THE QUESTION

Does "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" still allow self-defense?

Asked by a THF member on June 10, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 10 early Christian passages and 27 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/does-all-who-take-the-sword-will-perish-by-the-sword-still-allow-self

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

The early writers here do not read the saying as a warning only to people who attack first. Jesus spoke it to a disciple who was defending Him. Tertullian says that by disarming Peter the Lord took the sword from every Christian, and Origen says Christ's law does not let believers resist even persecutors.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Jesus stopped a sword drawn to defend Him

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In Tatian's harmony of the Gospels, the disciples ask if they should fight, and Peter strikes a servant of the men who came to arrest Jesus. Peter is defending his Master, not starting a fight, yet Jesus tells him to put the sword away and then heals the wounded man.

1

“Put the sword into its sheath, for all who take the sword shall die by the sword.”

later in the same passage

“And He touched the ear of the man who was struck and healed it.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 48 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Jesus chose the Father's cup over armed rescue

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Jesus ties His refusal of the sword to obeying the Father. He says He could ask for angels to save Him, but He will drink the cup the Father has given so the Scriptures are fulfilled.

2

“The cup that my Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?”

later in the same passage

“Do you think that I am not able to ask My Father, and He will now send Me more than twelve tribes of angels?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 48 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

"Buy a sword" points to Scripture being fulfilled

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Just before the arrest, Jesus tells the disciples to buy a sword. In the same breath He says He must be counted with the transgressors, and when they show two swords He says these are enough. Read together with the arrest scene, it does not look like a general permission to fight.

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3 “For I say to you that this scripture also must be fulfilled in me: that I should be counted with the transgressors.”

later in the same passage

“His disciples said to him, "Our Lord, look, here are two swords." He said to them, "They are sufficient. Arise, let us go from here."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 46 (c. 150–180 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Tertullian: disarming Peter disarmed every Christian

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian reads the command to Peter as more than advice for one night. He says the Lord took away the sword, so that in disarming Peter He unbelted every soldier.

4 “But how will a Christian man wage war? No, how will he even serve in peace without a sword, which the Lord has taken away?”

later in the same passage

“Although soldiers had come to John and had received his instruction for their conduct, and although a centurion had likewise believed, still afterward the Lord, in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Idolatry* 19 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

The saying shapes how a Christian lives

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian uses the same saying to ask whether a Christian may make the sword his work. He adds that a believer is not even the avenger of his own wrongs.

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5

"Should it be considered lawful to make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord declares that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword?"

later in the same passage

"And should he apply the chain, the prison, the torture, and the punishment, when he is not even the avenger of his own wrongs?"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *De Corona* 11 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Origen: believers do not resist even persecutors

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Origen says Christ never taught His disciples to use violence against anyone, however wicked. He describes Christian laws as so gentle that believers do not resist their persecutors even when facing death.

6

"Yet He nowhere teaches that it is right for His own disciples to use violence against anyone, no matter how wicked."

later in the same passage

"Nor would Christians, if they had owed their origin to a rebellion, have adopted laws so very gentle that they do not allow them, when they are destined to be killed like sheep, to resist their persecutors on any occasion."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 7 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Christians turned their swords into plows

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin says Christians who once lived by war and slaughter have changed their weapons into farm tools, as the prophets foretold. He presents this peace as the fruit of following the crucified Christ.

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7 “We, who were once filled with war, mutual slaughter, and every wickedness, have throughout the earth, each transformed our weapons—our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into tools for farming—and we cultivate piety, righteousness, philanthropy, faith, and hope, which we have from the Father Himself through Him who was crucified; and each of us sits under his own vine, that is, each man with his own married wife.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 1, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages answers the 'aggressors only' reading by name.
- They do not discuss defending a family member or a stranger from a criminal attack.
- No passage here explains in detail what Jesus meant by telling the disciples to buy a sword.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 10 early Christian passages and 27 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–10, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 11–20, in Bible order), then 17 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *10 passages from 4 writers*

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 5** “we who were filled with war, and mutual slaughter, and every wickedness, have each through the whole earth changed our warlike weapons,— our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English; on point 7) “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more… [continues online] **read ›**

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Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Diatessaron* 46 **Quote 3, page 3** "22:38 His disciples said to him, "Our Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Diatessaron* 48 (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 2, page 2** "the sword into its sheath: for all that take with the 38 sword shall die by the sword… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 5–7*

5 *De Corona* 11 (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** "it be held lawful to make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *On Idolatry* 19 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "how will a Christian man war, nay, how will he serve even in peace, without a sword, which the Lord has taken away… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Against Marcion* 14 (1885 English) "6:14-17 This sword the Lord Himself came to send on earth, and not peace… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 8–10*

8 *Against Celsus* 7 **Quote 6, page 4** "yet, if a revolt had led to the formation of the Christian… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Against Celsus* 10 (1885 English; on point 1) "even to Him who wished to help Him, and who smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear, He said: Put up your sword into its sheath… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Against Celsus* 33 (1885 English; on point 7) "to those who inquire of us whence we come, or who is our founder, we reply that we have come, agreeably to the counsels of Jesus, to cut down our… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *10 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

11 **Susanna 1:59** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

12 **Matthew 26:51** Behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. **read ›**

13 **Matthew 26:52** Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword. **read ›**

14 **Mark 14:48** Jesus answered them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me? **read ›**

15 **Luke 22:36** Then he said to them, "But now, let him who has a money bag take it, and likewise a bag; and he who has none shall sell his cloak and buy a sword. **read ›**

16 **Luke 22:38** They said, "Lord, behold, here are two swords." He said to them, "That is enough." **read ›**

17 **Luke 22:49** When those who were around him saw what was about to happen, they said to him, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" **read ›**

18 **Luke 22:52** Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and elders, who had come against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? **read ›**

19 **John 18:11** Jesus therefore said to Peter, "Put the sword into its sheath. The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not surely drink it?" **read ›**

20 **Philippians 4:19** And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *17 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Psalms 45:7

Daniel 7:24

Micah 4:6

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Matthew 8:5 · 10:34 · 26:61
Luke 3:12 · 7:1
John 15:2 · 18:4 · 18:6 · 18:36
2 Corinthians 10:4
Ephesians 6:14
2 Thessalonians 2:1 · 2:3
Revelation 1:16

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Does "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" still allow self-defense?” on June 10, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY