



Another sermon: Retribution is a sin!

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Before we begin, I'd like to thank everyone who took the time to get in touch with me about my last column, "Today's sermon: Take Jesus at face value!" which appeared a couple of weeks ago in the November 30th edition of the Daily News.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Much appreciated. As a result, my faith has been somewhat renewed.

Based on that experience, I was inspired to pen one more biblically-based piece before returning to my usual quest to stamp out political, economic and cultural ignorance.

Today's topic: Retribution.

You don't have to look very far to see that reprisal, retaliation and payback are front of mind for many of our fellow citizens these days. Certainly, the president's ongoing "revenge tour" tends to dominate the news cycle as well as most social media platforms.

The need to get people back for what they've done to us seems to be a distinctive feature of the human species. If we feel we've been wronged, our first instinct is to even the score.

As such, it is important that all those who call themselves Christians pay extremely close attention to one of the underlying principles that Jesus taught:

Retribution is a sin.

It's a transgression in the same category as any of those listed in the infamous Ten Commandments, which many of my friends claim should be posted in every government office and school building.

Put another way, vengeance will send you to hell as fast as rape, murder or worshipping a false god. Let that sink in for a moment.

Consider Matthew 5:38-42:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 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. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

Unlike some, and as I maintained in my last column, I believe what Jesus is saying here can be taken completely at face value and is applicable under any circumstance, i.e., the admonition can be fully and completely understood without referencing any other Scriptures.

Unconditional forgiveness is a fundamental principle underlying what it means to be a follower of Jesus and can be universally applied without any restrictions, stipulations or other qualifiers. Context is irrelevant.

Moreover, it is the height of arrogance to argue that you are somehow acting as the instrument of retribution on God's behalf. First, I'm pretty sure God doesn't need your help in carrying out his will. Google "omnipotent" when you have a spare moment.

Second, most individuals who seek to punish others are usually doing it for their own personal gratification – not to make them atone for their actions in a spiritual sense. More evil has been inflicted on others under the guise of carrying out God's will than any other pretext in history.

So the next time you feel the urge to go after someone who has injured you in some way, recognize that this is not what Jesus wants, and you are not justified in your actions. You will be held accountable for the harm you inflict on others regardless of the harm you feel was inflicted on you.

No exceptions.

During my career, like most of us, I have occasionally been treated unfairly. I've been accused of things I didn't do. I've been unjustly blamed for the actions of others. I've had my reputation tarnished and my livelihood threatened.

In every instance, my first instinct was to go after those who I felt were responsible. But I didn't. I did my best to keep my focus on moving forward and continuing to act with integrity. It was difficult, and I admit I didn't always do the best job of maintaining a positive perspective as I perhaps could have.

What I've noticed is that, over time, the truth usually rises to the surface and justice tends to be served without me having to lift a finger. Certainly, I'm still around while most of those who tried to harm me are no longer here.

To reiterate, retribution is always wrong; those who engage in behaviors designed to exact penance in any way, shape or form for perceived slights are not following Jesus. Period.

Remember this the next time you feel the need to give someone a taste of their own medicine, turn the tables, or fight fire with fire – or you find yourself cheering for someone who is terrorizing those they feel have treated them unfairly.

In those moments, Jesus is not pleased. And if you are a true Christian, isn't that what counts?



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