

# Buying a sword?

Then He said to them, 'But now, he who has a money bag, let him take *it*, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one'. **Lk 22:36**

## Introduction

There are many Biblical expositors and preachers, including some good men, who claim that Christians can not only use violence to defend themselves and their family but can kill attackers. This is particularly prevalent in America which is a nation birthed in rebellion and armed militias, and where the Second Amendment is so controversial.

Thus you commonly find Christian preachers telling their flock to go and buy a handgun and an assault rifle. The Second Amendment was indeed written in order to maintain the ability of Americans to form armed militias to defend the Constitution; not against an aggressive foreign power but against an overreaching federal government. When the US government has become so draconian and antagonistic against its own people, as it has today, no wonder that gun rights are so uppermost in the minds of Constitutional Americans.

Now it is not my place here to discuss American politics, but Scripture. My problem is that Luke 22:36 has been hijacked in this debate and is used as proof that Christians should be armed and commit violence when necessary.

Is this good exegesis?

In summary, the questions are:

- Does Luke 22:36 support using violence in self-defence?
- Does Luke 22:36 support buying pistols and assault rifles (such as an AR-15) to be used in self-defence (owning guns for pleasure, hunting or sport is not in view here)?
- Does Luke 22:36 support killing another person if it is in self-defence?

## The prime law

You shall not murder. **Exod 20:13**

This is one of the Ten Commandments that is understood by everyone and applied in the national laws of most nations.

What sins are involved in murder? Very many. They include:

- Disobedience to God's revealed law.
- Dishonour of God who owns the human soul he created and alone has the right to destroy the body.
- Stealing from and depriving the family of the victim of their loved one. This involves inflicting pain upon innocent people that lasts for a lifetime. Thus there are multiple sins created by the one act of murder.

- Stealing a life from the victim.
- The ground cries out for the blood spilt on it.<sup>1</sup> The natural order demands vengeance and justice. Murder is one of the sins that cry to heaven.

Murder is such a serious sin that the effects of it cannot be fully analysed. It is the height of wickedness and the first sin noted after the Fall. If people could see the seriousness of this terrible wickedness, they would be less prone to kill.

So, the Old Testament establishes that there is no excuse for deliberate (pre-meditated and through anger) killing (accidental manslaughter is different). Killing in self-defence is deliberate killing. Killing in war is deliberate killing. Thus there can be no apologetic for killing in self-defence or in warfare.

Therefore, while nations may make a case for a just war, Christians cannot be part of any war since that would involve deliberate killing. I know that many church leaders have made a case for a just war (such as Samuel Rutherford in *Lex Rex*)<sup>2</sup> but I believe that such a conclusion is false.

## Jesus' universal teaching

Whatever our interpretation of Luke 22:36, it has to comply with the teaching of Jesus in general. Does Jesus support any form of violence to other people?

The answer is clearly, 'No, not at all'.

### The teaching of Jesus on violence

Far from Jesus giving any sanction to violence, he actively spoke against any kind of violence and the necessity of long-suffering under extreme provocation.

I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. **Matt 5:39**<sup>3</sup>

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. **Matt 5:44**

I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. **Lk 6:27-29**

There is no possible way to develop a Christian apologetic for any kind of violence (including self-defence) in the light of such passages.

When Jesus said, 'I tell you not to resist an evil person' that is a command that is simple to understand.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 4:9-11, "Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.'

<sup>2</sup> 'Lex Rex: or The Law and the Prince; a dispute for the just prerogatives of king and people.' His arguments deal more with politics than theology.

<sup>3</sup> The idea of some Puritans that this meant turning to the side in order to draw your sword and fight in self-defence is too ludicrous to bother contending with. Jesus says not to resist an evil person.

### **The example Jesus set**

Jesus was in front of many antagonistic people at the end, including soldiers that attacked him directly. At no point did he react to this and certainly not with violence.

In front of his accusers and the rulers that he faced he was like a lamb led to the slaughter. He did not fight for his own life but calmly trusted in God.

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away. **Acts 8:32-33** (quoting Isa 53:7ff.)

When He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously. **1 Pt 2:23**

Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'. **Lk 23:34**

## **The teaching of the NT in general**

Does apostolic doctrine support the claim that Christians can use violence in self-defence?

It does not.

### **Blessing enemies**

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **Rm 12:14**

'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head'. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. **Rm 12:20-21**

Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. **1 Pt 3:9**

### **Warfare is spiritual**

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. **Eph 6:12**

Surely this needs little comment?

We do not fight physically because we are called to strive spiritually; our warfare is spiritual and not material. Regarding human persecution, we suffer; just as all historic saints were called to suffer and be martyred. But regarding spiritual oppression we fight with heavenly instruments, such as prayer, the declaration of Scripture and faith.

It must be emphasised: our warfare is not material but spiritual.

### **Longsuffering under persecution**

You had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. **Heb 10:34**

## Apostolic examples

Do the apostles give any model whatsoever to support violence against opposers?

No they do not; not one. Instead they reveal that they faced persecution with patience and submission.

To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure. **1 Cor 4:11-12**

And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'. Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin'. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. **Acts 7:59-60**

## Interpretation of Luke 22:36

Then He said to them, 'But now, he who has a money bag, let him take *it*, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one'.

### Exegetical point

A minor point (exaggerated by some) is that the NKJV translation is correct but the original word order is different. A literal translation of the Greek would be, 'Then said he to them, "But, now, he who is having a bag, let him take {it} up, and in like manner also a scrip;<sup>4</sup> and he who is not having, let him sell his garment, and buy a sword"<sup>5</sup> Another, 'And he said unto them, "But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet; and he that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword"<sup>6</sup>.

The NKJV simply moved the word 'sword' to make the verse more readable in English.

### Interpretation

Jesus' chief point in Luke 22:36 is to tell the disciples to prepare for the future as itinerant Gospel preachers that would often be on long arduous journeys. It is about prepping.

*Machaira* is mainly used as a description of a long knife used in killing and preparing animals, e.g. for food or fur. It does not always mean a sword used by soldiers, although it can refer to a short sword or a dagger. The sword used by Greek hoplites<sup>7</sup> in warfare was not a *machaira* but a *rhomphaia*.

Unlike the earlier sending out of the 70 disciples, who lived by faith and were sent to towns and villages, this commission was for the long-term future and would involve long-distance travel, even to foreign countries. This would necessitate travelling through rural and even wilderness areas where there were no provisions. Thus Jesus tells his disciples to prepare for this work by taking a wallet with money, a rucksack for basic needs and a large knife.

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<sup>4</sup> A leathern sack, equivalent to our rucksack or satchel.

<sup>5</sup> Young's Literal Version.

<sup>6</sup> ASV.

<sup>7</sup> A hoplite was a heavily armed, ancient Greek, foot-soldier; much like the later Roman legionnaire, who was modelled on a hoplite.

Now any modern prepper will tell you that the basic tool one needs for bushcraft camping is a good quality knife. It is vital for a multitude of tasks: killing animals for food, skinning animals, preparing the food for cooking, cutting firewood, cutting cordage, preparing a shelter, defence against wild animals, and so on.

Jesus is giving the disciple sensible advice about what to take on long journeys where you do not know what is in store. Such a knife would not be necessary if you were living in towns and villages.

### **What about defence?**

This is not explicitly mentioned. However, I will say this. There were many brigands and robbers outside of Roman protection in wilderness areas. Outside of the Roman Empire the situation was much worse. In this situation a person with a long knife can threaten would be robbers and drive them away without actually hurting anyone. No robber is going to attack an armed man when there is danger of injury. Even two or three robbers would think twice. So, having a long dagger may have been useful for this purpose but Jesus does not mention it. Even so there is no sanction for actually hurting someone.

### **What about Rm 13:4**

Preachers often point out that the same word used for sword in Lk 22:36 is that used in Rm 13:4, *machaira*. They then imply that this must mean a sword used in capital punishment executions. Let us examine this.

For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil.

Rm 13:4

The magistrate,<sup>8</sup> or any state ruler, wears a sword. In fact, even Caesar wore a *machaira* on his belt.

The point Paul is making is not literal but figurative. Just as Caesar wore a dagger as a politician, so also the ruler wears a dagger to symbolise being a judge and punisher. The dagger is not for actual use but to symbolise having the power of life and death.

But did rulers execute people? Yes they did but not with a dagger; neither did they do this themselves. The executioner would have used either an axe or a *rhomphaia* to behead criminals.

Thus the fact that Paul used *machaira* here is neither here nor there.

### **But people are killed with a *machaira***

This is true and such occurs in the NT such as,

He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Rev 13:10

A dagger will kill a person just as much as a long sword. Usually killing with a dagger speaks of creeping up on someone and assassinating them.

In the same way, many people have been killed with a kitchen knife, which is a large bladed knife. So what? This means nothing regarding Lk 22:36.

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<sup>8</sup> The word used in Rm 13:3 is *archon*. This means ruler, commander, chief or leader. 'Rulers' is therefore a decent translation. Reformers and Puritans commonly used the word 'magistrate'.

## Conclusion

There is no justification for attacking someone with a sword, or killing someone, from Lk 22:36. The fact that the same word for 'sword' is used in Rm 13:4 is irrelevant.

In fact, it would have been much better if the translators had used 'dagger' for *machaira* and sword for *rhomphaia* to demonstrate the difference between them.

Jesus is commanding that his disciples prepare for a life on the road. This means getting a wallet and using money, getting a backpack and preparing for travel and getting a good quality knife for various uses on the road.

Jesus was not commanding disciples to buy swords but a decent knife.

There is no sanction for killing people with a dagger or a gun.

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