

Gun Control Is Not Enough—We Need God's Protection

Parents barely had time to grieve for the 17 victims of the horrific Valentine's Day school shooting in Parkland, Florida, when there was another outbreak of campus violence this week. This time it was at Great Mills High School in southern Maryland, where a 17-year-old student shot two students with a handgun before an armed deputy shot him.

What is going on here? Since the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting—an unimaginable tragedy that left 20 first-graders dead—there have been 239 school shootings nationwide, with 138 casualties. This number doesn't include mass shootings in other locations like the attack on a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, in November 2017; the Las Vegas massacre in October 2017; or the Orlando nightclub shooting of June 2016.

This week's incident in Maryland came on the same day that a package mailed from Austin, Texas, to an address in Austin exploded while on a conveyer belt at a FedEx facility near San Antonio. Investigators are convinced the person who mailed the carton is the same person who constructed four elaborate package bombs, three that were left on the doorsteps of homes in Austin and another that was left beside a road there.

Two men died in those attacks, two men were injured and a 75-year-old woman had to have her leg amputated because of her injuries. And these unsolved crimes remind us that guns are not the only weapons mass murderers use.

All these incidents have worried students, outraged parents, rattled nerves and sparked a national debate about gun control and school security. J. Scott Smith, a Maryland education official, declared at a press conference after the shooting at Great Mills: "If you don't think this can happen at your

school, you are sadly mistaken.”

What’s the answer? Can we stop the violence?

I personally believe we’ve been way too lax about the types of weapons that are sold over the counter in this country—and we are too naïve about the legal age of gun ownership. A disturbed young man like Nicolas Cruz, the 19-year-old assailant in the Parkland massacre, should never have been allowed to get his hands on an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle.

We are setting ourselves up for more massacres if we don’t adopt stricter background checks on those who purchase guns. We are inviting tragedy if we don’t require guns to be locked up if they are stored in homes with children. And we are foolish if we allow anybody and everybody to sell firearms without requiring proper registration.

Yet as students stage walkouts to protest gun violence, and Congress holds hearings about enacting stricter laws, we also must recognize there is a spiritual dimension to this problem. Yes, America is becoming more violent, but guns alone are not the root cause.

Our country needs God.

The Bible tells us that when people honor God, He blesses them with peace and protection. Psalm 144 contains a powerful prayer for the welfare of a nation. It says: “Let our sons in their youth be as grown-up plants, and our daughters as corner pillars fashioned as for a palace; ... Let there be no outcry in our streets! How blessed are the people who are so situated; how blessed are the people whose God is the Lord!” (Psalm 144:12,14b-15, NASB).

Psalm 91 also underscores the truth that God extends His protection over those who love and serve Him. It says: “If you say, ‘The Lord is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come

near your tent" (Ps. 91:9-10, NIV).

God is a shield to those who acknowledge Him. He defends them from harm. But when a nation or a people reject God, His protection begins to lift. Violence increases because Satan holds sway over unredeemed, unbelieving, unrepentant people.

French diplomat Alexis de Toqueville (1805-1859) traveled throughout the United States in its formative years, and he came to believe that our prevalent Christian faith made our democracy strong and our economy vibrant. He wrote in his classic book, *Democracy in America*: "There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America."

I don't know if de Toqueville would have the same opinion today. We have fallen so far. We redefined morality and stripped away all mention of Christian faith from our schools, institutions and halls of government. We basically told God to leave us alone. And that has left us extremely vulnerable.

If we want safety in our streets and an end to this epidemic of violence, it will require more than gun control. We need a spiritual awakening and a return to true faith. As you pray for protection for our schools and our neighborhoods, pray that America will rediscover the God who is our only safe refuge.