



Echoes and Stars

"We got the sky to talk about and the world to lie upon."

"What's Going On?" She Asked.

□ June 1, 2020 June 1, 2020 □ matt b redmond



Last night a friend of mine, in a text group, wondered out loud what was going on in response to the protests happening around the country and literally just down the road from us.

I responded with Paul's words from Ephesians 6:

¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. ¹³ For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, ¹⁵ and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.

And I made clear that no one really believes this anymore. That is an obvious exaggeration. But my point was that if you see the violence and destruction as necessary and excusable, we have lost the worldview of the New Testament. The liberal and the conservative both now see the kingdom of the heavens as an

afterthought. There is no focus on the unseen. The highest realities are *the seen realities* in the modern world and the church is really no different.

But really a better answer to my friend would be this essay, *"The Violence of Modernity"* by Stephen Freeman. (<https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glory2godforallthings/2020/06/01/the-violence-of-modernity/?fbclid=IwAR3UFajMH2YtdRsFA9hyYnjDBYychxFjcr2jlhr5R6OXLF-tW4oU0JP1bE0>). Some of you may get lost in some of the language and philosophy of the piece, but I think it would be fair to sum it up with the following quote:

"Changing the world," under a variety of slogans, is the essence of the modern project. Modernity is not about how to live rightly in the world, but about how to make the world itself live rightly. The difference could hardly be greater.

In other words, Modernity asks "How do I change the world?" But that is not the right question. The answer to that question requires a violence and control foreign to the Kingdom of the Heavens.

The question we should be asking and answering is, "How do I live rightly in this world?"

A few more quotes:

Modernity has as its goal the creation of a better world with no particular reference to God – it is a secular concept. As such, that which constitutes "better" is, or can be, a shifting definition. In Soviet Russia it was one thing, in Nazi Germany another, in Consumer-Capitalist societies yet another still. Indeed, that which is "better" is often the subject of the political sphere. But there is no inherent content to the "better," nor any inherent limits on the measures taken to achieve it. The pursuit of the better ("progress") becomes its own morality.

The approach of classical Christianity does not oppose change (there is always change), nor does it deny that one thing might be better than another. But the "good" which gives every action its meaning is God Himself, as made known in Christ. In classical terms, this is expressed as "keeping the commandments." Those commandments are summarized in the love of God and the love of neighbor. There are other elements within the commandments of Christ that minimize and restrict the use of violence.

There is, for example, no commandment to make the world a better place, nor even to make progress towards a better world. The "better world" concept is, historically, a heretical borrowing from Christianity, a secularization of the notion of the Kingdom of God, translated into terms of progressive technology and laws (violence). But, in truth, the management of history's outcomes is idolatrous. Only God controls the outcome of history.

We now live in a time in which the call to love your enemies and the oppressed is seen as nonsensical. And the reason why is because we assume the mindset of modernity that requires rage and fear. The call to be angry and support other people's rage is now ubiquitous (Romans 8:32). And if you question the right and righteousness of rage, you are obviously part of the problem.

Rage and the resultant violence are now a virtue.

And if you say nothing or do nothing, then you are doing nothing to change the awful world we live in. He addresses that too.

*My experience is that questioning our responsibility for history's outcome will always be met with anxious objections that we would be agreeing "to do nothing" and the results would be terrible. **Keeping the commandments of Christ is not doing nothing.** It is, however, the refusal to use violence to force the world into ever-changing imaginary versions of the good.*

Think with me for a moment and ask yourself this question – “Have you so rationalized the world around you that prayer and obedience to Christ and his teachings now feels like doing nothing?”

Is that because of what you read in the Scriptures and see in the life of Jesus and his Apostles and their teaching? Or is it because you cannot put your phone down for long periods of time without picking it up to look at social media?

Hopefully you are truly asking yourself these questions and not just blowing them off, because blowing off such questions may just be the ember of the very violence we are talking about.

But after asking these questions, you can then ask, “How should I now live?” Freeman answers the question beautifully:

How should we live?

- *First, live as though in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated into the world and the outcome of history has already been determined. (Quit worrying)*
- *Second, love people as the very image of God and resist the temptation to improve them.*
- *Third, refuse to make economics the basis of your life. Your job is not even of secondary importance.*
- *Fourth, quit arguing about politics as though the political realm were the answer to the world's problems. It gives it power that is not legitimate and enables a project that is anti-God.*
- *Fifth, learn to love your enemies. God did not place them in the world for us to fix or eliminate. If possible, refrain from violence.*
- *Sixth, raise the taking of human life to a matter of prime importance and refuse to accept violence as a means to peace. Every single life is a vast and irreplaceable treasure.*
- *Seventh, cultivate contentment rather than pleasure. It will help you consume less and free you from slavery to your economic masters.*
- *Eighth, as much as possible, think small. You are not in charge of the world. Love what is local, at hand, personal, intimate, unique, and natural. It's a preference that matters.*
- *Ninth, learn another language. Very few things are better at teaching you about who you are not.*
- *Tenth, be thankful for everything, remembering that the world we live in and everything in it belongs to God.*

I cannot recommend this essay too highly. If you find it hard to read, then dig into it. We live in a world that accepts simplistic clichés and bumper stickers slogans without blinking. This essay is worth the hard work.

☐ Uncategorized ☐ modernity, riot, stepen freeman, violence

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