

Ethics of Life

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[0 : 00] Check one, check one, check, check, check, check. All right, good morning, everyone.

Welcome to week six of our class on the ethics of life, where we've been exploring the meaning and implications of the sixth commandment, which is you shall not murder. Let me give just a quick review before we dive in this morning. We spent the first two weeks of our class looking at the kind of biblical principles behind this commandment. And we said there in those classes that one of the implications of this sixth commandment was that the church was to become more and more through the gospel, a community of honor and dignity for all people, a community of hope and a community of reconciliation.

Then we spent two weeks kind of discussing some of the practical implications of the sixth commandment. And we started at the very earliest stages of human life, specifically looking at the topic of abortion. And we saw that across numerous biblical passages, the Bible makes no distinction between the dignity of human life inside and outside the womb. And so we argued that abortion is morally wrong. Then just last week, we discussed capital punishment. And we noticed that Christians have understood and applied those biblical texts differently on this question. And I think it's safe to say that what we observed was that capital punishment was both permitted and commanded by God in the Old Testament. And we saw that in a passage like Romans 13, capital punishment by civil authority seems also to be permitted in the New Testament. But we also gave some thought and considered that given the different contexts in which we live today, perhaps not everything that is permissible is fruitful or prudent. So we noticed that there are different approaches among Christians as to how best to handle that question today. Now, our original plan, if you were here last week, was to discuss the topic of war today. But we needed to make a schedule change because I realized I'm going to be out of town next week. So Tom was gracious enough to swap weeks with me. So next week, Tom is going to lead us in a consideration of Christian approaches to war and pacifism and just war. Today, we're going to talk about self-defense, self-defense, self-defense in light of the sixth commandment. So the question before us this morning is this, does scripture prohibit the use of physical force to defend oneself against a physical attack? If we're being attacked, if our life is threatened, or if the life of a loved one is being threatened, are we permitted to use physical force, even lethal force, to defend ourselves or others? And if so, is it right for a Christian to own and use a weapon such as a gun for that purpose? Now, we're talking about individual citizens, Christians. We're not talking about the state or police forces today. I think we looked at Romans 13 last week, and we'll look at it again next week, where we saw that there is a place for state and for governmental authorities to use that kind of force. But we're asking about us personally. Now, again, as we saw last week concerning capital punishment and what we'll see this week with respect to war, or next week with respect to war, is that faithful Christians do take differing views on this question.

But I think the best place to begin as we think about this question of self-defense is with Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. So if you turn to Matthew 5, verses 38 through 48, we'll begin our reflections there. So Matthew 5, 38 through 48, Jesus says this, he says, you have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

[4 : 21] And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those

who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same. And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same.

You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. All right, let's pray. Father, we thank you for this morning. Thanks that we can gather together as your people, Lord, and come to your word and ask for your wisdom and guidance. And we thank you that through your spirit, you do offer that to us. Lord, thank you that we as your people can live according to your word by the power of your spirit. And God, thank you that through your spirit, you give us charity as we wrestle with these tricky issues together. So God, we pray that as a result of our meditation on your word this morning, we'd come away with a richer sense of your goodness and your power and your beauty and a deeper sense of living for you, living faithfully unto you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, so some Christians would certainly understand Jesus to be prohibiting all forms of self-defense here, right? Jesus says, don't resist the one who's evil, but if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Now, often this interpretation of Jesus' words, if one takes that interpretation, is part of a larger interpretation of scripture that sees all use of physical force or violence as wrong and evil, whether by individuals or by the state. So for example, the Anabaptist tradition has been especially known for its commitment to this sort of total nonviolence. Now, other Christians would say that Jesus here isn't really speaking about self-defense in the way that we usually mean it. The slap on the right cheek it's argued, is not actually a form of physical violence or a lethal attack, nor is it kind of physical abuse. Rather, in the context of the ancient world, the slap on the cheek was actually what we might call an insult. It was a form of social humiliation and contempt. It didn't threaten your life. It actually threatened your reputation and your dignity. And in response to that, Jesus says, don't retaliate. Rather than returning insult for insult, rather than kind of brooding over how you're going to get them back and make them pay, Jesus says, turn the other cheek. Let their insults fly.

In fact, the greater strength in that moment isn't hurling your insults back at them. It's breaking the cycle of retaliation and refusing to respond in kind.

Even if that means you receive more insults in the process. Okay, so we've got these sort of two broad readings of this text. Now, I think exegetically, putting this passage in context, I think that second reading of Jesus's words in Matthew 5 is actually more accurate than the first. I don't think Matthew 5 is speaking directly to the question of whether Christians can justly defend themselves against a violent attacker. I think Jesus is giving an example of how it would be easy to retaliate and escalate a conflict, and as his followers were not to respond in that way. Rather, as children of our heavenly Father, we're called to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, and to do good to those who are unjust and who may seek to do us wrong.

[8 : 43] But, if Jesus isn't speaking directly to our kind of particular question about self-defense here, are there not still principles in what Jesus is teaching that could and should apply to that situation? Well, I think the answer to that is yes. But in order to do that rightly, we need to consider this passage along with some other passages in Scripture that might apply to this same question. So, let's do that. Let's look at some other passages. First, I think we should consider that Jesus's clear teaching about non-retaliation and love of enemy does not mean that Christians should never remove themselves from danger. In fact, I think there's plenty of scriptural precedent to suggest just the opposite. There are passages that seem to clearly encourage escaping from danger, right? Think about 1 Samuel 19, 9 through 10, where David flees from Saul.

Here's the passage from 1 Samuel. It says, Then a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand, and David was playing the lute. And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear. But he eluded Saul so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night.

Right? So, here's an example of David. His life is at danger, and he runs away. And the Scriptures seem to say, that's probably a good idea, right? Get yourself out of danger. Interestingly, as we follow the story of David and Saul in 1 Samuel, even though Saul repeatedly tries to kill David, David never retaliates against him. In fact, David refused to kill Saul in what we might call self-defense, even when David has numerous opportunities to do so, because Saul is the Lord's anointed, right?

David says he has no right to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed. So, at least in this example, David's treatment of Saul seems to support Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 that we should refuse to

retaliate when wronged. But Jesus kind of applies that principle to all of our relationships. Okay, we see another example of escaping from danger in the New Testament as well.

In 2 Corinthians 11, 32 through 33, Paul says, So, when facing physical violence, Christians should certainly seek, if possible, to remove themselves from danger.

[11 : 19] Jesus' teaching about loving our enemies and turning the other cheek and not retaliating doesn't mean we should keep ourselves in the position where others can persist in harming us.

Okay? All right, second. Second thing. Jesus' teaching about non-retaliation doesn't mean that we shouldn't take lawful means to prevent violence and unjust treatment.

Right? Even though Jesus has turned the other cheek, that doesn't mean we shouldn't take lawful means to prevent violence and unjust treatment. And the New Testament offers numerous examples of the apostles verbally and legally defending themselves and others before the sort of violent courts and authorities of their day.

Just to rattle off a few examples, in Acts 4, Peter and John are arrested by the Sanhedrin, and they speak boldly in their defense. In Acts 5, the apostles again defend themselves before the Sanhedrin.

In Acts 7, Stephen gives a long and bold verbal defense before his martyrdom. The apostle Paul likewise defends himself numerous times. In Acts 16, he defends himself to the Roman city authorities in Philippi.

[12 : 32] And at the end of Acts, in chapters 22 through 26, we have a series of legal defenses that Paul makes before Roman centurions and crowds and Jewish courts and Roman rulers. And then when we turn to Paul's letters, we see Paul defending himself and his ministry against a number of accusations.

Okay, so what's the lesson here? Following Jesus' teaching about non-retaliation doesn't mean that we cannot give a clear, truthful, even bold verbal and legal defense against accusation or even against the threat of physical violence.

We're meant to take those lawful means to protect ourselves and others. Now, third thing to keep in mind, one of those lawful means to which Christians can and should appeal are the God-given civil authorities.

Okay, let me read Romans 13, 1 through 7. And if you'd like to turn there, this is a little bit of a longer one. You can follow along there. Romans 13, 1 through 7. So as we seek to follow the principle of Jesus' command that we're not to retaliate when others do us wrong, we see that it's quite permissible to remove ourselves from danger.

It's quite permissible to take lawful means to prevent it. And here we're going to see that one of those lawful means to which we can appeal are the God-given civil authorities who are entrusted by God with the right use of physical force.

[13 : 53] Let me read Romans 13, 1 through 7. Paul says, Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there's no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval. For he is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid. For he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Therefore, one must be in subjection not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this, you also pay taxes for the authorities or ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

Pay to all what is owed to them, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

[14 : 59] So in this passage, we see that Paul affirms the role of rightful government authority to use physical force to stop evil and to punish evildoers.

Right? Paul says they do not bear the sword in vain. Now, of course, the New Testament knows very well that human governments can become corrupt, that human governments can themselves become instruments of wrongdoing and evil.

But nonetheless, this passage teaches that God institutes and appoints certain human authorities, what we would call today the state or the governing authorities, in part to administer his justice by punishing wrongdoing.

So when we see governments acting unjustly or corruptly, our response isn't to tear them all down, but to reform them and to change them and to call them to justice.

Right? So what does this mean then? Jesus' words about non-retaliation and loving our enemies do not exclude calling the police when you or your loved ones are in danger.

[16:11] Now, I know that sounds kind of obvious to us, but I think there is very good biblical precedent for it. In fact, this is exactly what you should do when you are facing physical attack or experiencing physical abuse or imminent danger.

Remove yourself from harm as quickly as possible and call the authorities. In fact, this act of removing yourself from harm and calling the police as it were, is, I think, a clear way to obey Jesus' command not to retaliate and to love our enemies.

Allowing someone to do wrong to us and do sin against us is actually not loving them. It is loving to stop the violence from being done, to stop the sin from being committed as much as we're able.

Okay. But what if, again, in this sort of question that we're considering about self-defense, what if the attack happens suddenly?

What if you aren't able to escape or help the person in danger to escape? What if you call the police, but they won't arrive in time to stop the attack? What if you don't have the means to contact the police in that moment?

[17:18] Is using force or even lethal force as a means of self-defense justified in those instances? Well, I think there are a few passages that seem to point in the direction of saying that God does allow the use of some degree of force to stop harm and defend oneself.

The one that is perhaps most relevant is from the Mosaic case law in Exodus 22. So in Exodus 22, 2 through 3, Exodus 22, 2 through 3, the case law of Moses says this.

It says, If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no blood guilt for him.

But if the sun has risen on him, there shall be blood guilt for him. Okay, what is this law describing? What's the scenario here? So this law seems to be assuming that if someone, say, breaks into your home at night, you will be startled and you will defend yourself against them.

[18:38] And if in the act of defending yourself at night, you happen to kill them, the Mosaic law says, there's no blood guilt for that.

In other words, you're not going to be held guilty for his death. As we would say, it was an act of self-defense. But interestingly, the Mosaic law says, if the theft happens during the day and you kill him, you are guilty.

The presumption seems to be that if the sun has risen, less lethal remedies, including help from others, are available. And the availability of such alternate remedies in a case like that or in an analogous case, well, that would be subject for deliberation in court as judges are asked to assign levels of guilt.

So remember, this passage is case law. It's giving examples that then the judges of Israel would need to apply to actual situations. So it would seem that in this instance, the Mosaic law permits an individual to defend themselves.

And that the judges would have to determine whether it was indeed a valid case of self-defense. But notice that this law also puts limits on it as well.

[20:00] Right? And those limits, I think, serve a few purposes. I think the first purpose that that limit puts is that even in the Mosaic law, God's people were called to love their neighbors as themselves and to refrain from unlawful, unjust, and unnecessary taking of another human's life.

In other words, just because someone was acting in self-defense doesn't mean that all bets are off and anything goes. John Frame, who's a Christian theologian and ethicist, puts it this way in his reflection on this passage from Exodus 22.

He says, the law of love limits our response even to a home invader. But at the same time, John Frame says, the law of love does not forbid us to defend our lives and our families by force to the extent that it is necessary.

So you see, there's a balance there. Okay, so how ought we to kind of synthesize this biblical material then? First, I do think on the basis of the principles in Exodus 22, Christians are permitted

to act in self-defense in extreme cases.

Sometimes an act of force may be necessary to protect oneself from harm or to protect a loved one from harm. However, the New Testament also prevents us from seeing retaliatory violence as the immediate and proper answer to every criminal wrongdoing and physical attack.

[21 : 36] Listen to what Paul writes in Romans 12, 14 through 21. And this is before the passage in Romans 13 that we read where he talks about the sort of rightful authority, right?

Paul writes in Romans 12, starting in verse 14, Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another.

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but get thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head. And Paul's quoting our proverb. And then he sums it up with this.

[22 : 37] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. So while I don't think that this passage completely excludes self-defense in every instance, I do think that it ought to remind us of the appropriate posture of our hearts towards those who may do us wrong, even attack us.

Right? Let us not forget that the New Testament tells us again and again that as Christians, we will be persecuted and some of us will be put to death.

And the consistent response to such violence in the New Testament is not, self-defense is permitted, so be ready to attack them back. What is it? The Apostle Peter talks about this again and again in his first letter.

In 1 Peter 4.19, for example, he says, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. Now contrast that, I think, very straightforward, albeit very hard, biblical position.

Contrast that with the words of, say, a former Christian college president in 2015 who, in response to terrorist activity, spoke to the student body at the college in a chapel service.

[24 : 03] And this particular Christian college president, after implying that he had a gun in his back pocket, 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. Is that the message of the New Testament?

Let's teach them a lesson if they ever show up here. Consider how that same kind of mindset can trickle into other areas of life, not just to protection against the hypothetical lethal threat of a terrorist.

A different Christian theologian who advocates very strongly for self-defense and gun ownership goes on in his reflections on self-defense, to advocate that we teach our children to fight back against bullies because, this is a quote, otherwise, the failure to oppose physically harmful attacks with physical force will often lead to more harmful attacks and more wrong being done.

And then he says, and that Christian children who are not taught to defend themselves with physical force can often be harmed repeatedly. And because of that, can internalize deep feelings of injustice and despair.

[25 : 23] No parent should allow this to happen to his or her children. Okay, so you see where we've come now.

So no longer are we talking about extreme situations of life and death, but we're teaching our children to fight fire with fire on the playground because they might internalize deep feelings of injustice and despair.

Is that the way of Jesus? That same theologian argues that in situations of violent harm by criminals, he says, if it's morally right to call the police who would use firearms to protect us in such circumstances, then it seems to me morally right to use a weapon if necessary before the police can arrive.

Then he clarifies, not for vengeance, but for self-defense. But friends, isn't that a deeply problematic line of reasoning? I mean, one of the major points of Romans 13 and the Mosaic Law is that not every citizen has the right to act in the stead of the governing authorities.

you don't have the right to act in the same way as the police before the police get there. Now again, I'm not saying that Christians are totally forbidden to use various forms of self-defense in extreme situations, but what I am saying is that it's very easy to slide into worldly and fleshly thinking when it comes to this question.

[26 : 51] And suddenly, we Christians don't sound at all like those who truly believe that God is in control, that vengeance is His, that God's kingdom doesn't advance through the sword, and that peace and not violence is the way of Christ, actually is the way of courage and wisdom, and that our weapons are not the weapons of this world.

Okay, lastly, and then we'll pause for some questions. Let me say a bit about Christians and gun ownership, as if we're not talking about something controversial enough. Let's talk about guns. Here we are.

You know, some have argued, okay, so some have argued that on the basis of Jesus' words in Luke 22, Christians should be encouraged, not just permitted, but encouraged to own weapons for self-defense.

In Luke 22, verses 35 through 38, you can look that up if you'd like, Luke 22, 35 through 38, Luke records these words of Jesus after Jesus shares the Last Supper with his disciples.

Okay, so Luke 22, 35 through 38. And Jesus said to them, when I sent you out with no money bag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?

[28 : 05] Jesus is referring here back to their earlier ministry in Galilee. Did you lack anything? They said nothing. He said to them, but now, let the one who has a money bag take it, and likewise, a knapsack, and let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.

For I tell you that scripture must be fulfilled in me. And he was numbered with the transgressors for what is written about me has its fulfillment. And they said, look, Lord, here are two swords. And he said to them, it's enough. When I was in seminary, this passage actually came up on my final exam in New Testament 1.

Where does Jesus tell his disciples to buy a sword? Luke 22. There it is. So the argument runs something like this. Jesus knew trouble was coming for his disciples.

So, he tells them to buy swords for self-defense. Therefore, Christians today should be equipped with the modern-day equivalent of self-defense, which is a handgun.

[29 : 16] Okay. I think John Piper is right when he responds to this line of thinking in this way. John Piper, who's a pastor and theologian, has reflected a lot on Jesus' words in the Gospels, wrote his PhD dissertation on Jesus' love command, and pastored for many, many years, and lived in inner city, and lived in the inner city where he pastored.

He writes this. He says, I do not think that Jesus means in verse 36 that his disciples were to henceforth be an armed band of preachers ready to use violence to defend themselves from persecution.

If that is the correct interpretation of this text, my question is, why did none of his disciples in the New Testament ever do that?

The probable answer is that Jesus did not mean for them to think in terms of armed defense for the rest of their ministry.

Jesus' abrupt words at the end of the paragraph when the disciples produced two swords were not, well, you need to get nine more. He said, rather, it's enough or that's plenty.

[30 : 36] This may well signify that the disciples have given a mistaken literal meaning to a figurative intention. In other words, Jesus was speaking figuratively.

And indeed, New Testament scholar Daryl Bach also writes about this passage. He says, the church's nonviolent response to persecution in the book of Acts shows that the church is armed only with prayer and faith in God.

Luke 22, 36 then sees the sword as a symbol of preparation for persecution since Jesus' rebuke of a literal interpretation shows that a symbol is meant.

In other words, it points to readiness not to revenge. Okay, so if Jesus isn't literally telling his disciples to arm themselves in this passage, does that mean Christians should not own guns? Should Christians not have conceal and carry licenses? Well, just because that's not what this passage is about, I don't think that means that Christians should not own guns.

[31 : 42] Right? Ultimately, I do think this is a matter of conscience for Christians. I genuinely do. I know faithful Christian brothers and sisters who have conceal and carry licenses, and I'm not going

to rebuke them, and the elders are not going to bring them under church discipline.

In fact, I think we should be more concerned about our attitudes and our hearts when it comes to these things. In other words, whatever our decision is, are we promoting a cavalier approach to violence?

Are we promoting a culture where guns are the supposed answer to bring peace? Is our hope for security and safety in a gun? Are we falling into a mindset that says let's teach them a lesson if they ever show up here?

Now, look, I'm not saying that owning a gun automatically leads to that mindset. Right? In fact, the Christians I know who have conceal and carry licenses don't have that mindset as far as I know. But we have to be very careful that we are not at the same time giving way to these anti-Christian attitudes and beliefs. The question of gun ownership for self-defense I think kind of sits between two theological poles.

[33 : 05] On the one hand, there is very real evil in the world. There is violence and there is wickedness and Christians are called to protect the vulnerable. But on the other hand, we also have to balance that with the sort of culture that we want to promote and create.

Is the proliferation of guns and other instruments of death the sort of society we want to build? Is promoting the answering of violence with violence the path toward the sort of culture that honors the Lord Jesus Christ?

And I think both of those poles are real and I don't think there are easy answers. Personally, I don't own a gun for self-defense. I don't ever intend to get one.

But I also respect Christians who've chosen differently than me. And as a church, we want to have hearty conversations about these things and still love each other if we disagree. Okay, all right. Let's stop there and let's open it up for questions. What questions do you have on this thorny topic? Yeah, go ahead, Brent. Yeah.

[34 : 16] Yeah. Ezekiel 33 11 stated in as I live in the world of God, have no pleasure in the death of the wicked that the wicked turn from his way and turn back and back into the ways.

My will have died, not to me. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. That's well said, Brent.

Yeah. I'm just going to repeat that so it ends up on the recording. In Ezekiel, there's a very clear passage where God says, I don't delight in the death of the wicked. And if that's true of our Lord, neither should we.

Yeah. That's right. Even if there's an appropriate time for defense. That's right. Thanks, Brent.

Yeah. Yeah, Susan. I think you could name a congregation or training in martial arts where you have the ability to dishonor or explain someone.

[35 : 20] Yeah. That's right. That's right. Yeah. And, you know, that. So I went to my undergraduate college that I went to was out of the Anabaptist tradition. So it was a peace tradition. So this was kind of a question we talked about a lot.

And what's interesting is that in the peace tradition, it's the response to the kind of imminent threat is not, well, you just end up, you just end up dead.

Right. But it's actually, okay, how do we creatively engage here, courageously engage? And sometimes that does require some kind of restraint.

Right. You know, now, I don't think our Mennonite brothers and sisters are taking Taekwondo. But I think you're making a good point, Susan. There's other ways to respond that are not lethal.

If you're trained to. If you're trained. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Yeah, that's right. That's right. Ivor, did you want to jump in? Go ahead. There's been several churches that have been attacked. Yeah. Yeah.

[36 : 18] Yeah. That's a really good question.

We've talked about this some as leadership, right? So Ivor's saying there have been, you know, instances where churches have been attacked and someone with a conceal and carry license was actually able to sort of kill that person and then presumably save more lives.

We've actually talked to local law enforcement about this question. And what they've actually strongly recommended to us is that we do not encourage people with conceal and carry licenses to try to respond in those situations of mass shooting.

And they said that for a couple of reasons. One is most people, even with conceal and carry licenses, with the appropriate training and licensing and practice that it takes to get that, are actually

not equipped to respond in moments of that kind of high intensity with lots of other civilians around. That their sense was is that more often than not, more innocent people will be hurt than less. Second, when the police do show up, which by the way, we have a system at Trinity to call the police very, very quickly.

[37 : 40] If anything happens, if we need that, that when they do show up, they actually don't know who's the bad guy and who's the good guy. So, so to say. What they recommended we do is grab something really heavy, like the fire extinguisher, and swing as hard as you can.

So, use physical force, but don't have an untrained individual pull another gun in that situation and cause more chaos and mayhem.

Now, that's very different than if there's someone in the church who's a trained law enforcement officer or a trained member of the military. They have the kind of training to respond appropriately in those situations.

So, but thank you for that, Ivor. Yeah, this is what makes it a complicated issue, right? Yeah. Yeah, Giovanni. Yeah, so I do agree that this is a conscious decision for each one of us as Christians. But I wonder how do we balance the attention between like the individual and the collective problem with police. Yeah.

[38 : 46] So, yeah, I agree in theory that Christians are allowed to have guns, but should we be like advocating for proliferation of guns?

Yeah. Because like the data shows kind of very clearly that that's a problem that creates more violence on average. Yeah.

And more mortality on average. Yeah. So, yeah. How do we deal with like our individual freedom and the collective problem? I agree, Giovanni. And this is a bit of what I was trying to get at by thinking about that poll of like what kind of culture do we want to create as Christians, right?

Because we are, as Christians and as churches, creating the culture we live in, right? As humans, God created us to be culture makers. We can't not do that. So, the actions that we make aren't just for our own selves, but they do have broader impact.

So, I think we have to weigh that very seriously. Now, I'll speak off the record. I'm not speaking on behalf of the elders. I'm just speaking on me personally. I think that there are certain kind of guns that a civilian can buy in the United States that they should not be able to purchase.

[39 : 56] I think any kind of assault style weapon should not be allowed to be owned by a civilian because they can cause massive amounts of death in a very short amount of time.

And I just don't think that's appropriate. I think that's a good idea. I do think that's different than a handgun for self-defense, you know? It's much harder to kill dozens and dozens of, I know that I'm speaking very bluntly about this.

It's a very serious and sad issue. But it's very hard to use that kind of instrument of death to kill massive amounts of people than it is some of these other weapons that in our American culture one can purchase seemingly pretty easily compared to other parts of the world.

So, I think the issue of gun control in the United States is a very important one. And I think Christians need to, yes, respect the Constitution that talks about a right to bear arms.

But we also have to consider the fact that our technological advances mean that the arms that we can bear can create massive amounts of death and mayhem.

[41 : 11] In ways that that probably wasn't possible in the 18th century when the framers of our Constitution put it together. One could not do the mass kind of shootings that we are so tragically hearing about way too regularly in our culture with a single shot musket rifle.

Yeah, Alex. Do you think it's the case that this particular issue is kind of like a marriage of Christians? It might be. Yeah. Do you think in any way that sort of shapes just the way Christians sort of have these conversations?

Yeah. Giving us a little bit less of perspective or kind of like maybe our sometimes eyes, our vision is a little bit blurry. Yeah. Oh, I'm sure it does.

I'm sure it does. So Alex was saying that doesn't our location in America with a certain culture around firearms and self-defense, doesn't that shape how we as Christians approach this issue? I'm sure it does. I'm sure it does. Which is why, you know, Giovanni mentioning, hey, in other cultures maybe there isn't the same sort of problem that we're having. I think as Christians and as a church, we need to listen to that and we need not be so tied to our citizenship in the United States that that overrides our citizenship in heaven.

[42 : 33] And our citizenship in heaven is the thing that's determining how we live as citizens of this world. So, you know, Alex, I'm very well to be challenged and be like, brother, if you lived in a different country, you would come down in a very different place on this.

I might actually. And I think we need the church. In the very first class, we talked about how we need to be having these ethical conversations with the historic church and the global church to be coming to good conclusions.

So I think this is a great example of that. Thank you. Yeah. I really appreciate that because I think our culture encourages not just in the world of firearms, but generally within.

Yeah. So this morning while I was trying to deliver, I saw three commercials for law officers that can get me more. If somebody makes a mistake and hits my car, I can get more if I go to them.

If you're hurt, get burnt, right? Yeah. And it's just perfect. As someone who's old enough to have lived before this highly detentious period of time, Yeah. I mean, we are just playing with dentists.

[43 : 39] Getting back. Getting back. Yeah. How counterculture is it that Paul says, why not rather be defrauded? Could you imagine? It's almost laughable.

You know, we took a family road trip this summer. And, you know, we get so used to the lawyer billboards around us, you know, we could all rattle them all off. But it's true everywhere in the United States.

We were in the deep south. And it's like we knew every single lawyer we could hire down there. If anyone so much has got close to us, we had their numbers blasting at us. Yeah. Every number one is okay to go after your danger.

Sure. You know, if you can't afford to fix your car, you don't have to go after your danger. Sure.

Sure. But now it's like, how can I profit from somebody? Yeah. Yeah.

Zarian, did you want to jump in? Oh, I was going to ask. Like, I know that you don't personally hold a gun. Mm-hmm. But, like, why do you think a Christian wouldn't be purchased or owned a gun?

[44 : 35] Yeah. What would be the reason for that? Yeah. I'm not going to turn this out to the audience and say, who here owns a gun? Tell us why. I think to try to be as charitable as possible, I think it would be, the rationale would go something like this.

We live in a deeply fallen world where there's real evil and wickedness. And if I'm in a situation where someone is taking criminal advantage of someone who's vulnerable, this is a way to neutralize that, right?

And stop harm being done, right? There are ways of, you know, I think that's the rationale, right?

So, it's sort of acknowledging the wickedness in the world, right?

Which will be there until Jesus returns, right? And as a means of trying to say, and yet, if a responsible use of this instrument can prevent that from happening in extreme situations, then that's what I want to do.

Yeah. Yeah, Peter. To more clarify what I think what you're saying, it's more about the necessity to protect others as opposed to protecting yourself necessarily.

[45 : 48] I think for some it could be. My sense is that it's from people I know or from conversations I've heard about this, I think it is both, you know? I think some of it is both.

That, you know, if someone's attacking me, like, I have a right to be able to prevent that, right? So, yeah. Let's not leave out Ephesians chapter 6 where Paul says that we wrestle against, not against questions, but...

Right. And at the end of that passage, Ephesians put on the whole armor of God, pray. Yeah, that's right. That's right. Yeah. I try to remind myself that with all the stuff that I see happening in the world, all of the advances that our enemies are making around the world, that for the believer, the most powerful weapon we have is pray.

Yeah, that's right. You know? Yeah. Pray against that. Yeah. Yeah. Well, and make no mistake.

The kingdom of God does not advance through the weapons of this world, right?

So, as much as it may be a temporary emergency sort of thing to think about owning it.

[47 : 03] And here, I don't want to sit here and defend gun ownership to you all. But I do think the important thing to realize is that we need to be very careful that we don't slip into a mindset where we think that the tools and the weapons of this world is what's really going to bring peace and justice and righteousness, right?

If Jesus thought that, he would have not gone to a cross and been crucified by the Roman Empire. He would have done what so many people wanted him to do, which was raise an army and fight.

And yet, from the very first, that has never been the church's response. And when the church has responded that way, they have been wrong. And it has led to incredible heartache and tragedy. And it has actually besmirched the gospel and sent back the kingdom of God and not advanced it. So, and I think, of course, you know, to be charitable to those who do have conceal and carry licenses, I think they could say, absolutely, I agree with that 100%.

Like, me owning this thing is for a very narrow thing that the Bible does in extreme circumstances permit. But I don't think that we should fire up, you know, a Crusade 2.0 to conquer lands with swords and think that that's going to somehow spread the gospel.

[48 : 19] You know, sword point conversions are not conversions. Yeah. Okay. Maybe one more and then we'll have to break. Yeah, go ahead. Can you follow up on Giovanni's question about advocacy? How does that translate to how we weigh it at the polls?

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. As far as a candidate's stance on gun control. Is that right? Yeah. How much do we weigh that? Is that something that we as Christians?

Absolutely. Yeah, yeah. Well, I think as we move from these moral positions into the sphere of policy and into the sphere of voting for political candidates, you know, as Christians, we move progressively in the realm of wisdom.

Right? Right? So, and I think as we move out from sort of the principle to the policy to then the politician that we vote for, I think what's important to say is that different Christians are going to weigh those things differently.

Right? I think living in Connecticut, given what happened at, say, Sandy Hook, it would be completely understandable if many, many, many, many Christians in our part of the country weighed gun control very highly when we went to the polls.

[49 : 26] Right? Maybe even outweighing some other Christian moral principles. Right? And I think as Christians, when we're in that realm of politics and who to vote for, we are all making a least bad choice.

Right? Because no candidate is going to perfectly represent how we weigh those issues. Right? Or certainly how scripture weighs those issues. So I think we have to give each other a lot of freedom. Right? We should never sort of say, if you vote for candidate X, right, you're clearly wrong. Right? I think that's a very hard statement to make, given that there are so many factors that are being weighed out as we vote for a particular candidate.

So I can't say how heavily one should weigh it. Honestly. I really can't. But I think as an individual Christian, if it's something that that person weighs highly, I think that's valid.

Right? Yeah. Okay, we do have to break because it's five of. Let me say a quick prayer and we'll go. Father in heaven, thank you so much for your love, for your care for us, for your protection over us.

[50 : 35] God, help us to be a people who live into the way of Jesus, where you, God, remove the spirit of vengeance and retaliation and hatred from our hearts.

Lord, help us to love even those who are enemies. Because you have loved us when we were your enemies and you've made us your friends. God, help us to have that deep hope in the gospel. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.