

This twofold obligation to preserve the life of others and to preserve one's own life carries with it the responsibility to defend others and to help others defend themselves, as well as the responsibility to defend one's self against anyone or anything that would threaten to unlawfully take away human life.

Acts 25:9-11 -- "Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, 'Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?' Paul answered: 'I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!'" Paul knew that a group of Jews had formed a conspiracy to assassinate him, and that if he agreed to go back to Jerusalem, he would probably be killed on the way. So he defended himself against this threat by refusing to stand trial in Jerusalem. In addition, he realized that he had a responsibility to defend his life against the charges brought before the Roman governor Festus, and he employed the means of defense available to him, which in this case was an oral presentation of the relevant facts and arguments.

8. The sacred obligation to preserve human life is binding on societies as well as individuals.

Romans 13:1-5 -- "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience."

Human rulers and human laws have been established by God for three basic purposes: (1) to protect the members of a society from harm by other members; (2) to ensure cooperation among the members of a society, so that they will be able to live and function with as little friction as possible; (3) in certain limited areas, to direct the actions of some of the members of a society in order to get a job done. The first function of human government -- protection -- is relevant to this topic. Human rulers and laws have in part been established by God to preserve human life. Because they have been established by God, they have the right to do whatever is necessary to preserve human life. Because human beings are made in the image of God and consequently have an inherent dignity, human governments have a responsibility to preserve human life.