

What's This World Coming To? **By Patrick Swayne**

It has been a tumultuous year to date in the United States. Massive hurricanes and storms have ripped across our southern states, while fires have burned across those in the west. Protests over race relations or political ideology seem to happen daily; rather than bringing about positive change, these events seem to cement division and often end in violence. People don't have to be at the forefront of ideological battles to find violence though. As the last couple of weeks have taught us, violence can find you, whether you are sitting in a church building or attending a concert. Safety and stability seem a long way away.

Natural disasters, as tragic as they are, have always impacted our sin-shaped world (cf. Genesis 3:17-18), and will continue to do so as long as time continues. In fact, the reason we are so shocked by these events is that they are not typical of our existence – our God “daily loads us with benefits,” rather than pain (Psalm 68:19). When these disasters come, they are an exception, and, as terrible as they are, they are also opportunities for man to draw closer to one another and closer to God.

Violence, on the other hand, is a little harder to swallow. It is a disaster, but it is not natural; it represents a perverse and selfish choice motivated by hatred for God and for men who are made in His image (Genesis 1:27). God hates “hands that shed innocent blood” (Proverbs 6:17), so it is only natural for us to hate them too. However, sometimes violence causes us not only to hate hands but the hearts that move them, and to crave a vengeance that belongs to God and government (Romans 12:17, 19; 13:3-4). We must “give place to wrath” (Romans 12:19), and “love [our] enemies” (Matthew 5:44).

Hating those who hate us represents a sinful overreaction to their sin; the blame game represents an underreaction. I heard a woman on the radio whose children were at the Las Vegas concert accusing the hotel that housed the shooter of negligence. Why weren't metal detectors installed, she asked; never mind that virtually no hotel in the United States has a metal detector and that hotel staff are taught by popular demand to respect the privacy of their patrons. I would suggest though that all of the safety precautions in the world will not prevent hatred and violence from occurring.

Some, even Christians, see the hateful speech and violent behavior that flood our news networks and our streets and ask, “What is this world coming to?” The question is an exercise in futility and especially so for Christians, who are told, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7). In a specific sense, it is impossible to know what the world is coming to; the disciples couldn't know whether the Lord would “restore the kingdom to Israel” (1:6), and we can't know what the Lord has in store for our future either.

There is more wrong with this question though than the fact that we cannot see the future. Sometimes, when people ask what the “world” is coming to, they actually mean “the United States,” and therein lies a great misconception. The United States is not the world. While the United States has been tremendously blessed by God, human history shows that nations rise and nations fall; none have continued since the beginning of time. We must not place our faith in the stability of our nation, but in the King of all nations: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15).

Further, even though we cannot see the future, faith provides some answers. What’s this world coming to? As long as time continues, “evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13). “Scoffers [...] will come [...], walking according their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’” (2 Peter 3:3-4). “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). While we don’t know the particulars, we know exactly what the world is coming to on this side of eternity, and we even know what’s coming on the other side of eternity: “[T]he earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

Even though we as God’s children know these things, we were never called to dwell on them. Instead of thinking about what the world is coming to, God’s children are supposed to be thinking about the fact that “the Light has come into the world” (John 3:19). You want to end hatred and violence? You can’t do it through protests or politics; you have to do it through prayer and preaching. Until men and women see the Light, they will dwell in darkness, “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). Violence will occur. However, if they come to Christ, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4).

It is natural for doubt to creep in when we like the prophet can say, “Plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises [...]T]he law is powerless, and justice never goes forth [...]T]he wicked surround the righteous” (Habakkuk 1:3-4). However, like the prophet, we need to bring our questions to God and turn to His word for answers. We will find that “the LORD is in His holy temple” (Habakkuk 2:20) as He has always been, that things are never as bad as they seem, and that the only hope for things to get better is found in Jesus Christ and His gospel.