

# CHRISTIANS AND THE USE OF ARMS IN SELF –DEFENSE: AN APPRAISAL OF LUKE

22:36

Izunna Chijioke Eze\*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The pertinent question in the minds of Christians who find themselves in violently ravaged regions is, “What is the Bible’s stance against violence? Can Christians fight back when illegally mistreated by fellow countrymen in the name of religion, or should believers in Christ continue to be onlookers when their family members are being killed and their properties destroyed? This paper tends to look at the biblical response to self-defence against violent attacks on Christianity and argues whether Christians should take up arms against the invaders and stop them from harming the church or exterminating Christianity, or should they not take arms? The methodology used is a historical-critical and exegetical approach in Luke 22:36. The writer also employs this tool to unravel the mystery behind the text. We find that aside from church leaders and national leaders, those in the academic circle are also divided on the matter of self-defence as Christians respond to violence by Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists. Some scholars oppose the idea with vicious resistance, while others believe we have a God-given right to self-defence against harm and have not only the responsibility of defending others from harm but are accountable to God for their defence and protection. The writer thus submits that Christians should be guided by the Holy Spirit before they act in self-defence when they are faced with a violent attack by the enemy of their faith.*

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**Keywords:** *Christian, Arms, Self-Defense, Appraisal.*

<sup>1\*</sup> Rector, Ezekiel College of Theology (Affiliated to Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo), Ujoelen, Ekpoma, Edo State. \* Correspondent Author: [revizunna2003@yahoo.com](mailto:revizunna2003@yahoo.com)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The world is currently witnessing an unprecedented increase in the level of violence against Church, Christianity, and Christians. It is no doubt a serious matter of concern in Nigeria as the violence has evolved from the use of machetes and clubs to the use of automatic guns AK47, Grenade, small arms, and bombs. Church leaders in Nigeria are harshly disunited over how to react to this surge in violent attacks against Christians and churches in the country especially in the entire Northern region where Muslims are in the majority. Christians in the Northern region of Nigeria are in a dilemma not knowing what to do or how to respond to the attack from these extremists who are unleashing terror on them every day (Olagunju, 2021). Sometimes ago, hundreds of Christians were killed, and churches burnt in a coordinated attack by the Muslim extremists and Fulani herdsmen in Jos, Adamawa, Gombe and other states in the Middle Belt and the North East and Central region.

The Boko Haram terrorists and Bandits in Southern

Kaduna, Katsina and Sokoto are making insecurity in the country a challenge to the security agencies like the military, para-military and police. Recently in Niger States some bandits unleashed terror on innocent citizens and the security personnel killing scores of them. These continuous attacks have exterminated churches in the terror ravages community especially in states aforementioned above. Hardly can one find any church standing in this particular area because most of the churches are either burnt or destroyed. This incidence has thrown the Christian community into thinking of what to do. Should they also take up arms and fight or just be watching and allow the enemy of their faith to annihilate them from their father's land or do nothing or folds their arms for heaven's sake? While some continue to advocate for eye for an eye, others are telling Christians to turn the other cheek and be calm and pray. But now the paradigm has shifted from turning the other cheek to urging Christians to defend themselves if not, the church will be annihilated and allow history to repeat itself of what happened during the medieval period when all the churches in North Africa were overran by the Muslims vandals.

In 2011 CAN national president Ayo Oristejafor stated that Christians can no longer continue to watch while aggressors attack them. “I have a responsibility to defend myself and my family,” he said. “Christians in the nation have suffered enough.” John Praise, General Overseer of Dominion Chapel International Church in Abuja, has called for churches to raise “young people to defend the church because nobody has the monopoly of violence”. In contrast, Bishop Wale Oke, national vice president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria’s South West region, argues that Christians must resist such temptation to fight for themselves, “we must depend on God to fight our battles” he said for our weapon of war is not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds casting all imagination and making people to come to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:3-5 NIV) A historical-critical and exegetical approach would help to examine Luke 22:36 to provide the much needed scriptural understating of the issue of use of arms in self-defense by Christian.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Christian:** According to *Wikipedia*, “The term "Christian" used as an adjective is descriptive of anything associated with Christianity or Christian

churches, or in a proverbial sense "all that is noble, and good, and Christ-like. It does not have a meaning of 'of Christ' or 'related or pertaining to Christ'. *Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines it as "one who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ" A Christian is someone who believes in Jesus Christ and follows his teachings. As a Christian, someone who has put faith and trust in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ through His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection. One whose behavior mirrors, reflects and resembles Christ. Being gracious and merciful to others is behaving like Christ. Forgiving, loving and praying for our enemies is Christ-like. Striving for justice resembles Jesus. But it's not simply good works that make someone a Christian. Being a follower and disciple of Jesus extends beyond our outward behavior. It includes the condition of our heart.

**Arms:** This refers to weapons which soldiers use to fight the enemy. It is usually used along with ammunition when wars and counter wars take place. It can also be light weapons referred to as firearms, especially those requiring explosives for self-defense or

defense of territorial integrity (Benson,2020; Benson,2021; Benson & Williams, 2023). Self-defense and defense of territorial integrity always involve the use of arms and ammunition to prevent the enemies from achieving their dastardly acts i.e. killing or maiming their targets for selfish reasons. In recent times Boko Haram used explosives more than physical weapons which could claim a number of people at once (Igbari, 2016).

Arms can be carried by hand or carried by armoured tanks for defensive measures. Light machine guns, rifles, revolvers also belong to a class of fire arms used to defend self or a group of people (Enemugwem & Sara, 2009). The use of arms is employed to express active rebellion, protesting strongly against an enemy attack or aggression. In another perspective, arms can also be spiritual in the context of Pauline view of Christian warfare in his letter to the Ephesians Chapter 6:11. In his text, Paul encouraged Christians in Ephesus to be prepared for self –defense against principalities and powers of the world, which could wage war against the body and destroy the soul. He used the word “Armour of God”, which to him could be more effective than physical arms, especially from the kingdom of the

devil. In summary, arms are physical and spiritual weapons used to defend self or a group against the attack of the enemy (Igbari, 2016).

**Self – Defense:** Self-defense is a counter-measure that involves defending oneself, one's property, or the well-being of another from harm ([www.dictionary.reference.com](http://www.dictionary.reference.com)). The use of the right of self-defense as a legal justification for the use of force in times of danger is available in many jurisdictions, but the interpretation varies widely (Udo, 2008; Udo 2018). Physical self-defense is the use of physical force to counter an immediate threat of violence. Such force can be either armed or unarmed. In either case, the chances of success depend on a large number of parameters, related to the severity of the threat on one hand, but also on the mental and physical preparedness of the defender (Udo, 2022). The self-defense laws of modern legislation have their foundation on the Roman law principle of dominion where any attack on the members of the family or the property it owned was a personal attack on the '*pater familias*'. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes argues that although some may be stronger or more intelligent than others in their natural state, none

are so strong as to be beyond a fear of violent death, which justifies self-defense as the highest necessity. *Dictionary.com* defines “self-defense as the use of reasonable force (as compared with the attacker’s force) in protection of one’s person, family, property, or anyone else against attempted or threatened attack. Legal doctrine of self-defense justifies as preemptive action taken in the reasonable belief of immediate danger, without making any retreat, and may (specially in case of provocation) condone killing of the perpetrator of a murderous attack” ([www.businessdictionary.com](http://www.businessdictionary.com)).

**Appraisal:** *Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines appraisal as “the act of judging the value, condition, or importance of something: the act of appraising something”. It also defines it as “**something** that states an opinion about the value, condition, or importance of something”.

**Exegesis of Luke 22:36** “He said to them, “But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one” (RSV).

**Historical Context:** The historical context of Luke 22:36 demonstrates that for three years Jesus avoided making a public, triumphal entry of his visits to Jerusalem because he understood that when he set foot



in the holy city in this way, he would fulfill his mission to die, in a death that looked like one of a common criminal, just as Isaiah the prophet had predicted hundreds of years before (Is. 53:12). He needed to complete his work outside of Jerusalem.

Now, however, Jesus finally enters the city famous for killing her prophets (Luke 13:33-34), a few days before his arrest, trial and crucifixion, all of which he predicted. Religious leaders were spying on him and asked him trick questions, so they could incriminate him (Luke 20:20). These insincere questions, though they were also asked before he entered the city, increased in frequency during these compacted tense days. But he answered impressively, avoiding their traps. Despite the tension, each day Jesus taught in the temple, and crowds gathered around him, so the authorities could not arrest him, for fear of the people (Udo & Udoh, 2023). Then Judas volunteered to betray him, saying that he would report back to the authorities when no crowd was present (Luke 22:1-6).

As Passover drew near, Jesus asked some of his disciples to prepare the Last Supper (most likely the Seder). He elevated the bread and the wine, representing his body and blood, which was broken and shed for the sins of the world in the New Covenant (Luke 22:17-20). However, during the meal, Judas slipped out to search for the authorities because he knew that it was

the custom of Jesus to go to the Mount of Olives to pray (Luke 21:37), and that night would be no different. At this point we pick up the textual context of Luke 22:36 (bold print). He is eating the Last Supper on the night he was betrayed.

Luke 22:35-38 says:

35 [Jesus] asked them [the eleven apostles], "When I sent you out without a purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"

They said, "No, not a thing."

36 He said to them, "But now the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.

37 For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled."

38 They [the disciples] said, "See, Lord, here are two swords. "It is enough," he replied. (NRSV)

The **textual context** reveals at least two truths. First, Jesus contrasts his ministry before his arrival in Jerusalem with the tense few days in Jerusalem when spies and the authorities themselves were seeking to

trap him. Does the tension play a part in understanding why he told his disciples to go out and buy swords? This is answered, below. Second, he says that he would be arrested and tried as a criminal, as the prophecy in Is. 53:12 predicted. Does this have anything to do with swords? Do criminals carry them around? This too is explained, below. Jesus may have a deeper meaning in mind than the violent use of the swords. What is it?

The interpretation of the verses can follow either a strictly physical direction in which swords must be used, or a nonphysical one in which swords must not be used, during Jesus' last hours. The surest and clearest direction is the non-literal one, but first we analyze why the literal one will not fit into Luke 22:34-38 and into the passage about the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-53).

The Bible passage at hand has caused confusion to many Bible readers. From the first look it seems that Jesus, the Prince of peace (Isa 9:6), is commanding His disciples to buy swords. However, there are different understandings of this passage, which can be categorized into two sects: figurative and literal interpretation.

## **CHRISTIAN NONRESISTANCE: THE MEANING OF LUKE 22:35-38**

Now, that one knows the context of the passage,

the pericope's interpretations can be explored. As it was stated, Luke 22:35-38 has caused confusion among many Christians. How should one understand Jesus' words? Perhaps there exists many kinds of interpretations, but some commentator's/commentary's explanations will be presented here. They can be separated into two camps: figurative and literal understandings of the text.

As Ville Suutarinen (2017) observed;

Ronald Knox, who was a Catholic Priest, said that Jesus' words were probably "an ironical utterance" (Knox, 1954: 189). Marshall (1978), Reader in New Testament Exegesis in University of Aberdeen, agreed with Knox (p. 823). David Gooding, Professor of Old Testament Greek in Queen's University, Belfast, stated that the need for a sword was "a metaphorical reference" (Gooding, 1987: 334). Leon Morris, Ph.D. and the Principal in Ridley College, Melbourne, stated that the uttering was a figurative speech (Morris, 1974). As a more recent example John MacArthur, the President of The Masters' University, stated that Jesus' words were "figurative" (MacArthur, 2014, p. 324).

On the other hand, Barnes (1868) argued that Jesus was referring to the future, when the disciples would sometimes need to carry weapons and defend themselves, because of the dangerous times. Lenski (1946), a professor at Capital University, Ohio, agreed with Barnes (p. 1068). A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica (1979) states that Jesus urged disciples to buy swords against the common enemy, not to quarrel among themselves (p. 205). In turn, Michael D. Goulder, Professor in the School of Continuing Studies at the University of Birmingham, wrote that Jesus' words were literal (Goulder, 1994). As current example, not a commentary per se, of an interpretation that believes that Jesus meant real weapons, comes from a respected scholar, and a past president of the Evangelical Theological Society, Wayne Grudem (Grudem, 2010).

In addition to the grouping of figurative and literal understandings, the interpretations can be divided into three groups, as well:

(1) those which believe that the Bible is its own interpreter, and Luke was consistent in his writings;

(2) those which believe that the Bible is its own interpreter, and Luke was consistent in his writings, but Jesus gave a licence to use sword when necessary; and

(3) those which believe that the Bible is not its own interpreter, and Luke was not consistent in his writings,

and he was not a reliable author.

This paper argues that the interpretations 2 and 3 are inconsistent, unbiblical, and illogical.

**Luke's Consistency.** Four examples of scholars, who think that Luke's work is carefully made, are mentioned here. Carson and Moo (2009:218) says that according to narrative analysis of Luke's gospel, when comparing it to other similar works of literature from the ancient world, it "must be interpreted as a careful and well-thought out literary production". Cosaert (1999:311) writes that Green sees in his commentary on Luke, "a narrative unity in Luke-Acts with the single purpose of bringing 'salvation in all of its fullness to all people'". Kistemaker (1982:35) says that "the Lucan account is the most comprehensive" of the gospels, and that "Luke composed his gospel with care, precision and design," because it is "evident already from the introduction (1:1-4)" (p. 34). These studied people think that Luke's gospel is consistent. It is trustworthy, as well?

**Luke's Integrity:** Firstly, the message of the gospel, which includes disciples' mistakes, honesty-demanding repentance, and the teaching about the goodness-pierced kingdom of God, is a strong proof for the integrity of the Lucan composition, and the whole Bible. Secondly, Luke's gospel is valued as accurate in "detail of

Roman provincial government, first-century geographic boundaries, social and religious customs, navigational procedures, and the like,” by scholars like William Ramsay, A. N. Sherwin-White and Colin Hemer (Carson & Moo, 2009:318). Now, that one knows the general consistency and integrity of Luke’s gospel, one can proceed into the closer exegetical discussion about Luke 22:35-38.

Firstly, there is the possibility that Jesus used figurative speech. Figures of speech are a legitimate literary genre in hermeneutics (Ramm, 1970:143). Either Jesus’ words to go buy swords were a totally new command, not in harmony with His other teachings or He meant something else, and used a figure of speech. In defining that whether the pericope, or Jesus’ precise words, are figurative or literal, one must explore three questions. Firstly, did Jesus use figures of speech in other places of the gospels? Secondly, what is the content of Jesus’ words? Thirdly, what does other parts of the Bible teach about that content?

**Metaphors of Jesus:** One could argue, that the words of Jesus in the passage are not figurative, because his saying is not a parable per se. However, Jesus used figurative speeches or figurative acts, mixed with “normal speech”, in other circumstances, as well.

First of all, another text where Jesus mentioned a sword (Matthew 10:34), is figurative, as well. In this

passage, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword!” “The context makes it clear that Christ was calling for spiritual division” (Clouse, 1981: 53). Additionally, the parallel passage in Luke speaks of “division” instead of “sword” (Luke 12:51). In Luke 14:26 Jesus said that if one is not ready to hate his or her father and mother is not suitable for the Kingdom of God. Obviously, this was a figure of speech, talking about a situation when one would have to choose between Jesus and one’s parents because of the division that was mentioned from Luke 12:51, since Jesus taught to honour one’s parents, as well (Mark 7:10).

Another similar metaphor by Jesus appears in Luke 9:60 (and in Matthew 8:22), where Jesus says, “Let the dead bury their dead,” talking about spiritually dead and literally dead in a same sentence. Additionally, Jesus said that He would raise the destroyed temple, meaning His body, in three days (John 2:19); He cursed the fig tree as a figurative act (Mark 11:12-24); and Jesus said that “it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:25). In fact, even the Last supper was a kind of figurative (symbolic) act from Jesus, which makes it possible for Him to speak those other figurative words about the swords, as well. Kaiser Jr., Davids, Bruce and Brauch (1996:486) do not believe in the



literal interpretation of Luke 22's "swords", and state that "it is widely held that this saying was not meant to be taken literally".

**The Content of Jesus' Words:** Another point that leads into the direction that Jesus' words are figurative, is the content of His speech. This paper argues that by referring to buy swords, Jesus pointed to another group of people, not to the disciples; and additionally to the current time of the passage, Jesus pointed to the future circumstances of the church.

**Two Groups of People.** Jesus' teaching about the end times is talking about two different classes of people, those who are persecuted and saved, and those who are persecuting and not saved. The argument that Jesus is talking about the disciples at first in Luke 22:35, and then discusses about a different group of people in 22:36, needs evidence. Firstly, When Jesus said to His disciples that they did not lack anything (Luke 22:35), He was referring to the situation when He sent His disciples to their mission (Matt 10:9-10). With the interrogative  $\mu\eta$ , Jesus presents a rhetorical question (Lenski, 1946). This means that Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that when he sent them to their mission, they really did not lack anything. They were safe even among the devil-possessed people; by Jesus' name, the disciples could cast out devils. The disciples

did not need weapons to fight the evil. Everything went smoothly, and the Kingdom of God seemed to come, and did come, to the midst of humanity through Jesus.

Secondly, in verse 36, Jesus did not use the personal pronoun “you”, but “he”, which means that Jesus was referring to only some or one of the disciples or to some or someone else from some other group than the disciples. The immediate context of the passage is the situation when Judas had just left, after making his decision to betray Jesus (John 13:2, 18-31; Luke 22:21-23; Mark 14:18-21; Matt 26:21-25). In other words, Jesus was referring to Judas. When Jesus taught His disciples, He was using Judas as an example of people who wanted and want worldly honor and glory. He that has a purse, is obviously the one who has the financial and economic power; he who has the bag, has possessions and the ability to do business, since Judas had the “bag” of money (John 12:6; 13:29). “Bag” (Hebr. סֵכַּ and חֶרֶץ; Greek γλωσσόκομον) in the Bible is associated with gold (Isa 46:6), money (Prov 7:20), wages (Hagg 1:6) or weights to balance goods (Deut 25:13; Micah 6:11; Prov 16:11). Finally, “sword” (Hebr. בַּרֶּחַ) represents battle and military power (Isa 2:4; 22:2; Jer 5:17; Lev 26:6; Ps 76:3), and persecution (Dan 11:33). However, Jesus was referring to another group of people than the disciples.

The disciples did not have economical and military power. It would have been absurd from Jesus to think that the small group of disciples could have gathered army large enough to match against the authorities of Rome (Okide, 2020; Okide, 2021a). This is why Jesus, in Luke 22:38, did not mean that the two swords were enough for defending Him, but He meant that “enough of this kind of talk!” (Morris, 1974: 310). While referring to four scholars, Marshall (1978:827) comes to a conclusion that Jesus said, “That’s enough!” as a rebuke. Then, why did Jesus use the word “now,” like He would have talked about the same group of people? Jesus is emphasizing the circumstances. “But now,” as Jesus begins the verse 36 (KJV), the situation from before would change; earlier the Kingdom of God was making victories as the disciples were evangelizing, healing the sick, and casting out demons successfully (Matt 10:1-15). Now hostility and persecution would face Jesus and His followers. Jesus’ words in Luke 22:36 can be applied to future; in fact, because those words are prophetic, they can be applied to farther future than just the rest of the history of the nation of Israel during the first century after the birth of Christ.

**A Prophecy:** As it was mentioned above, the Greek text points to the direction that in Luke 22:36 Jesus used indicative future active 3rd person singular, which

means that He was prophesying. This is in harmony with the “last events” speech (Matt 24) and the “sending of the disciples” speech (Matt 10) by Jesus. When looking at the context from the perspective of all the gospels, it is prominent that all the synoptic gospels set the Last supper and the “two swords” speech right after the speech about the final events of the world (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Ville Suutarinen (2017) , says; “It is true that Carson and Moo (2009) position the pericope into the next section from “the final events” speech, but in the time line of Jesus’ life, the time between these two talks is only one or two days (Matt 26:2, 17). This means that Jesus had the theme of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God in the New covenant, as well as the persecution of saints until the end of time, in mind all the time when He was in Jerusalem, the capital of the earthly Kingdom of God during the Old Covenant. This New Covenant would continue after the time of the apostles, as Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 (cf. Acts 20:29-30; John 17:20).

Luke 22:36 prophecy fits into history. Firstly, Jesus was saying that the disciples lacked nothing, which means that they did not lack garments, as well. Secondly, Jesus mentioned that the other group of people first had garments, but they sold them to buy swords. It is interesting that “garment” in the Bible

symbolizes righteousness (Isa 64:6; Luke 8:44; Matt. 5:27; Rev. 7:14; 19:8). Disciples had their garments from Jesus, which means righteousness by faith. However, this other group in the far future would abandon righteousness by faith, or it would sell their garments of their own righteousness for people (because “selling” can mean teaching, declaring or advancing religious beliefs (Stefanovic, 2009:436), which would lead for gaining masses of people to be this group’s supportive substitutes in political and militaristic matters. So far this paper has argued that Jesus’ words were not literal but figurative, and that Jesus did not mean His disciples, when He said that some would buy swords. Even though Kittel (1965:295) stated that Jesus’ words, “That’s enough!” in verse 38, are not “very clear in the context,” one can conclude that they have become more clear because of the study of the overall context from other gospels. Obviously, Jesus meant, “Enough of that kind of talk”. This will become even clearer as the study continues to discover whether Jesus’ overall teaching was directing towards use of arms for self-defense. Now we come to the question, is it legitimate for a Christian to kill in some circumstances?

**To Kill or Not to Kill:** Manson is right, when he is saying that Luke 22:35-38 “has nothing to say directly on the question whether armed resistance to injustice and evil is ever justifiable” (as cited in Kaiser Jr. et. al., 1996, p. 487). However, interpretation of a Bible text does not rely on one passage. Firstly, Jesus said many other quotes about peace and violence. Secondly, Sola Scriptura and Tota Scriptura principles do not build alone on Jesus’ life and His teachings (while He was on earth as a human being), but to all the Scriptures’ teaching, because the whole Bible is Jesus’, God’s, Word, as He spoke through all the prophets and the apostles (1 Cor 10:4; John 15:26).

The Bible reveals an important hermeneutical tool itself. In the question of violence’s legitimacy in Christian’s life, which will be concentrated on in this section, the meaning of covenants becomes prominent. This meaning is closely tied to the issue of war, because if there is no difference between the Old and the New Covenants, then the Old Covenant’s laws are still binding, and, indeed, it is legitimate for a Christian to make war against other nations, cultures, or people groups.

**God's Use of Sword:** The New Testament uses two different words for “sword”: μάχαιρα and ρομφαία (a larger, two edged, sword). μάχαιρα is used in Luke 22:36 and 38. In addition to literal meaning of the word, or “sword’s” symbolic meaning of war and strife, both of these Greek words for “sword” are used as a symbol of God’s word (Eph 6:17; Luke 2:35). This means that the context of the word in the Bible defines the meaning of the word. Only God has the authority to use literal sword, and to execute lethal judgment. It is prominent that the only verses in the New Testament where the word “sword” is used, which are related to lethal execution, are the descriptions of the final judgment in the end of the world, where God will use physical force in the execution of the judgment to the wicked (Rev 19:15, 21). Additionally, Jesus said that only God will execute this act according to His judgment (Matt. 13:24-30), which, even though it is a just action because the wicked do not want to be saved, and they would continue their immoral rebellion even after understanding God’s love and salvation.

When people tried to cast Jesus over a cliff (Luke 4:28-30), Jesus did not do any physical self-defense, or the Bible does not say that He used any violence.

Because the New Testament teaches nonresistance, it becomes clear that Jesus just walked through the crowd, without hurting anyone.

**Jesus, the Prince of Peace:** Isa 42:2 gives a prophecy about the Messiah, stating, “He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street” (NKJV; cf. Mat 12:19-20). This means that “Jesus was not the harsh militaristic king many Jews were looking for to lead them in battle against Rome. Instead, he was gentle and compassionate” It is true that one can be militaristic leader and, still, be gentle and compassionate towards some people, and during some times (not all the time, because according to the Bible, human beings are sinful and corrupt from the inside [Jer 17:9; Ps 51:5]). But, the verse that Matthew is quoting, is talking about the overall character and nature of the Messiah. This argument can be defended by the fact, that in addition to Jesus’ blood (John 1:29), His character and nature are salvation for human beings (John 14:6). Jesus was and is sinless (2 Cor 5:21). ? Gospel of Luke emphasizes peace and joy. However, the gospel of Luke suggests that God’s people can start advocating peace already here on this earth before Jesus comes.



**Governments' Sword:** The Bible says, “For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer”(Rom 13:4 NIV). Perhaps the greatest challenge for nonviolent stand is the New Testament’s command to obey the rulers (1. Pet 2:13-15; Rom 13:1-7; Tit 3:1). The obvious question is, What if a ruler wants one to defend one’s country by weapons? Moreover, “Jesus seemed to accept war as part of the world system (Matt. 24:6), and his followers who were soldiers were not condemned (Acts 10)” (Marshall & Pickering, 1984:1153).

### **SHOULD CHRISTIANS DEFEND THEMSELVES WITH ARMS?**

When we hear this question our minds are immediately drawn to the use of guns or other weapons. However, before considering the implications of the answer, a fundamental consideration must be given to the general question of self-defense. Is it permissible for Christians to defend themselves? We might consider Jesus’s words in Matthew’s Gospel, where followers of Christ are taught not to resist the one who is evil, but, “if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and give him

the other also” (5:39). Most Bible commentators see this slapping as personal insult rather than an act of physical violence. (Notice the right cheek is emphasized, demonstrating that a backhanded slap is most likely in view.) Instead of returning an insult or another blow, the believer is to be content to endure the stinging slap. On the other hand we do see examples of believers offering self-defense. In fact, Jesus foretold that his disciples would need to defend themselves against accusations, even noting that the Holy Spirit would aid them in their defense (Luke 12:11-12). And the apostle Paul found himself regularly defending himself (Acts 22:1, 24:10).

The more controversial question has to do with whether or not Christians may defend themselves with use of force (even lethal force) when in danger. In particular, can a Christian carry (and use a gun), use force, or otherwise act to stop an attack upon themselves or others? Some Christians say “no” because we should embrace persecution from those who are ardently opposed to the faith. It is true that Christians are to pray for those who persecute them (Matt. 5:44) and patiently endure persecution (1Pet. 2:19). However, not all violence is persecution. And the

Bible does not forbid us from fleeing from violent persecution (cf. Lk. 4:29-30, Jn. 8:59, 10:39; 2Cor. 11:32-33). Others may claim that while the government has the power to use the sword to protect its citizens (Rom 13:1-7), we as ordinary citizens do not. Most people who would hold this view would support the police and military's right to use force (even lethal force) as an application of a passage like Romans 13. However, the Bible does not specify police or military; it simply refers to the government. The state has given the police and military the right to defend its citizens by use of force. In the case of the United States, the government has also given its citizens the right to arm and protect themselves and others in the face of imminent danger. If Christians have no biblical issue with the police and military defending its citizens against attack, then there would not seem to be a biblical case to oppose individual citizens doing the same.

Jerry Falwell, Jr preached a sermon to the students of Liberty University in a campus chapel service and said; "I just want to take this opportunity to encourage all of you to get your permit. We offer a free course. And let's teach them a lesson if they ever

show up here.” He clarified that the policy at Liberty now includes permission to carry guns in the dormitories. John Piper, the Chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary, responding to the sermon preached by Jerry Falwell said, “The issue is about the whole tenor and focus and demeanor and heart-attitude of the Christian life.” The New Testament does not encourage fighting with gun. The writer is in support of John Piper with this nine considerations that lead to this conclusion.

1. The apostle Paul called Christians not to avenge ourselves, but to leave it to the wrath of God, and instead to return good for evil. And then he said that God gave the sword (the gun) into the hand of governmental rulers to express that wrath in the pursuit of justice in this world (Romans 12:17-21, 13:1-4).
2. The apostle Peter teaches us that Christians will often find themselves in societies where we should expect and accept unjust mistreatment without retaliation. Let us do our best to hear and embrace and be transformed in our self-protecting hearts by these texts from 1 Peter. This is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. (2:19). Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the

contrary, bless. (3:9)

3. Jesus promised that violent hostility will come; and the whole tenor of his counsel was how to handle it with suffering and testimony, not with armed defense. ( Luke 21:12-13,16-19, Matthew 10:28)

4. Jesus set the stage for a life of sojourning in this world where we bear witness that this world is not our home, and not our kingdom, by renouncing the establishment or the advancement of our Christian cause with the sword. Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” (John 18:36). Jesus said to [Peter], “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52)

5. Jesus strikes the note that the dominant (not the only) way Christians will show the supreme value of our treasure in heaven is by being so freed from the love of this world and so satisfied with the hope of glory that we are able to love our enemies and not return evil for evil, even as we expect to be wronged in this world (Matthew 5:11-12). The early church, as we see her in Acts, expected and endured persecution without armed resistance, but rather with joyful suffering, prayer, and

the word of God. In all the dangers Paul faced in the book of Acts, there is not a hint that he ever planned to carry or use a weapon for his defense against his adversaries. He was willing to appeal to the authorities in Philippi (Acts 16:37) and Jerusalem (Acts 22:25).

6. When Jesus told the apostles to buy a sword, he was not telling them to use it to escape the very thing he promised they should endure to the death. We have to be satisfied in the sure hope of heaven, not the shaky hope of self-defense.”

9. Even though the Lord ordains for us to use ordinary means of providing for life (work to earn; plant and harvest; take food, drink, sleep, and medicine; save for future needs; provide governments with police and military forces for society), nevertheless, the unique calling of the church is to live in such reliance on heavenly protection and heavenly reward that the world will ask about our *hope* (1 Peter 3:15), not about the ingenuity of our armed defenses.

Some Nigeria Church leaders made their comments on whether a Christian should use arms or not to defend themselves. Prophet Isa El-buba Sadiq, Founder, Evangelical Bible Outreach Ministries, Intl, Jos Plateau State, has urged in a viral video that

Nigerians should defend themselves against terrorist attacks. The cleric, who expressed sadness over the continued killings of innocent Nigerians in the north and other parts of the country, said that the government and armed forces cannot do it alone and asked the people to awake and kill the enemies before they killed them. In his words, “if you don’t stop the fire in your neighbours’ house, it is going to get to your house. Nigerians need to wake up to stop this evil. God is on our side. But remember, God will only work when we start the work. Kill the enemy, it is not a crime.” The cleric’s controversial statement has continued to generate reactions.

In his reaction, Bishop Jide Orire, the founder and General Overseer of Save and Serve Family Church, Abanla, Ologuneru, Ibadan in a chat with *Sunday Independent* stated that anyone who wants to defend themselves must do that within the confines of the law, stating that he will not support anyone to take arms illegally. Orire further stated that “I don’t think I will like to support people taking up illegal arms. If you are going to take arm it must be licensed by government. If there is arm found with anybody that is not licensed they can say the person is an armed robber or criminal. What are

you doing with guns? “The best thing is, let it be within the confines of the law.

Rev. Prince Obed Ezeonye, Senior Pastor, Excellent Glory Christian Centre Iju Lagos, on his part fears that if people are allowed to carry arms for self-defense that may lead to anarchy. He, however, called on Nigerian leaders to step up on their actions to ensure the safety of lives and property which they have sworn to protect. He also pointed out that, “There is one thing that’s very important in the Biblical context of scriptures. For every text, there is a context on which the scripture is used. The same Bible that says give the other cheek also after the other one is smitten, is the same that says, if you don’t have a sword, sell your garments and buy one (Luke 22:36). To watch Christians massacred and churches burnt in the 21st century as in the medieval period is no longer acceptable”.

Rev. Dr. Elisha. Ogundiya, former Osun State CAN Chairman in his reaction said that the Bible teaches us that there is a legitimate use of the sword and illegitimate use of the sword and those that kill illegitimately will face eternal judgement as seen in Revelation chapter 13 verses 10. The cleric also



noted that as much as the Old Testament supports Christians to fight their enemies and defend themselves, the New Testament never encourages revenge or engaging in a physical fight with one's enemies. He noted that in our modern era, the Christians of Northern Iraq and Nigeria, under savage assault by Boko Haram and ISIS, would suffer even greater loss without armed men willing to defend them. He advocated that there should be no law to restricting law-abiding church leaders, members and citizens from availing themselves of weapons for defensive purposes. The general right to self-defense is clearly biblical. Pastor Isaac Ogunrinola of The Apostolic Church in his responses insisted that we must follow biblical teachings of love irrespective of the degree of hatred and enmity saying, "If you want to follow biblical teachings, we should live in love no matter the degree of hatred and enmity. Carrying physical weapons about is not good. If it's allowed we will continue killing ourselves because of our temperament.

## **CONCLUSION**

Even though the situation of Nigeria warrants that one should carry a weapon for protection, the New

Testament does not encourage such and the Nigerian constitution does not allow it (Okide, 2019; Okide, Nwagbo & Okide, 2017). I will say everybody should know how to defend themselves, spiritually and physically. Therefore, Christians should be guided by the Holy Spirit before they act in Self Defense when they are faced with violent attack by the enemy of their faith.

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