

Introduction

Violence ... one bible dictionary defines it as ... Unrestrained physical or verbal force designed to hurt others, or to gain mastery over them.¹

1. Violence marks our World ... it is real.

When we think of violence, we can't help but think of crime that is so rampant in our country.

- Farm Murders
- Xenophobia
- Gender based violence
- Domestic Abuse
- Bullying
- Rape
- Murder
- Road-rage

The statistics are alarming.

The situation gets worse when you add to this list behaviours like *bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, along with every form of malice.*

The very sins that are true of many of us.

“Violence describes both sin and its destructive effects”.

The ultimate effect being death.

Genesis 6:11–13 ... ¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³ So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, (the reason) for the earth is filled with violence (the cause) because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.

¹ Manser, M. H. (2009). [*Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*](#). London: Martin Manser.

And God did exactly that as he sent the great flood over the earth that wiped out every human being except Noah's family.

In doing so, you may reckon that God used violence to do away with violence.

Throughout the Old Testament we see how God, for similar reasons, wipe out cities and nations and individuals.

It is important to understand that God's justice cannot be equated with violence. God is holy and perfect, he cannot and does not sin.

When he acts with justice, it is perfectly right.

In fact, his justice is an act of love.

A love that was ultimately seen when his Son, Jesus, faced the worst of suffering as he took the penalty for the sins of the whole world upon himself.

The cross was the most violent of acts ever witnessed.

An innocent man mocked, flogged, humiliated, scorned, beaten and ultimately executed for all to see.

When we talk about violence as we know it, sin is always the root cause.

God states in Genesis 6 that *the earth is filled with violence because of people*.

Only one generation after Adam and Eve's fall, we already see how one brother murders another.

And that has been the pattern since.

James 4:1–3 ...¹ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Because of sin, this world is filled with violence of all sorts.

Many prayers are prayed daily for the protection of my family and the He Saves ministry team as we minister to those caught up in various crimes.

But I have to remind myself that I am not exempt from crime and violence.

Not even because I am a pastor.

- As a Christian, you are not exempt from it.
- Christian farmers are not.
- That sticker that says *this car is covered by the blood of Jesus* is not necessarily going to stop the hijacker.
- Putting a cross in the front window of your house will not necessarily stop the crowbar gangs.

Many people, especially Christians, struggle with this.

It can so easily rattle your faith, especially as violence comes knocking at your door.

How can a God who loves his people allow such cruelty to happen to those who serve him?

There is no easy answer.

But what I can say is that ...

2. Violence matters to God ... he does not condone it

Psalm 11:4-5 ...

⁴ The Lord is in his holy temple;
the Lord is on his heavenly throne.

He observes everyone on earth;
his eyes examine them.

⁵ The Lord examines the righteous,
but the wicked, those who love violence,
he hates with a passion.

God looks, he sees, he knows every single gruesome detail of every violent act committed.

God knows what lies in the heart of the school-ground bully even before he acts out.

God knows what abuse you may face as you go back to a spouse tonight who thinks the idea of God is pathetic.

God knows and sees when a child is abducted and their innocence violated.

God does not turn a blind eye to evil.

He is sovereign even over the most heinous of crimes.

He hates it with a passion.
Even more than you do.
His righteous anger burns against all evil.

Psalm 11:6-7

⁶ On the wicked he will rain
fiery coals and burning sulfur;
a scorching wind will be their lot.
⁷ For the Lord is righteous,
he loves justice;
the upright will see his face.

The judicial system may fail people at times.
But God's justice will prevail.
Every single person will give account and face what is due to them.

So often we read about a family who is distraught because a criminal takes his own life before they are found guilty of a terrible crime. They commit suicide to escape public disgrace and the wrath of the law. What they do not realize is that they will open their eyes again in eternity. And there they will behold the ultimate Judge ... the Lord himself ... What a fearful moment that must be!

Scott Petty, in summarizing 2 Peter 3:7-10 that speaks about Judgement Day, says:

God will one day eliminate evil; but of course that will mean that he will eliminate all evildoers and sinners as part of the process, which doesn't really help anyone who doesn't trust him. He's actually holding off to give people the opportunity to turn and trust in him.

Not annihilation – but eternal suffering and pain in Hell

Revelation 6:10 ... ¹⁰ *They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"*

The Lord's answer ... *just a little bit longer* ... until the time is right ... until he has saved the last person whom he have chosen from before Creation.

God is a righteous God.

He will not let sin go unpunished.

Yet God does not wish to see anyone perish. (2 Peter 3:9)

Ezekiel 33:11 ... ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!’

There are countless stories of the worst of criminals who, through the Spirit, are confronted with their sin.

They are confronted with the glory of Christ.

They repent and get saved ... worshipping the Lord today.

Have you come to that point in your life where you have accepted Jesus as your Lord?

Where you have sought his forgiveness, putting your faith and trust in him?

If you have, then you would most likely have experienced a peace that transcends all understanding.

This peace is only found in Christ Jesus, who is the Prince of Peace.

You and I should be concerned about the violence in SA.

But we should not be fearful.

Like Jesus, we need to trust fully and whole-heartedly in our Heavenly Father’s plan and purpose to bring about the fulfilment of his Kingdom.

We must do so until the day comes that we enter the new creation, where there will be no more violence, no more evil, no more suffering, no more pain, no more sin.

God’s perfect people living in perfect peace in God’s perfect place under his powerful rule.

In Genesis 6 God promises to never send a flood again to destroy the earth. But he promises that he will send his Son to bring about the final judgment to usher in the new creation.

Until then we live in a world marked by violence.

How we respond to violence and evil is of utmost importance.

3. Violence motivates Christian living

When violence confronts us ... when our security systems fails us ... as the walls of comfort crumble around us ... it should move us deeply.

It should drive us not to despair, but to the cross of Jesus.
For only there can we start making sense of it.

As we behold God's love there, that very love should compel us to fight evil with good.

Let me briefly mention 7 ways in which we can respond to violence.

I'll do so from the passage that was read ... Rom 12:9-21

a. Hate Violence

v9 – *Hate what is evil.*

ESV says *abhor what is evil*

Paul is referring especially to the pain and suffering that flow from evil and sin.
Violence should not sit easy with us.

Elsewhere Paul encourages us to expose evil deeds.

Report child abuse.

Report rape.

Report criminal activity.

But when you do so, do it in a loving manner.

Be careful how you interact on your Neighbourhood Security Groups.

b. Endure Violence

v12 - *Be joyful in hope*: the resurrection hope – the Lord's return and the glory to follow

v12 - *Be patient in affliction*: persevere in your trials

We can rejoice in our sufferings, because it produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; and character produces hope. (Romans 5:3–4)

c. Pray Faithfully

v12 – *Be faithful in prayer:*

Pray for perseverance and strength.

Thank God for using even evil for his good purposes.

Jesus teaches us to pray - *Father lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

Pray for protection - for yourself, your loved ones, our missionaries.

Pray for justice to be served.

Pray for those who commit evil, pray for their salvation.

Because as you do so, as v14 says, you are in fact blessing them.

d. Do not curse

v14: *Bless and do not curse*

When you curse someone, you are wishing ill and harm onto them.

You are in fact wishing evil onto them.

Be careful how you react with your words and thoughts towards those who commit evil.

Do not wish evil onto them.

v17 – *Do not repay evil for evil*

Gandhi once said ... “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.”

e. Mourn over violence

v15 – *Mourn with those who mourn*

Suffer with those who are impacted by violence as you experience their pain and grief.

Be there for those who hurt.

Violence and its consequences should move us to tears.

f. Do not retaliate

v19 – *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.*

Unless they turn to Christ, there is no future hope for the evil man (Prov 24:19f)
They will receive their just punishment when they stand face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not retaliate, instead imitate Jesus:

1 Peter 2:23 ... ²³ *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

g. Overcome violence with doing good

v9 – *Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

But not only do we cling, for v21 says, we are to *overcome evil with good.*
ie. we are to do good!

Jesus says: Love your enemy ...

- Pray for their salvation
- Seek ways to minister to those who are caught up in violence
- Consider joining the prison ministry team
- Get involved in your community projects and meetings.

²⁰ ... *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”*

Many a criminal has come to repentance through the genuine love, including forgiveness, received from the families of their victims or even from the victims themselves.

It may take time.

Martin Luther King, Jr. ... *“The nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had. Finally it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality.”*

To expect immediate change in our country with regard to violence, I think, is far-fetched.

But change is possible as we live out the gospel.

As we show love and forgiveness and mercy to people who live only for themselves.

We do so by being fully dependent on the Lord.

For that is how we combat violence.

At the end of the day it is a spiritual war.

As a Christian you know who is the Victor.

Conclusion

There are those who look at the Holy Wars and blame Christianity for most of the violence in the world.

If we respond in the correct and godly way, peace can result.

It starts with you and me as individuals.

It moves on through our families, our neighborhoods and our cities.

We love as God loves us.

A love that does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. (1 Corinthians 13:6)

Let us pray together the prayer David prays at the start of Psalm 140 ...

¹ Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men; protect me from men of violence, ² who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day. ³ They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips. ⁴ Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; protect me from men of violence who plan to trip my feet. Amen