

Godly responses to antagonistic people

Retaliation for a wrong done is often defended as the right thing to do. How often we flare up in a rage when a wrong is done to us. We're forced to do something and we dig our heels in and do it reluctantly if we have no choice whilst planning on revenge against the one forcing us. Retaliation is more about getting revenge than getting justice. God is a just God and his vengeance is based on his justice, not on revenge.

Matthew 5:38-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

1) Godly justice

- Matthew 5:38 You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'
- It was common for people to justify revenge by quoting the law – an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.
 - Exodus 21:22-25 "If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows."²³ But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life,²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.
 - A key phrase here is "...the court allows"
 - This was never intended to be for personal revenge, but for legal justice.
 - Legally the punishment must fit the crime.
 - Don't take a life if an eye is lost, and don't only take a tooth if a life is lost.
 - In other words there's a just payment for the crime committed.
- Jesus was not against the criminal justice system. He was against the misuse of it.
- Jesus upheld justice as God is a just God.
 - Psalms 89:14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.
 - The definition of being just is based on, or behaving according to, what is morally right and fair.
- Godly justice is therefore based on God who is always morally right and fair.
- When we seek justice for the way we've been ill-treated we don't always go about it in the right way and react emotionally.
 - Emotions aren't bad, but they can make us act or react in the wrong ways when we're controlled by them, especially when someone has hurt us.
 - They don't take into account what is morally right and fair when responding to injustices.
 - How often we compare something that we've been found guilty with to someone who, in our opinion, has done something worse than what we did so we cry foul. If we get caught doing 140km/h in a 120km/h zone but someone gets off doing 160km/h we cry injustice. However, our fine is completely just because we broke the law, although injustice in regard to other driver because he got off without a fine. We need to understand that justice isn't always comparable, but relates to us and the law.

2) Godly responses

- Having highlighted the misuse of the justice system Jesus then points out His expectations on how we are to respond to injustices against us.
- By instructing us to turn the other cheek, to give the extra shirt, or to go the extra mile when forced to do so, Jesus was in no way saying that we should relinquish justice and let sin reign.
 - In denying justice against sin Jesus would be denying his just character.
- What He was doing was dealing with our quest for revenge rather than justice.
 - He was dealing with the problem within us, not the sin of the original perpetrator.
 - A sinful retaliation to a sin committed against us is equally as sinful as the sin against us, and doesn't please God.
 - In a dispute with someone if they are 90% wrong and we are 10% wrong in the situation we are still 100% responsible for our wrong.
- Putting up a personal non-resistance, and even giving more than demanded or doing more than what is required goes against our natural character of retaliation and reveals the measure of Christlikeness in us.
 - Jesus merely instructs us to do what he did.
 - He knew the will of God and willingly submitted to his persecutors even though he could have called on twelve legions of angels to free him from them.
- By acting in the opposite spirit of our persecutor we reveal Christ and add to the guilt and shame of the perpetrator.
- How often a perpetrator is stifled at a submissive response, yet emboldened to be more harsh with reactionary responses.
 - Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
- The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate...Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Martin Luther King jnr.

3) Godly love

- Martin Luther King jnr. only reiterated what Jesus stated
 - Matthew 5:44-45 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.
- The love of God is always proactive and not reactive.
 - He didn't love the world because the world loved him, because the world was and is hostile to him.
 - He loves because it's his nature to love.
 - We love because he first loved us.
- When we love our enemies we are demonstrating that we are born again children of God with the divine nature living in us because we are acting towards those who are hostile towards us as God acts towards them.
- How often we avoid people who we don't like, but Jesus tells us to greet them.
- Loving our enemies doesn't mean that we have a relationship with them. It means that we want the best for them and so we bless and not curse them.
- How did God want the best for His enemies?
 - He died for them that they might be forgiven, repent, and come into an eternal relationship with Himself.
 - That is the best blessing we can offer our enemies.