

# Buy a Sword

Toward a Theology of Civilian Self-Defense

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## Introduction

In his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn described the way scientists change their minds about the world. In his study of the history of science, Kuhn found that scientists tend to shift from one model of the world to another based on the new model's ability to solve three sets of problems: (1) the problems the old model can solve, (2) the anomalies of the old model, and (3) particularly vexing problems that remained opaque under the old model. While Kuhn did not intend his work to be a study in the art of persuasion, we may adopt some lessons from it. Among the most obvious lessons is that a well-articulated, coherent model is, *in itself*, a tremendously persuasive argument—a mode of persuasion the Reformed writers employ often. My goal here today is to extend and develop a Christian model of the world, to show how it solves certain problems.

The problem this paper will address is a Christian response to criminal violence, not in terms of public policy, but at the personal level. How should a believer respond when he is about to become the victim of a violent crime? Or when someone else is about to become the victim of a violent crime? In other words, this paper addresses the questions surrounding self-defense: how to define it, under what circumstances it is appropriate, and how to prepare for and think about it.

### **Is it Ever Right to be a Pacifist?**

The Christian debate over the question of whether it is ever right to use force, or take a life, in self-defense has been interminable. The degree to which conservative thinkers have been willing to take the pacifists seriously dignifies a patently absurd position. Some ethical issues are simply beyond discussion. One does not seriously discuss whether it is right to steal or commit adultery. That someone would seriously advocate either of these behaviors indicates gross ignorance of Scripture, gross moral problems, or both. Although a long tradition of Christian waffling on this issue tends to lend a certain respectability to pacifism, when we return to Scripture, it quickly becomes clear that it has problems on a par with theft or adultery.

God kills people. Often. Starting with Noah, God tells His people to kill people. If killing people is inherently wrong, then *God is ordering His people to sin*. Lest we think that somehow all this has changed in the New Testament, let us look at just one passage. Luke 22:36 records Jesus instructing His disciples about how they are to conduct themselves in the coming church age.<sup>1</sup> He commands the disciples that when they travel, they are *each* to take a sword with them, as well as whatever other resources they have to hand. This passage will be discussed in more detail later. For now it suffices to say that swords are for killing people, and Jesus instructs *each* of His disciples to carry one as they travel. True, He does not specify what they are for. *Why should He? A sword is a*

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<sup>1</sup> Since the command is delivered just hours before the crucifixion, and since Jesus (after the resurrection) commands the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit (Ac. 1:4-5), clearly He intends them to fulfill this command in the church age.

*single-purpose tool.* A church-age believer who is not prepared—by which I mean in possession of the will *and the means*—to use lethal force in self-defense is violating this principle, period. There is a wealth of biblical evidence in support of a pro-self-defense position, but this passage *alone* effectively ends the argument, so this paper will not dignify the pacifist position by taking it seriously.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Approach of This Study**

Because self-defense advocates have continued to take pacifist claims seriously, they have found themselves having to approach the most basic question in the field again and again, and seem to do little exploring beyond it. There are substantive spiritual issues involved in self-defense well beyond the question of whether it is right, and these issues have gone largely unaddressed in the literature, to say nothing of the pulpit. This paper seeks to begin framing a well-rounded answer to the question, “How should a Christian approach self-defense?” This paper will approach that question by laying a foundation from the Scriptures, building on that foundation with knowledge of the natural world, and formulating an ethical synthesis based on the data thus gathered.

### **Special Revelation: The Book of Scripture**

Data can come from two sources: Scripture and nature. Medieval thinkers considered these two sources the two “books” of revelation.<sup>3</sup> Since God made the world and everything in it, and God wrote the Scriptures, it follows that God’s Word and God’s world will not contradict. Thus, a believer has everything to gain, and nothing to fear, from an examination of the world around him. However, this examination needs to be guided by Scripture. Propositional revelation is clearer than nature, and easier to understand. It must be our starting point. It is impossible to practice a discipline in a Christian manner without constituting that discipline on biblical principles; moreover, that discipline cannot be rightly related to other disciplines except within the overall framework of a biblical worldview. Thus, data collection has to begin with Scripture.

All manner of biblical commonplaces that apply to every aspect of daily life apply to self-defense as well: dispensational distinctions, confession of sin, etc. The following treatment will draw on some of these issues, as well as passages specific to self-defense. This is in no way a comprehensive treatment, but should draw out the high points and

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on this particular aspect of the issue, see Robert A. Morey, *When is it Right to Fight?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1985), Todd Vierheller, *An Exculpation of Self Defense Based on the Teaching and Example of Christ* (M.A. thesis, Multnomah School of the Bible, 1986), Chester J. Spartzak, *Matthew 5:38-39 Does Allow for Christian Self-Defense* (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Some Christian thinkers have seen three “books”: Scripture, nature, and the mind of man. There is a strong historical argument that this three-book approach is the reason for the three books on Harvard’s crest. (David Hill Scott, “A Vision of *Veritas*: What Christian Scholarship Can Learn from the Puritans’ ‘Technology’ of Integrating Truth,” a paper presented to Christian Scholarship: Knowledge, Reality, and Method Conference, University of Colorado at Boulder, October 1997. Edited paper accessed from <http://leaderu.com/aip/docs/scott.html> on February 24, 2006.)

help to lay the groundwork for further study. For the sake of space, treatments will be brief.

### **Genesis 1-4**

As with every other human discipline, this one begins with creation. Genesis tells us that God made man to live on a perfect earth in harmony with Him forever. Since all men would be in perfect harmony with God, they would likewise be in perfect harmony with each other, and use of force would be completely unnecessary. However, man fell, and falling, entered into a perpetual state of conflict with God, and consequently with each other. Thus the human body is not designed for combat, but for the peaceful administration of a perfect creation. In order to administer creation, the body had to be a general-purpose instrument for interacting with, and having dominion over, the creation. Thus running, jumping, swimming, climbing, lifting and carrying, pulling and pushing, etc. are all part of the design for the body. This implies two facts about human physiology. First, because the body is not designed for combat, one would expect that when employed in combat it has certain endemic weaknesses. *These are not design flaws*; employing the body in a sin-cursed environment was not what God built the body for. Second, because God designed human anatomy to be very adaptable, it *can* be used to fight, although this might take a little work to get the square peg into the round hole, as it were. God also made man creative, so it took very little time for man to discover both the vulnerability and the adaptability of the body. Within one generation, the first murder had been committed.

There is no revelation regarding humans having authority to carry out capital punishment at the point of the first murder,<sup>4</sup> but Cain appears to have understood that a retaliatory killing would have been natural, because he is afraid that anyone who finds him will kill him.<sup>5</sup> God spares Cain's life, but affirms—indeed, requires—capital punishment later in history, in the Noahic covenant.

### **Ex.21:12-14, 18-19**

The Mosaic Law specifically commands capital punishment for premeditated murder. However, note the contrast in v. 13: "...if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand...." The contrast is binary; if one man kills another, either he did it by premeditation or God delivered the deceased into the killer's hand. No third option exists. This particular legal structure seems to apply equally to self-defense, mutual fights, and accidental deaths in non-fighting situations.

The fighting in v. 18 is described as a mutual quarrel; it is not self-defense. Under the Law, fighting was not prohibited as such. If two men wanted to step outside and have it out, there was no rule against it, even if a stone (i.e., an ad hoc weapon) was used.

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<sup>4</sup> As Charlie Clough noted in his 2-message series, "The Origins of Civilization," the presence of an angel with a flaming sword at the gates of Eden may imply that angels carried out capital punishment in the antediluvian world.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 4:14

However, if the fight resulted in injury that confined the injured party to his bed, restitution had to be made. The restitution in this case is not “an eye for an eye,” but only payment for lost labor and healing. If the injured party did not heal to the point of being able to leave his bed with a walking stick, then apparently other penalties were assessed.

### **1 Samuel 14, 17-18**

The engagements recorded here are military engagements between competing states. The particulars of the battles are not terribly important, but the attitudes displayed by Jonathan and his armor bearer (chapter 14) and David (chapters 17-18) are very pertinent to self-defense. In both cases, the men knew that righteous service to the Lord had brought them into the conflict, and therefore they could confidently trust the outcome entirely to the Lord. However, this trust did not mean that they shirked their physical preparations for battle; the men approached their respective engagement armed with weapons with which they were familiar and well-trained. In both cases, they exemplify a synergy between prudent physical preparation and proper spiritual practice.

### **Psalms 9, 10**

Psalms 9 and 10 together form an acrostic poem with three movements. Note the attitude toward the common criminal that is displayed in this psalm. David, perhaps as king, is asking God to deal with the crime problems in Israel. Today, the ruling powers<sup>6</sup> can follow David’s example and pray against the criminals who prey upon the body politic. Note the categories involved in the prayer: requests for poetic justice, vengeance, and deterrent display are all presented as appropriate in Israel’s national hymnal.

### **Psalms 139:19-22**

This passage is one of the keys to understanding the imprecatory psalms generally. Here, David takes God’s enemies for his own; in other imprecatory passages, David asks God to take David’s enemies for His own.

### **Psalms 144:1-2**

David, a fierce warrior of no mean skill, attributes his whole skill set to the Lord Himself. Since God is the Lord over all creation, and any skill in relating to His creatures (nicely or not) involves knowing the truth about His creation, it follows that He is ultimately our teacher. When a believer learns to fight, he is learning God’s truth.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that in the United States, the ruling power is vested in the people, and therefore we, as citizens with voting rights, are responsible to exercise our ruling power to see justice done. Therefore even if the use of this prayer is restricted to governing authorities, the American citizen has a right, if not a duty, to make use of it.

### **Matthew 5:38-39**

This much-abused passage instructs disciples of Jesus Christ to allow physical insult to pass unavenged. It does not address criminal assaults on the offended party's life; the subject does not even come up. Furthermore, if this passage outlaws self-defense entirely, Luke 22:35-38 becomes impossible to understand.

### **Luke 22:35-38**

When Jesus sent out his disciples on their first training exercise without Him, he told them to take no supplies with them.<sup>7</sup> The Lord's instructions on the eve of His trial reveal the earlier instructions as a special circumstance, not standard operating policy; now, they are to use the resources they have. Notably, the items discussed (money bag, knapsack, sandals) are still optional. However, the disciples are each *ordered* to acquire swords for their journey, even if they have to sell their outer garments to get one. The outer garment was extremely important to a traveler in those times. It was his windbreaker, raincoat, and sleeping bag all rolled into one. Undertaking serious travel without an outer garment would have been difficult, to say the least. But Jesus sees the sword as more important. There can be only one use for the sword in this context. It is also worth noticing that the sword is not noted for its utility in nonlethal applications.<sup>8</sup>

### **Acts 6:8-7:60**

Stephen apparently did nothing to resist his murderers. Although it was illegal for them to kill him, since the Romans had taken away the power of capital punishment, they were the legally constituted authorities.

### **Acts 12:1-19**

Peter leaves captivity when God offers him a way of escape, and continues to evade capture by leaving the jurisdiction.

### **Acts 22:23-29**

Paul submits to the Roman authorities, but protests being treated illegally by them. He does not use the illegality of the treatment as a justification for resistance, nor does he use submission to authority as a justification for silence.

### **Romans 12:17-21**

Paul instructs his readers to seek peace with all men. However, he qualifies the statement twice: "if it is possible, as much as depends on you." Accordingly, peace is not an

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<sup>7</sup> Lu. 10:4-7

<sup>8</sup> Luke was a companion of Paul; we may therefore surmise that Paul and his entourage were familiar with this instruction, and undoubtedly followed it as they traveled about the Mediterranean.

absolute good: the believer should seek peace, but should not be willing to purchase it at any price.

One can imagine an immature Roman reading verse 18 and thinking, “Well, I’d love to be at peace with my neighbor Epictetus, but he’s wronged me, and I *have* to get him back, or he’s going to do it again.” Paul here instructs his readers that instead, a believer should trust the Lord to repay his enemies. It is important to note that the basis for the prohibition against taking personal vengeance is that God reserves that privilege to Himself.<sup>9</sup> The passage does not say that vengeance is a bad thing to want; only that as a procedural matter a believer is not permitted to take the matter into his own hands. Accordingly, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with asking God to take vengeance, since He has promised to do so (as we will see, there are New Testament examples of this).<sup>10</sup>

### **Galatians 5:22-23**

Love, peace, and self-control are fruits of the Spirit. Calm in the face of the chaos of a fight is a desirable quality, and believers need not rely on the strength of the flesh for it. For control of the emotions, mind, and body, believers must cultivate the habit of relying on the Lord.

### **1 Timothy 4:6-10**

This passage offers a cautionary note to the believer, lest he be consumed by any form of physical training. Paul makes it clear that although physical training does yield some profit, the believer must emphasize his spiritual training above all things, because it is useful for all things.

### **2 Timothy 1:7**

Dealing with fear is a major theme in Scripture, and many different verses make this point. Believers are to fear only God, not men. Paul encourages Timothy to step forward and fulfill the role that God had for him, allowing power, love, and a disciplined mind to take the place of his fear.

### **2 Timothy 4:14**

In a directly imprecatory statement, Paul asks that God repay Alexander the coppersmith for the harm he did to Paul. Paul’s statement here is reminiscent of Psalm 9:15 (in requesting poetic justice) and Psalm 10:14 (repaying wickedness), as well as any number of other imprecatory passages.

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<sup>9</sup> The OT quote in the passage is from Deut. 32:35.

<sup>10</sup> We should also keep in mind that delivering someone to God’s vengeance carries mercy with it: God may mitigate or delay judgment where man would not (as, for example, in Jonah 3:10-4:2). David trusted himself to this very fact when choosing his punishment for murdering Uriah (2 Sam. 24:14).

### **1 John 3:16-18**

John deals directly here with charity toward a fellow believer who needs financial help, but consider the question it raises. How can you love God if you have the ability to help your brother and you refuse to be moved by his plight? If this is true of providing food for my fellow believer to eat, how much more would it apply to providing protection from assault, if that is required?

### **Revelation 6:9-11**

This passage is a particularly telling imprecatory prayer. The saints who pray for vengeance on those who hurt them are already dead, and therefore *perfected*.

## **General Revelation: The Book of Nature**

Once we have a foundation in Scripture, we can approach the world and see what information we can gather. This is necessary because while Scripture gives the framework within which we interpret the world, Scripture does not give us all the knowledge we need about the world. The Bible does not even tell bachelors not to wash red shirts and white underwear in the same load of laundry, much less teach how to fly a plane, perform CPR, or pluck a chicken. If we want to know how to avoid criminal assault, and how to fight it when we cannot avoid it, we need to study our world.

### **The Believing Research Program**

A word of caution is in order here: this information is *not* trustworthy in raw form. Most knowledge of the world is compiled by unbelievers, arranged and interpreted according to their unbelieving worldview. It is feral information; it properly belongs in subjection to Christ but has run wild in rebellion against Him. Therefore, as believers we have to approach this information with caution. We must be cautious not to absorb the ungodly presuppositions now surrounding the truth about God's world, encrusting it like so many barnacles. However, we dare not leave the truth in subjection to pagans who have no right to it; therefore we bring it back into subjection to Christ where it belongs. Our approach is as Paul described in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, taking every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...". This is a spiritual struggle, because there is no neutral ground on which to approach the world. One either takes God's revelation seriously and constitutes the discipline at hand on that basis, or one does not. Augustin described the Christian program of research this way:

For we ought not to refuse to learn letters because they say that Mercury discovered them; nor because they have dedicated temples to Justice and Virtue, and prefer to worship in the form of stones things that ought to have their place in the heart, ought we on that account to forsake justice and virtue. Nay, but let every good and true Christian understand that

wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master; and while he recognizes and acknowledges the truth, even in their religious literature, let him reject the figments of superstition, and let him grieve over and avoid men who, “when they knew God, glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.”<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, if those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it. For, as the Egyptians had not only the idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and fled from, but also vessels and ornaments of gold and silver, and garments, which the same people when going out of Egypt appropriated to themselves, designing them for a better use, not doing this on their own authority, but by the command of God, the Egyptians themselves, in their ignorance, providing them with things which they themselves were not making a good use of; in the same way all branches of heathen learning have not only false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary toil, which every one of us, when going out under the leadership of Christ from the fellowship of the heathen, ought to abhor and avoid; but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality; and some truths in regard even to the worship of the One God are found among them. Now these are, so to speak, their gold and silver, which they did not create themselves, but dug out of the mines of God’s providence which are everywhere scattered abroad, and are perversely and unlawfully prostituting to the worship of devils. These, therefore, the Christian, when he separates himself in spirit from the miserable fellowship of these men, ought to take away from them, and to devote to their proper use in preaching the gospel. Their garments, also, — that is, human institutions such as are adapted to that intercourse with men which is indispensable in this life, — we must take and turn to a Christian use.<sup>12</sup>

The brief discussion which follows will attempt to reconstitute a variety of information, mainly gathered from non-Christian sources, into a consciously Christian form that will be useful to a believer approaching the field. The field of self-defense embraces a wide variety of disciplines: geometry, physics, psychology, sociology, martial arts, anatomy, physiology, medicine and various others. Clearly there is more material than any one

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<sup>11</sup> *On Christian Doctrine* 2:28

<sup>12</sup> *On Christian Doctrine* 2:40

paper can address. What follows below is a brief sketch of some of the high points.<sup>13</sup> My English teachers will have to forgive me, but here I am going to depart from standard conventions and speak to you, the reader, directly.

### **The Situation**

In seeking to understand self-defense, it is important first to define the situation. By definition, you as the defender are not seeking the fight; rather, the attacker has sought you out. Thus, the attack occurs at a location and time of the opponent's choosing, almost certainly by surprise and from ambush. He comes armed as he chooses to be, accompanied by whatever friends he wishes to bring. He knows the confrontation is coming and has time to prepare himself mentally for it. Against this, you must be prepared to rise to the occasion instantly, with little or no warning, armed with whatever you have on your body at that moment, against whoever steps up. You may be old, weak, or otherwise handicapped, and facing strong young men; predators are not known for their chivalry. In addition, in a striking number of cases, the attacker will be known to you, which can contribute to the shock value of the attack and erode your willingness to respond appropriately.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Solution**

You begin the race several steps behind. Because of this, you have to have most of your work done ahead of time. Being ready to defend yourself is like wearing a seat belt: if you are going to have it on when you need it, you have to have it on all the time. This means that you have prepared your mind; you have already considered the salient points of the situation in advance and decided what you are willing to do. You have cultivated your intent so that you will not waver in the event. Most of all, you have cultivated your spirit to rely on the Lord in this situation, and to cry out to Him for help. This part, the mental and spiritual part, is the *sine qua non* of self-defense. Untrained people defend themselves every day with nothing more than their determination and their fury. Training just adds focus, effectiveness and efficiency. If you are old, weak or handicapped, best you find something you can do, and a means of practice that suits your physicality.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the mental, you have cultivated your skills with your weapon and with your body, so that you can express your intent clearly and immediately. You are alert so that you will be able to avoid a situation, and failing that to have the most warning you can

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<sup>13</sup> Throughout this section, I have tried to use a mixture of print and internet sources, because although print sources as a class are more reliable, they can be very hard to find. Internet resources allow a reader to check my references more conveniently.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noticing that the very first murder was a fratricide. While people tend to think of self-defense in the context of an attack by a stranger, Scripture tells us that the first violent crime was within the family. If preparation for intrafamilial attack is appropriate, it is also appropriate to involve some authorities outside the family (elders, friends, legal authorities if necessary) to help stabilize the situation and repair the relationships.

<sup>15</sup> Physical debility is no excuse for lack of preparation. I currently study Serak, an extensive martial system developed by a man with a short arm and a club foot, and specifically tailored to his unique physiology. My previous teacher was blind, partially deaf, and had hip mobility problems as well. These things just mean you have to cheat harder.

get. This much is just responsible living. If despite your best efforts you find yourself in a fight, you have done your part, and the Lord is responsible for the outcome.

**The Elements of Assault**

So what do you look for to avoid an assault? Every assault requires three basic elements: opportunity, intent, and ability. If any one of these elements is missing, the assault will not occur. For example, consider the case of a man who lives in San Francisco. He knows that some of the most violent criminals in the country live only a few miles away, in San Quentin. He knows they have the intent and ability to commit crimes—that’s why they are in prison. But he is not afraid of them, because being in prison, they lack the opportunity to hurt him. Likewise consider a woman walking to her car on a dark, deserted street. If she is alone, then she may feel unsafe, but there is no specific threat. If a husky male friend walks her to her car, she does not feel less safe than when she is alone, she feels safer, despite the fact that she is now alone with someone who has the opportunity and ability to hurt her. Why? Because she knows he does not have the intent. Finally, consider the case of a day-care worker who has to take a toy away from a two-year-old. The child may be furious, and may hit the day-care worker with all his strength, yet the day-care worker is unafraid. Why? The child has no lack of intent to do harm, and has the opportunity to lash out, but lacks the ability to really do any damage. All three elements—opportunity, intent, and ability—must be present, or no real threat exists.

**Thwarting the Elements of Assault**

An effective self-defense strategy involves an awareness of these three elements and a series of ways to keep them from all coming together at once. For each element, there is a corresponding battleground—an area over which you must assert control—and a means to do so in order to derail that particular element.

<b>Element of Assault</b>	<b>Need to Control</b>	<b>Means of Control</b>
Opportunity	The space around your body	Deny access to yourself as a target
Intent	The criminal’s mind	Communicate an unfavorable risk-to-reward ratio
Ability	The criminal’s body	Counterattack

***Opportunity***

The safest avoidance strategy is to simply deny the opponent the opportunity to attack. Contrary to the popular dictum, the best defense is *not* a good offense. The best defense is being somewhere else. The good news is that for most people in our society, this is relatively easy. Although the American crime rate is certainly nothing to brag about, much of the trouble that happens involves people who went looking for it. People who do not indulge in illicit sex, drunkenness, or illegal drug activity and do not knowingly hang around in dangerous places automatically avoid much of the violent crime that occurs.

However, not all crime involves people who already were doing something they weren't supposed to. As in nature, human predation tends to occur in "fringe areas," places that are heavily trafficked enough to offer prey, but isolated enough that the predator is unlikely to be interrupted in the act. Everyone passes through areas like this every day – and has to. Parking lots, apartment laundry and trash facilities, public parks, jogging trails, and similar areas are common examples. The key to avoiding crime in fringe areas is awareness of the heightened danger and willingness to avoid the area if a potential predator is lurking nearby.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Intent***

Intent happens inside the criminal's head. Various theories of criminal motivation have been propounded; Christians will be content with the idea that a criminal is a selfish, evil person to start with.<sup>17</sup> Whatever the root of the motivation, the criminal still usually weighs risk-to-reward ratios. In other words, if he doesn't think he can get away with it, he probably won't try.

Intent is closely related to opportunity in that there is no such thing as absolute denial of opportunity. The United States president is one of the most heavily-guarded men in the world, yet as history repeatedly demonstrates, a dedicated and resourceful assassin can find a way to attack him. The average person has far fewer resources than the Secret Service, but fortunately most people do not inspire the kind of obsession that drives a presidential assassin. Often quenching a criminal's intent is simply a matter of crossing the street when you first become aware of his presence, so he has to chase you (with a head start). If he doesn't want to work that hard—and let's face it, how many criminals have a good work ethic?—then you've successfully extinguished his intent. Depending on the nature of the case, one might also nod or establish eye contact to let him know that you have noted his presence, or display a weapon, or take other measures to demonstrate that you won't be as easy a target as he might hope. Cultivation of an appropriately aggressive attitude is a major element in preparation for self-defense. There is an identifiable difference in demeanor between someone who is thinking "Dear God, please don't let the scary man come over here" and someone who is thinking "If he comes one step closer, I'm going to break his knee." The key is to communicate to the criminal that attempting the assault will cost him a great deal more than he is willing to pay. If you have to address yourself to a potential assailant's intent, *the fight has already started*; you are just trying to keep it from getting physical, and failing that, you are positioning yourself for advantage if the confrontation does become physical.

### ***Ability***

Destroying a criminal's ability to launch an assault is by far the most dangerous of the three ways to short-circuit the attack. If you have permitted a criminal the opportunity to

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<sup>16</sup> After determination, awareness is the single most important component of a self-defense plan. For a good introduction to the subject, see Marc MacYoung's video production *Safe in the Street* (Boulder: Paladin, 1996). His website, [www.nonenseselfdefense.com](http://www.nonenseselfdefense.com), has some good information in this area as well.

<sup>17</sup> This idea has been proposed in the secular literature as well. See Stanton Samenow, *Inside the Criminal Mind*, (New York: Crown Business, 1984).

attack, and have failed to dissuade him from making the attempt, a physical confrontation is inevitable. As in any fight, seizing the initiative is key. Remember that the fight has already begun, and you did not start it. There is a lively debate over whether one should fight to defend against a robbery or merely hand over the goods. This is a personal decision you have to make before the event.<sup>18</sup>

### Weapons

Outdoor survival instructor Tom Brown teaches his students two basic principles that govern any attempt to survive in the wilderness. The first of these principles is, “Man is the toolmaker.”<sup>19</sup> This is a paramount principle in conflict with another human being as well. For all of recorded history, unarmed combat has been the last resort of desperate people under surprise attack; otherwise, they used weapons, and so should you. Handguns are generally considered the most efficient weapon available, and are readily concealable if you wear more than a Speedo. Knives are a close second; clubs of various sorts are third. Less-lethal weapons (pepper spray, stun guns/tasers) have made a strong showing in recent years, but until the police are happy enough with them to leave their firearms at the station house, you might want a primary weapon that will kill someone if it needs to. In certain situations, carrying a purpose-built weapon is out of the question; carry what you can. A sturdy pen will penetrate an eyeball or a major blood vessel or create a considerable nuisance when stabbed into a large muscle, and can be carried just about anywhere.

There is a pervasive fear that carrying a weapon will precipitate a situation where the assailant takes the weapon away and uses it on the defender. This fear is mostly unfounded. Actual occurrences of this are relatively rare. Furthermore, the willingness to actually use the weapon reduces the risk substantially, and a modicum of training will eliminate 99% of the remaining danger. By far the most risky thing any defender does with a weapon is threaten his attacker with it. In such a situation, the weapon is likely to be extended away from the defender’s body, close to the attacker’s body, and more or less stationary. This is very nearly a perfect situation for defeating whatever weapon retention strategies a defender might have. If, instead, the defender gets at least a little training in using his weapon, practices regularly if briefly, and approaches the interaction with the attitude that the weapon will be drawn and used, not displayed, he largely negates the danger of losing the weapon.

### Fighting at Contact Range

If you are using a contact weapon, or are surprised in the shower and don’t have a weapon to hand, there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that stronger defeats weaker every time. The good news is that you don’t necessarily have to fight the whole person. In other words, in a contest of whole-body strength, a 110-lb. secretary will lose to a 300-lb. powerlifter. But in a contest between the secretary’s thumb and the

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<sup>18</sup> The advice to hand over the goods is ubiquitous. For an alternate view, see Jeffrey Snyder, “A Nation of Cowards,” *The Public Interest* (Fall 1993) (internet reprint available: [www.rkba.org/comment/cowards.html](http://www.rkba.org/comment/cowards.html), accessed February 27, 2006), or Gabriel Suarez, “The *raison d’etre* of the Armed Citizen” in *The Tactical Pistol* (Boulder, CO: Paladin, 1996) 1-3.

<sup>19</sup> The second principle is, “You can’t survive in a parking lot,” i.e., a natural environment really will provide everything the human being needs to survive, but an artificial environment may not. (Tim Lukas, “Primitive Firemaking” guest lecture at VDT Academy Serak Camp, Bellflower, CA, December 11, 2004)

powerlifter’s eyeball, guess which one wins? So the goal is to make the fight between your strengths and your opponent’s weaknesses. This can happen at a number of levels.

Level	Human body considered as...	Means of Control
Geometry/Basic Physics	Object moving through space	Intersect the Line of Attack at an advantageous angle
Skeletal Positioning	System of bony levers	Misalign the skeleton
Vital Systems	Combination of vital systems (blood, breath, mobility)	Cause structural damage
Neurological Function	Sensorimotor information delivery system	Attack the nervous and/or meridian <sup>20</sup> systems (to cause pain or to overwhelm the system)

*Geometry/Basic Physics.* The first element that comes into play is the geometry of the conflict. When your opponent attacks you, the direction of his force is referred to as the line of attack. If you resist him directly on the line of attack, then you are opposing all his force with all of yours. However, it is possible to counterattack at an angle to the line of attack so that you achieve a superior position. In that case, the opponent can only bring a small amount of his force to bear on you, while all your force is available to use on him.<sup>21</sup> For precisely this reason, a preoccupation with the geometry of positioning for conflict is characteristic of a number of martial arts across a wide span of time, culture, and geography (e.g., many Indonesian arts,<sup>22</sup> various Filipino arts prior to the arrival of the Spanish in 1521,<sup>23</sup> the Spanish school of fencing,<sup>24</sup> and the Afro-Brazilian art of Capoeira<sup>25</sup>)

<sup>20</sup> Opinions vary on the value of the meridian (i.e., acupuncture point) system in combat (or in anything else, for that matter). Individuals exist who can and do reliably achieve effects not explicable in terms of current medical understanding, and who explain their results in terms of meridian theory. Whether the explanation of the phenomena holds true, or whether it turns out to be an ultimately false model with a certain amount of explanatory power, remains to be seen. In the meantime, needs must learn the skill from someone who has it, and learn the model they teach. This is not *so* bad. Ptolemy was wrong about the nature of the cosmos, but he could teach you how to predict the next lunar eclipse accurately. If that was all you were trying to do, his model worked well enough for your needs.

<sup>21</sup> A number of modern systems do not consider this issue. See Hunter B. Armstrong, “Approach, Close, Entry” (available: [www.hoplology.com/articles\\_detail.asp?id=3](http://www.hoplology.com/articles_detail.asp?id=3), accessed: February 27, 2006) for a discussion of its necessity and the implications for systems that lack a way of dealing with this issue.

<sup>22</sup> Victor I. C. DeThouars, *Pentjak Silat Serak: Sambuts 16-30*, (Bellflower, Ca: VDT, 2002) 35-42, touches on a few details of Serak’s extensive system of footwork platforms. For examples from other systems, see Guy Savelli, “Master Reeder’s Triangle Step #1” (available: [www.worldkungfu.com/triangle1.html](http://www.worldkungfu.com/triangle1.html), accessed February 28, 2006), “Langkas” (available: [www.pencaksilat.com/langkas.html](http://www.pencaksilat.com/langkas.html), Accessed February 28, 2006) , “A Brief Introduction to the Saffa Al Akbar” (available: [www.zulfakr.com/destreza/saffa.htm](http://www.zulfakr.com/destreza/saffa.htm), accessed Feb. 27, 2006), “The Naqshi-i-Sarmoun, or Diagram of the Bee” (available: [www.zulfakr.com/destreza/naqshi-i-sarmoun.htm](http://www.zulfakr.com/destreza/naqshi-i-sarmoun.htm), accessed February 28, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Mark V. Wiley, *Filipino Martial Culture*, (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1996) 313.

<sup>24</sup> Ramon Martinez, “The Demystification of the Spanish School” parts 1-3, *Journal of Western Martial Art*, 2001 (available: [www.ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2001/jwmaart\\_martinez1\\_0201.htm](http://www.ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2001/jwmaart_martinez1_0201.htm), accessed Feb. 26,

*Skeletal Positioning.* Immediately prior to physical contact, one needs to position the skeleton for maximal protection. The body is designed<sup>26</sup> to use the skeleton to protect vital areas from damage. Thus, the natural response to threat is to face it, crouch, and raise the arms.<sup>27</sup> In this position, the eyes are protected first by the hands, then by the brow ridge. The throat is protected by the chin (which has dropped slightly for that purpose). The heart, lungs, and most other major organs are protected by the sternum and ribs (which are penetrable from below, but relatively difficult to penetrate from the angles of attack available in this position). The vulnerable abdomen, unshielded by any bone, is retracted away from the threat, and the groin, generally considered one of the prime targets, is retracted even further.

Once physical contact has been made (a moment referred to as “entry”), you reach an important point on the combative decision tree. If you are seeking to grapple with your opponent, you will use the combination of the geometry already established and the collision of your bone shield with your opponent to misalign his skeletal structure while maintaining your own. This leads to a variety of applications ranging from simple redirections to control holds to gravity-assisted fractures and dislocations. If you are seeking to strike, then you would have made at least one strike on entry, and you follow up by launching your second strike while your opponent is still involuntarily reacting to your first.

*Vital Systems.* Once a position of (at least momentary) control has been achieved, it becomes possible to attack the opponent’s body through a variety of structural damage.<sup>28</sup> The principal targets are the opponent’s vision, breathing, and mobility.<sup>29</sup> It is best not to think of these as “organ systems” but rather as functional systems. For example, one can attack the eyes by slashing the forehead, causing blood to run down into the eyes (variously referred to as the “curtain of blood” or the “blood veil”). This is obviously an attack on visual function, but not necessarily an approach one would consider if he were thinking of attacking the visual “organ system.”

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2006), “The Mysterious Circle of Gerard Thibault” (available: [www.zulfakr.com/destreza/circle.html](http://www.zulfakr.com/destreza/circle.html), accessed Feb. 20, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> I.e., Capoeira in its various forms. See Nestor Capoeira, *The Little Capoeira Book*, rev. ed., translated by Alex Ladd (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2003) 62-65. Note that his implication that the Angola gingas are idiosyncratic and unstructured is not necessarily true; the *angoleiros* of my acquaintance have an extensive series of specific platforms.

<sup>26</sup> “Designed” is an important word. Even if God is not explicitly mentioned in one’s treatment of these truths, one either approaches them as though the body were an accident of evolution, or a design of the Creator.

<sup>27</sup> This has been demonstrated repeatedly. See Bruce K. Siddle, *Sharpening the Warrior’s Edge* (Milstadt, IL: PPCT, 1995) 50-53. For practical applications of this information to combat shooting, see William E. Fairbairn and Eric A. Sykes, *Shooting to Live With The One-Hand Gun*, (Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1942, reprinted Boulder, CO: Paladin, 1987), Rex Applegate, *Kill or Get Killed*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Paladin, 1976), Rex Applegate and Michael Janich, *Bullseyes Don’t Shoot Back*, (Boulder, CO: Paladin, 1998)

<sup>28</sup> Note that in many approaches, this is the first strategy; skeletal positioning is barely considered and geometric positioning not at all.

<sup>29</sup> Mobility in this sense includes the movement of the whole body; it is difficult to continue an attack with a broken elbow or collarbone. Granted, it is more difficult still to attack with a broken ankle, but the upper-body damage is sufficiently distracting to be worthy of consideration.

*Neurological Function.* This is the famed “knockout.” Loss of consciousness can be anything from a momentary blackout following a blow to the carotid sinus<sup>30</sup> to a premortem response to massive damage. Short of the latter, percussive attacks on consciousness explicable in terms of Western medicine generally involve striking the carotid sinus or the spine, over-rotating the brain stem, or concussion. Chokes, strangles and blood loss round out the Western repertoire. Eastern concepts of attacking the body’s energetic systems open up a wider field for exploration. Many of the phenomena involved have yet to be explained in terms of Western science. Presumably that problem will eventually be overcome;<sup>31</sup> in the meantime, the phenomena continue to work.<sup>32</sup> Qualified instruction is a *must* in this area particularly. If it all turns out to be bunk, you won’t have missed anything for not trying it out on your buddy, working from a book or video. If it really works the way they say it does, you are taking your partner’s life in your hands if you don’t know what you are doing.<sup>33</sup>

**Training**

Once one has a picture of how the conflict ought to go, one has to consider how to inculcate the necessary skills to create that result on resisting opponents. There are three basic approaches to this question, as outlined below.<sup>34</sup>

<b>Reaction Based Approach</b>	A number of reactionary techniques are presumably rehearsed and memorized to be called on in crisis for application to an attacker’s action. Reaction-based approaches are <b>context-specific</b> . If the attacker does “A,” the defender reacts with technique “B.”
<b>Reflex Based Approach</b>	This approach is built on reinforcing and positively utilizing the autonomic and hormonal arousal as a platform for counter-aggression. Reflex-based approaches are <b>context-free</b> . Regardless of the attacker’s specific weapon, the defender, once determining imminent danger, proceeds indiscriminately until the attacker is neutralized. If the defender uses techniques, these are restricted to a handful of biochemically-augmented, gross-motor, large-target-oriented tactics.
<b>Response Based Approach</b>	This approach is rooted in diminishing relative autonomic and hormonal arousal, diminishing response time, increasing efficiency and proportionality, and increasing kinesthetic, position, and force/tension sensitivity. Response-based approaches are <b>context-sensitive</b> : awareness, sensitivity and improvisation spontaneously create an appropriate solution to the event as it unfolds – without predesignated “skills,” but with deep internalization of natural laws and efficiency.

<sup>30</sup> That’s St 9 for you acupuncture/meridian folks.

<sup>31</sup> Valiant efforts are being made in some quarters. See Michael Kelly, D.O., *Death Touch: The Science Behind the Legend of Dim-Mak*, (Boulder, CO: Paladin, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> My evidence for this is strictly anecdotal. However, since the anecdotes involve my body, or the bodies of trustworthy friends, I am disinclined to be skeptical. Effects range through compelling movement, pain, loss of consciousness, and invoking various psychological states.

<sup>33</sup> This information is conserved in certain traditional Indian, Indonesian, Chinese and Japanese arts, as well as a very few Americanized versions. Readers interested in this area might consider starting with the healing applications (which are considerably safer). See Tom Bisio, *A Tooth From The Tiger’s Mouth*, (New York, Fireside, 2004) for a good place to start.

<sup>34</sup> The following table is from Scott Sonnon, *The Three Dimensional Performance Pyramid: Three Dimensional Physical Preparedness for the Combat Athlete*, (Atlanta: RMAX, 2004) 24.

The reaction-based approach has its place in certain specific situations, but it is extremely risky as a general approach to self-defense training. Since it depends on predicting and training for the specific attack in advance, it is like trying to pass a math test by memorizing all possible problems. If your predictions are good, you'll be fine, but what are the chances?

The reflex-based approach offers much more adaptable—and very effective—results for a very small investment of training time. In addition, the reflex-based approach is much less likely to be derailed by fear, which is a considerable advantage. When a human being perceives himself to be in mortal danger, the body responds automatically by accelerating the breathing and heart rate, diverting blood flow from digestion and other non-survival functions to the large muscles, and releasing a variety of hormones into the bloodstream.<sup>35</sup> The net result is a considerable increase in strength and general readiness to fight or flee, but at the cost of coordination.

By relying on simple techniques, large targets, and gross-motor skills, reflex-based approaches capitalize on the strength advantage of fear and seek to minimize degradation in performance caused by the loss of coordination.<sup>36</sup> For readers who want an effective means of self-defense and have no desire to make training into a long-term hobby,<sup>37</sup> or for those who are just beginning, a reflex-based approach is appropriate. Nothing else will make someone effective as quickly.

However, there are two principal drawbacks. First, the range of response for a reflex-based approach is fairly narrow. The counterattack will be strike-based and very harsh on the opponent. Second, as the reflex-based practitioner's skills continue to grow, he reaches a point where further investment of training time yields diminishing returns. For someone who has no desire to invest a lot of time, this is good news, because it means he can begin to invest even less time and still maintain his skills at existing levels.<sup>38</sup>

A practitioner who wants a wider range of responses to situations, or simply has more time to invest and wants something that will reward a larger investment of time and effort, will prefer a response-based approach. The response-based approach requires a longer developmental time before the practitioner becomes effective, but allows for a greater payoff as well. The response-based approach trains to diminish arousal rather than harnessing it (as in the reflex-based approach), and thereby allows the practitioner

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<sup>35</sup> For detailed, context-specific information on this subject, see Dave Grossman and Loren W. Christensen, *On Combat* (USA: PPCT, 2004) or Bruce K. Siddle, *Sharpening the Warrior's Edge* (Milstadt, IL: PPCT, 1995). For a more general overview, see Desmond Morris, *People Watching: The Desmond Morris Guide to Body Language* (London: Vintage, 2002) 245-249.

<sup>36</sup> The reflex-based approach does not *require* fear (an important point for a Christian), but is designed to deal with it when it occurs.

<sup>37</sup> Initial training time can be as brief as a few hours for a *very* rudimentary grasp of a small amount of material. Expect to spend a little time training regularly to maintain the skills, but as little time as 10-30 minutes/week has gotten good results. Of course more training time will give better results, up to a point.

<sup>38</sup> As an adherent for a number of years of a reflex-based method, the author can attest personally to both its strengths and its weaknesses.

more controlled and efficient patterns of movement. By permitting a wider range of response, this approach also allows for a more merciful approach to the altercation.

## **Conclusion**

The defender is already at a disadvantage; his assailant chooses the time, place and manner of the attack, comes from ambush, comes armed as he chooses and accompanied by whatever friends he may have. Against this the defender has only whatever skills he possesses and whatever weapons he happens to be carrying at that moment. With a modicum of training and (preferably) with decent armament, the defender can prepare himself to save his life by killing or maiming his assailant. With more training, the defender can prepare himself to meet the same goal in a more efficient manner, or allow himself the latitude of a more merciful approach, but in order for this to work, he has to reduce his fear to manageable levels. Our study of nature tells us that the human being is capable of all this, and much more.<sup>39</sup> But what *should* a person do? On that issue, nature is silent, and we must turn again to the Scriptures.

## **Synthesis: Toward a True Systematic Theology (On This Issue)**

In the Prolegomena to his *Systematic Theology*, Lewis Sperry Chafer specifically rejects the idea that systematic theology is merely “the orderly arrangement of Christian doctrine” on the grounds that (revealed) “Christianity represents only a mere fraction of the whole field of truth relative to the Person of God and His universe.” Rather, he defines systematic theology as “a science...which purports to incorporate into its system all the truth about God and His universe from any and every source.”<sup>40</sup> Of course Chafer’s *Systematic Theology* comes much closer to attaining the definition he rejects than the one that he accepts, but this is no mean feat in itself, and in any case no one but God could truly meet the latter definition. Nonetheless, coming as close as revelation allows is a worthy aim.<sup>41</sup>

This paper organizes systematic theology in terms of the Creator-creature distinction, then in terms of the three basic entities among the creation: Angels, Man, and Nature. For the visually inclined, these four can be placed as the four vertices of a tetrahedron,

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<sup>39</sup> At Babel God says of man, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing they propose to do will be withheld from them” (Gen. 11:6). The Christian worldview acknowledges the possibility of incredible human potential, but cautions that such achievement may not be a good thing.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena, Bibliology, Theology Proper* (Dallas: DTS, 1948, reprint: Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993) 5. Chafer offers another definition on the next page which uses the words “God and His works” instead of “God and His universe,” but taken in context the intent is the same.

<sup>41</sup> Chafer himself mentions this weakness on the first page of his theology: “Though it is highly impractical to encumber the science of theology with extended discourse covering all the ‘ologies’ of the universe, it remains true, nevertheless, that the basic fact underlying each and every science is its relation to the Creator of all things and His purpose in creation. Though not usually included in the science of theology, the other sciences would be both sanctified and exalted were they to be approached, as they should be, with that awe and reverence which recognizes in them the presence, power, and purpose of the Creator.” (Chafer, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, 3)

with the various other categories of theology mapped in relation to them.<sup>42</sup> This simple structure places self-defense, as a matter internal to the human race, under anthropology. Under that broad heading, the theology of self-defense has to do with the treatment of human life and the protection and stewardship of the physical body. It also relates to the problem of evil, because beyond the intellectual answers to evil's existence, it offers a concrete Christian response to certain kinds of evil in society. Where self-defense also touches on defense of others, it also involves the doctrine of Christian charity.<sup>43</sup>

## **Principles**

Listed below is a set of principles that begin the project of bringing the truths from Scripture into right relationship with the truths of nature so that we can grasp the discipline as a whole.

1. **God's Creative Design:** We are not designed for combat, but because sin is present in the world, combat is sometimes necessary. God created us to be wonderfully adaptable, and we can use the instincts, emotions, minds, and bodies God gave us to protect ourselves.
2. **Our Teacher:** Insofar as we learn anything effective about ourselves and our world that allows us to prevail in battle, we are learning about God's creation, and we are thinking God's thoughts after Him. Thus, the Lord is our foremost teacher, the One who trains our hands to war and our fingers to fight; with regard to loyalty to teachers, our loyalty belongs to Him above all.
3. **Sufficiency of Scripture:** Preparing to kill or be killed raises a series of moral and spiritual questions to which the serious practitioner must have answers. We maintain the sufficiency of the Scriptures to supply those answers and allow us—with a clear conscience—to focus our whole being on carrying the fight to the enemy if it is necessary to fight at all.
4. **The Battle is the Lord's:** We enter into combat confident that the Lord is not constrained to save by many or by few, and that victory comes from His hand alone. The foremost element in a believer's fear management training must be spiritual preparation through meditation on this truth. While physical training is an important component in fear management, it is secondary to the spiritual.
5. **Fierce Worship:** As disciples of Jesus Christ, we view our lives as a constant expression of worship. Our preparation to protect ourselves and others from

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<sup>42</sup> This simple structure makes a useful memory device for the visually inclined.

<sup>43</sup> Placing these issues in a theological (rather than just an ethical) structure may seem strange at first, but it makes a real difference in the way we approach the subject matter. Most people find it difficult to grasp the relationships of these (clearly ethical) issues to the theology only because so little decent thought has gone into the theology of the body at all. We have no particular shortage of Christian health books but no grasp of the whole counsel of God relevant to the body, and therefore no solid foundation on which these books can draw. In a culture that deifies the physique that comes from denying the bodily pleasures while simultaneously also deifying indulgence in those same bodily pleasures, this is a lack we can ill afford.

violence is an act of obedience to Christ's commands, and thus an expression of our love for Him. Our training is worship; if we must use our training, that is also worship.

6. **Moral Release:** By seeking to live at peace wherever possible, we establish our legitimate right to be utterly ruthless with the one who simply will not allow us to be at peace with him. The fact that we did not choose the fight means that we are free to pursue victory in the most efficient possible manner. The choice rests with him; thus the responsibility for the consequences also rests with him. This affects technique selection, especially in the initial phases of training.
7. **Mercy Through Skill:** The *real* battle is against Satan and his demons, and the prize is the attacker's soul. Damaging his body more than necessary is pointless and counterproductive. Accordingly, we do not seek to avenge ourselves for the attack,<sup>44</sup> and we exercise mercy responsibly, where our skill level is sufficient to allow room for it, in order to preserve the attacker for future evangelism. As training continues, this principle has an increasing effect on technique selection.
8. **Duty to Prudent Preparation and Action:** By commanding the disciples to buy swords for their traveling gear—and even to sell their outer garments to raise the funds, if necessary—Jesus requires that his followers make prudent preparations for their own protection. By this same command, Jesus implicitly requires of His disciples that they take action to protect themselves. A believer who does not prepare to do this rebels against Christ's command.
9. **Protection of the Weak:** As it would be unchristian to permit the helpless to starve to death when we could feed them, it is also unchristian to permit the helpless to be victimized by violent criminals when we can defend them. Thus, as a sacred duty we protect those who cannot protect themselves.
10. **Complete Commitment to Excellence:** As Christians, we are to do whatever our hand finds to do with all our might; thus, we pursue excellence in our training.
11. **Regard for Authority:** The example of the martyrs teaches that defense of the body is not an absolute value; where the legally constituted authorities are persecuting us for our faith, we submit to their authority whether they are acting in accord with the law or not. Protest is permitted, as are escape and evasion, but there is no church-age precedent for active resistance.

### **The Principles in Practice: A Solo Reflex-Based Skill Maintenance Session**

Most practitioners do not have the luxury of a dedicated practice area, so Jack practices in his garage, with a partner when he can, alone when he must. Today he is alone. Usually he practices 3-5 minutes weekdays and about half an hour every Saturday, but this Saturday he is pinched for time, so only has 20 minutes before he has to go take Robert to

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<sup>44</sup> In other words, throwing in “one more shot, just to teach him a lesson” is not appropriate for a Christian.

soccer practice. *The baby of the family, and already playing soccer*, Jack thinks to himself. *Amazing*. After moving the minivan to clear a little space, Jack warms up briefly, then hangs up a 25-lb sack of rice stuffed into an old duffel bag from an eye-bolt screwed into a ceiling joist, using a rope to hang the bag at about neck height. Jack has his eye on a 70-lb heavy bag at Wal-Mart, but he doesn't have the money right now.

Before he begins training, Jack crosses the garage to the only unused space on the walls, between the kids' bikes and the pegboard over the workbench, where he has tacked the text of Psalms nine and ten on the wall. He reads through the Psalms and pauses a moment for prayer: *Lord God, thank You for giving me life and health, and thank you for Peggy and the kids. It's my job to protect them. You gave me that job, so please bless my training time so I'll be able to do it. Keep me from situations where I'll need to fight with people, but if I have to, please confuse them and defeat them and help me win.* With five minutes down and fifteen to go, Jack starts training. He begins by hitting the bag horizontally with his right elbow, rotating around his spine as fast as he can go. He falls into a steady rhythm: **whack**-two-three **whack**-two-three **whack**-two-three. Catching himself, he stops and consciously 'resets' after each shot. *It's not an aerobics class, Jack.* He also varies his starting distance and angle relative to the bag. *Change it up, Jack. Explore.* After a few minutes, he switches to the left elbow. A few minutes later, he switches to a right-left combination, trying to catch the bag with his left before it swings out of reach. *Twelve minutes down; eight minutes to go.*

Jack switches to the only other strike he knows, a short, chopping, forward blow with the edge of his hand and forearm called the "short ax." He's having trouble; when he lands the blow hard, he knocks himself off-balance. He slows himself down and examines the process carefully. After a few minutes, he figures out that he's leaning back slightly as he throws the blow. *Forward drive, Jack! Come on, buddy, you know better than that.* He throws it slowly, focusing on leaning forward, and with each repetition speeds up slightly. At about three-quarter speed, he catches himself starting to lean back again. He slows down slightly, does a few more correct repetitions, then returns to three-quarter speed. This time the problem does not reappear until almost full speed. Again, he slows down slightly and starts to work through the problem. After about ten more repetitions, he glances at the clock on the wall. *Seventeen minutes down; three minutes to go. One more thing to do.*

Jack stops, picks up a paper grocery bag full of last week's newspapers and holds it in his left hand. He positions himself so the punching bag is forty-five degrees to his right and about five feet away. After taking a few deep breaths, he closes his eyes. In his mind, he sees himself *leaving the grocery store and heading out into the poorly lit parking lot, little Robert running by his side to keep up, his hand-me-down shin guards flopping around his ankles. It's getting late; soccer practice ran over, and Peggy is coming down with a cold, so she asked him to pick up some groceries on the way home. As he approaches his minivan, he hears a scuffling noise behind him. Turning around, Jack sees two men headed for him, about 15 feet away. He yells, "STOP! BACK OFF!" They keep coming. Ten feet. The big one on the right chuckles and says to the other, "Get the kid, Joey." Seven feet. Jack launches the grocery bag toward the man on his*

*left, opens his eyes and explodes toward the punching bag on his right. In his mind, Jack sees the big man's eyes widen just before his right short ax smashes into his throat. Jack launches himself at the smaller man, landing a left short ax (poorly) across his ear as the fellow starts to duck and turn. He's hitting empty air, but Jack can see it like it's really happening. Frantically, he grabs the man's jacket and hauls him down and to the left. As the man starts to fall, Jack slams into the back of his neck with his right elbow. Jack spins around, sees the big man still standing, and drives back into him with a barrage of short ax strikes. The man falls; Jack spins back around and sees the smaller man is down. He stomps on the nearer opponent's ankle, scoops up Robert and runs for the safety of the store to call the police. Jack stops at the side door to the garage, his chest heaving, vibrating with adrenaline. Nineteen minutes down, one minute to go.*

He focuses on his breathing until he feels himself start to calm down. *Breathe in-two-three-four hold-two-three-four out-two-three-four hold-two-three-four...* When he feels his body starting to calm down, Jack prays: *Thanks, Lord, for a good practice. Please help me to work out that problem with my short ax. I don't want to knock myself on my butt if I have to hit someone for real.* He unhooks the duffel bag from the eye-bolt and puts it away, then pulls down the garage door. *Time to take Robert to soccer practice.*

## Conclusion

The ability to resist criminal violence is attainable for everyday people. Normal people do it every day with no training whatsoever; training allows greater effectiveness and efficiency. Since God holds believers responsible for the stewardship of their bodies, and commands us to be ready to defend ourselves, it behooves us to know what we are doing. Since this is a stewardship issue, no one can tell you what you ought to do; the matter is between you and the Lord. Everyone has different situations, different amounts of money and time available to dedicate to the endeavor, and different levels of physical ability. Nonetheless, the command exists; a believer must be ready to obey it.

That said, *stewardship* implies balance. Dropping everything to become an expert martial artist who can whip 100 ninjas bare-handed is not really called for. It might be a useful ability to have in some situations, but it won't save you from a grease fire in your kitchen, high carbon monoxide levels coming from your furnace, or a heart attack. Caring for your body *includes* protecting it from attack, and caring for your family *includes* protecting them from attack, but the picture is quite a bit broader than that. Do not become one of those people with a customized firearm hidden in every room of the house, but no fire extinguishers, no smoke/CO detectors, no deadbolt on the back door, and a gluttonous diet that's apt to kill you long before any criminal gets to you.

Once you have determined the reasonable expenditure of time and resources for you, given your means and situation, get to work! If you simply aren't able to invest in this area at this time, don't worry about it. You are responsible for good stewardship of the resources God gives you; He is responsible for the outcome. If you can invest some time and effort, do so, but consciously approach the issue as a Christian. Filter everything you learn carefully, "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

## Appendix A: Items for Further Study

### 1. Use of Force in a Lawless Environment: Factors to Consider

- i. Capital punishment must be carried out, but by whom? In other words, in a lawless environment, at what point does private individual X become responsible to God for executing private individual Y, whom he knows to have committed murder yesterday?
- ii. To what extent do other governmental functions (such as punishment of non-capital offenses) devolve upon the individual or family group in such an environment?
- iii. How does one define a lawless environment? *A de jure* dissolution of the government is probably too much to ask for, and mere impotence or lack of will by the government is probably too little provocation. One could say there must be a *de facto* abdication by the sitting government, but who decides, and on what basis?
- iv. Were Simeon and Levi morally wrong to respond as they did to the Dinah incident? (Note that Jacob's objection is pragmatic, not moral, but moral rectitude is not a theme Scripture emphasizes in the Jacob stories.)

### 2. Professional Use of Force

- i. Taxonomy
  1. Private, i.e. bouncers, bodyguards, private security personnel, etc.
  2. State-sponsored
    - a. vs. outside entities (other states, terrorists, etc.): war
    - b. vs. subject entities (persons, corporations): police
- ii. Ethics
  1. A Christian use-of-arms professional cannot just plan to approach the Bema with the excuse "I was just following orders." What are the moral constraints that should govern professional behavior?
  2. How are the constraints different in the different categories of the taxonomy, above?

### 3. Overall Theology of the Physical Body: The issue of self-defense is only a tiny part of the overall theology of the physical body. What does that theology look like?

## Appendix B: Resources

The unprecedented peace and openness of American culture has caused an incredible proliferation of information about self-protection. There are charlatans in the field, of course, but there always have been. The difference now is that if you do your research, you are less likely to be taken in. Below are a few resources that will give you a place to start. Approach them with care, and with your biblical worldview firmly and consciously in place.

1. **VanCook, Jerry. *Real World Self-Defense*. Boulder, CO: Paladin, 1999.** The single best introduction to the field in print, period. Overviews the entire package: attitude, legalities, fighting armed and bare-handed, motivation to train, finding a teacher, etc. If you're buying one book, buy this one.
2. **Fairbairn, William E. *Get Tough!* New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1942, reprinted Boulder, CO: Paladin, n.d.** Strictly about fighting. One of the early standouts in the field, and still one of the best, despite being somewhat police-oriented.
3. **Applegate, Rex. *Kill or Get Killed*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boulder, CO: Paladin, 1976.** A student of Fairbairn and others, and an expert in his own right, Applegate spent his life fulfilling "Wild Bill" Donovan's command to "learn everything there is to know about close combat, with and without weapons." This book is the fruit of his life's work.
4. **Hardy, Bo. *Defensive Living*. Pine Bluff, AR: Defensive Living, 1992.** A miscellany of tips, tricks, and tactics. Creative and thorough.
5. **Perkins, John, Al Ridenour and Matt Kovsky. *Attack Proof*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2000.** The best book of training drills (solo and partner) in print anywhere. Maps out a progression that begins with a reflex-based approach and transitions into a response-based approach.
6. **[www.gutterfighting.org](http://www.gutterfighting.org).** An outstanding online repository for simple, reflex-based approaches to self-defense. If you can't find or afford quality instruction or just prefer to work on your own, this is an outstanding source of information. Fair warning: long on opinionate folks, punctuated by foul language, and short on Christian charity.
7. **[www.rmax.tv](http://www.rmax.tv).** Coach Scott Sonnon's website. Good source of up-to-date conditioning information and materials for *anyone*, regardless of fitness level. Also an outstanding source of combative information and drills for a response-based approach. Particularly good for those with special physical considerations, since Coach Sonnon focuses on helping you uncover *your* natural way of moving rather than teaching you to move like *him*. A lot more civilized than the above website, but biblical worldview is not much in evidence here either.

If you have questions, feel free to contact me through the Chafer Theological Seminary office or directly by email at [tnichols@chafer.edu](mailto:tnichols@chafer.edu).