

Lawlessness, Cold Love Drives Batman Shootings

As I write, the news services are filled with reports of the shooting at the **Century 16 Theater** in Aurora, Colo., a suburb of the Denver metroplex. My heart breaks for those who have been affected by this heinous act. This is my city and it touches me deeply.

Already I hear cries for more **gun control**, but the problem has little to do with guns. Until just recently in this nation's history we have safely owned firearms without shooting one another in streets, schools and movie theaters.

I'm 60 years old and never in my younger years or those of my parents did this kind of thing ever happen. Now in the last decade and a half we have seen school shootings, killings in work places and shopping malls and finally this. Why now? Stricter gun control laws will do nothing to prevent such tragedies because guns are not the root of the problem, and if guns are not the root of the problem, then increased gun control cannot be the solution.

The root of the problem lies in something much deeper and more complicated than guns or even the deranged heart of a single shooter. Events like this recent act of violence represent only an extreme manifestation of a deeper problem, the visible and ugly head of a widespread cultural disease.

We can therefore choose to blame this one man for 12 dead and 50 injured, projecting our collective guilt on him alone, or we can realize that he is only an extreme expression of a depth of cultural decay for which we all share responsibility. Bear with me as I explain, and understand that none of what I say in any way absolves the perpetrator of responsibility for this hideous crime.

Post-modern philosophy has taught a generation that we human beings are not created in the image of an almighty creator God, but that we rather evolved from lower life forms, the result of natural processes. This has conditioned us to believe that there is no absolute baseline for morality or law handed down by a Higher Power.

Morality, our sense of right and wrong, then becomes relative to the feelings of the individual person. This is true even of many who call themselves Christian. I see the compromises every day in my ministry as a pastor. We simply reinterpret the meaning of God's clear commands to mean what we want them to mean rather than submit to the intended meaning of the Author and those He anointed to write it.

Alternatively, we presume upon His grace to forgive, wrongly thinking that grace grants immunity from the law of sowing and reaping. This amounts to lawlessness. Matthew 24:12 reads, "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold" (NASB).

Every word of Scripture and every rule of behavior contained in Scripture is God-breathed love designed to teach us how reality actually works so that we might live well within it. For instance, because it doesn't work, God forbids any form of sex outside of a marriage between one man and one woman. Ultimately this kind of immorality produces destruction and harm that a loving God who wishes us to live well and be blessed would prevent.

God forbids **divorce** because it destroys lives and in most cases deprives children of the essential presence of a father in their formative years. In 1951, the year of my birth, the divorce rate in America was 4 percent. Today it has risen to more than half because of our lawless self-focus and consequent lack of ability to live in self-sacrificial covenant. We therefore reap the whirlwind of violence and crime that results when a culture becomes fatherless and

family foundations are destroyed.

God prohibits theft, coveting of a neighbor's goods and lusting after a neighbor's spouse because these things violate the principle of love for one's neighbor. I could similarly demonstrate the love in every other law or principle of Scripture.

Culturally, however, we have rejected God's laws and principles in favor of a relative sense of morality based in the personal feelings of the individual. We cry, "Don't judge me!" when someone challenges our personal sense of right and wrong, whether or not the confrontation of that sin is lovingly offered. The spirit of lawlessness runs loose in the land and, as a result, love grows cold. When love grows cold we become self-focused rather than selfless as God originally designed us to be. Consequently, acts of outrageous harm to others become possible.

Conscience, based in selfless concern for the welfare of others and the effects of our actions on them, dies when lovelessness and self-focus take root. We all then become somewhat less than human. Thus, cultural collapse under the weight of loveless self-focus and the rejection of God's laws and principles creates the conditions under which the very broken—broken ultimately by our open rejection of God's ways—commit vicious acts of violence against others. We have seen it happen numerous times since 1999 and, barring a tremendous move of repentance nationwide, we will see more in the days to come.

Lawlessness produces love grown cold and we are collectively responsible for the destruction that results as we have rejected God's laws and written His presence out of our culture, our national life, our schools and our courts. We have sown the wind and now must reap the whirlwind.

Let the true sons and daughters of God arise in these days as

lights in growing darkness to reap a harvest of desperate souls damaged by our cultural decay and the suffering caused by sin. Let true love win the day that we might be a healing force for those who suffer, no matter what the cause.

Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners. Days after His infinitely selfless act on the cross, the resurrected Lord appeared to His disciples and John wrote, "So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained'" (John 20:21-23).

The word *retain* in the original Greek means "to seize" or "to hurl." Jesus came not only to forgive, but to break the power of sin and its destructive effects, to seize and to hurl it away. He has called us, His disciples, to exercise authority over sin and its manifestations in order to set people free. We therefore heal hurts. We repair the damage. We break the power of lawlessness over the hearts and minds of men and women and thus restore lives.

Can we do this long after the initial impact of the Century 16 shootings has faded? We are a hurting culture and becoming more so, but we who believe have been given the healing balm and the authority to use it. As destruction accelerates, we must speak the truth boldly, but at the same time apply the healing oil. Jesus called us "the light of the world." Light in a dark place shines all the brighter for the darkness around it. We have the power to bring hope.

And please, let us not forget to pray for the families and friends of the victims of this terrible crime in Aurora, Colo. I can't even begin to imagine their pain. Some of those injured were friends of members of our youth group at New Song Church and Ministries in Denver. This touches us close to home.

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