

#223 "The Lust for Violence"

By Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

The love of violence is becoming mainstream in our culture between the mixed martial arts fighting and the gory, graphic video games marketed to young kids. As the marketers tell us, there is something within all of us that enjoys the fight, the beating, the blowing up, and the killing. They are right about sinful man, and violence does sell. In Jesus, however, we have a very different picture. Isaiah 53:9 says of Jesus, "His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, *Because He had done no violence*, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth" (emphasis added). Jesus didn't advocate violence or commit violence. He didn't enjoy seeing the weak oppressed or the innocent suffer. He didn't make jokes to His disciples about how slow some people were to pick up on the truth. He didn't use His power to bully the religious leaders of the day. He didn't use His wisdom to try to make people feel stupid in order to garner a laugh. He denounced violence, even asking Peter to holster his sword rather than fight for His Lord. He even healed the ear of the soldier whom Peter struck. The world would heap violence upon Him on the cross, but Jesus didn't fight back. He knew that love was the only thing that could stop the violence. Love is what the world needs to see because it is what it doesn't have.

The devil loves violence, for it is part of his very nature (Ezekiel 28:16). As such, the world contains wars, rumors of wars, killing, ethnic cleansing, mass graves, fighting for pay and pleasure, cruelty to animals, slavery, oppression, termination of the unborn, and brutality of many kinds. Violence is a defining mark of the world. As Genesis 6:11 says, "Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence." We live in a violent world (Psalm 58:2) with violent people (Psalm 73:6) who love to do violent things (Psalm 74:20). That is just the sad reality of a world marred by sin. As Christians, we need to recognize that violence can be contagious, and the Bible commands us to not associate with people who love violence (Proverbs 24:1-2). That is not to say that there is not a time to stand up and defend country or family, for example, but we should never find joy in violence itself.

Some people claim that since the Bible is not shy about recounting acts of violence that this justifies violence as being acceptable in terms of our entertainment. For example, they might point to Samuel hacking Agag to pieces in 1 Samuel 15:33 as a rationalization for splattering pixels of blood all over the computer monitor. The reality is that they miss the message of the whole counsel of God concerning violence. Agag was supposed to have been killed already because God had sanctioned his death on account of his evil ways. Samuel's actions were meant to send a message to Israel, particularly to those in observance, such as King Saul, that God was serious about purging the evil from the land. In no way did Samuel derive some sick pleasure from his actions. Rather, it should have left everyone, including us, with a sick feeling in the pit of our stomachs because of just how much God hates sin. In the New Testament, Jesus was hung on a cross with nails put through His hands and feet after having the flesh on his back ripped off with 39 lashes. This was extremely brutal, and the Bible doesn't shy away from that fact. This does not mean that violence is healthy and fun, but rather it shows how evil the world is and

how much it hates mercy and grace. Rather than try to justify what the world loves, we should try to show them a more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31).

Christians must stand apart from the love of violence, seeking peace as much as it depends upon us (Romans 12:18). We should be gentle, forgiving people with tender hearts (Ephesians 4:32) yet willing to boldly declare the truth concerning our Savior. Psalm 11:5 says, "The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates." We need to let that last part sink in. God hates those who love violence. He is at enmity with those who work violence and love cruelty. These store up His wrath and bring Him great indignation (Psalm 7:11). As believers, why should we seek the company of such people, let alone participate in the violence that they love?

Violence has a devastating effect on individuals, families, neighborhoods, and societies. It leaves people with fear and horror, for they do not know when they will become the next victim of violence (Ezekiel 12:19). In Hosea 4, God says He has a case against Israel because they have adopted the ways of the world. He says in v. 2, "There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed." Violence breeds further violence, and only love can break the cycle.

Christians tend to know this instinctively given that they are often victims of violence on account of their faith. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:12, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." Violent men enjoy doing violent things to those who speak out against their violent ways. Paul was one of those people before his conversion. 1 Timothy 1:13 says, "Even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." As in the case of Paul, we would do well to remember that, thankfully, our God is not a God Who loves violence but mercy. He wants men to repent and cast aside their wicked ways. Change can happen, and it needs to start with those who call themselves followers of Christ. We need to reevaluate what we watch and how we treat others, searching our hearts to see if there is anything that enjoys or loves violence, cruelty, insults, or oppression. The merciful will be shown mercy, but the violent will meet a violent end.

If we really want to make an impression on somebody that can actually make a positive eternal difference, we must choose love and not violence. As Proverbs 25:21-22 says, "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you." If only the world was willing to try this, what a difference it could make, but they won't because they love violence. Therefore, it is up to us who love Jesus to show the world a new and better way, a way that leads to truth, to conviction, and, by God's grace, to peace.