

GUN CONTROL, OR SELF CONTROL?

The current wave of gun-wielding students, bent on destroying the lives of either fellow-students or teachers, always sends the media into a feeding frenzy, the parents into paroxysms of fear, the politicians into an activist gun-control spin, the psychologists rushing into the school, and the students into shock. Yet, the group that is so conspicuously absent from all the excitement, ignored by media, parents, politicians et al, is the religious community. The breakdown of morals, or of moral restraints, and of self-discipline in society can be laid squarely at the feet of those who should be forming the moral base of society. For many decades now, the majority of humanly organized churches have abandoned the task of teaching godly morality, in favor of promoting feel-good religion. The “I’m OK–you’re OK,” self-esteem, libertine mentality that has corrupted society is the outgrowth of this abandonment. The pulpits no longer resound with the message that divine punishment will be visited on the sinner. Sin has become almost invisible, as a result.

Yet, the Word of God cannot be canceled by puny human beings. The truths in it are universal and eternal. The Apostle Paul once wrote in Romans 7:12-13, “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.” He recognized that God’s decree of spiritual death as the consequence of any sin marks it as “exceedingly sinful.” This principle is reflected unevenly in human law. The greater degree of vileness in the crime, the more severe the punishments prescribed for that crime. The person who has to spend 48 hours in jail for committing a minor offense is not burdened with a heavy weight of guilt. But, the guilty person who is faced with life imprisonment without a chance of parole, or death by lethal injection, is sure to be aware of the heinous nature of his crime.

With God, so that He might impress upon us more evenly the gravity of every kind of

sin, there is the common sentence of spiritual death. The true Christian who understands this is motivated to live free of all types of sin at all costs. Any deviation from that course brings an oppressive feeling of guilt, and a consequent desire to confess sin to a merciful, but also meticulously just God. Morality is not instinctive, except in cases that touch on the experience of mankind. Human beings yearn for peace and tranquility and freedom from harm for themselves, and may instinctively recognize that they cannot have these things for themselves, unless they grant them to others. This is the basis for civil law. Those who break the law either do not desire to have these advantages, or are so perverse as to think that they can have them while denying them to others.

It is different with God. His goal is to separate to himself a “people for his own possession, zealous of good works.” Such a people must have a selfless attitude toward all men, but they must also have personal morality appropriate to their relationship with a sinless God. When this is ingrained in them, they share in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), rising above their fleshly impulses (Galatians 5:24), seeking only the welfare of others (Romans 15:1-3), willing to live lives void of offense (1 Corinthians 10:32), and be lights “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Matthew 5:16).

A few modern religious organizations may still seek to implant this moral agenda in their members, but the majority have taken the road of least resistance. Their members, therefore, have a weak tradition of moral restraint. Self-control is of little importance to them, because they do not comprehend the serious and spiritually fatal repercussions of sin. The church to which they belong has put more emphasis on participation in “church league” sports, perhaps, than on developing a strictly moral character. If the moral agenda of God had not been abandoned by these churches for more mundane goals, there is the possibility that fewer crimes would be committed today. The temptations to destroy and maim and wound others would reside in fewer people—therefore fewer such wounds.

I am not hopeful that there will be a reversal of this trend of violence very soon. There seems to be little effort on the part of malfunctioning religious organizations to admit their

failures enough to make corrections in their practice. For the church of the Lord, which claims to have retained the moral high ground, there is only one vital change to be made. We must re-emphasize the role of creating more “salt of the earth,” more people who wear the “armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” in the world. We must not be seduced to go the way of other outlets of religion that have become mere social clubs for not-quite-converted sinners.

Christians may be shocked by the rise of violence in the very young, but we must be aware of the cause. There are parents who are either too busy to rear their children properly, or are devoid of moral standards themselves, so that they are poorly equipped to rear their children properly. There are authors, movie-makers, and television producers that are so vain in their own conceits that they do not care if their products arouse the same sort of sordid behavior they direct their actors to portray in their products. There are psychologists who extol human wisdom above the ancient and tested Word of God, who advise clients to abandon the standard of morality found in the Bible. There are politicians so corrupt in their morals that they can offer no practical solution to the problem (they are part of the problem). There are teachers who have degraded divine morality in favor of lesser forms of ethical behavior that bear no threat of punishment. Finally, there are preachers in churches who have forsaken the Bible. Among them are many homosexuals who advocate and approve that lifestyle. Many are adulterers, and encourage it in others. Many are hypocrites who bend with the moral wind of society rather than trying to reform the lives of their adherents with divine precepts.

But, let us not leave out the Christian who has allowed his moral view to be diluted by the prevailing trends of the world. The Lord reveals to us through the Apostle John that we must “not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world– the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life– is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17). What

Christian wants to be branded as one who does not love God, or as one who will perish with the world? Yet, many Christians have so embraced the world, and its rudimentary principles, that they can be hardly distinguished from the sinners of the world.

Let the church become once again that herald of righteousness, and it may have some impact on reversing the moral decline of society. It may again become a beacon of light in a darkened world. This must begin with Christians obeying the word which says “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life...” (Philippians 2:14-16).