

INNOCENT BLOOD

**A study from God's word on defense
and the use of force to protect the innocent**

PLEASE NOTE:

This edition is specifically intended for Seventh-day Adventist Christians. While anyone is welcome to read this document, parts of it may not make much sense without an understanding of SDA church history and current thinking. If you are not an Adventist, feel free to ask us for the standard edition intended for all Christians.

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Introduction & Why NOT To Use a Gun

Firearms are an issue on the public mind right now, and this discussion has entered the church as well. But there are principles behind “the gun” itself, and that is what I’m really interested in. While guns are instigating the discussion, this paper is more about the principles of defense, use of force, and how God looks at all of this. Once we are clear on the principles, all the details will fall into their proper place.

It’s important to note that there are a number of good and valid reasons why a person might choose **not** to use a gun for defense of their family or innocents around them. In this paper, I’ll be sharing the evidence I’ve collected from 20+ years of research to prove that theology is **NOT** one of those reasons.

Does this mean that everyone must carry a gun? Absolutely not. In fact, there are quite a number of reasons why a person might decide that a gun is not the right tool for them. But I think it’s important to recognize what the reason really is. And it’s also important to not use “theology” as an excuse for taking a position that we really hold for other reasons. It’s okay to not be comfortable with guns as an option, but let’s be clear about the real reasons why we have chosen that position.

Perhaps you experienced a traumatic accident with a firearm in your childhood. Maybe you have no training and are not willing to get good training. Do you have a temper/anger issue going on? Do you live in a location where it would be illegal to own a firearm? Are you scared to death of guns and unwilling to overcome that fear? Are you more concerned about the potential liability of using a firearm than you are about the outcome of the violence you would be stopping?

Any of these could be a reason to not use a gun. Some of them may be overcome, such as fears. It’s always a good idea to try and overcome fears, especially when they are unreasonable fears. But other objections may be of such a nature that you determine that firearms are simply not for you. It’s a personal decision that only you can prayerfully make. I cannot make that decision for you, nor am I attempting to. The point of this paper is to demonstrate that theology is **NOT** a valid reason for deciding against the use of firearms.

Finally, we all come to this issue with a world-view that has been shaped by a number of factors. Perhaps the most profound factor is the way we were raised. It’s difficult to look objectively at an issue if your parents either deified or vilified it. The effect is profound and long lasting, and it takes a lot of maturity and courage to set aside those preconceived ideas and take a truly unbiased look at the issue. There is a big difference between objectively looking at an issue, and trying to prove that your preconceived position is correct. The latter often happens without even realizing it. So my hope is that you will have the maturity and courage to set aside those preconceived ideas that we all have regarding any given issue and look at this from a theoretical / theological point of view. Let’s deal with that first. If you find this paper to be Biblical and make sense, then you’ll have to apply the practicality test and discover what works best for you to implement the principles discussed here. The solution is not the same for everyone, so don’t let the fear of an inanimate object (i.e. a gun) coerce you into making a bogus theological argument.

Just because guns are “okay” doesn’t mean you have to use one or even own one. But I feel it’s important that we be consistent with our theology and logic. Our children can spot inconsistency a mile away and it does a lot of damage. But if we are willing to own up to the **real** reasons why we are against something and not hide behind “theology”, that takes courage and in the end, will elicit respect from those around us—even if they don’t agree. And once we are courageous enough to face our real fears, maybe we’ll discover that we can overcome those fears and not be controlled by them.

I’m writing this paper because I was raised with an old fashioned approach to this issue. It was an approach that used to be the norm but is very rare today. You see, I was **not** raised to love guns or to hate guns. While they were an occasional part of my life, they were no different than a baseball bat, a car, or a kitchen knife. They had a purpose. They had to be handled carefully or harm could come to one’s self and others. But they were all just “things”. They were not good or bad. Bad people could use any of them for bad things, and good people could use them for good things. But it boiled down to the user (the person)—not the inanimate “thing”.

In this day and age, the media has tried to breathe the “breath of life” into the barrel of guns, to make them evil in and of themselves. But that notion is simply absurd, and it’s completely unbiblical. I’m sure you realize that, but I had to say it.

There are several foundational principles that this study is based on. Let’s take a look at them before jumping into Biblical stories and accounts...

Foundational Principles

1 - Human Effort Plus Divine Power

This really is the principle behind almost everything that gets done in God's work or in our personal lives.

God could do everything for us. He certainly is plenty powerful for that. And we have no power in and of ourselves. But God has not chosen to work that way in this world. He has chosen to require humans to cooperate with him and put forth all of the efforts we are capable of, while He supplies His Divine power to perform that which we cannot do.

We often talk about God providing for us, and He definitely does. "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19) But God's "provision" usually looks different in day-to-day life than it does in some people's theoretical theology. God *could* rain money down from Heaven and give us everything we need—and we wouldn't have to lift a finger! But experience has shown that those who try this end up penniless and hungry (or on welfare in America!). Most responsible adults recognize the duty to get a job and work, in order to "provide" for their family. And they don't consider that a lack of faith. In fact, the Bible states "if any would not work, neither should he eat." (2 Thes. 3:10) God could miraculously supply our tables with an abundance of food, but does He generally do that? No. We have to grow it, or buy it, or perhaps someone else grows some food and gives us a gift of it now and then. If we sit at an empty table and pray for food when there is something we could do about it, we are going to be hungry for that meal. But if we have exhausted everything we could reasonably do to provide food for our family and we still come up short, that is when we can responsibly ask for God to intervene in our behalf. But even then, God usually works through His natural channels and impresses someone else with abundance to share. The point is that God generally doesn't work a miracle to make up for a lack of effort.

God has clearly laid out this principle of cooperation between the human and the Divine...

James 2:14-18 - What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so **faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone**. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith **by** my works.

LP 267 - [REGARDING PAUL'S SHIPWRECK ON VOYAGE TO ROME] "Passengers and crew roused from their apathy, and put forth **all possible exertion to save their lives**. There was much yet to be done. **Every effort within their power must be put forth to avert destruction; for God helps those only who help themselves.**"

PP 509 - [REGARDING JOSHUA'S BATTLE WITH GIBEON] "Joshua had received the promise that God would surely overthrow these enemies of Israel, yet **he put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon the armies of Israel alone**. He did all that human energy could do, and **then** he cried in faith for divine aid. The secret of success is the **union of divine power with human effort.**"

Pro. 21:31 - "The horse is **prepared** against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord."

Please tuck this principle away, as we will be looking back to it throughout this study.

2 - The Defender/Protector/Warrior

Another fundamental principle in this discussion is actually one of God's characteristics—the Defender or Protector or Warrior.

In recent months, we've been playing some Michael Card lullabies to our children when putting them down for a nap. Heidi is down for a nap right now as I write, and the song "Sleep Sound In Jesus" is playing. One verse strikes me as very profound on this topic:

“Sleep sound in Jesus, the angels are here,
They're keeping watch so there's nothing to fear.
Against any foe they are ready to fight,
So sleep sound in Jesus, I'll turn out the light.” (Michael Card, *Sleep Sound In Jesus*)

This protective characteristic is a powerful part of God's very character and that of all of his servants. He is our Father and Defender. He constantly watches over His children, protecting them. Here are just a few passages:

Ps. 5:11 - But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou **defendest** them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.

Ps. 18:48 - He **delivereth** me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast **delivered** me from the violent man.

Ex. 15:3 (from the song of Moses) - The Lord is a **man of war**: the Lord is his name.

Jer. 20:11 - But the Lord is with me as a **mighty terrible one** [NIV “**mighty warrior**”]: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.

The husband/father is, in a special way, to represent God's character to his family. What picture of God does it send to our children if we do not take their safety seriously? What if we neglect to defend them when they are in danger? Or even worse, what if we claim that God forbids us from physically and effectively protecting them? If we place the safety of a murderer above the safety of the family that we are obligated to protect, what picture does that give of God's character?

Needless to say, we also are to practice this principle of defense, as God does...

Job 29:16,17 - I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And **I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.**

Ps. 82:3 - **Defend** the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.

Pro. 24:11,12 - If thou forbear to **deliver** them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and **shall not he render to every man according to his works?**

Luke 12:39 - And this know, that if the **goodman of the house** had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and **not have suffered his house to be broken through.**

In a special way, the husband and father has an increased duty to protect those under his charge. He is the “lawful protector” of his wife...

1T 307,308 - And it will not detract from the dignity of the wife to yield to him whom she has chosen to be her counselor, adviser, and **protector**. The husband should maintain his position in his family with all meekness, yet with decision.

AH 215 - The Lord has constituted the husband the head of the wife to be her **protector**; he is the house-band of the family, binding the members together, even as Christ is the head of the church and the Saviour of the mystical body. Let every husband who claims to love God carefully study the requirements of God in his position.

1MCP 231 - ...why not go a step farther than you already have and make yourself her **lawful protector** and have an undisputed right to devote the hours you choose in her company?

1 Tim. 5:8 - But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

We are tasked with providing more than just food for our family. We are commanded to provide all those things which are needful, and safety is one of those essentials. It is a denial of our faith to not provide protection for our family.

3 - Thou Shalt Not Kill

As part of the moral law, the 6th commandment stands at the heart of this issue.

In looking at this commandment, I see 3 possible interpretations one could come to:

- 1 - God forbids any and all killing under any circumstances
- 2 - God forbids all killing, but when defending one's self or family from a deadly threat, the taking of life is never the goal or intention and so it cannot be considered killing.
- 3 - The commandment should have been more accurately translated "Thou shalt not murder" (as many versions have done) since God clearly has commanded or condoned numerous instances of killing. Defending one's self or family is one of the circumstances in which God approves of the taking of life (only if absolutely necessary) in order to save life.

#1 - I will not undertake to elaborate on this position, as it is not one that I believe to be tenable or to make any sense at all when looking at the Bible as a whole. So I would not be in a position to make an adequate defense of this.

#2 - I found an interesting article on this issue on the Biblical Research Institute website, written by Angel Rodriguez (retired head of BRI). The BRI is the official body of the church that sorts out the finer points of theology. And while I do not always agree with them and would **never** try to say that their position on an issue makes it "the truth", I will place it here for your perusal. It is of special interest since the leadership of the Adventist church in modern times typically takes positions that are in line with a pacifist standpoint.

"Personal self-defense has traditionally been upheld by the Christian church, but self-defense should not be equated with the taking of life. Self-defense requires the use of the minimal force to neutralize the intruder or assailant. Of course, that action could result in the death of the individual, but that is not the intention."

Once again, this is certainly not cited as being an "authority" on this issue. But it's an interesting perspective that gives some insight into the 2nd interpretation of the 6th commandment.

Contrary to some people's preconceived ideas, virtually any self-defense training course that one might take (whether it be firearms based or otherwise) will teach you that your goal in self-defense is never to kill anyone. Your goal is to stop the threat and save life. You do whatever you can to avoid a bad situation, you try to deescalate it, you turn and run (if no innocents would be jeopardized by doing so) or whatever you have to do to avoid a fight. But if you are "backed in a corner" with no safe alternative, only then is it advisable to fight.

And when fighting for your life (or the life of others), your goal is one thing and one thing only—stop the threat that is trying to hurt and kill. They teach that you have a duty to discontinue using force as soon as the threat is no longer a threat. And if you can safely do so, they teach you to call an ambulance and administer first aid to the one who was just trying to kill you and yours. This is pretty much what is taught across the board at any reputable firearms or hand to hand defensive school.

My point in bringing this up is to illustrate that defense is **never** about killing the "bad guy"—it's about doing only what is absolutely necessary to save life. I repeat, defense is not about killing, it's about saving life.

I would sum up this 2nd position by quoting from Ellen White on the subject of being judged by our motives rather than simply the outward appearance:

3T 506 - It is an important duty for all to become familiar with the tenor of their conduct from day to day and the motives which prompt their actions. They need to become acquainted with the particular motives which prompt particular actions. **Every action of their lives is judged, not by the external appearance, but from the motive which dictated the action.**

#3 - There has been much theological discussion on the word "kill" in the 6th commandment. The different versions of the Bible reflect this divergence of opinion. While the vast majority of versions (including NKJV) translate this as "murder", the venerable KJV translates it as "kill". Either God is condemning any and all taking of human life, or He is condemning willful murder.

My understanding is that most scholars believe this commandment to refer to murder. But the rest of us are at a disadvantage in the Hebrew and Greek department. The problem is that, unless you are a Hebrew scholar yourself, you

have to take someone else's word for it. But thankfully, we have something more reliable than scholars to lean on—God's word itself. You see, the Word interprets itself.

We'll use common sense rules of interpretation (such as those developed by William Miller). If something seems to not make sense or appears to contradict other passages, we need to examine all related references. Look at the body of evidence as a whole for interpretation, rather than placing a lone verse of scripture in contradiction with a mountain of evidence.

A case in point...The state of the dead. If we as Adventists did not use this method of interpretation, it would be very easy to take a few verses that, when isolated, appear to say something very different than the mountain of evidence presented elsewhere in Scripture on this issue. For instance, take the rich man and Lazarus or Paul's statement about "absent from the body and present with the Lord".

So, when we run into an area of theological disagreement that comes down to how one translates a particular word, I think it's especially important that we apply this same rule of interpretation.

One point I would bring up is the fact that God directly commanded the use of lethal force many times. He also commended others who were not directly commanded to kill, but did so justifiably. You'll see many of these passages in the coming paragraphs, but here are just a couple of examples (out of **many**):

Ex. 22:2 - If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. [we will discuss this verse in detail later on]

Gen. 9:6 - Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. [this verse will also come up later on]

So I simply don't see any reasonable way to harmonize a "Thou shalt not *kill*" interpretation with the numerous examples of God commanding or condoning otherwise. The only logical conclusion is that God is not referring to killing in its broadest sense, but is limiting the prohibition to murder. In other words, God's law makes the same distinction that man's law makes between "justifiable homicide" and "murder". A broad "kill" interpretation of the 6th commandment creates a striking contradiction with the rest of the scriptures.

My belief is that position #2 and #3 (from above) are the only ones that are supported by the weight of the evidence. And I believe #3 to be the most clearly supported one. To sum up this position, I will quote from the pen of inspiration, where we are given commentary on each of the commandments. Each commandment is taken, one-by-one and is applied to everyday life. Here is the entire section on the 6th commandment:

PP, 308 - "'Thou shalt not kill.'

"All **acts of injustice that tend to shorten life**; the spirit of hatred and revenge, or the indulgence of any passion that leads to injurious acts toward others, or causes us even to wish them harm (for "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer"); a selfish neglect of caring for the needy or suffering; all self-indulgence or unnecessary deprivation or excessive labor that tends to injure health—all these are, to a greater or less degree, violations of the sixth commandment."

Clearly, if "all acts of **injustice that tend to shorten life**" are what is prohibited, then there must be a time and a place where the taking of life **is** justified. This is the only possible explanation for this commandment that is consistent with the rest of Scripture. And notice that the rest of the passage refers to motives of hatred, revenge, passion, etc. If the goodman of the house is protecting the innocent lives in his charge, there will be no hatred, revenge, or passion motivating his act of defense. He will be solely motivated by love and will be striving to save innocent lives from the destroyer and murderer. His goal will be to stop the threat and save innocent blood. His actions are just and noble, and they receive the stamp of approval from God. He did what he had to do, in spite of it being the hardest thing he's ever done in his life. Innocent blood, so precious in God's sight, is preserved. He did the right thing at the right time.

6T, 24 - "It is the very essence of all right faith to do the right thing at the right time."

Eccl. 3:1-3 - To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:..**A time to kill, and a time to heal**; a time to break down, and a time to build up;...

To be clear, the very last thing in this world that I would **ever** want to do is to take another life. I cannot imagine the trauma that would be caused to all involved. And the thought of ending anyone's life is incredibly sobering! I certainly have no desire to hurt anyone—ever. I have managed to avoid EVER getting into a fight of any kind in my entire life, and I intend to continue with that pattern for the rest of my life, if at all possible. I believe in the principle Paul stated in Rom. 12:18 - "**If it be possible**, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

But if innocent lives are placed in danger, I now have a sacred duty to do what I reasonably can to preserve innocent blood. If there is any possible way to ensure that the innocent ones are safe without harming the guilty party, I will gladly do so. Gladly! But if the destroyer places innocent lives in danger and it is in my power to stop him, I will do whatever it takes to preserve innocent blood. And I will do so with a clear conscience. In fact, to do any less would be a violation of my conscience and I would have innocent blood on my hands. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17)

Pro. 24:11,12 - If thou forbear to **deliver** them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and **shall not he render to every man according to his works?**

I could not live with myself if I placed a higher priority on the life of the destroyer than I did on the life of precious innocent human beings. It would be the height of injustice!

Finally, it is important to recognize that any command of God may be taken to extremes that He did not intend. In Ellen White's day, there were people claiming that "Thou shalt not kill" meant exactly what it said—when taken to its furthest extreme. They thought it included the killing of *anything*, even insects. The idea was that even spraying one's fruit trees or stepping on an ant was a violation of the 6th commandment.

We look at this argument as being absurd, but one must remember that the commandment is translated in some versions as "Thou shalt not kill". So if one takes the position that killing is always wrong under any circumstances, but yet the killing of animals or insects is not prohibited, how do they account for the difference? If there are no logical limitations, then why does the commandment not extend to these absurd extremes?

Ellen White dealt with this fanaticism in these words:

2SM 329 - "There are those who say that nothing, not even insects, should be killed. God has not entrusted any such message to His people. **It is possible to stretch the command "Thou shalt not kill" to any limit; but it is not according to sound reasoning to do this.** Those who do it have not learned in the school of Christ.

"This earth has been cursed because of sin, and in these last days vermin of every kind will multiply. **These pests must be killed, or they will annoy and torment and even kill us**, and destroy the work of our hands and the fruit of our land. In places there are ants [termites] which entirely destroy the woodwork of houses. Should not these be destroyed? Fruit trees must be sprayed, that the insects which would spoil the fruit may be killed. **God has given us a part to act, and this part we must act with faithfulness. Then we can leave the rest with the Lord.**

"God has given no man the message, Kill not ant or flea or moth. **Troublesome and harmful insects and reptiles we must guard against and destroy, to preserve ourselves and our possessions from harm.** And even if we do our best to exterminate these pests, they will still multiply."—Manuscript 70, 1901

While this statement is specifically in regard to killing animals and insects, there are some important principles that we may draw from it. One important principle is that **there are limits to the 6th commandment** and that sound reasoning must be involved in recognizing those limits. "It is possible to stretch the command 'Thou shalt not kill' to any limit; but it is not according to sound reasoning to do this."

Another interesting principle to notice is that Mrs. White recognized that the 6th commandment's domain does not include killing something that was trying to destroy or harm us—in other words, self-defense. "These pests must be killed, or they will annoy and torment and even kill us..." and "Troublesome and harmful insects and reptiles we must guard against and destroy, to preserve ourselves and our possessions from harm."

Finally, we find the important principle of human effort plus Divine power. “God has given us a part to act, and this part we must act with faithfulness. **Then** we can leave the rest with the Lord.”

If you are okay with using lethal force on animals or insects when necessary, then you are placing limits on the 6th commandment and are denying the absolute “thou shalt not kill” argument. How did you determine those particular limits? Using “sound reasoning”, no less! If the commandment allows killing animals and insects who are trying to harm us, why would it not allow us to use lethal force when innocent human blood is being threatened by humans?

Jesus distilled the 10 commandments into two—supreme love to God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. I would submit that the principle of the 6th commandment is more about preserving the sacred gift of life than it is about NOT killing. The same goes for the other 9 commandments. For instance, the 4th commandment is more about worshipping God than it is about NOT breaking the Sabbath. The 7th commandment is more about preserving the family unit than it is about NOT committing adultery. The 10 commandments are framed as negative laws, because God believes in freedom. Negative laws leave you free to do anything that is not forbidden. But when you look at them through the 2 great commandments that Christ distilled them down to, the principles of the laws are positive. And if we look for that positive principle as Jesus did, I believe we’ll find it. The sacredness of life is the theme and purpose of the 6th commandment.

This brings us to the next key concept that the scriptures present on this issue of defense. It is summed up in the phrase “innocent blood”. Let’s look at it for a few minutes...

4 - Innocent Blood

Life—the gift of God—is so precious in His sight that He has placed extreme protections around it.

In God’s word, we find an important classification—“innocent blood”. The life of the body is in the blood (Lev. 17:11), so this is referring to innocent life.

In the Bible, we find that not only does God view the shedding of innocent blood as something especially different, but he has instituted drastic provisions to prevent the shedding of innocent blood.

Let’s look at a few examples of God referring to the shedding of “innocent blood”...

2 Kings 24:3,4 - Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; And also for the **innocent blood that he shed**: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; **which the Lord would not pardon**.

Pro. 6:16-19 - These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and **hands that shed innocent blood**, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Jer. 7:5-7 - For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and **shed not innocent blood in this place**, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

Jer. 22:3 - Thus saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, **neither shed innocent blood** in this place.

If the shedding of any and all blood for any reason was wrong in God’s sight, why would He use the adjective “innocent” time and time again to describe a particular kind of killing that was different than the rest—something that is abhorrent to Him?

I also find it interesting to look at some of the earliest instructions in the Bible on how to handle a murder.

Before the flood, the antediluvians lost all sense of law and order and it degenerated into survival of the fittest.

PP 91 - Neither the marriage relation nor the rights of property were respected. Whoever coveted the wives or the possessions of his neighbor, took them by force, and men exulted in their deeds of violence. They delighted in destroying the life of animals; and the use of flesh for food rendered them still more cruel and bloodthirsty, until **they came to regard human life with astonishing indifference.**

And so we read the instructions given to Noah:

Gen. 9:5,6 - And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. **Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.**

Although this principle was given long before the days of Moses, it was reiterated later on in the Mosaic law:

Deut. 19:9-13 - If thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I command thee this day, to love the Lord thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, beside these three: **That innocent blood be not shed in thy land**, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee. But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities: Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Thine eye shall not pity him, but **thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.**

PP 516 - If the one tried for murder were proved guilty, no atonement or ransom could rescue him. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Genesis 9:6. "Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death." "Thou shalt take him from Mine altar, that he may die," was the command of God; "the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it." Numbers 35:31, 33; Exodus 21:14. The safety and purity of the nation demanded that the sin of murder be severely punished. **Human life, which God alone could give, must be sacredly guarded.**

1BC 1091 - How carefully God protects the rights of men! **He has attached a penalty to wilful murder.** "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." (Genesis 9:6) If one murderer were permitted to go unpunished, he would by his evil influence and cruel violence subvert others. This would result in a condition of things similar to that which existed before the Flood. God must punish murderers. He gives life, and He will take life, if that life becomes a terror and a menace.

This principle, first given to Noah, was the institution of the death penalty against murder (if you doubt this being specifically about murder, you might re-read the above quote from PP 516). In today's "modern" society, the death penalty is looked upon by many as barbaric, but to God, it was the most effective thing He could do to preserve the peace and prevent murder.

That precious innocent blood, that human life which He had created in His own image, was so incredibly special that it must be preserved—even if guilty blood had to be shed to protect it. Yes, it's true that the death penalty didn't save the initial victim, but the shedding of that guilty blood made such a powerful testimony to the sanctity of life, and sent such terror through the hearts of the evil, that it would naturally tend to restrain the wanton taking of life that had been so prevalent before the flood. And the value of that innocent blood was so high in God's sight, that it warranted the shedding of the guilty blood.

Please do not misunderstand my point. I'm not advocating vigilantism by going around and killing someone who has already shed innocent blood. We have a system of law and order established that is supposed to handle that in an unbiased and fair manner.

Here's my point...If God guarded innocent blood so sacredly that He commanded the death penalty against murderers, why would He not place even more value on preserving that innocent blood from ever being shed? If He was willing to shed the blood of a murderer after the crime had been committed, why would He not authorize the use of force—even lethal force if necessary—in order to save an innocent life? This is in perfect harmony with the rest of the Scriptures.

And notice the statement quoted above in 1BC 1091: "**He [God] has attached a penalty to wilful murder**". Why is there a penalty only for "willful murder"? Why does it not read that God has attached a penalty to all killing?

It is deeply troubling when people are more concerned with the safety of a determined murderer than they are with the safety of all the precious innocent souls in our charge—the innocent blood. It would be well to remember the incredibly high value that God places on each one.

You can be sure that no one is more serious about avoiding the use of lethal force than me. It truly is a last resort—something that will alter one’s life forever. None of us want that. But if I am to follow the principles outlined in the Scriptures, I must place priority on the innocent lives around me rather than the murderer who has chosen to destroy beings that are created in God’s image. The murderer made that decision to take life, not me. I have no desire to take his life and will never under any circumstance try to take his life. My one and only goal in such an encounter would be to stop the deadly threat and save life—whatever it takes. And the murderer will have to abide the consequences of his actions. His blood will be on his own head. But my prayer is that I will be faithful in preserving the innocent lives around me in the wisest and most effective way possible. This is what God requires of us as men, husbands, and fathers. It’s a duty.

“Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.” Neh. 4:14.

Amen!

The remainder of this study goes through numerous stories and principles from God’s word and history. As you look through it, keep thinking of the 6th commandment and how to view it through the prism of the Scriptures as a whole. I believe a clear picture of God’s view on lethal force will emerge by the end.

Sacred History

Abram delivering Lot

Gen 14:14,15 - And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

While Abraham was a great man of God, he was not perfect and made some mistakes. So the question should be asked, “did he do the right thing?” Did God commend him for his actions? On Abram’s way home from the battle we read...

Gen. 14:18-20 - And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he **blessed him**, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

Gen. 15:1 - **After these things** the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

And in Patriarchs and Prophets, Ellen White describes the story with additional detail. Notice toward the end of this statement her comments about Abraham’s actions and ask yourself these questions:

- 1 - Were Abraham’s actions something that displeased God?
- 2 - Did God wink at a mistake that Abraham made or did he positively do the right thing?
- 3 - Did his actions have a positive effect on those around him?
- 4 - Did Abraham have some special opportunities for receiving direct orders from God to do this deed—some sort of opportunity that we don’t have today (i.e. Urim and Thummim)?

PP 134,135 - Abraham, dwelling in peace in the oak groves at Mamre, learned from one of the fugitives the story of the battle and the calamity that had befallen his nephew. He had cherished no unkind memory of Lot’s ingratitude. All his affection for him was awakened, and he determined that he should be rescued. **Seeking, first of all, divine counsel, Abraham prepared for war.** From his own encampment he summoned three hundred and eighteen trained servants, men **trained** in the fear of God, in the service of their master, **and in the practice of arms.** His confederates, Mamre, Eschol, and Aner, joined him with their bands, and together they started in pursuit of the invaders. The Elamites and their allies had encamped at Dan, on the northern border of Canaan. Flushed with victory, and having no fear of an assault from their vanquished foes, they had given themselves up to reveling. The patriarch divided his force so as to approach from different directions, and came upon the encampment by night. His attack, so vigorous and unexpected, resulted in speedy victory. The king of Elam was slain and his panic-stricken forces were utterly routed. Lot and his family, with all the prisoners and their goods, were recovered, and a rich booty fell into the hands of the victors. To Abraham, under God, the triumph was due. The worshiper of Jehovah had not only **rendered a great service to the country**, but had proved himself a man of valor. **It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham’s religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed.** His heroic act gave him a **widespread influence** among the surrounding tribes.

God has implanted in humans an abhorrence of violence and of taking life. This is a good and healthy and natural reaction to bloodshed, such as Abraham witnessed and took part in. Understandably we read:

PP 136 - Abraham gladly returned to his tents and his flocks, but his mind was disturbed by harassing thoughts. He had been a man of peace, so far as possible shunning enmity and strife; and with horror he recalled the scene of carnage he had witnessed. But the nations whose forces he had defeated would doubtless renew the invasion of Canaan, and make him the special object of their vengeance. Becoming thus involved in national quarrels, the peaceful quiet of his life would be broken. Furthermore, he had not entered upon the possession of Canaan, nor could he now hope for an heir, to whom the promise might be fulfilled.

But God doesn’t leave us hanging there, wondering how to respond to Abraham’s troubled thoughts. If we continue reading the statement above it continues on with the following:

PP 136 - In a vision of the night the divine Voice was again heard. "Fear not, Abram," were the words of the Prince of princes; "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

Could God have placed His stamp of approval on Abraham's actions any more clearly than this? I think not. First, Melchizedek blesses Abraham and receives tithes from him (tithes which came from the battle). And then when Abraham is struggling with doubts in the aftermath of what he had done, God speaks words of approval and comfort to him.

Finally, did Abraham have a special communication directly from God that instructed him to go and fight? Was it a form of communication that we don't have access to, such as the Urim and Thummim (where he could get a yes or no answer from God directly and physically)? In other words, is it possible that Abraham was able to be directed by God in a special way that is impossible for us today?

I see no evidence that Abraham had any more guidance from God than we have access to now. He was not some superhuman figure that was permitted to do things that the rest of us mere mortals are not allowed to do. In fact, Abraham had far fewer advantages than we do, when you consider the huge amount of material from God's word and the pen of inspiration that we have now. The statement says that he did the very same thing that any of us can do when faced with a difficult decision: "**Seeking, first of all, divine counsel**, Abraham prepared for war."

Does this story mean that we are to organize a militia that goes around using violence to rescue everyone who is wrongly attacked by another nation? No. Abraham lived in a time and place where it appears that law and order was not well established. He did what others have done throughout history when confronted with lawlessness—he did the right thing and defended the innocent. But the principle this story teaches us is that God **does** condone the use of violence and lethal force when necessary, in order to defend the innocent. And it also reveals that God's people are not to be cowards, but that we are to be "courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed." (PP 135). The implication is that anything less than this **would** be cowardice.

And finally, doing the right thing and defending the innocent (with force if necessary) can prove to be a powerful witness for God, as was the case with Abraham. "The worshiper of Jehovah had not only **rendered a great service to the country**, but had proved himself a man of valor. **It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed.** His heroic act gave him a **widespread influence** among the surrounding tribes." (PP 135)

A Thief at Night

Ex. 22:2 & 3 - If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

First, the idea that these verses of scripture are to be disregarded as if they don't exist is without merit. The rationale given is that these verses are in the law of Moses and cannot be applicable to today. If that's the case, then what about the laws of clean meats?

But more importantly, I think it's critical to note that there is a special portion of the law of Moses that is often referred to as the "statutes". It was not related to the "typical" portions of the law (such as feasts, sacrifices, etc) which pointed forward to Christ as a "type" and were fulfilled. It was a practical application of the 10 commandments to the everyday life of the people. It contained principles that we can apply to our lives today. Here is evidence of that:

1BC 1104 - In consequence of continual transgression, the moral law was repeated in awful grandeur from Sinai. Christ gave to Moses religious precepts which were to govern everyday life. These statutes were explicitly given to guard the ten commandments. They were not shadowy types to pass away with the death of Christ. They were to be binding upon men in every age as long as time should last. These commands were enforced by the power of the moral law, and they clearly and definitely explained that law.

Now that we see these verses *are* applicable to today, let's look at what is written and see if we can glean some principles from it. Since some of the language is a little ambiguous in the KJV, it may be helpful to get some context by looking at a couple other translations as well and compiling them all.

Ex. 22:2 & 3 (NIV) - If a thief is caught breaking in at night and is struck a fatal blow, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, the defender is guilty of bloodshed.

Ex. 22:2 & 3 - (Wycliffe Bible) - And if a night thief breaking (into) an house, either undermining (it), is found (out), and he taken is (made) dead by a wound, or hurt (and when he is caught, he dieth from a wound), the smiter shall not be guilty of his blood, or death; that if he did this when the sun was risen, he did manslaying, and he shall die (but if the lord of the house did this when the sun was up, he hath done manslaughter, and he shall be put to death).

So we read about a thief that is breaking into someone's home in the middle of the night. The owner of the house perceives an unknown threat and defends his family. During the struggle, the thief is killed or he dies from his wounds shortly thereafter. And we are, in effect, told that the homeowner is justified in shedding the thief's blood. But in the next verse we read that if the same thing had happened during daylight, it would not have been justifiable for the homeowner to kill the thief, and the homeowner would be guilty.

This may seem confusing and contradictory at first blush, but it makes perfect sense and harmonizes with the rest of scripture when we take a closer look.

First off, we are talking about a **thief** here—not a murderer. This is a petty thief who is lurking around someone's home at night and trying to steal something. He is not trying to harm anyone. As far as I am aware, you will not find any justification in scripture or any USA Laws for killing someone who is merely stealing property. That is what the magistrate is for—he arrests the thief and sees that justice is served with due process in a fair manner. I repeat, there is no justification or support for killing anyone over a property crime.

But this thief in Gen. 22:2 is a little different. He proceeds to break into the man's house. It is night time, the time when criminals lurk, and it's hard to determine what someone's intentions are. Petty thieves generally do home invasions when the home is empty—unoccupied. By breaking and entering during the night, the thief knows that the homeowner is likely present, which means there is a good chance the "thief" is after more than simply property. The assumption is that someone breaking into a man's house in darkness is intent on harming the home's occupants.

On top of all that, the goodman of the house has just been awakened from sleep and is at a disadvantage—trying to gather his wits about him and figure out what is going on. He perceives that his family is in danger. He does not suffer his house to be broken up and violated. He defends his family from what he perceives to be a violent threat. In the ensuing struggle, the thief is killed. God's judgment is clear—the goodman of the house was justified. There was just cause for him to perceive the thief as a violent threat to himself and his family. The goodman of the house is vindicated by God. And any upright court of law would vindicate him as well since the standard of judgment is based on what a "reasonable" man would have done if he had been in the same circumstances and had the same information.

Now the scene changes to a very similar scenario, but with one crucial difference. Once again, we have a **thief**—not a murderer. Once again it appears he is trying to break into a home. But this time, it is in broad daylight. The implications of the daylight are multifaceted. No one is asleep. It is likely that most of the home's occupants are not even inside. And now it is much easier to perceive the thief's intentions. The thief works his way inside and proceeds to try and break into the family's fire safe. The homeowner hears a noise in the other room, investigates, and finds the thief working on breaking into the safe. No violent threat is being posed to the homeowner or his family. No one's life is in danger. He could hold the thief in custody until the magistrate arrives, but instead, he pulls out his sword and kills the thief on the spot. **That** is what verse 3 is referring to. And that would be murder in any upright court of law as well as in God's law. The homeowner receives the sentence visited on murderers—death. If the thief survives the incident, the civil government administers the penalty due him for theft, but it's not the death penalty.

When we look at this picture that Moses is painting, it is very clear what he is referring to. And in the process, it illustrates two timeless principles:

1 - Innocent blood is so precious that it is right and just to defend it from someone that could reasonably be perceived as a violent threat—even if the threat is killed during the defense.

2 - It is **never** right to shed blood in defense of property. Only when faced with a violent threat is it right to take action that could potentially end someone's life. Let the civil government do its job and handle the prosecution of property crimes.

The Theocracy (using David & Goliath as an example)

Some would dismiss much of the sacred history in the Old Testament as not applicable to us since Israel was living under a theocratic system of government. While the theocracy issue certainly can disqualify some of the Old Testament stories, it's an unwarranted mistake to ignore the large amount of Old Testament instruction on this issue. Here's why...

Let's take, for example, the story of David and Goliath. In order to discount this story with the "theocracy" argument, we would need to know that God had tangibly commanded David through someone in a leadership capacity in the theocracy. Without that, he was in the same position that we are today when faced with a difficult decision.

While there is evidence that David was visited by an angel who directed him to save his people (PP 644), many others have been instructed by God through angels in the millenniums since the Jewish theocracy ended. God communicates to us in many ways today (even occasionally through angels), so this communication with David would need to be something unique to the theocracy in order to disqualify the story from our discussion.

When I think of a story that is disqualified by the theocracy, I think of the conquest of Canaan. This war was waged at the direct and tangible command of God through the theocratic channels that were in place. There is no way that anyone could countenance the destruction of an entire people in any other setting than a theocracy—under the direct and tangible command of God. You couldn't do something like that just because you were "impressed" to do so. And in any other setting than a political theocracy, such an act would be considered a heinous crime against humanity, punishable as murder. But the order was given by the government, which happened to be ordered by God—hence it was a theocracy.

Comparing that story with David's, we realize that his communication from God from not unique to a theocracy. It came in a form that has been used many times since the theocracy ended. And as such, I see no reasonable way to discount this story just because the government of Israel was a theocracy at the time.

David and Goliath is simply an example, but the same principle would need to be applied to any other Old Testament story before discounting its application to today, due to the theocracy. Some may be applicable, and others not. But you can't just discount them all *carte blanche*.

The second point I'd like to make regarding David & Goliath is about war. The setting of this story is in war. And war is a very different situation than defending one's family or self. Comparing those two is like comparing apples with oranges. So while I don't believe the theocracy disqualifies David's story from applying to self-defense, I do think the war setting of this story makes it inapplicable to the defense question we are discussing here.

And speaking of war, let's jump into that for a minute...

War vs Defense of Innocents

When discussing personal defense, it's inappropriate to bring most of Israel's **wars** into the discussion. Here's why...

The *first reason* would be the theocracy issue discussed above. Israel wiped out entire nations, killing men women and children. They did things that no true believer in God could ever even consider doing unless directly commanded by God to do so. Hence, it was only appropriate to take actions like that under a theocracy, when following the direct commands of God that were presented in a tangible way (i.e. more than just receiving an "impression" to do it).

At times, God would also tell the armies of Israel to stand down and watch the Lord defeat the enemy in battle. He used hornets and hail and other means upon occasion. All of these were directly commanded by God through His prophet, so I do believe that what they did in those circumstances would not otherwise be permissible or advisable without direct communication from God. And even with that direct tangible communication from God, it would require a theocratic form of government to actually carry out such things.

Second reason. Beyond the theocracy issue, I find that any discussion of war is not applicable to the issue of personal self-defense. It's like comparing apples with oranges. Everything is SO different. During a war, nations are squabbling over various issues, corrupt politicians and generals are running the show, and the soldiers are forced to obey the orders given them without using their consciences. Wars of conquest are aggressive in nature; they are the polar opposite of the

defender that we have described (who is doing everything he can to avoid a fight). The two are absolutely and completely different, and I reject any attempt to apply objections against war to this issue of personal self-defense. It's completely unreasonable and doesn't work.

I personally take a very hard line on wars of conquest and have stood against them for years. In Ellen White's commentary on the 10 commandments, she said: "The eighth commandment condemns manstealing and slave dealing, and forbids **wars of conquest**" (PP 309). I believe the wars of aggression that our country is fighting today are accurately described by Ellen White when she laid out the reasons why Adventists could not take part in the Civil War. She said: "I was shown that God's people, who are His peculiar treasure, cannot engage in **this perplexing war**, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith." (1T 361). Enough said.

While Ellen White is speaking specifically of the Civil War, she gives numerous reasons why a Christian could not have engaged in that war, and I think that virtually any American war in the last 50 years would receive the very same condemnation.

But while Adventists have historically taken a "noncombatant" position in war, that doesn't mean we are "pacifists". We'll look at pacifism in more detail shortly. Noncombatant status and pacifism are two completely different things, and I'm perplexed at how the subject of war would even enter into a discussion of protecting innocent lives from acts of criminal violence. I really don't see any way to make a connection between the two.

Bottom line...I am just as against the wars we are fighting today as anyone is—perhaps even more so. But war is a **very** different issue than what we are discussing in this study.

Okay, back to our journey through history...

Nehemiah

The rebuilding of Jerusalem by Nehemiah presents a powerful example. To us today. This man of God demonstrated what it looks like to be physically prepared to stop violence, while at the same time trusting in God for protection.

There are two particular incidents to consider in this story...First, Nehemiah's armed escort to Jerusalem (in contrast to Ezra's unarmed caravan)...

Neh. 2:7 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah

"His request to the king had been so favorably received that Nehemiah was encouraged to ask for still further assistance. To give dignity and authority to his mission, as well as to **provide protection** on the journey, he asked for and secured a **military escort**...

"This example of wise forethought and resolute action **should be a lesson to all Christians**. God's children are not only to pray in faith, but to work with diligent and provident care. They encounter many difficulties and often hinder the working of Providence in their behalf, because they regard prudence and painstaking effort as having little to do with religion. **Nehemiah did not regard his duty done when he had wept and prayed before the Lord. He united his petitions with holy endeavor, putting forth earnest, prayerful efforts** for the success of the enterprise in which he was engaged. Careful consideration and well-matured plans are as essential to the carrying forward of sacred enterprises **today** as in the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls." {PK 633.3}

Next, we take a look at the opposition to the building of the wall when it intensified to the point of violence...

"As the enemies of Israel saw how unavailing were their efforts, they were filled with rage. Hitherto they had not dared employ violent measures, for they knew that Nehemiah and his companions were acting under the king's commission, and they feared that active opposition against him might bring upon them the monarch's displeasure. But now in their anger they themselves became guilty of the crime of which they had accused Nehemiah. Assembling for counsel, they "conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem.

“But taunts and ridicule, opposition and threats, seemed only to inspire Nehemiah with firmer determination and to arouse him to greater watchfulness. He recognized the dangers that must be met in this warfare with their enemies, but his courage was undaunted. ‘We made our prayer unto our God,’ he declares, ‘and **set a watch against them day and night.**’ ‘Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.’” {PK 643.2}

Then Ellen White quotes some more from Nehemiah chapter 4...

“‘And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, everyone unto his work. And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and **the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons....** They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, **everyone with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.** For the builders, **everyone had his sword girded by his side,** and so builded.’

“Beside Nehemiah stood a trumpeter, and on different parts of the wall were stationed priests bearing the sacred trumpets. The people were scattered in their labors, but on the approach of danger at any point a signal was given for them to repair thither without delay. ‘So we labored in the work,’ Nehemiah says, ‘and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.’” {PK 643-644}

At the conclusion of naming all the extensive physical preparations that Nehemiah made, notice what Ellen White says:

“Amidst great discouragement, **Nehemiah made God his trust,** his sure defense....The response of faith today will be the response made by Nehemiah, “Our God shall fight for us;” for God is in the work, and no man can prevent its ultimate success.” {PK 645.2}.

Clearly, Nehemiah’s physical defenses did not diminish his faith in God’s protection. In fact, his actions demonstrated his faith—he was cooperating with God. You see, Nehemiah didn’t put his trust in his armaments, but in God. And he was simply cooperating with God in working toward success. “Faith without works is dead, being alone”. And throughout the entire faith chapter (Heb. 11) we read that by faith, Abraham **did** this, and by faith, Moses **did** that. True faith is demonstrated by action. And Nehemiah was demonstrating his faith in God’s promise of restoration to Jerusalem, by cooperating and doing everything he could to make it successful. An important part of that was keeping the violent enemies from doing harm to God’s people and His work. And Nehemiah’s actions have the clear stamp of approval from God.

Esther

The story of Esther is a fascinating one we have all heard since childhood. But I find the aftermath of Esther’s actions to be most applicable to our topic here.

After the king was made aware of Esther’s ethnicity and how Haman’s new law would affect her and her people, the king did what he could to reverse the genocide that was about to occur. Esther pled with him to reverse the law. But according to the law of the Medes and Persians, once a law was passed it could not be rescinded, so the king found himself in a dilemma. How do you reverse a law that could not be reversed?

The king evidently realized that Mordecai was a very wise and effective scribe, so he handed his ring to Mordecai and told him to write a new law in the king’s name that would deliver the Jews. So the scribes were called, and Mordecai formed the new law that granted the Jews the right to defend themselves with arms against anyone who would do them hurt. While not reversing Haman’s law (which could not be reversed), it gave the Jews the legal right to defend themselves against anyone who tried to act on Haman’s law.

Esther 8:11 - "Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey,"

If the only law in place had been Haman's law and the Jews had defended themselves with arms, it may have been a very different situation. It could have been perceived as insurrection and could have reinforced Haman's claims, as this would have been armed resistance to the law of the land. But with the new law in place, their legal right to self-defense was recognized. Now, instead of being viewed as an insurrection against the king, the actions of the Jews were recognized as right and just and lawful self-defense.

To emphasize the fact that they were **only** acting in self-defense (not for material gain), the record clearly states that although they were given the right to the spoil from any who assaulted them, they did not do so. It says "but on the prey they laid not their hand".

Here's the connection. In our great nation, the law of the land makes clear provision for the defense of one's self and of others who are being threatened with violence or are in fear of death or grave bodily injury. This is the law, and as long as one truly is being assaulted and takes the actions necessary to protect themselves or other innocents, their actions are in perfect accord with the laws of the land (just as the Jews' act of self-defense was in accordance with the laws of their land).

Some might try to say that this was the King's doing and that somehow it is okay for the government to defend us but it's not okay for us to defend ourselves. First I would say that the law was framed by Mordecai, not the king. Second I would say that if it is right for the civil government to defend its people, it is right for the people to defend themselves. To say otherwise is great hypocrisy akin to the Pharisees who would hire gentiles to do their work on Sabbath or other things they were not allowed to do. If it was wrong for the Jews to do it, then it was wrong for the king to do it too. But that's beside the point, as Mordecai made the law.

Another objection some might have...How do we know that the Jews were doing the right thing in this instance? They certainly made plenty of mistake through their history, and if we took their course of action as justification, we could rationalize all sorts of terrible things.

That's a great point and one that we must always consider when looking to history, even sacred history. Just because a story is in the Bible doesn't mean that God condoned what was done. So while it seems clear from the scriptures that the action of the Jews was approved of God, I'd like to pull from some inspired commentary on this story:

"In every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes." Esther 4:3. The decree of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked; apparently there was no hope; all the Israelites were doomed to destruction.

"But the plots of the enemy were defeated by a Power that reigns among the children of men. In the providence of God, Esther, a Jewess who feared the Most High, had been made queen of the Medo-Persian kingdom. Mordecai was a near relative of hers. In their extremity they decided to appeal to Xerxes in behalf of their people. Esther was to venture into his presence as an intercessor. "Who knoweth," said Mordecai, "whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Verse 14.

"The crisis that Esther faced demanded quick, earnest action; but both she and Mordecai realized that **unless God should work mightily in their behalf, their own efforts would be unavailing**. So Esther took time for communion with God, the source of her strength. "Go," she directed Mordecai, "gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." Verse 16. PK 601

At this point in the reference, we see Esther and Mordecai recognizing the necessity of combining human effort with Divine power. Their efforts would accomplish nothing without God. So they prayed earnestly for deliverance. And none can dispute that God sent deliverance. But it's a most fascinating story of how He sent it. Let's keep reading...

"The events that followed in rapid succession,—the appearance of Esther before the king, the marked favor shown her, the banquets of the king and queen with Haman as the only guest, the troubled sleep of the king, the public honor shown Mordecai, and the humiliation and fall of Haman upon the discovery of his wicked plot,—all these are parts of a familiar

story. **God wrought marvelously for His penitent people**; and a counter decree issued by the king, **allowing them to fight for their lives**, was rapidly communicated to every part of the realm by mounted couriers, who were “hastened and pressed on by the king’s commandment.” “And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.” Esther 8:14, 17.

“On the day appointed for their destruction, “the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people.” **Angels that excel in strength had been commissioned by God to protect His people while they “stood for their lives.”** Esther 9:2, 16. PK 602

It would be difficult to find a clearer picture of the “human effort plus Divine power” principle. This principle is everywhere in God’s word, but we sometimes have a hard time applying it to our lives today. What does the “human effort” look like for us today? This has to be one of the most critical questions in life that any of us could answer.

While this is a question that each of us must answer for himself/herself, we can look to sacred history for examples of what the answer was for others in similar circumstances. In this story, you have people who were being harassed and whose lives were finally threatened. Then you have the civil government, miraculously influenced by the hand of God to recognize their right to defend themselves. Then you have God’s people acting on the working of God. They did not simply rejoice and sit back and relax, counting themselves saved. They armed themselves and protected their families from those who would do them hurt. And we read that “angels that excel in strength had been commissioned by God to protect His people **WHILE** they stood for their lives”.

What an amazing story of God’s deliverance and His cooperation with the efforts of His people!

Jesus and Swords

PART 1 - BUY A SWORD

As Jesus was sharing his last bit of instruction with the disciples, He made a statement that has puzzled many people. He told His disciples to make sure they owned a sword. Some read that verse without taking the context into account, and they think we must be misunderstanding what Jesus was saying. In an effort to make sense of this statement that is so out of character with their preconceived view of Jesus, some would spiritualize this clearly physical command. They say Jesus was speaking figuratively. Others would have us believe that the sword Jesus was referring to was something akin to a pocket knife today and that it was used purely as a utensil or in their trade as fishermen.

The rules of interpretation state that we must take a statement of Scripture in its obvious sense unless the laws of nature would be violated. If it seems to contradict other passages, then we look at everything on the topic to bring the weight of evidence to bear on the topic.

Luke 22:35-38 - And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.

Jesus was telling them that the relatively peaceful setting they had been used to for the previous years was about to change, and they could no longer expect others to help them. They would need to provide for themselves. Among other things, they would need to provide for their own security as they traveled through criminal areas.

Was this sword for their fishing work? They didn’t go back to fishing, so why would they need a fishing knife? Was it a bread knife or table knife? That would have been some table knife in order to cut off the high priest’s servant’s ear! What a ridiculous notion! When someone has a small knife, they don’t swing it around and cut off someone’s ear. What Peter did had to be a swinging action that would be consistent with a longer instrument—a sword.

Was Jesus speaking figuratively, as some would suggest? Was Jesus speaking of spiritual swords to his band of unarmed disciples? If Jesus was speaking figuratively, He certainly didn't give the slightest indication of it. There is nothing in the context to indicate anything of a figurative nature. I did a search of the gospels to see if Jesus ever referred to swords figuratively. I found not a single instance where He referred to a sword figuratively to represent something spiritual. It is always used to refer to an actual sword with the exception of one time when Jesus was referring to contention ("I came not to send peace, but a sword"). The same generally holds true in the entire New Testament, with two exceptions. Those exceptions are when clear reference is made to the figurative nature of the sword ("sword for the spirit") and in the book of Revelation, which is a heavily symbolic book.

I also find it interesting that all those who would take these verses to mean either a fishing knife or a figurative sword, take a very literal view of the word sword when Jesus refers to them mere minutes later ("all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"). You can't have it both ways! This was a very real, literal sword.

Finally, I must ask why two of Jesus' disciples were already carrying swords on their persons that very night? If Jesus was against swords, how could these disciples have spent so much time with him and He never told them to disarm?

PART 2 - PETER AND HIS SWORD

The second portion of this section is regarding Peter's use of his sword a few hours later, and Christ's rebuke of him.

Jesus was on a mission to die for all of us. Prophecy had predicted this, and Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem to certain death. Any action that anyone could take to prevent this from happening (even if it was well-intentioned), would be an effort to derail the plan of salvation. Peter had tried to do this earlier, and was given one of Jesus' sternest rebukes:

Mat. 16:21-23 - From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. **But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.**

And now in Gethsemane, Peter unwittingly tried to stop the Lamb from fulfilling the great plan of salvation. He pulled out his sword and attempted to prevent Jesus from being arrested. What would we expect to hear from Jesus? Why would His response be any different now that it had been previously? As He did before, Jesus rebuked Peter.

That rebuke is often used to condemn the principle of defense. But I'd like for you to notice the rationale that Jesus gives for the rebuke. Why was it wrong for Peter to do what he did? Did Jesus condemn Peter for trying to defend an innocent Man from being murdered by a lawless mob? Or was Jesus' rebuke limited to Peter's rash effort to prevent Christ from fulfilling prophecy and sacrificing His life?

Mat. 26:52-54 - Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? **But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?**

John 18:10-12 - Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: **the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?**

Jesus was clearly rebuking Peter for a very specific reason. And in addition to the obvious problem with Peter trying to stop the Savior from making His supreme sacrifice, Ellen White indicates that Peter's response was the product of anger and passion.

3SP 104 - They [disciples] were disappointed and indignant as they saw the cords brought forward to bind the hands of Him whom they loved. Peter in his vehement anger rashly cut off, with his sword, an ear of the servant of the high priest.

DA 696 - Peter in his anger rashly drew his sword and tried to defend his Master, but he only cut off an ear of the high priest's servant.

And there is one more point that comes to mind...

It seems apparent that Peter and at least one more disciple were in the practice of carrying a sword (they told Jesus they had 2 swords). If Jesus was against using weapons or lethal force for any reason, why had He not rebuked His disciples for owning and carrying swords? Not only did He **NOT** condemn them for carrying swords, but He also encouraged it and told them to sell their cloak and buy one if they didn't already have one. Very interesting.

Two principles come out of this story.

1 - We must make sure that we never do anything with hatred, passion, or retaliation in our hearts.

2 - There is a time and a place where God's people will be persecuted and will be led as lambs to the slaughter, to witness for the truth. If God has arranged those circumstance to bring His truth to the forefront, we must not use force to try and prevent the working out of God's providence. But this is entirely different than the defensive scenarios we have been discussing (law abiding citizen attacked by a criminal).

So this story shows the importance of discernment, and doing the right thing at the right time...

6T 24 - It is the very essence of all right faith to do the right thing at the right time.

Eccl. 3:1-3 - To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven

With that in mind, we'll look at these 2 points (above) in more detail—retaliation and persecution—before moving on to modern history.

Retaliation, Persecution, and More

Retaliation vs Defense

When discussing this topic of defense, it is essential to recognize the difference between retaliation and defense. In other words, there is a huge difference between an insult and the threat of death or grave bodily injury to an innocent person. Retaliation is striking back when insulted or wronged. Defense is stopping a grave or deadly threat. Retaliation is never condoned by God or by the law. Defense is completely supported by both.

Rom. 12:18-20 - **If it be possible**, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, **avenge not yourselves**, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

The “eye for an eye” mention is from the Old Testament in more than one location (for instance Ex. 21:24). It was a civil instruction to judges to be equitable in their judgment and mete an appropriate punishment to the crime that had been committed. Jesus is not in any way diminishing the validity of “an eye for an eye”. He is setting it in its proper context. You see, the Jews of Jesus’ day were using “an eye for an eye” to justify retaliation for personal grievances—a form of vigilantism (or taking the law into your own hands). Jesus is telling us that this application is wrong. Something that may be a righteous act of justice when performed by the civil government after a fair trial, could easily be illegal and immoral revenge or retaliation when carried out by a private party in their personal capacity. This is what the “eye for an eye” reference is about.

Mat. 5:38-41 - Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy **right cheek**, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

It is interesting to note that specifically the right cheek is mentioned here. The majority of people are right-handed, so in order to smite someone on their right cheek, it would likely be a smack with the back of one’s hand—not even a clenched fist. Thus this is not representing a serious violent threat, certainly not life-threatening. In Jewish culture, to smite another cheek was a way of conveying insult to the person being smitten. It could be comparable to someone getting in our face and calling us 4-letter words. Nowhere in the Scriptures or even in our legal system is there a shred of justification for exercising lethal force on someone who is provoking you or insulting you. The only justification you will find in the moral law or in today’s civil law is when death or grave bodily injury is imminent.

Mat. 43,44 - Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Persecution vs Violent Criminal Acts

I’m afraid that much of the confusion surrounding the defense issue can be traced back to this point. God has given some very clear instructions regarding how to behave when persecuted for our faith...

Rom. 12:14 - Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Mat. 5:9-12 - Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

This wonderful instruction is sometimes taken out of context and misapplied to how we should behave when a violent criminal is randomly or otherwise working his devastation on us or those around us.

This is an important point that you cannot afford to miss! Nowhere has God commanded us to passively submit to criminal acts of violence that are threatening life and limb. Being persecuted for one's faith is a very different thing, and failure to take that into account can result in some grave misunderstandings of God's word. It can create an apparent contradiction between those passages that command passive submission (as quoted above) and the multitude of others cited in this paper that present a very different response.

How do we handle this apparent contradiction? Do we decide that the passages on one side of the issue "cancel out" those on the other side? No! God's word doesn't work that way. If an apparent contradiction arises, we search to find where our interpretation is in error. And in this case, understanding the difference between persecution and criminal violence clears up a multitude of apparent contradictions.

You might be wondering if we could find ourselves in a situation where it would be difficult to determine the motives of the attacker. In other words, we might not know whether we are being attacked as an act of random criminal violence or are being persecuted for our faith. While I don't see that confusion as much of a possibility right here and right now, it could be in the future or in other parts of the world. So let's look at this.

First of all, in this as in all things, I believe we should do what Abraham did before he used violence to rescue Lot. "Seeking, first of all, divine counsel, Abraham prepared for war." (PP 134, 135). It's the same thing that Nehemiah did when the King unexpectedly questioned him. He darted a prayer to Heaven, asking for wisdom and help. Isn't that what we should always do? And can't God make the intentions of an attacker just as plain to us as he has to untold thousands of Christians in history? I believe He can and He will. But we must be constantly connected to God and must have noble and right motives in our hearts.

Having said that, God does give principles for us on many issues, that we can use to make good decisions. And I'd like to present a principle that I believe will help us to discern the difference between persecution and criminal acts of violence.

Persecution typically has the support of the law of the land, while random acts of criminal violence are generally condemned by the law. So here's the principle. If your act of resistance is protected by the law of the land, then you are probably not being persecuted for your faith. In that situation, it is most likely a criminal act of violence, and the law upholds your right to defend the innocent from being harmed. However, if your act of upright resistance to this violent threat would be in violation of the law, then it may be that you are being persecuted for your faith.

Here's the rationale...If your obedience to God has placed you in violation of the law of the land, then you are now outside of the protection of the law. Yes, any law that outlaws the free exercise of conscience is a bad law and it is terribly unjust. But the fact is that you are no longer protected by the law. And that is generally what happens during persecution. The enemies of truth enlist the support of the civil government and make it illegal for those of other faiths to practice their conscience. Once you are breaking the law, you are now a criminal—by definition. And as such, any act of resistance against someone who is bringing you to "justice" would be a criminal act of violence against the government. However, if you are living within the law of the land, then you are a law abiding citizen and are under the protection of the law. And if anyone tries to harm you, **they** are the criminal, not you. And **you have the legal right to defend yourself**. Make sense?

This principle may not work in every situation, but I think it should help to clear up most of them. And as mentioned before, the key with this (as with everything we do) is to be in constant communication with Heaven and asking for guidance on what to do.

Furthering the Gospel With Arms?

This is an understood point among Adventists. I almost didn't even mention it because we are so strongly against the use of force in the furtherance of the Gospel. No one is EVER to be compelled with arms or any other weapon (either physical or emotional) to accept the gospel or anything else. The Papacy never did understand this concept, but Jesus made it very clear when He said:

John 18:36 - Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

Never, under any circumstance, should force be used in an attempt to further the gospel or coerce anyone to do anything. It is wrong and it will do far more harm than good.

I know this is fully understood by everyone reading this paper, but I had to include it in the interest of giving a complete statement on the issue.

Now let's look at some later church history and see if it sheds any light on the issue at hand...

Later Church History

The Waldenses

There are too many stories to put here, and Wylie's descriptions are so fascinatingly in-depth that they would take up more space than is allowed by this article. But needless to say, time and time again the Waldenses actively cooperated with God in protecting their people. Sometimes God would bring a cloud in to confuse the ravaging enemy and the Waldenses would finish the job by throwing huge rocks down the mountain—crushing the soldiers. Other times a handful of men would take up a strategic position where they could use arms to keep the murderers and rapists out of their valleys. If you would like the stories in detail, you can find Wylie's History of Protestantism online, and look up volume 3, book 16, chapters 3-13.

The Protestant Field Preachings In Holland (1500's)

"Citizens and strangers now poured out in one vast stream, and took the road to Overeen. Last of all arrived Peter Gabriel the minister. Two stakes were driven perpendicularly into the ground, and a bar was laid across, on which the minister might place his Bible, and rest his arms in speaking. Around this rude pulpit were gathered first the women, then the men, next those who had **arms, forming an outer ring of defense...**". Wylie, History of Protestantism, Vol. 3, Book 18, Chapter 10

The Protestant Field Preachings of Scotland (1600's)

"It is the year 1677. The Communion is to be celebrated on a certain Sunday in the Mearse, in the south of Scotland. Notice of the gathering has been circulated by trusty messengers some time before, and when the day arrives thousands are seen converging on the appointed spot from all points of the horizon....There is no hurry or distraction, each as he enters takes his place in silence, till at length not only is the bottom of the hollow covered like floor of church, but the worshippers overflow, and occupy row on row the slopes that form its enclosure. At the head of the little plain there is a low mound, which serves as a pulpit. There stands the minister about to begin the service. His white locks and furrowed face tell of suffering; he is there at the peril of life, but he betrays no fear and he feels none. He is a true servant of Him who planted the mountains that rise round him, and hung the azure vault above them. The Almighty wing covers him.

"Around this congregation of unarmed worshippers, a little way off, are posted a troop of horsemen, who keep watch and ward over the assembly. They may amount to a hundred, and are **variously armed**...Outside the first circle of watchers is a second, farther off, and amounting, it may be, to a score of horsemen in all. There is still a third line of watchers. Some dozen men ride out into the wilds, and disposing themselves in a wide circuit, sit there on horseback, their eyes fixed on the distant horizon, ready, the moment the figure of trooper appears on the far-off edge of the moor, to signal his approach to the church behind them, as they to the inner line. In this way an extent of country some fifty miles in circuit is observed, and the congregation within its triple line worship in comparative security, knowing that should danger appear they will have time to escape, or prepare for its approach." Wylie, History of Protestantism, Vol. 3, Book 24, Chapter 26

Early Adventist History

As has been mentioned earlier, one must be careful when citing historical incidents of God's people as being a statement of God's will on the matter. History sheds much light on a topic and is invaluable. But God's people have made mistakes. Just because those mistakes might be included in sacred history doesn't mean they are right. If God comments on the historical incident, then we can take it as His direction. But in lieu of that, we must view it as history and try to glean what we can from the experience of others.

The same holds true when citing historical happenings in Ellen White's life or her family's lives. But since some may try to cause a statement or two from Ellen White to match their understanding of this defensive firearms issue, I think it would be incredibly helpful to see what she and her family actually did and how they related to firearms. As you'll see, these statements are not "cherry picked". They include ones that could be cited by those on both sides of this issue, and I bring them up below in chronological order.

LETTER TO EDSON

In a little known private letter to her 16-year-old son Edson, Ellen White penned some words that catch the interest of anyone looking into this topic. In order to get a little context, I'll quote the relevant paragraphs:

Lt 7, 1865 (Oct. 19, 1865) - "You know, Edson, I talked with you in regard to guns and firearms, and cautioned you to restrain yourself on these points lest you should obtain a passion to possess such things, which are dangerous. Do you remember this? But perhaps it had so little weight with you that you never thought of it again. When I have tried to counsel you kindly and reason with you, you have sat and made no response, as though you were a piece of machinery I was talking to instead of a reasoning being. This has grieved me, that my eldest son could not at all appreciate a mother's anxious solicitude for her boy enough to frankly open his mind to her and confidently let her know his heart secrets. I wish you to read again the long letter written you from Illinois. Had that letter had the influence on you it should have had, your present misfortune would not have been. {Lt7-1865.4}

Edson, I cannot tell you how badly I have felt to have individuals tell me that I did not know you nor know what you were doing much of the time. I have reason to know that there was at least reason for them to make this statement. Now we have been laboring directly with you in regard to keeping things from us and not giving us your confidence, yet at the same time you continued to keep your secrets, to have your notions and plans and fancies, and to hide them from your father and mother, who have a right to know what you are doing. I have said enough on this point.

"You may feel to blame the brethren and sisters because they surmise things in regard to you that are not correct. But, Edson, your own course, my poor boy, has led them to suspicion you, and they may have done so in instances when you were not guilty. But when they see you going directly against that which they know to be our express wishes, see you secretly making trades, borrowing firearms, and concealing it carefully from us, can you, my dear boy, wonder that they lack confidence in you as an obedient, faithful, truthful boy? They may imagine you would go to any lengths in deception."

This is a fascinating letter that is one of the relatively small number of references to appear when searching for "firearms" in Ellen White's writings. If taken out of context, one could easily conclude that Ellen White was "anti-gun". This is an example of why it is so important to look up the context and also compare a statement with the bulk of evidence on a given subject. So let's do that.

First, it is important to note that this is a personal letter written to Ellen's son Edson. So while it may help us enter into her view on a given issue, I would caution against making it the basis of a doctrine unless there is evidence that God spoke to her on the principle in question.

Second, what was the context of the letter? Edson was 16 years old at the time and was living with another family that was basically raising him and Willie, due to the constant travels of Ellen and James. For some time, Ellen's letters to Edson indicate great distress over the fact that he had been deceiving and disobeying his parents about a variety of things. He was spending his evenings on the street. In one letter Ellen mentioned something about him obtaining a carriage and then deceiving them about it. In another letter she mentions his going to the river and swimming against their wishes (my presumption is that he couldn't swim well or the river was swift and dangerous)...

"When we went to Monterey last summer, for instance, you went into the river four times and not only disobeyed us yourself but led Willie to disobedience..."

"I see no way for us but to cease traveling and do what we can to save our own children. I have lost confidence in you and I think you would avail yourself of opportunities in our absence to gratify your propensity to go on the water. You know that we should not be pleased with this, but I fear this would not be sufficient to restrain you in your strong desire to go on the river. I think every day it would be nothing strange if my boys should go on the water contrary to our wishes, and one or both of them be drowned in their act of disobedience." (Lt 4, 1865)

Over and over, in letter after letter, she labors with Edson over the disobedience and deception he was practicing. And it was generally in regard to reckless unwise behavior common with teenage boys. But while she was concerned with his safety (as in the drowning example), she was far more concerned about the deception and disobedience he was practicing in their absence.

You may recall in the initial letter that I first quoted (Lt 7, 1865), Ellen references a previous letter that she had sent to him in regard to firearms. Looking to Lt 6a, 1865, we find her reference to this here:

“Edson, strive to set an example, worthy of imitation. Never visit such a place as where that air gun is kept in order to extort money from rowdies, curiosity lovers. Ever live as though you realized that the eye of God was upon you.” (Lt 6a, 1865)

It would appear that Edson was frequenting some sort of fair or place of amusement where there was an air rifle on display. She was clearly concerned about his safety, knowing that he was young and likely didn't have any experience with such things or how to use them safely. Add to that the fact that his parents were absent from him and unable to supervise him and determine his proficiency with a tool that could be dangerous. Also, Edson seems to have been inclined to recklessness. As a parent, I would not want a child of mine to be sneaking off by themselves to play with even an air rifle (aka a pellet gun). I would want to be in the loop so I could determine their maturity level, propensity to recklessness, and things like that. As they prove themselves under supervision, they are allowed more freedom. But if they are uninitiated and are deceiving me while I'm absent for long periods of time...you'd better believe I would be very concerned—even if it was only an air rifle. I'd feel the same about a pneumatic nail gun, or a car, or any number of items that could be dangerous if used improperly. The child needs to prove themselves under supervision before being allowed freedom on their own with a potentially dangerous tool.

If you read to the end of letter 7 (which is far more focused on the deception issue than the air gun itself), it appears that Edson, in his recklessness, had an accident with the rifle and injured his hand.

So the issue is clearly a mother, worried about the safety of her immature teenage boy who is experimenting with potentially dangerous things without supervision—and then is lying about it.

But this letter reveals that Ellen White was clearly opposed to guns, right? Let's see...

ANTI-GUN?

To learn if Ellen White had an anti-gun disposition, all we need to do is turn to other references she makes to firearms in her writings. Here is an incident from their time in the Colorado Rockies.

“Our provisions have been very low for some days. Many of our supplies have gone.... We expected supplies three days ago certainly, but none has come. Willie went to the lake for water. We heard **his gun** and found he had shot two ducks. This is really a blessing, for we need something to live upon.”—Manuscript 12, 1873, 3. {7MR 346.4}

This is now 8 years later, and an older Willie obviously owned a gun and knew how to use it safely. Ellen certainly didn't appear to have a problem with it. She was thankful for what he accomplished with it. It was simply a tool. Nothing more, nothing less.

A SHOTGUN IN BEAR COUNTRY

During the White's same summer vacation to Colorado, another interesting incident occurred. Arthur White relates this story. James was in need of getting a publication on the way to the publisher right away, and he was running out of daylight. So he remembered a dead wolf he had seen earlier that day and had an idea. We pick up with Arthur White's account here:

“Elder White thought perhaps—perhaps, they could get some fat off the body of that wolf and he could use that fat to make a light. He called his boy, Willie. “Willie, Willie, come here! I have got to have a light,” he said, “to finish this tract tonight. I have promised it and it must go at six o'clock in the morning when the men take the fish to Black Hawk. Do you remember the body of that wolf we saw out there on the trail?” “Yes,” Willie replied.

“Do you think you could find it?”

“Yes. I am pretty sure I can.” “All right,” Elder White said, “I want you to take your knife and a pan and go to the body of that wolf, scrape off all the fat that you can. I must have a light.” And as Willie was leaving, James White called after him, “**Don't forget the shotgun.**” There were brown bears up in that valley; So with a double-barreled shotgun over his shoulder, and a pan and the knife, Willie started back over the trail to see if he could find the body of the wolf.” {CFJS 35}

The Whites obviously relied on firearms for protection against wild animals. It's a fact. And the choice of firearm was very appropriate, as many experts today still say a 12 gauge shotgun with slugs is the best choice for defense from a bear.

But that was animals that they were defending themselves from. Ellen White would have never countenanced the use (or potential use) of lethal force against another human, would she?

DANGEROUS MEN IN INDIAN COUNTRY

American society in the 19th century was very peaceful compared to today. They didn't face very many violent threats from other humans. But one of the few widespread threats the Whites did face was when traveling through Indian country. What should a Christian do when faced with violence from other human beings? Would it be right in God's eyes to potentially end the probation of unreached savages, in order to preserve the innocent lives of the women, children, and men? While traveling with a caravan of other Adventists through west Texas, Ellen wrote the following...

"We have to be very well armed in passing through the Indian territory. We have our wagons brought up in a circle, then our horses are placed within the circle. We have two men to watch. They are relieved every two hours. **They carry their guns upon their shoulders.** We have less fears from Indians than from white men who employ the Indians to make a stampede among the horses and mules and ponies." {Lt20a-1879.7}

Bear in mind that these were not "men of the world" standing watch. This was a caravan of Adventists and those were Adventist men who were "very well armed" and standing guard with their guns on their shoulders while the caravan rested through the Sabbath hours. And Ellen White clearly indicated the necessity of such arrangements ("we have to be very well armed in passing through the Indian territory").

And you know what? They didn't have any trouble. It often happens that if one is well prepared to deal with a threat, that preparation deters an attack and prevents any violence from occurring on either side. But this is what they did, and there is no apology or explanation. It is simply a statement of fact. Arthur White, in his biography of Ellen White, says this regarding their preparations: "The precautions they took were in line with what was generally followed in like circumstances." (3BIO 110). It's what you do when faced with a violent threat. It was common sense back then. To many, it is uncommon sense now.

Current Adventist Response

And in modern times, you would be hard pressed to find an Adventist campmeeting that doesn't have 24/7 security on duty. As far as I am aware, all Adventist colleges and universities and hospitals have security departments that patrol their campus. Some are armed.

At the General Conference Headquarters, officers with concealed firearms are on staff...

"I've been trying to have this discussion for years," said Jim Vines, director of security at the Adventist Church's world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. He said **five officers on staff are licensed to carry a concealed firearm.**" (Adventist News Network, 2/12/13)

Another ANN article states that the General Conference Session in Atlanta had 450 private security guards alone (including a private security detail for various high profile individuals), plus local police. Obviously, at least the on-duty and off-duty police officers were armed, and likely some of the private security officers as well.

Finally, we'll finish up with a few miscellaneous items and some closing thoughts...

Miscellaneous Items

Day of Atonement

Some may bring up the Day of Atonement as a reason why no Christian should defend innocent blood with lethal force (if necessary). The starting point is that we as Seventh-day Adventists recognize that since 1844 we have been living in the anti-typical Day of Atonement.

As I understand it, this argument stems from the idea that there was a prohibition of war on the Day of Atonement in ancient Israel (in addition to other things like fasting, afflicting their souls, refraining from work, etc). While I find the other prohibitions, I was unable to find any reference to war being prohibited on the Day of Atonement. Perhaps I overlooked the verse that would prove this. It would not surprise me if the children of Israel did avoid waging battle on the Day of Atonement whenever possible, just as they avoided daily work on the Sabbath whenever possible. But as in the case of work on the Sabbath, there were exceptions for emergency cases that were unavoidable (for instance, the ox in the ditch). In the absence of any specific instructions on this particular issue, it would make sense that the same principle would apply. In other words, they would not intentionally wage battle on the Day of Atonement, but if a surprise attack was made on that day, it would be permissible to fend off the enemy.

Having said all of that, we have already dealt with the fact that there is a **huge** difference between waging war and defending one's innocent family and friends from criminal violence. So even if there *was* a prohibition of war on the Day of Atonement, I don't see how that would apply to stopping a murderer from massacring one's family.

And finally, if we are to apply the Day of Atonement instructions and prohibitions literally to today (the antitype), we would all need to quit work ("do no work at all"), stop eating (fasting), and other similar things. If we do not literally stop working or quit eating, then I don't see how a supposed prohibition of war on the Day of Atonement would translate into a prohibition of protecting innocent blood with lethal force (if absolutely necessary) from a surprise attack.

I simply cannot make that large of a stretch in logic.

God's Will

Some might say that we should surrender to the "will of God" if confronted by a violent threat. If it is "God's will" that we die, then we will die and there is nothing we can do to change it. And if it is "God's will" that we live, there is nothing that any bad person can do to harm us.

The problem with this line of reasoning is that it does 2 things.

- 1 - It removes the human action part of the equation
- 2 - It attempts to "force" God to act in defense of us rather than us doing what we reasonably can do to defend ourselves (as God's word lays out).

God's word is clear that He generally works in harmony with the laws of nature and seldom works what we would call a "supernatural miracle". When He does, it is generally in a situation where the human element has done everything they could do and it simply was not enough. Then God combines His supernatural power with man's weakness and works a miracle to supply the lack. But without the human element doing everything it could do, it would be blatant presumption to ask God to work a miracle.

Take a look at these references...

DA 720 - Judas reasoned that if Jesus was to be crucified, the event must come to pass. His own act in betraying the Saviour would not change the result. If Jesus was not to die, it would only force Him to deliver Himself.

DA 125 - When Satan quoted the promise, "He shall give His angels charge over Thee," he omitted the words, "to keep Thee in all Thy ways;" that is, in all the ways of God's choosing. Jesus refused to go outside the path of obedience. While

manifesting perfect trust in His Father, **He would not place Himself, unbidden, in a position that would necessitate the interposition of His Father to save Him from death. He would not force Providence to come to His rescue**, and thus fail of giving man an example of trust and submission.

LP 267 - **Every effort within their power must be put forth to avert destruction; for God helps those only who help themselves.**

PP 509 - Joshua had received the promise that God would surely overthrow these enemies of Israel, yet **he put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon the armies of Israel alone**. He did all that human energy could do, and **then** he cried in faith for divine aid. The secret of success is the **union of divine power with human effort.**"

God has given us promises of safety and protection, just as he gave Joshua the promise of victory. But as Joshua did, we must put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon us alone. We must do all that human energy can do, and then we can pray for divine aid. And the secret of our safety will be the same as the secret of Joshua's victory—the union of divine power with human effort. It's right there in black and white. Not my words.

Bottom line? "The horse is **prepared** against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord." (Pro. 21:31)

“Non-Lethal” Options

VARIOUS FORMS OF PACIFISM

Pacifism used to mean that the pacifist would never use any force to stop violence. They would only use peaceful measures. The classic story that comes to mind is of a medical student in Loma Linda many years ago. He and his young bride were at home in their apartment one evening, when an intruder burst in the door and proceeded to demand the man's wife. The future doctor fell to his knees and proceeded to pray, while the criminal raped his wife in front of him. There was no active resistance. I shake my head in disgust as I type this story into the computer!

Most reasonable people are outraged by such beliefs and recognize it as **criminal** to not come to the aid of an innocent person who is being violated or harmed. So the next system of thinking is to recognize the principle of defense, but deny the use of lethal force under any circumstances. Adherents of this position believe it is right to actively resist violence, but only with “non-lethal” measures. Basically, a true Christian must come to the aid of someone in danger, but he is never under any circumstances to defend to the point of taking the life of the aggressor. And if one or the other must die, it would be more acceptable to God if the innocent person is murdered, than for the murderer to potentially die while his attack is being resisted.

In an effort to apply this principle to real life, tools such as pepper spray, tasers, clubs, baseball bats, fire extinguishers, or hand to hand fighting skills are thought to be the solution. As far as I can tell, the perception is that using a gun equals killing, and these other tools are “non-lethal” because they won't kill people. In other words, the adherents of this position are not opposed to the theory of defense, but the issue seems to be guns alone since guns equal lethal force and lethal force is wrong under any and all circumstances.

LETHALITY OF “NON-LETHAL”

It is important to note that “non-lethal” options like tasers, pepper spray, batons, baseball bats, or even hand to hand skills are not called “non-lethal” by law enforcement and industry professionals. They are actually called “less lethal”. This is because every single one of them has the potential to be lethal, and has been lethal—perhaps more often than many people realize. And death was not the intended outcome of the user.

Some interesting statistics...

According to the FBI, more people die from being struck with blunt objects like batons, clubs, and baseball bats, than die from ALL rifles each year (including those scary “assault” rifles)! In full disclosure, the number of handgun deaths is much higher than that. But the point is that blunt objects can have consequences that are just as deadly as firearms.

And did you know that more people die from being struck by a body part like a fist or foot than die from rifles AND shotguns **combined**, each year? If you don't believe me, look up the FBI statistics for yourself. And if you have any trouble finding them, just let me know and I can send you the link.

Not much research has been done on the potential lethality of pepper spray, but there have been some documented deaths tied to it, especially for people with respiratory issues like asthma.

Tasers are used much more frequently by law enforcement and there is better research on them, finding that well over 100 people have died from taser use in the USA so far. And those are only the ones that have been documented.

Oh, and for what it's worth, there are over 5 times as many people killed each year with knives than are killed with ALL rifles.

The point here is not to say that pepper spray is more lethal than a firearm. I'm simply trying to show that **there is no truly "non-lethal" way to physically stop a murderer from killing people**. ANY form of resistance to stop a murderer has the potential to kill him under the right circumstances. **How do you deal with that fact if you believe that it is never right under any circumstances to take life in defense of innocent blood?**

The only consistent position that a strictly "non-lethal" adherent can take is a completely passive response. One would need to allow their life and the lives of those around them to be violated, savaged, and taken. They would have to huddle under a church pew while the shooter systematically murders every innocent child and woman and man. This is what happened in Sutherland Springs, TX. But as we've already seen, we have clear instructions to take active resistance when innocent life is being threatened. So God could not possibly want us to take a passive stance when confronted with such a vicious criminal threat.

THE MOTIVE / INTENTION

So how does one deal with this conundrum? There is a duty to save innocent lives on one hand, and on the other hand, there is the potential that any form of active resistance could result in the death of the perpetrator.

One might say that when using a "less lethal" weapon, it was not **intended** that you would kill the assailant. Your goal was to stop the murderer, but not to kill him, right? That is a very good point. But the trouble with this argument is that any sane defender who is using a firearm would have the very same goal. You are not trying to kill anyone. Your goal is to use only the amount of force necessary to STOP the threat from killing people. Your goal is to do only what you have to, in order to save innocent lives.

No one in their right mind ever wants to kill another person! And if you have ever actually taken any self-defense classes worth their salt, that is exactly what they teach you. Even firearms classes teach you to NEVER try to kill anyone but to only do what is absolutely necessary to stop a deadly threat and save lives. And they teach you that you have a duty to stop using force the moment the assailant ceases to be a threat. So, both the owners of "less lethal" tools and firearms owners have the same intention—to stop the murderer and save lives, but **not** to kill the murderer. That is their motivation.

3T 506 - It is an important duty for all to become familiar with the tenor of their conduct from day to day and the motives which prompt their actions. They need to become acquainted with the particular motives which prompt particular actions. **Every action of their lives is judged, not by the external appearance, but from the motive which dictated the action.**

LETHALITY OF FIREARMS

Some might say, "Guns are so deadly that shooting someone is basically a death sentence, right? Whether you intended it or not, they are going to die—it's just a matter of time, right?"

Actually, when looking at FBI statistics, roughly 80% of those who are shot with a firearm during an "assault" will survive and recover. Survival rates are even higher than that with accidental shootings and are lower than that with suicides (for obvious reasons). But firearms used during "assaults" gives us the most accurate picture of how lethal a firearm is when used to commit a violent crime or to stop a violent crime.

Once again, 80% will survive.

Is that number surprising to you? You see, Hollywood and the media have portrayed this image of firearms so that the uninformed think a shot will blow the recipient to the other side of the room and instantly kill him. Nothing could be further

from the truth. Can they be lethal? Certainly. But so can any of the other less lethal options. For that matter, ANY form of active resistance can be lethal.

VARIOUS OPTIONS

Once we have a realistic view of less lethal options, we can see that all resistance has the potential to kill the assailant. Each tool has a place and none are universal. Pepper spray may be the tool of choice for one situation and be woefully inadequate for another. Firearms may be the only effective way to stop a particular threat but may be unwarranted and positively inappropriate or dangerous for a different one.

I was profoundly impacted by our local Peace Officers when they addressed our church recently about active shooter preparedness. Police officers are experts in using these tools to deal with violent situations every day while trying to keep everyone safe. Both of them stated that, in their decades of service, they have never had to shoot anyone, even though they had encountered situations where they would have been justified in doing so. This makes it apparent that they are not trigger happy and looking for a fight. They really are true “peace” officers. With that understanding, I took great interest in their comments.

And what was the point that these officers kept hammering away at? There is no single tool that works for all situations, which is why they have a variety of options on their belt. They mentioned the “force continuum” which is the legal standard that they and all citizens are held to for matching the proper use of force with the level of violence one is faced with. They referenced altercations where a criminal was being belligerent and resisting arrest. But if the criminal was not a deadly threat, they would use pepper spray or tasers. But when asked about an armed deadly threat (such as an active shooter in the church), they made it abundantly clear that the only appropriate tool they would even consider is a firearm in well-trained hands. They emphatically stated that pepper spray is NOT a reasonable option for stopping a murderer with a gun who is trying to kill you (or others). And they also made it clear that a firearm in untrained or inept hands is an equally bad option. It’s a combination of the right tool and the right training.

LETHALITY OF “NON-LETHAL” ON THE VICTIMS

One other important point. So far, we’ve only been looking at this from the perspective of the murderer. Any discussion of lethality would be incomplete without looking at the potential lethality to the innocent people you are trying to defend. While pepper spray is less lethal than a firearm to the murderer, what about those little children huddling next to you? If the tool you use is not effective at stopping the threat ASAP, innocent lives **WILL** be lost. Where is the justice of putting the life of a murderer above the life of an innocent child?

THE SPOILER VS THE INNOCENT

Are we prepared to place the life of “the spoiler” the “murderer” and the “destroyer” on a higher level than the innocent children and women and men around us? The murderer made his conscious choice to do what he is doing. He made that choice to place himself in harm’s way in order to do his dastardly deed! Those innocent people didn’t choose to have their lives ended. And it is the height of confusion and injustice to place innocent lives in danger out of concern for the well being of a murderer. It’s like calling right wrong and wrong right. It completely ignores God’s instruction on innocent blood and treats the guilty party as if they are the one that should be protected from the innocent. This is madness!

I have even heard some go so far as to say that a Christian is better prepared to die than the murderer. So we should be willing to lay down innocent lives in order to avoid harming the murderer. While I consider that incredibly warped and repulsive thinking, let’s go there for a minute...

How do we know the hearts of those around us? How do we know who is ready to die and who isn’t? None of us can read the heart. But we DO know one thing. We know who is innocent and who is trying to harm people. And God has made it abundantly clear what He thinks of innocent blood and what we are to do when innocent blood is in danger of being shed.

One final thought on the topic of “non-lethal” options. There are untold numbers of lives saved each year by the mere presence of a firearm—without it even being fired. As soon as the criminal is faced with the realization that their intended victim is not going to submit and is capable of defending themselves, many will quickly lose interest and run away or submit to arrest, without a shot being fired. True, it doesn’t always turn out this way, but often it does. And when it does, both innocent and guilty are saved. Without the presence of a weapon, the innocent would be violated, injured, or killed.

A World Without Weapons

Imagine this for a moment...a world without guns or weapons of any kind. Sounds like Utopia, doesn't it? All these issues we have been discussing would be resolved. No one would get hurt or killed, and we could all live peacefully with one another. Right?

Imagine now, a 25-year-old woman—it's your daughter. She's 5'2 and weighs 100 pounds. Your daughter is single and she lives alone. One day on her way home from work, she notices a car that appears to be following her home, and it makes her uneasy. But the car kept on driving past her home, so she must have been paranoid, right? That night she hears a window break in her home. Then she hears someone climbing through the window and running through her home. She locks her bedroom door and calls 911, but the sound of footsteps gets closer and closer until the intruder easily breaks the door down. It is a 30-year-old man, 6'4", 220 pounds, and he is full of drugs. Since he's living in Utopia, he doesn't have a "weapon" either. But he does have the huge advantage of size and strength. Armed with a short piece of rebar, he proceeds to rape your daughter, commit unspeakable crimes against her and then beats her to death. He could have just as easily used his fists and feet. It doesn't matter, there was no contest here. There's nothing your daughter could do with such disparity of size and force. She was a helpless victim, and the bigger and stronger person was able to do whatever he wanted. Even if a policeman had arrived in less than 30 seconds (almost impossible), he couldn't have stopped this guy alone. Remember, it's Utopia and not even the police have weapons. Since this is a fictional tale, we are making the HUGE assumption that our criminal was unable to get ahold of a bonafide "weapon". In the real world, criminals have relatively easy access to illegal weapons, ensuring that only the victims are unarmed.

Now imagine the same scenario, except this time it's not in Utopia. It's in America, where the right to defense is enshrined in our Constitution. The murderer breaks into your daughter's home. And this time, rather than simply cowering in the closet with 911 on the phone, she opens her bedside "quick-access" safe and produces a pistol. Our husky 30-year-old criminal is likely armed this time, and he enters the bedroom expecting no resistance. But this time he is facing a bright flashlight that is mounted 1" below a barrel that is 9mm in diameter. Your terrified daughter shouts a determined command to the would-be murderer: "I'm armed. Stop or I'll shoot". If your daughter has been trained properly, one of two things is likely to happen. The more likely outcome is that this criminal realizes he's picked the "wrong" home, he turns and flees—disoriented and surprised to have met any serious resistance. No one gets hurt, and the armed police officers are able to apprehend the man later that night. The other outcome could be that the criminal refuses to stop—intent on violating and killing his innocent victim. But this time, your daughter refuses to be a victim. She uses her pistol as she was trained, and she stops the attacker. This time, she actually had a real opportunity to survive against overwhelming force. She refused to become a statistic and lived to accomplish the mission which God placed her on this earth to fulfill. Oh, and even though "deadly force" was used to stop the attack, statistics from the FBI state that the attacker has an 80% chance of surviving. So there is a very good chance that no one dies in the second scenario. But in the first scenario, your daughter will almost certainly be violated and brutalized and very likely will die.

The point of this fictional story is to illustrate what life would be like in a world without any weapons. Strength and size would be the weapon of the day. It would be much like what is described of the antediluvian world. "Survival of the fittest" would be the law, and whoever is bigger and stronger could do whatever he wants. No one would be safe. Not even the police could keep law and order without weapons. But with the simple introduction of weapons into the scenario, the scales are equalized. Now a 25-year-old girl or a 70-year-old grandma has the ability to protect herself from a drugged up 30-year-old man. *Without* an effective weapon, she stands no chance against him.

Firearms are called "the great equalizer" for a reason. They give those who are weak the ability to stop the attack of one who is much larger and stronger, as well as to protect the defenseless around them. Yes, it is true that anything (including your hands) can be used as a weapon. "Less lethal" options like pepper spray and tasers and batons and hand to hand fighting techniques are also weapons. These may be very appropriate weapons for certain situations. For instance, someone gets rowdy and is acting in a threatening manner, but they are unarmed. Even an unarmed attacker can be very dangerous (especially if they are bigger and stronger), but without a weapon, they probably don't present a deadly threat, and that could be a very appropriate time to use a less lethal weapon. But with what the experts tell us of the effectiveness of these options, I must ask you a serious question. Would you *really* want your daughter to face an armed and drugged up attacker with a weapon that may have little to no effect on him? Do you *really* want your daughter at a huge disadvantage when faced with a deadly threat?

Some may say that God will protect your 25-year-old daughter. But why hasn't God protected so many other girls in similar situations? What makes your daughter different and gives her immunity from the effects of crime in a world of sin? You may say that those other girls were not "in the truth"—they didn't have God's protection. I've heard that sort of reasoning before. Is that really the kind of God that you serve? A God who won't lift a finger for a girl who is being brutalized, simply because her theology isn't 100% correct? I consider that kind of position to be untenable and abhorrent! But let's just play along with that argument. Are you prepared to say that God has supernaturally protected every woman who is theologically "correct" without her putting forth a full effort? Or are you putting your proverbial head in the sand and simply *hoping* that crime won't affect your daughter.

Hope can be a wonderful thing, but misguided hope is very dangerous—it's called presumption. For instance, I could refuse to wear my seatbelt because I *hope* I won't get in a car accident. Won't God protect me? That, my friend, is presumption. We are living in a world of sin, and bad things happen to good people. We are not immune from these things, and God has given us a brain to figure out how best to prepare for them and prevent them (as much as possible). Once again...

Pro. 21:31 - "The horse is **prepared** against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord."

We say that God will provide for our needs, but why do we see the need to work and earn a living? God has established laws that govern the universe, and seldom does He supernaturally subvert those laws. Generally, He works in harmony with the laws that He established to achieve His purpose. And one of those laws is that "God helps those only who help themselves." (LP 267) If we leave our women and children vulnerable, they are more likely to encounter trouble. And while we have all experienced supernatural protection, it is presumptuous to *expect* for God's protection when we willfully neglect to take reasonable measures—measures that God-fearing Christians have taken for millennia.

We've seen the evidence in this paper—time and time again. What could be more reasonable than to avail oneself of the proper tools for a task? And when lives are on the line, the tool(s) should be selected very carefully. You wouldn't pound a nail with your fist or your shoe! So why would you try to defend yourself against an armed murderer with a fire extinguisher?

Men of God throughout the Scriptures have found it reasonable to defend innocent blood with the same (or better) weapons as those attacking them. Nehemiah was trusting in God when he posted his builders with the deadly weapons of his day. So did Abraham, when rescuing Lot. In the days of Esther, God's Divinely ordained plan for delivering His people was to legalize their acts of self-defense with the deadly weapons of their day. Jesus knew his disciples carried the deadly weapons of their day, and not only did He refrain from rebuking the practice, but He actually encouraged it. The Church in the Wilderness used modern weapons many times to cooperate with God in driving away the scavenging spoilers. Many years later, Ellen White and other early Adventists considered it common sense to carry firearms—the deadly weapons of their day—when faced with circumstances where their safety was at risk. And now in modern times, the General Conference has men carrying concealed firearms through the headquarters, as well as armed guards at various institutions and events. Yes, the evidence is clear and overwhelming.

The Magistrate's Sword

In a world without weapons, not even the police (magistrate) would have a weapon. How would that work? Not only would the weak be at the mercy of the strong, but there would be no law enforcement to bring punishment on wrongdoers after they have broken the law. How could there be, if the officers of law and order had no physical ability to defend themselves from the strong and ruthless, and bring them into custody? The notion of unarmed law enforcement is ridiculous to anyone—even to God.

Rom. 13:1-4 - Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for **he beareth not the sword in vain**: for he is **the minister of God**, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

This sword is definitely not a fishing knife or spiritual sword. And the man bearing it is called the minister of God for good.

Some have the idea that it is wrong to use lethal force to defend their family, but it is permissible for the “magistrate” to use the same lethal force (if necessary) in defense of them. This argument reminds me of the Pharisees who would rather die than work on the Sabbath, but then they would pay gentiles to do work for them on the Sabbath. If it was wrong for the Pharisees to work on the Sabbath, it was wrong for them to hire the gentiles to do it for them. The same goes here. If lethal force is wrong for a Christian to use under any circumstances, then it is wrong for a Christian to call the police to protect them with potentially lethal force.

It’s also important to recognize that the police have no legal or moral duty to protect us. From a legal standpoint, there are many precedents for this, such as *Warren v District of Columbia*. In this case, two women were upstairs in a townhouse, when they heard their third roommate being attacked downstairs by intruders. They called the police several times and were assured that help was on the way. After **about 30 minutes**, the cries of their roommate seemed to have stopped so they assumed the police had arrived. When they went downstairs, they found that not only had the police never arrived, but the intruders were still there. For the next 14 hours, all three women were subjected to the most hideous and inhuman crimes imaginable. Somehow the women managed to survive the ordeal and later sued the District of Columbia for failing to protect them. In that case, DC’s highest court exonerated the District and its police by saying it is the “fundamental principle of American law that a government and its agents are under no general duty to provide public services, such as police protection, to any individual citizen.” *Warren v. District of Columbia*, 444 A.2d 1 (D.C. Ct. of Ap., 1981). There are many other similar rulings, so this is a well-established fact.

Even from a Scriptural perspective, the officer’s duty is NOT to protect you or your family. Just look at Romans 13:4. He is “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” Notice, it doesn’t say that he **prevents** any crimes or that his job is to be the bodyguard for anyone and protect them from potential crimes. It says that his work is **after** the crime has already been committed. Revenge comes **after** something is done. And how can he execute wrath on one who has done evil, **before** the evil has even been done? The officer’s job is NOT to protect you, it is to enforce the law. By executing vengeance on the wrongdoer, he keeps criminals in check with the specter of what will happen to them **after** their crime is committed. That’s what it says!

One other important point about the police. The officer carries a firearm for his own protection, NOT for enforcing the law. You may not realize this, but officers are not generally allowed to use lethal force purely for apprehending someone, unless that person is posing a deadly threat. When someone breaks the law, starts running, and the police chase him, they can’t and don’t generally draw their firearms and start shooting—not unless the person is a deadly threat to someone. Police will often use a less lethal weapon (i.e. taser) or simply chase and tackle them. Even after someone has committed a murder, an officer cannot use lethal force to apprehend them unless the officer deems his life or someone else’s to be in imminent danger. Otherwise, the officer would become prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner all in one. How would he know for sure that the person he is chasing actually committed the crime? Or perhaps it was justifiable homicide. Who knows? All these things must be settled in a court of law. It is the officer’s job to bring the “suspect” in so they can receive justice. Only if someone is in danger of grave bodily injury or death, can he use lethal force. This is the same standard that everyone is held to. And if the officer’s use of force is not appropriate, he is charged with murder or manslaughter.

Here’s the point. How could we in good conscience request an officer to stop an attacker (with deadly force if necessary), if it’s wrong for us to do so ourselves? That would be hypocrisy. But as we’ve seen above, the magistrate’s work is approved of God. And just as the magistrate has the right to protect his life from deadly threats with the “sword”, so do we. And just as the magistrate is not permitted to become the executioner, neither are we. The only time the lethal force is permissible without due process is when someone is posing a deadly threat to another. It works the same for an officer as it does for us.

Conclusion

We've looked at the theory of all this. We see the evidence for defense of innocent lives, even if that involves doing harm to the guilty party, in order to stop them. This is clearly laid out in God's word, and is written in our very nature.

But the question still remains, why would one choose to use a gun instead of other options? We've seen that "non-lethal" options are actually "less lethal" and can potentially kill someone. Even baseball bats, fists, and feet can be deadly weapons. But it's also very true that the "less lethal" options are less likely to do mortal damage.

Life is about decisions and priorities. In every aspect of our lives, we have to prioritize. When it comes to relationships, my first responsibility (after God) is to my immediate family. Beyond that is my extended family, friends, and church family. Beyond that is any innocent person in need of help. And beyond that is everyone else—even one who is trying to hurt me. But it's critical to recognize that we all have to choose our order of priority. We can't have it all. With time management, money management, friendships, and everything else in life, we have to choose what is most important and let the rest find its rightful place under that.

The same principle applies for defense and protection. While I do have a duty to try and be of service to everyone in this world, there may be times when I have to choose between the safety of my family and the safety of a murderer who is trying to kill them. If the murderer chooses to put himself in that position, I must stop him at all costs, in order to protect the innocents who rightfully deserve a higher place in my life and require my protection. It's a matter of principle.

This concept of prioritizing should not be a new concept, as it is clearly laid out throughout the Scriptures. Here are just a couple passages that lay out the prioritizing of one group over another, based on their relationship to us...

1 Tim. 5:8 - But if any provide not for his own, and **specially** for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Gal. 6:10 - As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, **especially** unto them who are of the household of faith.

The first verse presents the immediate family ("those of his own house") as being a higher priority than extended family ("his own"). And the second verse lays out the higher place of priority that our church family ("household of faith") should hold over the general public ("all men"). And as soon as I confuse my order of priorities, I have mixed up the Divine order of things and I'm liable to make some very poor decisions that are dishonoring to God.

With that in mind, I look at the issue of tools from a similar perspective—priorities. When choosing how to defend my family, here's what I have to do. I must choose the tool that is most effective in protecting my family (my first priority) rather than choosing the safest option for the murderer who is trying to kill them. Period.

I will do everything I can to prevent a bad situation. I'll do my best to try and diffuse a volatile altercation. If, under the circumstances, I believe that I can stop the threat with a less lethal option than you'd better believe I'll do that! I think that pepper spray and similar tools can be a good option in certain situations. But if I'm presented with a deadly threat and I'm left with no safe option out, I choose to have access to a tool with the best potential of stopping the threat and saving innocent blood. And for me, that is a firearm. It is the emergency backup tool that I hope and pray to never need.

This is not the time or place to deal with specifics of brands and models and all that. But I will say that anyone who owns a firearm **MUST** take that responsibility seriously and get proper training as well as practice regularly. The same would be true for any defensive tools. Pepper spray, tasers, and hand to hand skills all require proper training and regular practice in order to use them safely and effectively.

If you think that a firearm is not for you because of personal fears, I would encourage you to overcome those fears. Fear is not a good reason to dismiss a particular tool. If you overcome the fears and determine it's still not for you (for other reasons), then maybe a firearm isn't a good idea—for you. There certainly is a lot of responsibility, and you must take it very seriously. It's much like driving a car...If you are not careful, you or others may be injured or worse. Like driving a car, there are potential liability repercussions that you must be aware of. Like driving a car, there are laws that must be learned and abided by. And like cars, it is a very good idea to have insurance to cover the legal expenses, should you ever need it. Thankfully, self-defense insurance is easily obtained and is very affordable.

You must be aware of the potential negatives from the use of a firearm and weigh that against the threat that your family could be faced with. I've heard from others who have been faced with a life-threatening encounter and were unprepared to stop it. They lost family members. And the regret and guilt that they deal with...it is not something I am willing to face.

I choose to do all that I reasonably can to protect my family, and I leave the rest in God's hands. I am not paranoid or fearful in the slightest. I am aware of my surroundings and try to be cautious, just as I do when driving a car. And if something bad happens, I'll know I did my part—I was not being presumptuous. Only then can I live with the outcome.

I refuse to have innocent blood on my head. When my children look at me, I want them to get a clear view of our Father in Heaven who is constantly protecting and defending them, who is a Man of war, who is mighty to save. I choose to take God at His word, to disregard the propaganda of today's media, and to do the right thing...whatever the consequences.

And finally, this issue is not a fundamental issue and I am not going to be a "Johnny one note" about it. I actually did not want to bring this up, but it was agitated in a public manner by another, so I felt it necessary to give the other side. I have done so with this paper and I'm moving on.

I refuse to let this issue come between myself and fellow believers. I am in favor of open, polite, and honest discussion. And if this discussion is unable to bring consensus, then I believe we should agree to disagree, with respect for the sincerity of the other party. My belief is that only fundamental issues that are of a salvational nature should be allowed to divide. And even then, the utmost respect and courtesy for others must be exercised.

So I would encourage you, dear reader, to set aside your preconceived ideas and look at the facts objectively. Look at God's word. Use your common sense here. Please let me know if you think I'm wrong, and show me the evidence. Let's have a polite and respectful discussion. And if we cannot come to an agreement in good conscience, then let's move on and not continue agitating the issue with each other. I leave you with this warning from scripture...

Pro. 24:11,12 - If thou forbear to **deliver** them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and **shall not he render to every man according to his works?**