



# TABLETALK

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## Do-Gooders Who Overcome Evil...

by John Moore

Occasionally I remind myself that I live in a civilized society - lest I forget. Though we live in the greatest country in the world, most major categories of crime are on the rise. Violence has become a common feature of American life.

It's like someone has switched life's price tags. The value of life has fallen below the value of things. People are murdered for little or no financial gain. Life is expendable. Our culture has a serious affliction: it is sin, and it is evil.

One current example of evil is abortion. While I see the pregnant girl or woman as a victim more than an offender, the act of medical termination of pregnancy takes the life of a human being. The Scriptures are clear: from the ancient Jewish prophets to the writers of the psalms - life begins at conception. I know of no exegetical way to sidestep this conclusion. Given that fact, and the evil of legalized abortion in our world, what is a serious Christian to do?

A few misguided participants in the pro-life movement advocate a "kind for kind" treatment of doctors who perform abortions. The headlines scream, "Kill a doctor for Christ!" Others reason by the numbers: if killing 100 doctors saves thousands of babies, then that is good. I would suggest that such reasoning is a contamination of the very gospel and God we represent. For believers, the ends never justify the means. We do live in a fallen world. And in this fallen world, it is sometimes difficult to find answers to difficult questions. But we defame the very name of our Savior if we dare suggest that "evil for evil", or the ethic of power, solves our nation's torment over the abortion question.

One thing is certain in this regard: Kingdom of God participants are to live by the ethic of love, not power. In even the hostile and evil Roman empire, where taxes propped up acts of persecution against Christians, Jesus said, *Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's (Matt. 22:21)*. The Apostle Paul concurred by writing, *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:21)*. Christians live as aliens in a foreign land.

Thankfully, our government gives us a variety of legal options. Our constitution provides important rights for expressing our concerns, and a process for changing laws. But we impugn God's name when we dare raise a

hand in evil against an enemy or victim in this agony called abortion. Christians should not only avoid these acts, but should also speak out in condemnation against those misguided persons who associate evil acts and the name of Jesus.

In obeying God, we acknowledge our heavenly citizenship. In obeying man, we humbly acknowledge that we can do no more than our laws allow. I would suggest that the ethic of love can compel us positively. As a Christian community, we can provide shelters for the frightened or abused. We can support pregnancy centers which offer medical and legal consultation. We can educate. We can provide temporary or permanent care for babies while birth moms decide their life's direction. And through it all, we can pray that God will providentially provide the people and opportunities to make a difference. These options have, and are, saving countless innocent, unborn lives.

Doing good. To the apostle Paul, in Romans 12, personal good was feeding the enemy. In Romans 13, it was submission to the laws or governments of the land. The motivation was twofold: negatively - fear of punishment if we disobeyed; positively - protecting our consciences as servants of God. The biblical solution to our evil society is living like Jesus - doing good during evil times.

How does the ethic of love - the doing of good - limit abortion? In smaller ways, it is already happening. In larger ways, I do not yet know the providence of God. But I believe there is a lesson found in the life of Telemachus.

Telemachus was a fourth century monk given mainly to gardening and prayer. Without preplanning, through his course of travels, he found himself in Rome during the holiday festival season. Following the crowds, he watched preparations for the gladiator games. These games, for the Emperor's pleasure, made sport of murder and sadism and savagery. Overcome with grief, and with a timid heart, he jumped up and cried, "In the name of Christ, forbear!" No one paid attention to a scraggly monk whose voice was not heard among the roar of the crowd. Undaunted, Telemachus, scrambled down to the floor of the Coliseum, ran between two gladiators, and tried to stop the spectacle. One gladiator roughly pushed him aside. The crowd cheered him on - thinking that he was part of the entertainment.

But Telemachus was undaunted. Again, he rushed forward. One of the gladiators brought his sword down swiftly across Telemachus' chest and stomach, delivering a fatal blow. As the monk fell, he gasped once more, "In the name of Christ, forbear." Slowly, the athletes and crowd alike began to focus on the fallen Telemachus. The arena grew deathly quiet. Then, without warning, all over the arena, spectators began to leave, until the Coliseum was empty.

Telemachus alone did not end the gladiatorial sport in the Coliseum. Other historical events contributed as well. But one little innocent man, with no visions of history or glory, was a major player in stopping this Roman sadism. Telemachus only knew he must do what his heart and faith required. God's providence did the rest.

Telemachus overcame evil with good. He stood in the gap and spoke the name of Christ. This option - overcoming of evil by doing good - bows our knee before God. We are both made in the image of God, and yet limited by finite vision in a fallen world. Doing good says, "I will do what I can with the means and resources available to me." A do-gooder says, "This world is God's world. He alone raises up, and strikes down, the evil man. That is His sovereign province alone."

This is as it should be. Our battle ultimately is not against flesh, or the world of the visible. It is against unseen powers, and is spiritual. Abortion is a problem of the heart. Even political solutions are bandaid approaches to a cancer problem. Maybe necessary bandaids, but only medical patches at best. This national malignancy requires radical and spiritual heart surgery by the Spirit of God.

May God give us wisdom as believers who live in an evil world - wisdom to live like Jesus - and humility to recognize that we cannot by power solve problems that are not merely biological or reproductive. This kind of evil is held back to some degree by Christian do-gooders. It is solved only by the saving and sanctifying work of God.

This is the ultimate ethic - the ethic of love - based on a God of love. It is carried out by His foot soldiers. We are the graced recipients: gaining what we have not deserved. We are the mercied benefactors: not receiving what we do deserve. Only with love as our motive, and doing good as our action, does our life and our work reflect our Savior - during this national agony called abortion.