

VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY

GENESIS 34

Violence is very much a part of our world, especially family violence. One of the more interesting surveys that I have seen took place in 1992 at Ridgecrest and Gloreita where about 5000 teenagers were surveyed. These would be youngsters that came from churches like ours. In the survey they revealed just how much violence is a part of their world. No one would imagine that things have improved in the six years since the survey.

27% indicated that they have been involved in a physical attack on another person.

Approximately 25% have participated in the destruction of both private and public property.

Approximately 30% have carried weapons and 7 out of 10 have observed youths at their schools with guns, knives, or other weapons.

22% of youth have been attacked.

22% have observed violent behavior in their homes.

The father is the most likely to have exhibited this behavior. Brothers are a close second.

77% of the youth reported that there was a gun in their homes.

52% of the youth reported that gangs exist in their local schools.

5% have participated in gangs.

9% have personally experienced sexual violence, which occurred on a date or at school.

4% indicated they have been raped.

The alarming things about these statistics is that they came from church kids—like those present in this evening time of worship. What in the world is going on? What has happened to us? Has a media filled with violence produced this kind of world? Has there ever been anything like this before?

One school teacher reports on an encounter at the hockey game. He was rinkside when one of the players rammed into the boards. As he struggled to regain his balance, he gasped, "There must be an easier way to make a living."

"I'll trade jobs," the teacher retorted.

"What do you do?" he queried.

"I teach sixth grade."

"Forget it," he said, and was gone.

I do not want to alarm you, but this did not start with the rise of the media. Without taking the media off of the hook for their negative contribution to our society, this all began with the entrance of sin into the human heart. The first book in the Bible records a frightening tale of violence from the beginning. The very family that God chose to be His own special people had bloody hands.

When I preached through the book of Genesis in the late nineteen sixties, I barely referred to this tragic chapter in Genesis. Because of the changes that have taken place in our society, I feel compelled to stop and consider this event with you. We need to know more about this violence that is so much a part of our world.

I. THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY.

This is the kind of thing about which modern soap operas are made. A beautiful young woman spends a weekend with a friend where she meets a handsome, rich young man. The young man is attracted to her at once and maneuvers things around so he can be alone with her. When she does not respond to his approaches, he forces himself upon her—today it is called

date rape. When her brothers—twelve of them—hear about the rape, they seek revenge. A careful look at this story will reveal some of the sources of violence. The names change in our modern world, but the causes are still the same. It worth remembering that the name of God does not occur in this whole chapter.

1. Lust is a cause of family violence.

Rape has always been a violent act. While some girls are raped by a complete stranger, most are raped by a family member or a close acquaintance. Dinah was raped by a powerful young man. He used the superior strength God gave him to protect a woman to violate her. His father, Hamor, was the local ruler. Shechem was used to getting whatever he wanted. When he saw Dinah, he knew that he wanted her. Sexual lust burned like a fire in him. She was probably not the first girl that he had wanted or the first that he had forced his favors upon.

Sexual lust is the source of much violence in our world. Often this sexual lust has been nurtured by pornographic material. We now live in a society that has concluded that to suppress sexual desire can be injurious to your emotional health so it is better to express it. It is

almost predictable that when the police search the room of a rapist they will find a good supply of pornographic material.

Most rapists actually feel in their perverted minds that they are doing the girl or the boy a favor. They have been led to believe that the victim really desires what they are giving, but they just do not know how to express it.

Put it down—lust is a source of violence. James identified it as being a primary source of violence—“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from our desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.” (James 4:1-2)

2. Anger is a cause of family violence.

When Jacob heard about the sexual violence imposed on Dinah, he held his peace until his sons returned from their work. When they returned to his tents, he had a family gathering and told the brothers about the humiliation of their sister. The response of the brothers was predictable—they were filled with rage.

But they were true sons of their father—they knew how to hide their true feelings and to act deceitfully. This they did! Instead of confronting Shechem and his father about the crime committed against their sister, they deceitfully entered into an agreement with the family of Shechem in which they agreed to allow the couple to marry. They would make a covenant with the whole tribe of Hamor if they would submit to circumcision. At the urging of Shechem and his father the whole tribe agreed to this covenant and was circumcised.

On the third day after the circumcision, while the men were at the most uncomfortable point in their recovery from the surgery, two of Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi took vengeance. They may have been assisted by some servants, but they killed all of the men of the tribe of Hamor. They spared only the women and children that could be made slaves. It was a bloody sight as they slew the innocent with the guilty. What drove them to this violent deed? Anger! Rage!

Everyone who has ever suffered a serious injustice knows just how real such rage can be and how inclined to violence it is. Even my pure

hearted companion of these years is capable of this. While we served in Texarkana, a school principal unjustly disciplined one of our boys. It created quite a stir in our home. On one occasion when my wife was driving on the driveway of the school, this principal walked in front of her car. According to her testimony the thought went through her mind that she ought to just run him down, run over him with the car. She wanted to hurt him bad.

Dr. Paul Tournier, the Christian psychiatrist, indicates that the potential for violence is just under the skin of every one of us. I feel its presence ever once and a while. Almost every time that I encounter an injustice to someone I love, I feel its presence.

Jesus knew this. He warned that violence begins with hate and anger. If you tolerate hate and anger in your heart, you are opening yourself to the possibility of serious violence. For sure, you better not let the sun go down on your wrath.

3. Greed is a cause of family violence.

Could there have been more than anger involved in this act of violence? What happened after they had killed the men would lead us

to think so. The ten brothers, who had no part in the killing of the men of the village, were more than ready to help gather the spoils of the town. They carried to their tents everything they could find. They claimed the women and children as slaves for their household. They took everything of value—including probably whatever might be removed from the dead bodies.

This is called greed. Greed is often a source of violence. We have read in recent days of sons who have killed their parents to get what they owned. We have heard of all kinds of violent acts by those whose only motivation was greed. Greed can give birth to all kinds of violent acts.

4. Violence is a cause of family violence.

I hesitated to make violence another cause of violence, but I think I must. It is so obvious that it cannot be ignored. Shechem rapes Dinah—her brothers kill him and his family. Violence almost never ends violence—it is almost always perpetuates it. One violent deed leads to another violent deed.

This includes violence on the larger scale. One nation goes to war against another nation to make the world safe for peace, but in the process it sows

the seed that will lead to the next war. It is true on the smaller scale—the abused become the abusers.

We are dealing with one of the most serious problems in the human family. This is not an exhaustive list of causes, but it probably does deal with the primary causes of violence.

II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY.

This recorded incident of violence in the family of Jacob does not teach us everything that we need to know about violence, but it does enable us to take a serious look at violence.

1. Violence produces shame.

This is particularly true of the violence of rape. The record is written from a man's point of view. No words are recorded from the lips of Dinah. No indication is given of how she felt about the whole thing. I doubt that any man is capable of understanding just how Dinah must have felt unless he too has been the object of sexual violence. Even then he may not fully understand since he still a man and not a woman.

Shame is the most common reaction to sexual violence. Long after the pain and humiliation of the moment is past, the person will still struggle with the shame. Her own sense of self-worth may be destroyed forever. The selfish Shechem took so much more than he realized in that moment of lust. He left behind a victim full of shame.

There are probably persons listening tonight who still cringe with shame at the memory of a past act of violence against their person.

2. Violence prevents healthy relationships.

If there was ever to have been a healthy relationship between Shechem and Dinah, it was destroyed by the violent act of the lustful young man.

Evidently he did genuinely love the girl, but he destroyed what might have been by the violent act.

Violence is deadly to healthy relationships in the family. A violent marriage partner can destroy the possibility of a wholesome happy marriage with just one outburst of violence.

3. Violence marks a family for generations.

When Jacob comes to the end of his life and blesses his sons, he still remembers the violence of Simeon and Levi. Jacob said of these two, “Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.” (Genesis 49: 5-7)

The children and grandchildren of these two men would live with the memory of their father’s violence. They were deprived of privileges that would have been theirs because of what their fathers did. The consequences of one violent act can continue for generations.

4. Violence can lead to a violent lifestyle.

This was not the last act of violence committed by the sons of Jacob. This time it was against someone outside of the family, but the next time it was against a member of the family. They actually considered killing Joseph, one of their brothers, but finally agreed to sell him into slavery instead. You will remember the story of the sale of Joseph to some passing traders because of their envy toward him.

Violent people do not turn their violence off when they come home. If you are violent outside of the home, you will soon be violent within the home. It is a consequence of violence.

III. THE CURE FOR VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY.

I don't want to be simplistic in responding to this serious problem. Those who have developed patterns of violent behavior know that changing that pattern is not easy. Those who have lived in families filled with violence know also that it is difficult to break this terrible cycle. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no way to eradicate this terrible thing from the family?

Jesus addressed this probably directly in the Sermon on the Mount. He indicated that the problem is with the heart. We abuse others with acts and words because our hearts are sinful. This is good news! If the heart is the problem, then there is a cure. Jesus is able to change the human heart. He is able to take hate and rage out of the heart and to replace it with love. He does this by giving to the person who comes to Him the Holy Spirit to live in the lives. The very first evidence of the Spirit living in a life is the love that He begins to produce in the life and through the life.

If you are willing to confess that your heart is wrong, He can begin His work within you this very night. Let me urge to take such a step of confession to the Lord right now.