

## What can Christians do to turn the tide of violence in community?

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Just when I think our society can't get any worse, I turn on the news and find out that it can. Recently, grim headlines announced the tragic shootings at Columbine High School — and headlines in newspapers across the country continue to bear witness to the ongoing degeneration of morality and spirituality.

Children are killing children. Children are killing teachers and parents. Parents are killing children. Jerry Springer's mindless, and mind-numbing, stupidity is the most popular television show among our youth. Girls as young as eleven are having and/or aborting babies.

We have political officials we can't trust, and whom we would not dare ask our children to emulate. Drug and alcohol addiction abounds among all age groups. Suicide continues to give us cause for concern, most significantly among the elderly and teenagers.

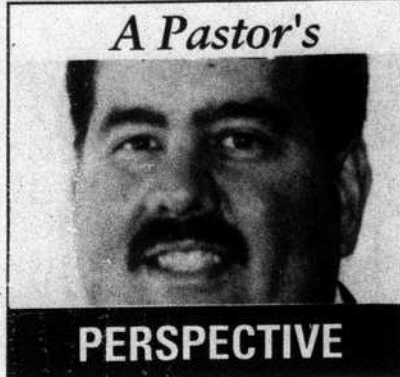
Where is it all going to end? Can things get any worse than they are? How much longer will the Lord tarry? Have we passed the point of no return? What is our government going to do? What are our schools doing to help? These are a few of the questions we hear these

days, expressing our stupefaction over the current state of affairs in our society. But are these the right questions?

Try on a different set of questions if you dare. What shall we do? Where is our outrage? Where is our concern? Is there any hope and do the Christians of the 1990s care? What is the church going to do? These are the questions I think we should be asking.

Perhaps a good starting place would be in the realization that we have a problem. Our lovely little rural corner of North Carolina is not exempt from the misery. Lest we believe these are global concerns, not affecting Chowan County, we need to look again. In recent years, gang-like violence has flared in our community, causing serious injury to some and bringing arrests for others. And, about this time last year, a teenager in our county was arrested and charged with the death of his mother. As I heard a longtime resident say, you don't go off and leave your doors unlocked in Chowan County any longer.

Talk to veteran teachers at our middle and high schools and they will tell you of the free flow of alcohol and drugs among our students. They will also tell you about a troubling decline of respect from students and parents alike. Talk to the good people at Albemarle



PERSPECTIVE

Crisis Pregnancy Center and they will tell you about the many teenage, unwed mother they assist. Talk to a social worker and let her tell you of the young boy or girl prowling the streets late at night because of a lack of parental concern or supervision. This is a short list; there are many others who bear witness to the downward moral spiral in which our community and every community is trapped these days.

We must define who has the problem. This problem does not belong to the politician, the educator or the social worker alone. It is a moral crisis that begins with the family and church and spirals outward to the fringes of society. Our political and educational systems need reform, but that alone will not win this battle.

At the risk of being tuned out by some who hold to a particular ideological position, I must agree with the likes of Bill

Bennett, Charles Colson and Pat Buchanan that we are in the midst of a cultural war. The casualty list includes Republicans and Democrats, young and old, black and white, male and female. This being the case it seems to me that Christians and the Church should be leading the battle. We cannot afford to wait for politicians, educators, or anyone else to provide a clear and consistent moral vision for our children. Christian families and churches should provide that vision and it should be based on the great truths of the Bible and our nearly two thousand years of Christian heritage. But we are not doing well; we have gone AWOL on this battle!

Along with defining whose the problem is, we need to define what the problem is. The problem, it seems to me, is not violence, obscenity, etc., but rather, the decline of moral constitution and direction. Will Dodson, director of Public Policy for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, has spoken insightfully on this subject. He said:

"The greater crisis is one of belief in transcendent and immutable moral truth, as revealed in Holy Scripture. The loss of belief in higher truth, God's truth, has been replaced by many with a conscious or

subconscious belief that what once was considered right for everyone is now open to personal opinion. Thus, what might be wrong for one person is not necessarily wrong for another. No moral value is absolute. Everything is relative."

It is this post-modern philosophy of morality which, in my opinion, is the real problem we face. If I don't believe murder is absolutely wrong under all circumstances, then I have no moral restraint to prevent me from murdering another human being. Similar cases can be made for the necessity of moral restraint with regard to not stealing, not committing adultery, etc. Teaching our children to live without absolute moral truth and restraint makes about as much sense as turning them loose on our highways without any speed limits or traffic regulations. Either case is a recipe for disaster.

We have focused on the symptoms of our disease for long enough. We need to treat the host cancer, that is, the lie that morality does not matter. The way to do that is with massive doses of scriptural education, daily prayer therapy, and by spending time with fellow strugglers and survivors.

We need a sustained and intensive dialogue in our homes and in our pulpits concerning this moral struggle and the way out of it. Our children need to

hear and see from us that there are moral absolutes and that what God says matters.

In Deuteronomy 6: 1-9, the Lord reminds Israel that her welfare in the land He is giving them is connected to their faithfulness and to their passing along of their covenant with God to each new generation. He tells us to teach God's commands to their children with diligence, "As you sit in our house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." Jesus said that He did not come to destroy the covenant God had made with the people in earlier times, but to bring it to fulfillment. And, He added, it is never enough to simply hear His Word — we must do it, obey it, live by it.

## Relay

Continued From Page 2-B

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## Iredell

Continued From Page 2-B

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**Meatloaf**  
Continued From Page 3-B  
shape beef mixture into round patty about 9 inches in diameter. Bake 30 minutes. Remove from oven. Arrange tomatoes and olives over top of meatloaf; sprinkle with cheese. Continue baking 8 to 10 minutes or until

meatloaf is to medium doneness (160° F.) and cheese is melted. To serve, cut into wedges.

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## Day

Continued From Page 3-B

etables, drained  
8 oz. uncooked pasta shells  
1 cup tomato juice or vegetable juice  
1/2 tsp. oregano  
Brown meat and drain.  
Add remaining ingredients, except cheese.  
Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.  
Top with cheese. Cover; remove from heat. Cool 5 minutes, until cheese melts.  
Makes 4 to 6 servings.

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