

Love, Isolation, and Violent Intervention

The youth of every generation tend to be idealistic. That is commendable for they call for a re-evaluation of accepted standards of conduct. They often envision a peaceful world in which both individuals and nations may coexist without strife and war. So it is only to be expected that many young persons especially are conscientiously opposed to war. For Christians, the problem of loving all others and warring against them is formidable.

The atrocities of September 11, 2001 have unexpectedly and forcefully raised this disturbing issue again. Can we be doves foregoing self-protection while practicing peaceful appeasement? Or must we be hawks employing force to protect society?

Without question, the greatest commandment and fulfillment in life is to love God and one another. All we have to do to have an idealistic society is to love one another. It is that simple, yet it is most complex. It would be simple if everyone loved, but everyone has never reached that state in even one city or society. There are always some evil ones who are disrespectful and destructive.

Loving everyone is not just having a warm feeling about them while we remain isolated from them and ignore the injustices many of them may be suffering. Love must be positive and aggressive. Love is the Great Commandment and the Golden Rule tells us how that love is to be demonstrated. *“So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets”* (Matt 7:12).

Here I will enlarge on an illustration I have used before. Let us imagine a beautiful, isolated, uninhabited island that becomes open for homesteading. A hundred families are apportioned land according to the size of each household. Several of the family groups, including yours, have thirty members each, but other households are much fewer in number --- one old man alone, two younger widows, a widow and four children, five teenagers whose parents are dead, and other households of varying description.

In planning this new community, all agreed to prohibit guns and weapons of any sort so they could live together in peace. It is an ideal arrangement and all goes smoothly -- for a while.

One of the larger families, however, begins to force the orphaned teenagers to work its fields each morning. Your family is disturbed, but that is really none of your business. You remind the teenagers that, when forced to go a mile, they should go the second mile as Jesus taught. So they should offer to work afternoons free also. And when they steal chickens from the old man, he should offer them his cattle also.

They seize the land of an elderly couple and drive them off their property. You sympathize, but advise them that Jesus taught, *“Do not resist him who is evil.”*

Men from one large family frequently force themselves on the two young widows who are helpless to repel their sexual abuse. Your heart goes out to them, but you cannot afford to become entangled in the affairs of others. You only tell them that they should “turn the other cheek” by inviting the men back at any time. (Read Jesus’ teaching in Matt 5:38-48.)

The offenses grow in frequency and in ruthlessness. All these helpless victims cry out to you for help. Members of other larger families come to you suggesting that you all band together to stop the aggressive injustices. A committee is formed and appointed to negotiate with the offending group. You urge them to stop their atrocities, but they only scorn the committee and increase their lawless tyranny. You negotiate again and again. They only grow more defiant and violent.

Now, what are you going to do? Can a Christian be an isolationist in the brotherhood of humanity? Are Christians denied self-defense against atrocious injustices committed against them? When love and negotiation fail, are we left as hapless victims of ruthless, evil men who ignore any intervention except greater force than they have?

You may contend as I did in my youthful idealism with misled conscience. I said that it would be a sin for me to use force against the offenders but that you should call the police or let the army take care of it. Well, that was nice! It would be a sin for me to intervene with violence or force but it is fine for me to call on others to sin for me! I even pay them by taxes to sin for me! I cannot be a policeman or soldier but I can support them by taxes and approve of their giving me protection. Isn’t that a bit ... well, I will let you supply your own word there for you may not like mine.

If someone is attacking my family, I may not have time to call the police. If not, I have the right to protect my family and myself. I am not required to love the attacker more than my own family. Neither God nor civil governments demand that.

Let the association illustrated above also represent nations instead of families and individuals. Can a moral nation isolate itself from injustices among the nations of our world? Does a society have the right of self-protection? Who can always be a dove and never a hawk?

“If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18). Peace in a society cannot be enjoyed unilaterally. Paul recognized that. Peace is bilateral.

Let me add a few words to put Jesus’ teaching in perspective. Yes, he declared, *“My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews..”* (John 18:36). He was speaking of being rescued from the cross. He was living in an earthly kingdom, the kingdom of Israel. In

Matthew 23, we have the expression of his love and mourning for his people. He warned of the destruction that would be brought on them as a nation for their rejection. The great tribulation and destruction would come upon them about forty years later when he returned in the events surrounding AD 70 described in Chapter 24. So the love of Jesus allowed for severe, violent retribution for evil.

Due to my mother's strong conviction and teaching, I developed the conviction that a disciple of Jesus would be totally out of line in serving in the military. So as the clouds of war gathered and men were required to register for the draft, on October 16, 1940, while I was a ministerial student in Abilene Christian College, I registered as a conscientious objector. I was deferred as a minister; so my objection was never made a point of contest.

As the years passed and I gained more maturity of insight into the Scriptures, I made a more thorough study. This time I did not just look for passages defending my objections, but I looked for a harmony of teaching. So I wrote what I think (immodestly) is a study from which any inquiring person may profit greatly.

That treatise, "The Right of Self-Protection," is Chapter 21 in my book, Free To Speak. You may access it at my web site or order the book from me for \$6.50 postpaid. The illustration used above is revised from Chapter 26 of that book and FR 93. []

(Cecil Hook, December 2004)

Talkin' Texas: Some of Arkansas is loved for its mountain beauty. Amarillo, Texas, sitting in an expanse of the High Plains at 3,676 feet is 923 feet higher than the highest point in Arkansas, which is 2,753 feet.