

The Answer to Society's Escalating Violence

Practically everyone believes that violence is wrong, evil and a huge problem all around the world.

We long for peace that is real, lasting and more than just an oasis in a desert of violence.

We just can't agree on what to do about it, what the Bible says about it, or what Jesus' stance on it is.

I have become convinced that this is a major concern of Jesus himself and the Bible as a whole.

Jesus confronts the world's belief that those who conquer are those who survive the killing victorious. He makes the counterintuitive assertion that those who conquer are those who die without lifting a sword.

The cross was him living that assertion out, but it was more than that. It was God's declaration that in this sacrificial death the evil of "righteous" violence was exposed, its chains on humanity broken, and the victory over such sin achieved.

The resurrection didn't achieve the victory; it declared and vindicated the victory. The victory was in the dying.

The rest of the New Testament was written to show that this was what God was up to all along in the story of Israel that is embodied in the Old Testament, and to lay out the implications of this victory for followers of Jesus living in a world that is still addicted to violence as a means of solving problems.

Even among those who can accept the above, however, there is resistance.

It's not just that it's difficult to do or even unworkable in a world in which evil still abounds.

It's that we still see incidents in which violence prevents evil, and to not resort to it is to stand callously by while innocent people are killed, raped and injured and the perpetrators gain power.

We point to the police officers who kill a murderer before he can strike again, or a world war that was necessary to stop a fascist madman.

To stand by and not use violence to protect and rescue the innocent seems every bit as evil as murder itself.

This is actually our chief complaint against an all-powerful, all-loving God who permits such atrocities to take place.

He's either powerful enough to stop them but not loving enough to care, or he's loving enough but can't do anything about it. But he can't be both.

And neither can we. If we love, and we have the power to do something about it, we must.

It occurs to me that we are talking about two different things.

Most of us are concerned about stopping the violence in front of us - the guy with an automatic weapon in an elementary school, the terrorist with explosives strapped to her body, the autocrat with an army and a thirst to rebuild an empire.

God - and Jesus - are not unconcerned about such things, but they are concerned with the larger issue that continually gives rise to these incidents: how to stop the cycle of violence to which humanity is enslaved.

Genesis 4:23 describes this cycle of violence. "I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech 77 times." This is Lamech speaking to his wives, showing that this problem is the

concern of the Bible early on.

By contrast, Jesus tells Peter (and all of us) that we are to forgive 77 times (Matthew 18:22). To solve the problem of escalating violence – from Cain’s seven-fold vengeance to Lamech’s 77-fold – takes escalating forgiveness.

You can’t use violence, no matter how justified, to interrupt the cycle of violence. It may stop the evil in front of you, but in the end, violence can only perpetuate the cycle of violence.

“Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars,” Martin Luther King Jr. asserted. “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

The only way to break a cycle is to refuse to join it. You have to do something different. You have to do the opposite.

The answer to escalating violence is escalating forgiveness.

This is not standing by and doing nothing; no one would accuse Jesus of doing nothing. This is confronting evil with something different. It is confronting evil with love, with life, with forgiveness.

Only love can beget love; only life can beget life; only forgiveness can beget forgiveness. Is this not the gospel?

Will innocent people die? Yes. One did, and we call him Savior and Lord.

Will his followers die? Yes, some of them. We call them “witnesses” (martyrs), and Jesus says that they are the first ones to enter the kingdom of God.

They are witnesses that love is greater than hate, and righteous forgiveness is more powerful than righteous retribution.

✘ [Larry Eubanks](#) is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Frederick, Maryland. A

<https://ethicsdaily.com/the-answer-to-societys-escalating-violence-cms-23896/> February 6, 2017 Larry Eubanks

[version](#) of this article first appeared on his [website](#) and is used with permission. You can follow him on Twitter [@EubanksLarry](#).