Dear Luke,

You wanted to know if it was a sin to kill to protect yourself or others such as in a mugging, home invasion or in a military action.

To murder is against every aspect of God's Law, but to kill is not necessarily so. We see God commanding Israel's armies to annihilate their enemies and understand God is saying that in a sinful world it is acceptable to kill when others would kill you and your way of life.

However, Jesus shows the Christian a higher standard. He tells us to turn the other cheek (to endure the evil when it is set upon us personally). Jesus tells us and shows us by example the highest way to respond. But he did not address what to do when family members may be threatened.

We believe it is not a "sin" to defend oneself, but it might not always be the best thing to do. The concept of self-defense is open to interpretation. If self-defense becomes a merciless attack, then it has crossed the line from holding off an attacker into a sin. Should a woman not defend herself against rape? We do not believe "turning the other cheek" applies here. Should a woman kill her attacker in rage? Not appropriate. What if she kills him because he just won't stop harming her? We think that is a different story. Should a man or woman fight back against an intruder in their home to protect themselves and their family? Yes, we believe that is not sinning (though there could be other ways of managing such a challenge). Should you fight back with the intent to harm? No - the fighting back should ideally be enough to stop the attack. If you used more than enough force to defend yourself and your family and as a result that action leads to the death of the aggressor, then it is a sin because you killed someone even though that action could have been avoided.

Self-defense is not one big category with an easy answer. If the situation arises where you need to protect your family from physical harm, you should do enough to keep your family members safe. However, your intent should not be to kill. After the event ends and the attacker is apprehended, we would suggest showing mercy and forgiveness. Conversely, because this is such a complex question with all kinds of varying scenarios, there may be instances where turning the other cheek is indeed the right choice for the Christian.

You asked if killing was a sin when engaged in military action.

Throughout the Bible, warfare is presented as a grim reality in a cursed world. There are forces of evil that must be stopped, and bloodshed and killing are sometimes the result. Whether a Christian should serve in the military is a matter of one's own conscience, but killing an armed combatant in the context of warfare is not sinful in itself.

We hope we have answered your question. Be sure to sign up for our weekly newsletter to receive CQ Rewind at ChristianQuestions.com. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

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