

#49 THE DREAM.....

I am riding down a street on a bicycle, and pass someone coming from the opposite direction. I greet him warmly and, to my surprise, that person speaks out some very unkind remarks. Anger seems to rise up in me. The "old man" is ready to react to these unprovoked words. As I formulate a most appropriate word-for-word response, I see the letters spelled out in front of me: "RETALIATION."

God was beginning to deal with this quality in me which so easily led me astray. Retaliation is simply the act of returning injury for injury or an eye for an eye. We all desire justice in avenging our personal injuries and affronts, but we must learn to leave justice with God and not take action into our own hands. Vengeance is the Lord's and we can be sure in due time all injustice will be handled. In our lives we are often tested by the desire for justice in all cases. Now justice is good and God delights in justice, but as believers we must leave the judgment to Him and trust Him in these affairs. We are to forgive what a soul has done to us and leave the retribution to God, knowing that He will deal with all sin in some time and place.

Now let us make a clear distinction between personal revenge and governmental justice. Many Christians falsely assume that government has no right to take a life as a penalty for murder. Far from the truth! In the Old and New Testaments this justice was carried out. The same misguided souls that quote, "Thou shalt not kill", do not bother to read its true meaning which is really expressed in the words, "Thou shalt not murder." Those who commit murder should expect a righteous government to exact their lives in return.

When God laid down civil laws in Scripture they were intended to be upheld for the benefit of society. Government has a right and duty to maintain order and to execute murderers. Murder is the unlawful killing of a person or persons. Killing is the right of a government to put to death that murderer to restrain evil within its borders. Some will say that the death penalty is not a deterrent. Even if it did not deter others from committing murders, it would surely prevent the one being put to death from murdering again! Sad but true, the average murderer in the United States spends about seven years in prison---many return to freedom only to murder again.

In this context we are talking about cold-blooded murderers. We can find God's instructions on this in Exodus 21:12, 14 and Numbers 35:30-31. A good government must take into account self-defense killings, unintentional manslaughters, and those acts that fit the exception. These, however, are not called murders by God, but killings.

Since we are on the topic of murder, let us move on to a subject which is very controversial in America---abortion, the murdering of unborn children. It is grievous that a nation can legalize and justify this evil action. We can be sure that God will not overlook these millions of deaths or the millions of women who cause these deaths. Men and women are evil to the utmost as they murder unborn human life because of their immoral, sexual and pleasure-seeking affairs. Though the nation may legalize it, those committing such evils will find themselves in hell forever under the wrath of an angry God. Only true confession of murder and true repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ can avert such punishment.

Abortion is just one step up the ladder leading to other evils such as euthanasia, assisted suicide, destroying retarded and maimed persons and total genocide of a people. Hitler ran the course well, and was he not inspired by Satan himself?

What an expression of warped thinking and perversion of justice when women and men fight against capital punishment with posters of "thou shalt not kill", yet themselves murder countless unborn children at their convenience! These same persons will fight tooth and nail for the rights of animals and

pets, but will murder unborn babes of whom God said He knew them in their mothers' wombs---such a gross, sub-human evil. Yes, God will soon call America into judgment for these abominations before His eyes when people call evil good and good evil.

God will have perfect justice in the end and none will have a place to debate it. If Christ said that evil men would come into judgment for every idle word spoken, surely He will not look kindly at murderers! People will be judged out of His records, and they will be just and perfect accounts. These things are not pleasant to hear, but God warns mankind to turn from their wicked ways or face a perfect judge who well knows how to deal with evil-doers. He may enlarge hell's borders to accommodate them!

Now we will return to our previous subject of governmental justice in a nation. Of interest are the New Testament Scriptures that tell us the two duties of government are to reward good and punish evil! The apostle Paul states that government acts as a minister of God and does not bear the sword in vain which was, my friends, the sword for putting to death those who had committed capital crimes. Social law and order must be maintained in any society, and anarchy held in check. The government's requirements for restitution and its penalties for breaking the law must be met. Repentant Christians at times need to make amends. Not that the murderer or law-breaker can not be forgiven by God, but society has the right and duty to uphold all law that is deemed necessary to keep order. Otherwise anarchy would prevail.

Now retaliation comes in a more subtle form to believers who wish to move deeper with the Lord. We may find ourselves retaliating in our hearts against the Lord because God has not answered or met our desires and expectations according to our plans. Like children we pout and, rather than openly rebelling, we play a game of sulking and getting even. You may say that is absurd, yet how often have we quit an area of discipline or duty to the Lord, or done it with a half-hearted attitude because we felt God had disappointed us. We must deal quickly with this small root of bitterness and resentment toward the Lord because, if not, it will grow into bigger and more hurtful sins.

Personal revenge and retaliation only hurt us and hinder our walk with the Lord and with people in general. Let personal justice die. If the offender has not repented of his sin you can be sure at some time he will be called before the Lord to give an account. When we entertain bitterness and retaliation, we reveal to ourselves that we are very much alive in an area that should be dead. If one kicks a dead horse that horse will feel nothing. Our old nature is supposed to be dead and buried. When we learn more how to take up our cross and follow the Lord we will take our affronts less personally.

One last thought here on retaliation: if Christians were more honest with one another they would do as the Lord commands in Luke 17:3:

“Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.”

Now in dealing with the unbeliever, leave them to God, but with our fellow Christians deal promptly to resolve matters before roots of revenge and bitterness can set in. Furthermore, we are told in Ephesians 4:26-27:

“Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil.”

Christians have a right to express anger---as the Lord did and still does---but anger is an emotion that some can not contain well, and so should not be carried long.

Anger as an expression of serious displeasure at sin or evil has a valid place in us, yet it must not be taken beyond the limits of that which is right and just. We must guard against self-justifying anger that may originate from personal hurts afflicted on us. Remember, too, that serious rebuking, reproof and warning are more effective when given in stern anger rather than in wistful or light attitudes. Anger toward injustice and wicked sin is normal. If you as a Christian do not sense this occasionally then you should check out your Christian walk and principles.