

A. Sometimes people think Jesus prohibited all self-defense:

Matthew 5:38 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."

B. But read the passage carefully:

1. Jesus is not correcting the error of self-defense but the error of personal vengeance (harming the person who has harmed you, to get even), especially in cases of personal insult.
2. The verb "slap" (Greek *rhapizo*) probably refers to a sharp slap given in insult, not to all kinds of physical violence
 - a. To "slap" on right cheek assumes use of the back of the right hand
 - b. Therefore the point is not to hit back when someone hits you as an insult
3. We should interpret the passage in the context of other similar passages in the Sermon on the Mount:
 - a. John Piper comment on commands in Sermon on Mount (Matt. 5-7): "The commands ... are not absolute prescriptions with no exceptions but rather are pointed, concrete illustrations of how enemy love may and should often look in the life of a disciple. That these illustrations are not always the way enemy love acts is clear from Jesus' own behavior ... [Piper cites cleansing of temple] and from the nature of love itself as that which aims at the best life for the beloved" (*Love Your Enemies*, p. 99)
 - b. Example: Matt. 5:42: "Give to the one who begs from you" must be considered along with the fact that we are to be good stewards of our possessions, and we are not to cast our pearls before swine, and we are to do all to the glory of God, and we are to do all things for edification, and we are to seek the good of our neighbor, and support our households, etc.

Therefore Jesus is teaching an attitude of generosity, a habit of generosity, but not the necessity to give to everyone who begs from us.
4. Therefore vs. 38 also must be interpreted in the light of the whole of Scripture, which teaches that it is right to try to avoid being harmed by a violent attacker:
 - a. David fled from King Saul (did not turn the other cheek: 1 Sam. 19:10)
 - b. Paul escaped from King Aretas (2 Cor. 11:32-33)
 - c. Jesus escaped from an angry crowd at Nazareth (Luke 4:29-30)
 - d. Jesus hid and escaped from hostile Jews in the temple (John 8:59; 10:39)
 - e. Jesus seemed to encourage his disciples to have swords for self-defense: Luke 22:36-38
 - f. We are to care for the health of our bodies, not to encourage actions that would harm them (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

C. Conclusion: defending ourselves and others from physical harm is not wrong, but is right when we are able to do so.

1. A failure to oppose physical harm with force often leads to more harm, more wrong being done (playground situations). Why should we encourage that?
2. Children who are taught not to defend themselves can often be harmed repeatedly, and can internalize deep feelings of injustice and despair.

D. Is it right for a person to use a weapon for self-defense?

1. It seems that Jesus wanted his disciples to have an effective weapon to use in self-defense.

He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one."³⁷ For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfillment."³⁸ And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough" (Luke 22:36-38)

 - swords served as protection against robbers and violent attackers
 - metaphorical interpretations do not seem persuasive here (see ESV Study Bible note)
 - Jesus had not prohibited his disciples from carrying swords though they were with him for 3 years (vs. 38, and John 18:10-11: Peter used his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane)
2. Merely carrying a sword would deter a criminal, and enable a person to defend someone else under attack from someone stronger.
3. A sword could overcome great inequalities in size or strength between an attacker and a victim.
4. The sword would provide protection against violent crime whenever a policeman or soldier was not in sight.

E. Is it right to use a gun for self-defense?

1. If the Bible authorizes self-defense, and Jesus encouraged his disciples to carry a sword for protection, then it is also right for a person to be able to use other kinds of weapons for self-defense (i.e., a gun, pepper spray, etc).
2. A gun is a great equalizer: even an older, more frail citizen or shopkeeper can defend against stronger attacker

3. Often brandishing a handgun will cause an attacker to flee, or if the gun is used, often the intruder is disabled, the attack is thwarted, and then the attacker recovers and stands trial.

One estimate: private ownership of guns prevents 2.1 million crimes/ year in the US

4. Love for neighbor, and not seeking revenge, and current laws all teach that the least amount of force required to stop the attack should be used, resulting in the least amount of physical harm to the intruder himself.

5. Excellent classes on the safe use of firearms are readily available at local gun clubs. (very wise if you own a gun)

F. What about the current debate over stricter gun control laws in the US?

1. Laws that prohibit gun ownership generally lead to increased gun crime

a. New Jersey – adopted what was described as the “most stringent gun: law in America” in 1966, and two years later, the homicide rate had increased 46% and the reported robbery rate had doubled.

b. Hawaii – After Hawaii adopted a series of increasingly restrictive measures on guns, its murder rate tripled from 2.4 per 100,000 in 1968 to 7.2. in 1977.

c. Washington, D.C. – The District of Columbia enacted one of the most restrictive gun control laws in the country, and the murder rate increased 134% in the same time that the national murder rate decreased by 2%.

d. With only one exception (the 2011 Tucson shooting), since 1950, all of the public shootings in the US that killed more than 3 persons were in “gun free zones” where private citizens were not allowed to carry guns, and police could not arrive fast enough to stop the shooter. Example: In Newtown, Conn., recently, police arrived 20 min. after first calls for help. [– John Lott in WSJ, 1-18-13, p. A15]

e. In UK, private citizens generally cannot own guns, but the rate of all violent crimes per capita (with or without guns) in the UK is about twice as large as in the US [see John Lott, WSJ Europe, Sept. 3, 2004, also at www.aei.org/article/21136.] (– due to large changes in British society in last 20-30 years)

2. Private gun ownership does not increase the likelihood of gun crime

a. For every gun that is used for murder in the US, there are approximately 12,653 guns not used in a murder every year. Many were actually used to prevent murders (see E.3 above) – see data in Grudem, *Politics*, p. 204.

b. Possession of a gun decreases a person’s likelihood of being injured in a crime.

c. Victims who defend themselves with a gun are less likely to be injured or to lose property

d. There is no evidence that using a gun for self-protection means that the attacker will take the gun away and use it against the victim (a popular myth)

e. Statistics on numbers of children killed often include gang members up to 18 or 21. Actual number of children age 14 and under killed in gun accidents in US: 227 per year in 1991. (Compare to over 300 deaths in bicycle accidents.)

3. The US Constitution

a. Second amendment: “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

b. Supreme Court decision (5-4) June 26, 2008, in *D.C. v. Heller*.

(1) “The Second Amendment protects an individual right to possess a firearm unconnected with service with a militia, and to use that arm for traditionally lawful purposes, such as self-defense within the home.”

(2) Laws can still place reasonable restrictions such as prohibiting felons and mentally ill from owning guns.

(3) “Militia” at time of Constitution did not mean “army” but “all males physically capable of acting in concert for the common defense.” (In other words, “militia” meant “armed male citizens.”)

G. But should an individual Christian own a gun?

→ There is room for Christians to differ about that question & for individuals to decide what is best in their own situation.

1. I do not think it is morally wrong for a Christian to own a gun for self defense.

2. That does not mean it is the wise or right thing for you to do in your own life situation.