

The Church Holds the Key to Ending Rampant Violence—But Will We Step Out?

Once hatred has been sown, once respectful constructive dialog can no longer happen between opposing groups, violence becomes inevitable. Scripture says that sin, when full-grown, brings forth death (see James 1:15). As a result, violence now escalates in our land and in the world at large. It's not all Islamic radicals, either. It's workplace violence, politically motivated violence, shootings in schools and violent racial conflict. A recent news article pointed out that shootings of police are up 20 percent this year. We have seen a key congressman and four others with him shot while practicing for a friendly baseball game, all victims of a hate-filled gunman.

We can shrug off responsibility for these things by attributing them to the insanity of the people who have done the shooting, or we can humbly take collective responsibility and repent for the hatred we've allowed to grow in our nation between opposing political parties, races and ethnic groups. We can accept and confess our own guilt for sowing the hatred that releases the violence we're seeing unfold. Hatred seeks an outlet. It will find the sickest among us to influence and activate, but know that this is the outcome of what we as a culture have allowed. It simply will not do to shrug our shoulders and say, "Well, it's just that crazy fringe element." Absent collective repentance and absent the heart of our Lord expressed in love and honor for all people, especially those with whom we disagree, it will only grow worse. Christians should be leaders in this kind of repentance.

Am I saying that we should be silent in the face of evil?

Absolutely not! Should we be faithful to confront wickedness and injustice? Absolutely! But we must take care concerning the spirit in which such confrontation is offered. It's one thing to confront one another with the wrongs we see or the sins committed, but quite another to do so with tones of hatred and dishonor. Such things appeal to our sense of self-importance. We can be deceived into thinking they give us power, but they can never produce the fruit of the Father's heart. "Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).

So let's speak out! Let's confront the issues of the day. I love Ezekiel 33:8-9: "When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity. But his blood I will require from your hand. Nevertheless, if you on your part warn the wicked to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity. But you have delivered your soul." God holds us accountable to confront sin, injustice and wrongdoing when we see it, but note that when Jesus confronted Peter with, "Get behind Me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23b) by way of rebuke, He addressed Satan directly and in no way devalued or insulted Peter. He wasn't name-calling to create shame. He was delivering Peter from demonic influence for Peter's sake.

Anger cannot produce righteousness. Hatred cannot bring forth justice. Darkness cannot produce light. Specifically, until the right and left honor each other, until white and black honor each other, until Christians love Muslims even while not agreeing with them, until we honor presidents in spite of what party they hail from, our nation will continue down a path that leads to more violence and destruction. Our calling as Christians is to declare that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and then demonstrate the truth of what we say in all our words and actions. {eoa}

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