

When you break up a fight between kids, you can learn a lot about their sense of right and wrong. Typically a kid rationalizes a fight this way: "If you hurt me, you give me the right to hurt you. To teach you from doing this again, I must hurt you worse than you hurt me." Violence escalates with this kind of reasoning so we tell kids fighting is wrong, but then we'll hear another insight into their sense of right and wrong: "Well," one of them will say, "I didn't start it." Or both of them will say it. When kids say that, they claim innocence and obligation. They admit it's wrong to start a fight, but once the fight has begun, they think it's wrong to do nothing. They feel they're innocent because they're obliged to fight back. We expend a lot of breath educating children that fighting is wrong. Violence done to you gives no permission to do violence back. Rather it presents an occasion to correct the offenders or to get help in reforming them. So if somebody starts a fight you step out of it, you try to understand your opponent and you get someone in authority to help.

Adults like to think we've removed ourselves from the type of fighting kids do, but many circumstances can throw us back into the ethics of a child. We have a legal system set up to do justice when we have been wronged, but some people want more than justice--they want vengeance. They want an unfair piece of the divorce settlement. They want criminals chained in gangs. They want thieves put to death. They want Lin Eliot to play in Siberia. I don't want to minimize the hurt people feel; some victims have had their lives destroyed, and quite frankly the worst advice to give them is to turn the other cheek. If someone abuses you, I'm sure Jesus would be the first to say you don't turn the other cheek, you get out.

Remember, the main advice Jesus gives is love your enemies. Love them. Sometimes love means saying no. Sometimes love means charging people for their crimes. Love may seek justice, but it never seeks vengeance. A society is violent only if individuals choose violence. To love perfectly, we must put violence away. In love we'll get to know our neighbors and watch out for them. In love we'll seek what will help criminals and not merely punish them. In love we will forsake handguns and the temptation to kill in anger. Too many lives have been lost; too little love has been shown. When violence strikes our community we have two options: We can do violence back, and fight like kids fight; or we can seek justice in love. Violence can stretch our ways of love, and love can conquer violence.