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# Pro Rege

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Volume 52 | Number 1

Article 4

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September 2023

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### Recommended Citation

Vander Meyden, Calvin (2023) "How Should We Respond to Murderers?,"

*Pro Rege*: Vol. 52: No. 1, 28 - 30.

Available at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol52/iss1/4](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol52/iss1/4)

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# How Should We Respond to Murderers?

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by Calvin Vander Meyden

The United States of America is gripped with gun violence. Elderly people, middle-aged individuals, young people, and tiny children have been killed because of gun violence. Day by day and week by week, we hear the horrible news that numerous people have been murdered again—in churches, schools, homes, workplaces, and the great outdoors. What is the result of such a horrible situation? For the average person, it is the fear of getting caught in crossfire.

Another question comes to mind. What should be done with these people, who cause such a crisis in our country? Our first reaction is to have them put behind bars in the county jail or the state prison, and if they are found guilty, to place them in prison perhaps for life or even have them put to death.

Now we raise an interesting question. What kind of people would pull the trigger on a gun and kill someone? Is that person an unbeliever who hates God and God's people? Is that killer an evil person? Perhaps that could be the answer to our question.

However, this question and the potential answer to it becomes quite complicated. Think of these individuals. Person one is a police officer who was raised in a Christian church. Things at home became tense and totally out of control. What was

the result of this tragedy? The police officer killed his wife! Today, he remains in a state prison.

Person two is a Biblical figure who has the name Moses. One day Moses became angry at an Egyptian, even legitimately so. But as a result, he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand (Exodus 2: 11-12). However, God used Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt and the wicked man named Pharaoh (Exodus 3:10). The Lord also used Moses to lead Israel through the Red Sea (Exodus 14: 15-16). God even appointed Moses to supervise the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 39:32).

Person three is David. David was the second King of Israel. In many ways, David was a good king. However, he fell in love with Bathsheba and had her husband killed in battle so that David could become the new husband of Bathsheba (II Samuel 11:1-17). We would think that David should have been punished for that sin. He was! His new-born baby—the child that Uriah's wife had borne for David—died (II. Samuel 12: 15-18). And yet, God used David (the second King of Israel) in a very important way. It was during David's reign that Israel's position in the land of Canaan was made secure.

More can be said about David the murderer. For example, he was the writer of many psalms in the book of Psalms. And "There are fifty-eight New Testament references to David, including the oft-repeated title given to Jesus—'Son of David.' Paul states that Jesus is 'of the seed of David according to the flesh' (Romans 1:3), while Jesus Himself is recorded by John as saying, 'I am the root and off-

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spring of David' (Rev. 22:16);"<sup>1</sup>

Person four is Saul, who became Paul. Saul was watching a horrible scene unfold. Saul was at a stoning event. The event was the stoning of Stephen, a devout Christian. While Stephen was being stoned to death, "he cried out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59, 60). Now remember that Saul was watching this dreadful scene. And what does he do? Acts 7:60

was put under house arrest (Acts 28). It seems evident from Paul's writings that he was released from this first Roman imprisonment and that he ministered further to the growing Christian church. He died, perhaps beheaded, in Rome. Paul's writings make up a significant portion of the New Testament, and range from intricate theology to passionate letters to struggling churches.<sup>2</sup>

Now comes the hard question! How should we treat a murderer? Well, we would feel that the mur-

## An elderly lady in Western Michigan is an amazing example of loving her enemy. A neighbor killed her son, whom she loved dearly. What was her response?

says, "And Saul was there, giving approval to his [Stephen's] death." Approving his death? In other words, Saul was a person who endorsed the murder!

But that is not the end of the story. According to Acts 9:10-19, Saul the murderer becomes Saul the Christian. What amazing grace! God enters Saul's life, and Saul becomes a follower and missionary for Christ. Jesus made a murderer a messenger for the Gospel of Christ. Jesus loved that murderer!

*The Concordance of The New International Version of the Bible* tells us about the amazing things this murderer, turned Christian, did for the Lord:

Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, and in this way, God turned one of the fiercest persecutors of the Christian church into one of its mightiest servants (Acts 9:4-9, 26: 12-18). Paul became an apostle (Gal. 1) and preached the Good News to the Gentiles. His first missionary journey was to Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 13-14); his second journey, with Silas, took him to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). After his return to Jerusalem, he was arrested (Acts 21), but he continued to preach (Acts 23:1-11). He was then transferred to Caesarea (Acts 23: 12-35), where he was tried before Felix (Acts 24). After being imprisoned for two years, Paul was tried further, first before Festus, and then before king Agrippa (Acts 25,26). Despite shipwreck on the voyage to Rome (Acts 27), he arrived safely and

derer should be put in prison if found to be guilty. Such a position makes sense and is the logical thing to do. However, is it proper to *love* the murderer? According to Scripture, the answer is *yes*. Matthew 5:43, 44 says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'"

An elderly lady in Western Michigan is an amazing example of loving her enemy. A neighbor killed her son, whom she loved dearly. What was her response? Did she hate the killer? Did she hope someone else would kill the killer? No, she didn't do that. Instead, she said to the killer, "I will adopt you and treat you as my son." That's amazing grace! That's sacrificial love!

Her adopted son remains in a state prison in Michigan, where he has shared the Gospel with many inmates. In fact, he attended a class offered by a Christian university. The class is offered to inmates who are interested in sharing the gospel with other inmates.

Another amazing thing to think about is this: remember the policeman who killed his wife? He is in the same jail sharing the Gospel in a church that is in the prison.

These are two examples of people who hated someone. But by the grace of God, they are now loving people instead of hating people! Thanks be

to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the city of Princeton, New Jersey, there is a magnificent Gothic chapel. The chapel is adorned with many marvelous stained-glass windows. One of the most beautiful windows is located in the chancel. As you gaze at the window, you will see these words: “A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34).

If we all obey that commandment from the Lord, we will have life and have it more abundantly!

Gracious God, may murders cease and peace prevail. May hatred halt in whoever is at fault. May all of us pray that love will be shown in all our homes, in our nation, and in the entire world! In the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

#### **Endnotes**

1. J. D. Douglas, Ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publisher, 1962), p. 294.
2. *The NIV Giant Print Reference Bible, Dictionary Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), p. 1,960.