**Perspectives on Protection (Self-Defense)**

\*What follows is meant to *supplement* rather *supplant* what our Elders/Deacons are doing, and what Bro. Sorrells talked about after services this morning.

I don’t intend to “preach” to you tonight. I don’t really even intend “educate” or “edify” you. In fact, I’m not sure that what I am going to do could really be called a “sermon,” or perhaps even a “lesson.” Instead, I want to just *talk* to you; to perhaps provide some perspective(s) that might be helpful. We’re going to read several passages and allow you to think about them, to consider them, to ponder them, to meditate on them, and mostly, to hopefully provide some perspective on *protection* and *self-defense* for Christians. I believe that ultimately, each needs to be *“fully convinced in his own mind”* (Rom.14:5) regarding these things, and to try *“not to put a stumblingblock in a brother’s way”* concerning them (Rom.14:13). I only ask that you listen carefully, consider fully, and try to resist the urge to get ahead of me.

Heb.5:14 says that *mature* Christians, because of *practice,* have their *senses trained* to *discern* between what is *good* and what is *evil.* Doing so (*discerning* what is *good* and what is *evil*) certainly gets much easier with *time, practice, study,* and *maturity.* But knowing exactly *what to do* or *how to react* to *good* and *evil* is not always easy despite the ability to *discern* it. That’s part of the reason we have Elders- men of sound judgment, wisdom, and *discernment.*  So I would urge you to not only *respect* their judgment in these matters, but to *follow* it.

Events of the last few years- especially those in which evil-doers come into to churches where innocent people have peacefully assembled to worship their God and petition Him for peace and safety in this life and salvation in the next, have led us to become either confused or conflicted (or both!) about **how to feel** and **what to do** in such circumstances. This conflicted confusion comes, in part, from what we “perceive” from God’s Word (but as today’s bulletin article highlights, our *perspectives* and *perceptions* do not always align perfectly with *reality).* For instance, the Scripture teach us:

* To *“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,”* Matt.5:44;
* Not to *“resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to Him the other also,”* Matt.5:39;
* That we are, *“to the degree that we share the suffering of Christ, keep on rejoicing,”* and *“if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God,”* 1Pet.4:13,16; and,
* To *“never pay back evil for evil to anyone,”* to *“be at peace with all men,”* to “never take your own revenge,” to understand that *“vengeance belongs to the Lord,”* and not us; to *feed and give drink to our enemies*; and to not *“be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good,”* Rom.12:17-21.

These things may *seem to be,* at least for some,at odds with using deadly force to stop (or take the life of) someone who comes into our assembly to do us harm. After all, men like Stephen and Paul (or other *martyrs*) didn't *fight back* or *resist* their persecutors.

But we may need to also consider…

* The *sacredness of life* itself, Gen.9:5-6. While we may be tempted to retort that such is meant for *civil governing authorities* as in Rom.13:1-4, remember that when God spoke these words to Noah, there apparently were *no civil governing authorities-* just people and God’s word.
* God often *has* and *does* use *human agents/agencies* to carry out His will. For example, God *provides us with daily our daily bread,* but this does not mean it shows up *hot and ready on the table* without our *planting* and *tending seed, harvesting the grain,* and *preparing it,* cp. Matt.6:11 with 2Thess.3:10. The point? Just as God providing *rain* and *fruitful seasons* to *satisfy our hearts with food and gladness* does not remove us from being *active participants in the process,* so too His “protection” does not mean we should sit *idly by* and wait for Him to make an *evil-doers* efforts to harm come to naught.
* We have been *blessed by God* to live in a country whose laws not only *allow for* but also *provide for* our right to self-defense, and to defend the innocent. Remember that Paul *utilized the law of the land* for his own protection when such was available, cf. Acts 22:24-29; 25:11. Obviously, unless *man’s laws* contradict *God’s laws,* we are free to utilize *civil law* to its fullest extent. That is all that we are doing when we use *deadly force* to protect ourselves and the innocent.
* The thought of using *deadly force* to protect ourselves is surely repulsive to every right-thinking Christian. But there is a significant difference between *wanting to* and *being willing to* take the life of an evil-doer who seeks to harm the innocent. Consider carefully Ezk.33:11. God *“takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked”* and surely prefers that *“the wicked turn from his way and live.”* We should *feel* the same way! But, God has always been, despite *feeling* this way, *willing to take the life* of the wicked to protect the innocent (please review the list of *capital offences* with the Law of Moses, *e.g.*).
* If the thought of “weapons in the house prayer, peace, and worship” bother you- even if *only to protect the innocent,* consider Jesus’ words to His disciples in Luke 22:35-36. The *sword* which the disciples were told *“sell his robe and buy one”* in this passage was *“the sword of the Spirit”* in Eph.6:17, nor was it to be used as an *offensive weapon,* but rather as a means of *self-defense.*

“But what about…

* Luke 12:4?” In context, Jesus is urging His disciples *“not to fear”* those who can *“kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do”* but rather to *fear God,* who, *“after He has killed has the authority to cast into hell,”* cf. vv.1-5. Perspective is being taught, not a lesson on the propriety of self-defense.
* Matt.5:39?” Personal *vengeance/revenge* is prohibited by Rom.12:19, but such is not the same thing as self-defense or protecting the innocent. Note carefully what Jesus actually says in Matt.5:39, *“whoever slaps you on your right cheek…”* and understand that *a slap* is an *insult* rather than an attempt to do real *bodily harm.* Thus, *an insult* is not really comparable to someone *attempting to kill you* or *others.*
* Matt.5:44?” We are, without doubt, to *“love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute”* us.But, does such mean that we are to allow them harm us or others unchecked? God allowed Solomon to have Joab killed *“in the tent of the Lord”* to *“return blood on his own head,”* cf. 1Kings 2:28-34.
* 1Pet.4:13,16? Aren’t we supposed to be willing to *suffer* and even *be persecuted as a Christian?”* Absolutely, we are *when* that suffering and persecution is truly *for Christ* and *for being Christians.* But is a mentally-deranged person, or one who simply wants to be famous through the taking of *unarmed* and innocent lives attempting to persecute Christians, or just wanting kill? Remember Gen.9:5-6.

**Conclusions**

* **We live in difficult, evil times. The answers for *how* to do so are not always easy.**
* **We are called to *“be at peace with all men,”* but it is qualified with *“if possible”* and *“as far as it depends on you,”* Rom.12:18.**
* **As much as we may *love* and *pray for* our *enemies* and those who seek to *persecute* us, must we allow them to harm or even kill the innocent in so doing? For whatever such may be worth, I think not.**
* **However, even if (may God certainly forbid such!) it becomes necessary to take the life of an evil-doer to save the lives of the innocent, we should not *gloat* or *glory* in it. Sometimes, God requires the righteous to do what is repugnant, cf. Ex.32:26-28.**