

"The Answer is God"

Someone commits a violent crime in America every 26 seconds and a murder every 36 minutes. Why? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." Today we're exploring the cause of violence and the solution. Stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's will. The Lord's way is a way of love, joy, and peace. It blesses everyone who follows it. Psalm 1 and verse 2 tells us about the blessed man. God said, "his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." If you want a better world, it begins with you. Don't wait on others. Today, seeking the Lord and meditating on His Word can make all the difference. Learn what God desires from you and then practice it. The Lord Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." I know you love the Lord and you want to serve Him. Thanks so much for spending this time with us. We want to be part of your life each week.

Lately we've seen lots of violence and hearing the word "evil." The nightly news carries story after story of assault, rape, and murder. Violent crime in America has grown dramatically in the last 50 years. According to the FBI there were 288,000 violent crimes in 1960; but in 2018 there were over 1.2 million violent crimes reported. We've grieved over violent school shootings, terrorist acts, and bombings. We wonder how anybody could be so cruel and hard-hearted.

While some psychologists spoke of violent people being mentally disturbed, others said they are evil. Perhaps it takes crime so horrific as this for us to remember that there is such a thing as evil. Postmodern America has spent so much time excusing itself and justifying its sins, it's forgotten how wicked and how evil humans can be. More than anything we need the teaching and the love of Jesus to change our hearts and to live righteously.

Now, if you want to study more about this topic, we offer the information on this program free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 2 Timothy 3:1 to 5, and we'll examine our culture of violence.

Our reading today comes from Paul's second letter to Timothy chapter 3 verses 1 through 5. And here he's warning Timothy about the changes, evil changes, that will take place as time passes.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

Rather difficult thing to think about, a world that is becoming worse all the time. Let's pray together. Oh, Father we are thankful that through Your grace You have given us the forgiveness of sins. Father we pray that Your love and Your goodness will help us to do the best that we can. To live lives that are holy and righteous. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

From the earliest days, the Bible speaks of the violence in this world. You'll remember in Genesis 4 that God had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering God had no regard. Cain became very angry and his face fell. God warned him in Genesis 4:6 to 7, "Why are you angry, and why

has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” But Cain let his anger grow in spite of God’s warning. Verse 8 says that-, “Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.”

What Cain did was evil. He planned to kill Abel out of his jealousy. God said in Genesis 9 verse 6 that, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” God has always considered taking the life of another as evil. The Lord’s Ten Commandments say in Exodus 20 and verse 13, “You shall not murder.” Murder is and has always been wrong. Revelation 21:8 says, “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

The New Testament warns us not to follow Cain. 1 John 3 and verse 12 the bible says, “We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.” Cain first thought evil and then put his deadly plan into action. We too must master our thoughts and not allow evil to overcome us.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:21 to 22, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” The Lord condemns the evil in the heart, even if we don’t act upon it. Anger, hate, and vengeance is as evil as murder itself. We should not even entertain the idea of harm or slandering another person.

The Lord Jesus said in Mark 7 and verses 21 to 23, “For from within, (that is) out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Because our inner thoughts affect how we behave, we must be careful to keep our hearts free from evil. We have to decide that we’re going to live above ugliness and malice.

According to Jesus, murder begins when people lose respect for another person. Spitting in the face of another, looking with contempt upon another, or releasing one’s anger are signs of a murderous spirit. Jesus forces us to consider our thoughts and our words, that we don’t allow our anger and hatred to overwhelm us. The Bible says in Ephesians 4 verses 31 and 2, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” We must learn to let go of evil thoughts and be kind to others, even if they’re not kind to us.

Evil in the heart leads to the most terrible sins. Even religious people, if they allow jealousy or hatred to build up in their hearts, they can do unspeakably cruel things to others. The chief priests, scribes and Pharisees were behind the death of Jesus Christ. They chose Barabbas, the criminal, to be spared, while they cried out for the blood of Jesus Christ. They didn’t fool Pilate, however. Mark 15 and verse 10 says, “For he (Pontius Pilate) perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.”

Why were they envious? First, because Jesus could perform miracles; but they couldn’t. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, some men ran and told the chief priests and Pharisees. John 11:47 to 48 says, “So the chief priests and the Pharisees (they) gathered the council and (they) said, ‘What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’” Well, the second reason came

from their fear of losing their livelihood at the temple. They figured it was better for Jesus to die than for them to lose their nation. Many people today do horrible things out of jealousy and envy.

Another cause of hatred is something you might not expect; it's the truth. People don't want the truth told, if it exposes their sins. The Lord Jesus said in John 3:19 to 20, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." Sinful people want the darkness to cover up their sinful ways. They hate for their sins to be exposed and hate anyone who exposes them.

You'll remember Herod had John the Baptist arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." (Matthew 14 and verse 4). Herod was grieved about the matter, but Herodias plotted to have John beheaded. An evil person who has hatred in his or her heart has no compassion. They will take vengeance into their own hands.

Selfish desire can lead people to commit murder. People who are greedy for power and gold will do anything to eliminate their competition. The Bible says in 2 Chronicles 21 and verse 4, "When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Israel." Lust for power causes people to do horrible things, even to their families. James 3:16 says, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."

Unrestrained sexual desire leads to evil. When David lustfully committed adultery with Bathsheba and got her pregnant, it led to many other sins. He tried to cover it up by getting Bathsheba's husband Uriah to come home to her. When nothing else worked, David arranged for Uriah to die in battle. Nathan the prophet told David in 2 Samuel 12 and verse 9, "Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites." Remember, when we sin against others, we're also sinning against God Himself. If you love God, you'll not allow selfishness to dominate your life.

The apostle Paul listed a number of fleshly sins in Galatians 5. And each of them arise out of selfishness. When people rebel against God and must have their own way, they lose sight of everyone else. They grow callous and don't care who they hurt. Paul said in Galatians 5:19 to 21, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." People who hold to fleshly sin cannot live with God forever.

And therefore, we must be careful to set our hearts on serving the Lord rather than living like the world. 1 John 2 verses 15 to 17 says, "Do 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 desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." Sinful desire has led many men and women into ruin. Selfishness leads people away from God, and loving God leads people away from selfishness. The answer to evil is God's love.

Paul explains how loving God and loving people leads us away from evil. He said in Romans 13:8 to 10, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal,

You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Just as filling your heart with anger and hate leads to sin, filling your heart with what is good and loving leads to righteousness. There's a stark contrast between the person who loves God and his neighbor and the person who loves only himself.

Keeping God in our hearts isn't trivial. It's not a game. It's the most important thing that you can do. It affects your life and the lives of everyone around you. Don't let anything come between you and the Lord. Jude 21 reminds us to keep ourselves in the love of God. When God is our focus, we love what is right and good; and when we push God out, every evil thing comes into our lives. The Bible says in Romans 1:28 to 32, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."

Why are we so angry and violent? Why has evil become so prominent? It's because we've forgotten God; we no longer "see fit to acknowledge God." We've stop reading the Bible and worshiping at church, we've convinced ourselves that we're an accident of evolution rather than created beings with intelligent design. We've let sinful behavior politically correct God's Holy Word, so what God calls sin is now morally acceptable. Without shame we've loved darkness and hated light, we've loved sin and blasphemed righteousness. We fill our media with every ungodly thought, every ungodly word, and every ungodly act. We glorify sin and mock righteousness. When we choose to be godless, why should it surprise us that our society becomes wicked? When we reject the love of God, why should it surprise us that we become angry, hateful, and callous?

When we shut God out of our hearts, we let the devil walk in. When God cannot enter our schools, Satan and his followers will. When we can't read the Bible or pray in public any more, why should we be surprised that sin fills our cities? We won't let the Bible into our schools, but we sure want them in our prisons. Shouldn't that teach us something? We need God in our hearts and in our lives.

Let's pray together. Oh, Father we are grateful for Your love and Your grace and all that it has taught us. Help us Father to be more and more like You. To love You and to love one another. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

The solution to violence is this: the love of Jesus must be in our hearts and His teaching in our lives. When Peter cut the ear off the high priest's servant, Jesus healed the man and said, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26 and verse 52).

The Lord Jesus knew people get angry and are violent. He taught a better way. He said in Matthew 5:43 to 45, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." If we're to be like God, we will love and even pray for our enemies.

Jesus practiced what He preached. Remember how Jesus prayed, when they were crucifying Him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23 and verse 34). Friend, the grace of God can even forgive the violent. Peter told the Jews at Pentecost, these Jews who were responsible for the death of Jesus. He said in Acts 2 verse 36, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus (and then He pointed His finger) whom you crucified."

They were cut to the heart over their sin and asked what they could do to be forgiven. Peter responded in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When we change our hearts and are baptized, we too can find God's forgiveness. The closer we draw to God, the better our world will be.

We hope that today's study has stirred your heart to be closer to God. And if you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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There's no better day than today to get your life back where it ought to be by worshipping at church. There's probably a church of Christ in your area. Why not worship with them today? If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell your friends about this program and invite them to watch as well. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.