

ANSWER TO VIOLENCE

By

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The world is filled with violence because it is filled with people — people in defiance of God. There is only one direction in following the Lord, but there are thousands of directions for men to take in not following Him.

All such directions are opposed to God. Nations war because men are at war with God. All men are in rebellion as long as they seek to live in defiance of the clear commands of Jesus Christ

Cain was a man of violence because he hated righteousness. When he saw that God would not receive him on his own terms, he resorted to violence and slew Able, who humbly met God's terms.

Noah met God's terms and was spared, but all the rest, who violently rebelled against God, were destroyed.

The citizens of Sodom tried to break into Lot's house and violate the guests there. Only by divine intervention through the angels visiting Lot was he and his family spared from their violence.

The mob that crucified Jesus was made up of common citizens and the elite of the town religious folk. They would have denied their trend to violence, but when they had to choose between submission to God in accepting the humble Galilean or their own proud way, they became violent in defense of their own pride and joined in calling for the blood of the Son of God.

The violence of Atlanta, Houston, Albuquerque or New York is all rooted in the same animosity toward God and righteousness. So is the violence of the Soviets, the Marxists of Ethiopia or El Salvador. It is not due merely to the anger of people who are hungry or who are seeking their "rights." It is the assertion of self-rule over God's rule.

It is the ancient sin of Adam and Eve, who thought they might "become as gods, knowing good and evil." They desired to cast off the hand of God, Who alone has the right to determine what is good and evil in His creation, and decide for themselves — to know for themselves without God's help — good and evil. Such is the declared goal of Humanism, the religion that had been gaining ground in America for the past century, until it has become the norm. People today fight for "rights" — which they have defined for themselves — rather than for responsibilities. The courts protect one's freedom to sin and violate the basic commandments of God, while they forbid the truth of God in public funded agencies, and the majority of people evidently want it this way.

Terrorism has become a political force in every nation. Assassination attempts are becoming commonplace. Mass murder is regularly in the news. No one knows when he or she may be targeted for an act of violence.

How shall a Christian respond to this kind of world? Should we answer violence with violence? There are some who confess Christ who answer in the affirmative. Not only are they stockpiling food and supplies, in anticipation of violent anarchy when the economy finally collapses, but they are arming themselves to protect their material treasures. I asked one such farsighted man if he would turn down a starving family who

might come to him in time of crisis, and he said, "Yes. If he will not prepare for such times, then he doesn't deserve to be helped by those of us who do." When I asked if he would actually kill such a person who tried to get some of his food, he said he certainly would. "If a man will not protect what he has, he doesn't deserve it," was his reply.

But this is not the way Jesus taught us. "You are the salt of the earth," He said. The salt is to be shared. It is expendable. But it must not lose its savor or it is worthless to the world and to the Lord. Better to lose one's life in faithful imitation of Christ than to preserve it by forsaking Him.

We have a record of how a Christian views the world and responds to its violence. The Romans glorified war and violence, sexual immorality and humanistic accomplishment. They were without excuse, Paul wrote, because the created universe was a testimony to the eternal power of God, and instead of giving thanks to God they exalted the creature and violated all the laws of God (Rom. 1:18-23). Paul's response was not to return good for evil, nor to take up the sword and violently oppose the pagan culture of his time, but to present himself a living example of what God desired all men to be. He refused to be conformed to the world, and never allowed the world to dictate his reactions to it. He saw the world as condemned and doomed to destruction. What mattered was turning men's minds and hearts to God in order that they might be prepared for the world to come. What mattered in this world was not preservation of things which will perish, but the use of all things to bring humanity to the feet of Christ, that they might not perish. "I count not my life as dear unto myself" (Acts 20:24). This was no denial of the value of life, as is seen in those who destroy their lives in drink or drugs, or those who think so little of life that they gamble with it in dare-devil stunts for fleeting glory. He counted his life dear to the Lord, and lived to serve and glorify Him. His admonition to the Christians at Rome was, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice to God..." This meant that they were to live for God, according to His commands and to the extent of the power He supplies.

Such Godly living includes vocalizing the truth, "holding forth the word of life," speaking, confessing, preaching, proclaiming, answering, and in every way possible telling the world the truth that God has revealed in Christ.

In most of the consideration given to violence, tyranny, hunger and the threat of war, men fail to take into consideration that this is God's world and because of rebellion against Him it is under condemnation. Nothing, including peace moves, technical progress, and humanitarian efforts is going to save it. In fact, a day has already been set for the judgment and destruction of the world, but that day is known only to God (Acts 17:31). Our status in the world is not to be reckoned from a worldly position, for such a status has no eternal value, since the world and its contents are to be consumed by fire in the final day. Rather our relation to the world is to be measured from our position with God. We are "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) and redeemed from "this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4).

Paul said that the world has the "smell of death" on it, but the Christian is one who smells of life. What greater contrast could there be than that between life and death?

A Christian view is a cosmic view, for we see from the revelation of God the whole plan for the universe, which includes the judgment and destruction of all ungodliness and the preservation and ultimate eternal glory of all that is Christian.

Therefore, it is not enough to take a stand against evolution, abortion, sexual promiscuity or abusive government. It is not enough to expose the various conspiracies that strive to destroy freedom and gain control. These are symptoms, the result of the infection of sin. We must speak against such, for sure, but we must speak to the real infection and offer its only cure: redemption in Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, we must have in mind the whole purpose of God in bringing man to His own image for eternity, and not seek to apply the cure merely for the relief of national problems. For example, some patriots keep preaching that we must “return to God or we will lose our freedom as a nation.” This is certainly true, but it is not the reason God wants us to return! His concern is not to maintain freedom for a sin-loving people! His concern is to have His creatures turn to him for His own sake, even if it means giving up freedom or even life. God will not be bribed into blessing a nation by people zealous only for their own material protection and blessing.

The early Christians understood this. They saw the Kingdom of Christ as greater than Rome, or Judea or Greece or Macedonia. Sins were to be abandoned, not to save the nation, but to purify the Kingdom of Christ and make one fit to be a part of it.

Wherever they went, the message was the same: the gospel, the good news that at last Christ had met the penalty of sin by undergoing that penalty in His own death, and then had risen from the grave to demonstrate the meaning of life and immortality; that he “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (II Tim. 1:10). The response required was always the same, to repent and be baptized. Whatever the culture, whatever the economy, whatever the political form, the problem was sin, and the answer was redemption through Christ.

Did this end violence? It did for those who became Christian! They might be on the receiving end of it, but they would not promote it. Their answer to it was to practice the golden rule and present the peace of Christ to the violent. Jesus promised, “in the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Then He died on the cross at the hands of violent men! We cannot overcome the world by beating it down, but by submitting to Jesus the Lord and dying to the world and its appeal, its pride, its glory and its false security.

We answer violence by living up to the gospel of peace. We answer violence with the message of Christ, the gospel that transforms the violent to peaceful servants of God. It will not change the whole world, since not all are going to accept it. There will still be violence right down to the very end, just as there was in Noah’s day. But God does not intend to tolerate violence forever.

The first earth was destroyed by water because of sin and violence of its inhabitants. The water that was stored in and above the earth was the means of the destruction of the rebels (II Peter 3:5–6).

The Creator hasn’t changed. He has promised that by “the same word (His word that brought about the flood) the heavens that now are and the earth have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (II Peter 3:7).

What then? Peter goes on to tell us that we “look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness” (Vs. 13).

Think of it! No violence. None whatsoever. Not a wicked person in all the world. No war, neither all the lying and conniving that goes on by so-called great men who engineer the wars.

No violence. No law enforcement required. No prisons. No fear. This is the fulfillment of God's glorious purpose to have man in His own image.

A new day is coming! It will be the ultimate solution to violence. In the meantime Christians are to practice peace, demonstrating to the world the new creature that is to live in the new creation, and trying to prepare every person for that day.

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