more radical of these positions it is argued that God will never allow any physical harm to come to His own unless they are out of His will or have unrepentant sin in their lives. Proponents of this theology often add the element of faith and love to their stand, saying that faith and love are the only weapon that are needed and if you only have the faith, God will always protect you.
- Sometimes proponents of these views argue that the Old Testament is superseded by the New Testament, you therefore cannot use the Old Testament as a basis for supporting any argument to the contrary. Hence all forms of violence are now outside Gods grace.

So Is the Old Testament superseded? Will God ever allow physical harm to come to his own? Lets see if I can answer those questions?

Is The Old Testament Superseded?

If one holds strictly to a concept that the Old Testament or Covenant (for they both mean the same) is no longer valid, then in my view, you end up invalidating Jesus words in Matthew chapter 5 verses 17 to 20. These verses immediately precedes the “turn the other cheek” verses.

He says:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished".

If You Throw Out The Old Testament You Leave The New With No Support!

Truth is truth and if it is true in the New Testament, it is true in the Old. As hard as this might be for some to accept, without the Old Testament (OT) there is no New Testament (NT) because Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old (Rom.10:4)

Although this means that everything in the OT must be interpreted in the light of Jesus and our salvation is not dependant on the Old Covenant or its rights and rituals (e.g. animal sacrifice), there is still authority in it. Authority that is endorsed by Jesus and the NT writers when they invoke the OT to make their arguments.

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There must of course be sensitivity and respect in using the OT to make arguments as instructed (Matt.13:52). Yet as Paul exhorts us, we need to recognising that scripture is a whole and we should apply the whole of scripture, to every doctrine and truth that we have (Rom.15:4).

Will God Ever Allow Any Physical Harm To Come To His Own?

There are examples:

- The disciples asked Jesus what sin had this man committed when confronted by the blind man ? They were told his blindness was for the glory of God (Jn.9:2-3).
- Paul was stoned, beaten, shipwrecked and persecuted for his faith and simply because of his journey (2 Cor.11:23-29).

This is supported in the OT. In Job for example, you only have to read the comments of Job's "comforters" to see that the idea that, God will allow nothing to happen to His own, has been around since very early times (Job.4:7, 5:20 -21, 8:20- 22 and many more). Long before Jesus appeared on earth. The book goes on to clearly show that such a view is not true. Job did nothing to deserve the disaster that happened to him (Job 1:8).

Jesus when talking about the sun and the rain declares that good and evil does not discriminate on who it falls (Matt. 5:45)

I don't wish to be harsh but there seems to me to be no other way of saying it; clearly the view that God will not allow any physical harm to come to his own, is a complete nonsense. This does not mean that I don't believe God looks after His children. He does! It's just that sometimes it is not always the sort of looking after we want from Him.

Stating Some Of The Problems I Have With The Passive Christianity

The Emphasis Is On The Response Of The Individual

Part of my problem is that the emphasis in Matt.5: 38-42 and Lk.6:29-40 is all on the individual having a passive reaction when we are confronted by oppression. But there is no expansion on what one should do for instance, if your actions were to have a serious impact on others? Now quite obviously if I am left without a choice because I am not, for one reason or another, able to defend myself then the whole story is different. But what if I was sure I could do something about oppression towards others? Something aggressive or violent. Should I choose to do it? The passages give no answer.

Love May Sometimes Require Us To Refuse To Stand By

Jesus said that you should Love your enemies (Matt.5:43-48, Lk.6:27- 28, 32-36).

Showing Love sometimes requires us to refuse to stand by and watch when we are able to do something. Jesus defended the Adulteress. But I'm not convinced that Jesus would have done nothing if someone had thrown the first stone at her or at Him (Jn.8:3-11)? I will come back to this latter.

Situations That Are So Overwhelming

In His prophecy of the Awful horror Jesus shows that there are some situations that are too overwhelming to confront. (Lk. 21:21-22, Matt.24:15-21, Mk.13:14-23). Clearly running away and hiding is a legitimate response but that only means that we are to be strategic not purely passive.

Jesus Defends Himself

There is at least one instance of Jesus defending himself (Lk. 4: 28). The text says that He simply walked through the crowd. The implication is that there was more to it than just walking away. It would seem that at the very least, He used His commanding presence to dissuade the crowd from continuing the attack and left or He used supernatural means. We are not told which. Perhaps it was a bit of both. But regardless, Jesus by His own example showed that it is sometimes appropriate to walk away from a conflict using whatever power and authority are available to us. This is not unknown in our world to day.

In self-defence classes it is often taught that confidence is a key factor. This is entirely consistent with Martial Arts principals. It is now pretty much confirmed through good research that assailants are less likely to attack a person who is confident. There are many instances of not just police, soldiers, Martial Artists and people in authority, but ordinary people finding themselves in difficult circumstances, including Christians whose personal presents were so strong that by the grace of God they just walked away.

This is a skill that can be taught and I think that I should teach it.

Jesus Protected His Disciples

Jesus said (Jn.17:12):

“While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.”

It is assumed that this protection is passive and spiritual, in that He prayed for them (Lk.22:32). But His protection took a number of forms. He protected them from drowning even when He was asleep in the fishing boat (Matt.8:23-27, Mk.4:35-41, Lk.8:22-25). Though their lack of faith did not perceive the protection. He saved Peter from drowning (Matt. 14:30). The Lord also protected Peter from harm after Peter attacked the soldier at His arrest, by healing the soldiers ear (Matt. 26: 52-54).

So it is appropriate for us to protect those in our care. So long as it is in our rightful power to do so.

An Expectation, To Protect Wives And Households

In Matt.24:43 and Rev.16:15 there is an expectation, that one would protect ones household.

Admittedly these passages are about how we cannot know when Jesus will return and we must always be prepared. But it is reasonable to also imply that defending your home is a good thing.

Some may say that the verses are only an analogy. However that doesn't change the verses to say that the act of protecting ones household would be an evil act in any way.

Others might say that this is an example of what a non-Christian might do. The problem being that the text is directed towards the disciples as much as the rest of the listeners. In fact the act is spoken of as something that would be expected of any normal person. Certainly Jesus protected His Fathers household from thieves with physical force (Jn.2:13-17, Matt.21: 12-13, Mk.11: 15-17, Lk.19: 45-46)

There is also an expectation by the Apostle Paul that men are to be prepared to lay down their lives for their wives. (Eph.5:25). To assume that this is always going to be able to be non-violent is, to me absurd. If the intent of the passage is that one should protect ones wife with your life then as any good rescue person will tell you " you are not much help if you are incapacitated by injury or dead."

There Is A Time To Be Prepared To Fight.

When talking to His disciples Jesus says that there is a time to be prepared to fight (Lk. 22:36 -38, buying a sword).

Now this verse is not always interpreted literally. Some are of the opinion that Jesus did not mean a physical sword. The fact that He got frustrated with Peter when he said that they had two swords, is presented by some as evidence of this. I see nothing in the context however, to cause me to agree with that interpretation.

Clearly at least some if not all the disciples, had not understood Jesus directive in Matthew 5:38-48 to be a blanket statement or they would not have been carrying swords at all at this time. With that in mind Jesus frustration can be understood in other ways. He may have been frustrated with the fact that they did not understand the timing issue or that Peter, ever the zealot so willing, jumped at the opportunity to fight, still not grasping that Jesus had to die first. In fact it is possible to look at the statement “it is enough” as not being frustration at all but affirmation that 2 swords would be

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enough at this time.

Whatever the reason, it is important to note that Jesus is only talking here about being prepared. But the implication cannot be denied, that at the right time (Eccl. 3:8), His disciples may have to be prepared to fight.

In the Old Covenant where there is a requirement to defend the weak and the innocent (Pr. 24:11-12). Using only words, Jesus did this in His defence of the Adulteress (Jn.8:3-11); though she was far from innocent. Thus the Lord Jesus not only upholds the Old Testament directive, He extends it. Paul goes even further, as now we are also required to guard the conscience of the weak (1 Cor. 8:12). Doing all this without raising your hand is clearly ideal but not always a realistic option.

Peter is rebuked for his aggressive action at the arrest of Jesus (Matt. 26: 52-54) and warned that, they that take the sword must perish by it (Matt. 26. 52). Yet Jesus is not discriminatory towards the Roman soldier (Lk. 7:1-10), and logically therefore He does not discriminate against any person in the military. John the Baptist didn't exclude them from the community of believers either (LK.3:14). His only request was honesty on their part. Including soldiers in the community was part of the New Testament churches understanding as well, since Cornelius was a soldier (ACTS.10). This man's house was blessed by the Holy Spirit. Which makes it a little hard to argue that soldiers are not accepted by God.

Some have presented the argument to me that these soldiers would have left the service when they were converted. Yet I can find no biblical evidence to support that idea.

Response To Acts Of Aggression Must Be Within The Law

I think that at this point I should make it clear that nothing I have said should be taken to mean that one should act outside the law. Even in the case of war and resistance of oppression there are standards of behaviour that must be upheld.

In New Testament times soldiers were agents of the state. The State and therefore its agents (or in our time Police etc.), are empowered to punish (Rom.13:1-5) and the state is not bound from administering Old Testament Justice. Such compulsions are only on the individual (Matt. 5:38-45), who is forbidden from seeking revenge (Rom.12:17-21). Therefore any response to any act of aggression that is possible to give must be within the law. Both then and now.

In Summary So Far

So I don't see Jesus as being in any way comprehensive when He tells us to turn the other cheek. In fact He uses His power and authority to defend Himself, those in His care and the helpless that come into His line of authority. By implication love demands that we are required to defend those who come under ours. In doing so Jesus uses principals that are entirely consistent with Martial Art principals. A strategic use of confidence.

We are called to be strategic but at least some are called to be prepared to fight. Police, Soldiers and others in authority for example, as long as they are acting for justice and inside the law.

Violence and the Kingdom of God

But the kingdom of God itself is not of this world and therefore human force can never advance it

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(Jn.18: 36). Building on this teaching, the New Testament tells us that the true nature of battle is spiritual and the real arena of war is heaven (Rev.12: 7, Rev.17: 14). This is drawn directly from the Old Testament which makes it clear that in the end, it is God that brings the victory in any conflict, not us (Neh.4:20). We are told that the Christian is a soldier in this (2 Tim.2: 3) who has to 'war a good warfare' (1 Tim.1: 18, 1 Pet.2:11; 2 Cor.10: 3-4, Eph.6:10-20). Jesus has already disarmed the principalities and powers (Col. 2:15) and their leader will be defeated by the very words Jesus speaks (... "the breath of His mouth " 2 Thes.2: 8). But not before a final battle... Armageddon (Rev. 16: 16)

How Should I React As A Christian

From this I draw an understanding that when it comes to self defence, not only is there a right time and place (Lk. 22:36 -38, Eccl. 3:8) but that right time and place is to be discovered in both the physical and the spiritual world. With this in mind, there are three things referred to above that I will look at more closely below.

They are:

- Nehemiah and Ezra (the two books are directly related)
- The use of the spoken word
- And the battle of Armageddon

Ezra and Nehemiah and Confidence in God

How These Two Books Contribute To NT Understanding Of Self Defence

Not only does John chapter 18 verse 36 state that the Kingdom of God is not of this world, it can also imply that taking up arms for ones earthly kingdom is to be expected. This sort of dichotomy can be seen clearly in the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah. In these two men we find an example of two different kinds of approaches to self defence.

Each man was similar in that:

- God was with each of them in their Mission (Ezra.7:6-7, Neh.2:8).
- Each was called to cross some very dangerous territory in order to get to Jerusalem (Ezra.8:31).

But their purpose was different:

- Ezra was to minister the Temple (Ezra. 7:14)
- Nehemiah was to rebuild the defences around Jerusalem (Neh. 2:8)
- Nehemiah was called to a more physical task
- Ezra was called to a more spiritual one
- Ezra had told the king that God would look after him, so he fasted and prayed that God would indeed do just that on his Journey (Ezra.8:23)
- Nehemiah, whose job it was to build a defence for Jerusalem, took a full complement of guards with him (Neh. 2:9).

If any lesson about self defence can be drawn from this, it is that the method one uses to defend ones self depends on your purpose and conscience.

Applying this to our New Testament passage (Jn.18:36), rather than Jesus telling us we should not defend our physical Kingdom, He is saying you should fight for the spiritual Kingdom in a spiritual plain and defend your physical kingdom in the physical plain. There is nothing to say

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that you should not fight at all. It depends on what you are called to do. In this context the New Testament fills out the Old.

One thing that I believe very strongly that we learn from this and the story of these two men: Self defence should never be taken lightly, whatever your belief. Don't forget that Ezra fasted and waited on God for protection and Nehemiah made very good physical preparations.

Whatever Kingdom you are fighting for, in the end, one unifying factor is that our confidence can only be in God. The credit must be His (1 Cor.10:31, Ps.144:1&2). Some may prepare in different ways to others, Just like Ezra and Nehemiah prepared differently (Ezra 8:21-23, Neh.4:6-9) but only God can bring victory in any conflict. In this there is absolutely no distinction between the Old and New Testament. (Neh.4:16-23, Jn. 15:5). Not that we have no confidence in ourselves. For we can see that Ezra and Nehemiah both had plenty of that. But God is the foundation of that confidence.

The Spoken Word

I want to make it clear that despite my willingness to use the physical elements of self defence, I think that scripture is clear that words are, the vast majority of the time, our best form of self defence and I would always default to them as my first approach in any confrontation. This is not only consistent with my understanding, as I will show but is wholly consistent with Martial Art principals.

In this respect I am of one mind with many of the more pacifist mind set. As much as they would not like to admit that they are acting in a Martial Art way. Particularly those who believe in political and legal activism. But I part company with those who believe that we should be submissive in all things. I think that this is completely justified using Jesus own example.

I stated above that, Jesus has already disarmed the principalities and powers (Col. 2:15) and their leader will be defeated by the very words Jesus speaks (... "the breath of His mouth " 2 Thes.2: 8).

It is agreed by the vast majority, if not all of the Christian world, that there is power in God's word. More than that, it is clear that we should use the spoken word to resist (2 Thes.2: 8, Rev.19: 21, Is.11: 4). From this I draw, that our first line of defence is always, God's word.

It is not possible to overstate the power of God's word. Armies are defeated (e.g. Is.19:5-7, 35-37 Ps. 76:6), demons are cast out (e.g. Matt.17:18), Satan himself falls (2 Thes.2: 8), all at the word of God. When it comes to the spiritual, God's word remains supreme. Nothing stands in its way. This is also the case when we are dealing in the physical, as can be seen in the calming of the sea (Matt. 8:23-27), the withering of the fig tree (Matt. 21:18-22).

We have a number of instances were Jesus used words as a defence. He used words to defend the Adulteress. ("He who is without sin, let him throw the first stone." Jn:3-11).

It is important to understand the way words are used, for their full potential to be realised. The power of words has as much to do with the strategy, as with the well considered phrase.

Consider that before Jesus spoke in the case of the Adulteress, He waited. The text says that He drew in the sand (Jn.8:6). Now there have been many attempts to understand why this is mentioned in the text but I think that the most reasonable explanation is that it was a strategic act. He was making them wait.

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This achieved two things :

- 1) It gave Him time to think.
- 2) Making them wait put Him in a controlling position.

When Jesus finally does speak, He does not confront the problem head on. Instead He defines the real problem, that they were trying to bring Him down to their level. They wanted to be justified by Him. Instead they would have been condemned by their own actions had they proceeded.

Consider also the instance of the coin (Matt.22: 15-22). The Pharisees in one of their many attempts to trap Jesus, ask him about giving taxes. This was of some concern for many Jews at the time. They contributed to the temple and gave their tithes, why should they pay taxes too. But not to pay taxes meant punishment from the ruling body at the time, the Romans. To say anything that would incite the populous not to pay taxes was an act against the state and carried severe punishment.

This time, Jesus chooses another strategy. He takes away the high ground from them by naming the offence. "Why are you trying to trap me..." (Matt.22: 18) He says. Like any deception a trap is a deception that does not like to be revealed for what it is. By revealing the truth He is able to call them hypocrites without fear of repercussion. Jesus redirects and redefines the intent of the problem by saying "Give to Caesar what is Caesar s..." (Matt. 22:15-22, Lk.20:20-26, Mk.12:13-17).

Jesus does this many times:

- When His disciples were gleaning wheat from the fields on the Sabbath He used words (Mk.2:27, Mk. 2:23-27, Matt. 12:1-8, Lk.6:1-5)
- The question of fasting (Mk. 2:18-22, Matt.9:14-17, Lk.5:33-39)
- The man with the paralysed hand (Mk.3:1-6, Matt.12:9-14, Lk.6:6-11)

These were all potentially explosive and high risk situations. In avoiding direct confrontation Jesus used principals that are intricate to all Martial Arts. Redirection, unbalancing and distraction are all sound Martial Art principles.

The closer Jesus came to His death however, the bolder He became (Matt. 22:41-23:36 see also Lk.11:37-54, Mk.12:35-40, Lk.20:45-47). He started to be more and more direct. He could do this because His mission was near completion and He did not fear death. History has shown us just how dangerous a man without fear can be. But even in this we note that He kept His disciples. (Jn.17:12, Jn.18:9).

It would seem correct to say then, that if God so chose and we remain close enough to him, the only defence we would ever need would be His word. Unfortunately, using the power of words is not an option for all of us. Some because we are not gifted that way, others because the door is closed to us. Perhaps it makes me the weaker in faith that I do not believe that every situation can be solved by words alone. Never the less, Jesus as I have shown, set the example.

As did the angel mentioned in Jude (Jude 9).

Wherever possible we should approach every conflict with words as our first resort, with particular

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deference to Gods word. This much is blatantly obvious. But even if we have the power of words and know how to use the power of God's Word physical conflict is never completely eradicated from being necessary. That is what I will now speak to.

Armageddon

No matter how potent or eloquent our words, sometimes there comes a point where, no matter how hard we try to avoid it, physical conflict results; leaving us with only one choice: fight or submit. Some at least, may choose to fight and still be a part of Gods Kingdom and here is my reasoning for that position:

As can be seen above when I stated that, Jesus has already disarmed the principalities and powers ... But not before a final battle... Armageddon (Rev. 16: 16), sometimes a spiritual battle can become a physical one.

In this case we see that even though a victory may be ultimately won by words, God's word in particular, there still may be no escaping a physical battle. This is not dependant on what your eschatology beliefs are, because even if, for example, you hold that these passages are not literal, the symbolism results in the same conclusion.

With the main emphasis throughout the most of the New Testament being that of Christians involved in a spiritual battle and the physical realm being overcome by spiritual means, the return of Christ sees that changing.

Thought to be based on the hill of Megiddo (HAR-MAGEDON - Armageddon) near which many famous battles took place in the reigns of Necho and Josiah (2 Ch.25: 22) it is also a spiritual battle in which Christ has already conquered (Jn. 16: 33, 1 Cor. 15: 57, 1 Cor. 15: 26). Thus there is a merging in the New and the Old Testament. Drawing together the Old Testament understanding of the coming Messiah (Rev. 19: 21, Is.11: 4, Ps. 110 b) in a physical Kingdom and the New Testament promise of eternal peace through a spiritual one.

Jesus clearly demonstrates this as He draws closer to His Death on the Cross. In the clearing of the temple we gain a glimpse of that spiritual battle becoming a physical one (Jn.2: 13-17, Matt.21:12-13, Mk.11:15-17, Lk.19:45-46). We see Jesus who called himself "meek " or gentle depending on your translation (Matt.11:29) showing that Meekness is power under control.

Some would argue: "but no people or animals were hurt in the temple, only tables were turned over". This argument is pure conjecture. The Bible says nothing about injuries one way or other. Even if it did, it would not change the point of the story: that sometimes a spiritual battle becomes a physical one.

It is clear then, that it is possible to have all the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-20) and still be aggressive or even violent in certain instances. For to argue that Jesus, the Son of God did not have the Fruit of the Spirit is absurd.

David, Solomon, Jesus, Violence And Being People Of Peace

God wants us to be people of peace, this is a given (Matt. 5:9). However, we are also called to be people of justice (Matt. 5:6) and as people of Justice, those of us who are called to it, should also be prepared to fight to uphold that justice. This is true in the Old just as much as the New Testament.

For example: God denying David the right to build the temple; giving that privilege to Solomon, is sometimes raised as an argument against the idea that Christians should be involved in any form of

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self defence.

David who always gave God the Glory for his skill (Ps. 144:1 & 2) and did not see himself as a man of violence (Ps. 17: 4), was not allowed to build the temple because he had too much blood on his hands (1Chron.22:8).

Despite many trying to insist otherwise we don't really know what God meant when he said “too much blood”. Most assume that it was because he had fought too many battles; others think that God was still punishing David over Uriah (2 Sam.11:1-12:15). We just don't know.

The one thing that can be said with certainty, is that it was not because of a broken relationship with God. We know this because he is upheld as a man after God's own heart (1 Kg. 14:8 & Act.13:22). We are also told that the battles that David, as well as many other great men fought, were by faith and they did what was right (Righteous or Just) in God's eyes (Heb.11:32-40)

Solomon was given the privilege of building the temple because he was a man of peace (1 Chron. 22:9). But it has to be noted that he maintained a huge army to support that peace (1 Chron.22: 8, 1 Kg. 9:22).

Hence, despite the fact that David and Solomon are often used to support the pacifist version of “peace”, it is actually difficult for them to do so. Neither of them were pacifists and there relationship with the military did not affect their relationship with God. The worst that can be said is that it lost David some very significant privileges, a sacrifice that handed his son the ability to be at peace.

It is also worth noting that it is the worrier that, in the end is remembered as being “after Gods own heart” and that Solomon; the man of peace, was the one that fell away from God and that was not because of his relationship with the military.

This of course begs the question “What is violence?” As it is the OT that causes the question the OT should answer it and Jeremiah does just that:

“This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or **violence** to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.”(Jere.22:3)

Therefore violence is:

Physically mistreating or allowing mistreatment of those who are in your care.

Like Solomon, Jesus Himself was never powerless. He controlled the wind and the sea and logically all the elements (Lk.8:22-25). He had at His beck and call at least 10,000 angels (Matt.26:53). It has to be remembered that He submitted to death because it was His Fathers will, not because he was powerless to avoid it. I said before that Jesus used a strategic confidence and this is why He was able to do so. Because He knew the extent of His power.

Knowing the extent of ones authority and power is why police, soldiers and other persons of authority, are able to command obedience in the face of apparent overwhelming conflict.

Knowing the power one has available to oneself, provides a foundation for you to avoid conflict.

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Jesus made it clear that faith alone could move mountains and there is no doubt that it was by faith that Jesus was able to confront conflict. But like every good Martial Artist, knowing the power He had available to Him didn't hurt.

We must be people of peace. However as people of Justice, if we are to use the example of Solomon, we who are called to do so, should also be prepared to fight to uphold that justice.

What Can We Say From All This

We can say that, from a New Testament standpoint, there is no doubt that, it is acceptable for a Christian to use non-violent self defence. (Lk.4:28, Jn. 17:12, Lk. 20:21-22).

But the New Testament does seem to indicate that non-violence is not always the most appropriate response (Eph.5:25, Matt. 24:33, Lk. 22:36) and in the light of the related parts of the OT our response may depend on our role (Ezra 8:22-23 & Neh.4:6-9).

There are some definite boundaries however, to the use of physical Self defence:

A) It is subject to the law of love (Matt. 5:43-48, Lev. 19:18).

Here we need to understand what living by the sword means (Matt.26:52).

Since living a life of violence is about the misuse of power (Jere. 22:3), then Matt.26:52 is not saying that one should never bear a sword, which is the traditional pacifist way of interpreting it. It is saying that, in the context of Love (Matt. 5:43-48, Lev. 19:18) those who bear swords, carry great responsibility not to live by it or misuse their power. Instead they must “Do what is just and right”. It's about motivation.

It was noted above that Jesus in Luke.22:36 told His disciples to buy a sword. This was just before He was arrested. Just before He was arrested is also were He told His disciples that if you live by the sword you perish by it (Matt 26:52). Understanding Matt 26:52 as being about motivation helps to clarify any confusion there might be between the Matthew and the Luke passage.

Hence not only should we feed and water our enemy when we are doing a spiritual work, it is also imperative that we feed and water our enemy that we are fighting in a physical confrontation as it becomes appropriate (Rom.12:20, Pr.25:21-22).

For example:

- POW's must be treated justly.
- Someone we have injured whilst defending ourselves or others must not be callously allowed to suffer.
- And those we train with in order to be able to defend themselves must not be brutalised, not even verbally.

B) It can never be for revenge (Rom.12:17-21).

C) It can not be outside the law of the land (Rom.13: 1-5).

Yet within those boundaries we are still expected to look after the weak (Pr. 2:11-12). And in fulfilling that requirement we should be aware that belief, policing and military service are not incompatible. (Lk.7:1-10, Heb.11:32-34).

As I said at the start of this paper, the New Testament is very quiet on how to handle much of the violence in our society. But there are hints (Heb.11:32-40, Lk.7:1-10, Eph.5:25, Matt.24:43, Jn.17:12). And these hints, I believe, are strong enough for the passive Christian to surely have to recognise that those of us who are more warrior like, are not outside the grace of God. So just

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as some Christians may be lead by their conscience never to fight at all, so others, are able to be lead by their conscience to willingly stand and fight if they remain inside the boundaries.

Whichever path one takes requires great courage (Love). Greater Love has no man than to lay down his life for a friend (Jn.15:13). There is no stipulation as to whether laying down ones life should be active or passive. It is no different if you stand in the breach and offer passive resistance as did Ezra and his followers or go to war, as did Nehemiah. Many a Christian Man and Woman, Father and Mother have done both through history. As far as I can see both are just as legitimate.

I said earlier that I am not convinced that Jesus would have done nothing if someone had thrown the first stone at the Adulteress or at him. Of course we can never know for sure. But based on what has been outlined above as to what Jesus did and said during His life, we can say there are some things He might have done:

- He might have scooped her up and hid (Matt.24:15-21)
- He Might have walked through the crowd with her (Lk.4:28-30)
- He could have chased them all away by brandishing a rope (Jn.2:13-17)
- He could have called angels (Matt. 26:53)

So it can be said that there were many options that were open to Jesus. In the end, He chose to use words. Even in this however there were choices:

Jesus might have overcome them with the power of His word as He did with the elements (Matt.8:23-27). Instead He used strategy that gave the words power. This strategy empowered the words to shame those who would have condemned and attacked the adulteress and extended forgiveness to the adulteress herself. He did in fact protect her and by the use of guarded words protected himself. This is true self defence as I understand it. To protect yourself only to protect others. Jesus as always, shows us the way by staying well inside the boundaries.

So, should a person allow themselves or someone else to be attacked or abused or raped in a mindless act of violence? Some would still say yes; in that everything that happens is in the sovereign will of God. I affirm this but I add that my action is also under the sovereign will of God; I 'may' choose to fight . Does that put me outside of the will of the Father? I don't believe so.

To look at the question more practically though, we have discussed the distinctiveness between the spiritual world and the physical. This distinctiveness might find expression in my life in the following ways :

If I was being persecuted because of my ministry, I would probably turn the other cheek.

For example: if I were attacked whilst handing out Christian literature on the street and I was the only one affected or I was with a group that had all agreed on that particular course of action.

On the other hand, if I were attacked whilst teaching Judo, which I see as a ministry, I may see it as necessary to react.

In the end its going to depend on what your situation and motivation is. It is all a matter of conscience. If it is your job to defend or you see it as your duty, then you must defend or make

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it no longer your duty. You have to do what your conscience dictates and do your duty according to what your duties are. I encourage everyone to think it through as best they can. No one wants to be confronted by a situation and fail to react in a way you felt appropriate just because you hadn't thought about it.

Even though I do not accept the idea that God will never allow any physical harm to come to His own, unless they are out of His will, my confidence is still in the Lord. I may in some instances prepare for a particular task like Ezra. In other cases I may react to a particular situation like Nehemiah. But the fact that in the end only God can bring the victory is unchanged.

A Christian mother asked me once "if your confidence is in the Lord to be your protector, why do you learn Judo?" I replied "I don't learn Judo to defend myself. I learn it because it is my sport and I enjoy it. But if I were to learn it as a self defence, I would ask you a question by way of reply. I would ask: why would Solomon, a man renowned for his wisdom, a man of peace, whose borders were secured on all sides, want to keep a huge, well trained army?" She went away to think about it.

I see myself as a person of peace. I teach Judo. I learn and teach it because I enjoy it. I believe that God has called me to use this knowledge for His glory. I hope and pray that I might win some for the Lord because I have been true to this calling. I don't teach violence in a world already full of violence. I teach people to live at peace within the boundaries that God and man have set. I do this as best as I am able and to the best of my understanding.

Solomon knew that, in order to keep the peace, he had to be prepared to fight. I will do all in my power to avoid conflict, but Solomon's wisdom is not lost on me.

Further reading :

Christian Philosophy Of Self-defence by John R. Himes

Copies may be obtained for \$4.00 (+SH) from the GMAU (3475 Neal Ave. S., Afton, MN 55001).

By Bob Orlando http://www.orlandokuntao.com/turning_the_other_cheek.html

JESUS - Weak or Meek?

By Dr. Michael Willett (<http://incma.tripod.com/willett2.htm>)

All Bible quotations are from the Revised Standard Version