



"Character is better than ancestry, and personal conduct is more important than the highest parentage."

—Thomas Barnardo

25-Oct-02

## *Connecting the Dots*

On the radio this morning, a commentator from the Washington, D.C., area spoke for most people by saying that they were letting out a "massive, collective exhale" after nearly a month of feeling fearful and tense. The sniper and his accomplice are behind bars. The citizenry of Maryland, Virginia, and D.C. can resume their normal activities. Why, they exclaim, they can even send their children out trick-or-treating on Halloween!

Is this not a typical American reaction? Two men kill ten people and keep the nation terrorized for more than three weeks, and once police nab the murderers, we all sigh in relief and, with hardly another thought, go back to our comfortable lives. We can be sure the pundits and experts will be asking, "Why?" for countless hours of airtime, but they will be asking the wrong questions.

Sure, we want to know why the snipers shot and killed ten people in cold blood from long range. We will want to figure out why they hate America and what made them take such a vicious road. People will comment and hypothesize about their psychological states, their backgrounds, their influences and motivations. However, all of these inquiries are about the killers, not about us.

We should be asking *ourselves* a few questions and demanding answers. We should ask: Why are normal American citizens the targets of terror? Why are these terror incidents happening now? What has changed in American life that we are no longer safe walking our own streets? Why is this war being fought on our soil? What can the individual do to make it stop?

Of course, very few people will ask themselves these questions. We do not want to answer them. With a little bit of ingenuity, we could answer them from a distance, pointing the finger of blame on this minority or that philosophy—anywhere but at ourselves. In fact, the American psyche is such anymore that it cannot connect the dots between individual morality and national blessing or tragedy. It does not have the foundation, the education, or the will to do it.

This same thing happened after [the World Trade Center/Pentagon bombings](#). All our rage and inquiry are directed outward because we all *know* we are guilty of nothing. We have never killed any Islamic fundamentalists! We have never bombed their cities! We have never blown their children to bits! We have never hijacked their planes and crashed them into buildings and fields!

We have never lied to our boss or fudged our income tax return. We have never stolen office supplies or played on company time. We have never had a fling with a coworker or gone to a prostitute at a convention. We have never killed unborn babies. We have never envied the Jones' new car or their sleek new powerboat. We have never worshipped money, status, or power. We have never stabbed Smithers in the back to move up one more rung in the company. No, we are all innocent.

Most Americans have swallowed the line that one's individual behavior makes no difference to society. That line is a lie. Every action we take—whether public or private—reaches out to touch other people. And let us not forget that [God](#) sees all. He sees every act, hears every word. As [Hebrews 4:12](#) says, He is even "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"!

What does He see when He looks down upon America? Does He see 280 million innocents or 280 million sinners? Notice verse 13: "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Isaiah tells us what He sees:

Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. . . . Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. ([Isaiah 1:4, 7](#))

America has not quite yet reached this point, but it is not far off. God is lifting His hand of protection from the people, allowing the enemy into our very midst to provoke terror and inflict destruction. The solution? It is simple, really: "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (verses 16-17).

The result: "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. . . . If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword"; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (verses 18-20).

God connects the dots between personal immorality and national calamity, as does [Jesus](#) Himself in [Luke 13:1-5](#). America's problem is spiritual in nature, and its solution is spiritual: heartfelt [repentance](#) and rededication to Almighty God. It is up to us, the individual citizens of the United States of America, to fix this problem—personally.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Halloween](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

As soon as we return home from the Feast of Tabernacles, we must face several months of the world's holiday season, and first off is Halloween. This holiday has seen a steady growth in popularity over the past several years, now ranking second only to Christmas in sales. There is no doubt, however, that Halloween should never be celebrated by true Christians. Not only is it pagan in origin and practice, but it also promotes self-indulgence, deception, and other ungodly behaviors. Far from being a harmless holiday, Halloween has the potential to destroy our relationship with God.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Innocent Victims?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

We often hear of "innocent victims" dying in some tragic way, but are they truly innocent? John Ritenbaugh discusses God's perspective of the sinful, human condition.

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