

## What do we do about violence?

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A few months ago a normally quiet community in Australia suddenly had to deal with the tragedy of a mass shooting. This event led to tighter gun-control laws, but it also brought to light the need to look deeper into the problem of violence.

The public debate on these issues started me asking: What prompts a person to fire on another? Would eliminating guns eliminate acts of violence? In looking for answers, I turned to a resource that, along with the Bible, has helped me many times with my deepest questions. It is *Science and Health*. Discussing the subject of motives, this book states: "Is it not clear that the human mind must move the body to a wicked act? Is not mortal mind the murderer? The hands, without mortal mind to direct them, could not commit a murder ..." (pp. 104-105).

This made me realize that a violent act is prompted by violent thinking. Firing a weapon requires mental activity, and so the starting place for eliminating violence must be with individuals and the way they think about themselves and others. There is a connection between motive and action. This is the point that Christ Jesus was making when he said: "That which cometh out of a man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders ..." (Mark 7:20,21).

The task of being alert, attentive, and heedful about what thoughts are accepted into consciousness is particularly needed in today's society. It helps us to guard against a morbid fascination with wrongdoing and to reduce the level of violence in the community.

One way to ensure that we reject evil or violent thoughts is to gain a clear understanding of who we really are. Although people may be portrayed as miserable sinners, each of us is actually God's beloved child. Goodness and purity are spiritual qualities natural to us all.

Because God is Love, and man is made in God's likeness, peace, kindness of heart, and sweetness of temper are inherent in everyone. No volatility of character or instability of mind is actually part of our being. As God's offspring we have never inherited unsuitable personality traits. Knowing this spiritual fact enables us to reject any evil claiming to be part of us and saves us from destructive conduct.

Another way that helps reduce violent outbursts is to think and act from a Christian standpoint. This is done by living in obedience to the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20:3-17) and following Jesus' example in loving others as ourselves. This, in turn, helps to detect and control evil thoughts and actions.

Many times as a young person I was saved from potentially bad situations. Spiritual intuition alerted me to the danger of following questionable impulses and helped me to reject them. This was the Christ speaking to me, guiding and governing my thought. When we listen to the Christ and follow these right thoughts, we are prevented from harming ourselves or our fellowman.

A further way to defend ourselves from ill will toward others is to keep our minds filled with goodness, with all that is pure, honest, and upright. Then there is no space for anger or hate. You see, spiritual ideas come from God, and when we entertain such thoughts it's like wearing a suit of armor.

An individual whose consciousness is clad in this armor of goodness cannot become a perpetrator of violence or abuse. Good thoughts act as a barrier against evil intentions, protecting not only us but those around us. When we deny malice entrance to our thinking, it has no opportunity for expression.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us of this when he says: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (6:11-13). Then he defines the armor of God as being the spiritual qualities of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation.

Jesus demonstrated these qualities in his life. He urged his followers to love their neighbors, to do good to enemies, and to pray for those who treated them with contempt. When he was betrayed by a friend and personally confronted by a band of men carrying weapons, he did not react to this show of force. Nor did he permit his followers to do so (see Luke 22:47-51). Even on the cross he refused to hate and asked God to forgive those responsible for putting him there (see Luke 23:34). His resurrection from the tomb proved that violence has no power over a life devoted to obeying God and expressing divine Love.

Continual prayer for those caught up in violence, for lawmakers, and for all other people in our communities will do much to help restore confidence in good and bring violence under control.

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