

Do not Fear what they Fear

(Suitable for use within a group over approximately one hour, or for an individual's personal Bible reading)

Thinking about life as a student in healthcare

We have all heard something like this before, 'If he hit you, hit him back! That is only fair'. And we certainly understand the philosophy. If someone steals from you, steal right back. If someone insults you, insult them back. If someone slanders you behind your back, slander them in return. But the way of Christ is entirely different, and as Christ's disciples we are called to follow this way.

1. Briefly discuss together times when you have observed this pay back principle in your university setting. You will probably be able to think of something within the last week.
2. What reasons do people give to justify their payback?
3. What reasons have you given to justify payback?
4. From what you have observed, what emotions do people around you feel in response to suffering they experience? Consider in particular struggles that arise within your healthcare context (e.g. – powerplays, big responsibilities to carry, etc).

What does God have to say?

Read 1 Peter 3:8-17.

Within this passage Peter explores two responses to evil inflicted - retaliation and fear - and, more importantly, he addresses the sinful outcomes that may arise from these responses.

Peter's words to 'not repay evil with evil...but with blessing' etc., reflect Jesus' words to love one's enemies, rather than 'hate' them (Matthew 6:43-45). One's behaviour is not to be determined by what behaviour is [acted out] on them; rather they are to behave in a manner that reflects the situation that each individual is accountable to the Lord – irrelevant of the external factors affecting that person. Remember Chapter 1:17, 'Since you call on a Father who *judges each man's work impartially...*'. Regardless of external factors, one is accountable for their evil behavior (3:10-12). Even evil inflicted does not justify evil administered.

It may be easy for us to stumble over these commands if in the name of 'justice' we feel a strong pull to personal **retaliation**. A sense of justice is good; personal retaliation is bad. How can we hold these two things together? As Jesus did – He entrusted justice to God alone, rather than seeking to take it into his own hands (2:23). For us Christians, evil, even hidden under the guise of personal retaliation (which we may convince ourselves is only just), is never acceptable behavior before the Lord.

Peter goes on in this passage to address the second unfavourable response to evil inflicted: **fear**. Verses 14 and following do two things: firstly, they bring *encouragement* to the believer that they do not need to fear 'what they fear'; and secondly they *command* the believer to set apart Christ as Lord, rather than fear 'what they fear'. The two are intricately linked. The quote in verse 14 comes from Isaiah 8:12. There also there is *encouragement* to not fear 'what they fear', and a *command* to instead fear the Lord. Again, there is an intricate link. We fear that which is 'lord' over us. The 'lord' we serve is that which we fear. If we are fearing Christ as Lord in our lives, fear of anything else is displaced. If we fear anything other than Christ in our lives, for that moment this 'other' displaces Christ as 'lord'.

This passage is comforting to us who so easily fear things (including evil) that we need not, and yet is also a rebuke for us who, because of fear, can at times, effectively 'serve' a 'lord' other than the Lord Jesus (i.e. fear can lead us down to idolatry – the essence of sin).

1. What might 'what they fear' be?

A strong sense of justice that expresses itself in retaliation, or a fear of evil – neither of these natural human responses to evil inflicted, actually justify evil administered.

Putting it into practice

Have you ever had the following thoughts cross your mind during your time of training:

- 'Lord I'm sorry for what I've just done but I was so angry at that person's sin!'
- 'Lord I'm sorry for reacting like that but you understand, don't you, that person is so frustrating!'

No matter what the circumstance, we cannot justify our own evil behaviour based on someone else's actions or based on the way someone else makes us feel. This is a hard truth, but one we need to hold on to if we wish to be faithful to the Lord.

1. Identify what sections of 1 Peter 3:8-17 help you to remember that you are accountable to the Lord for your sin, which cannot be justified by anything external to yourself (even if that external factor is evil itself).
2. Imagine you arrive at uni one day to discover that the notes you had been compiling over the past 6 weeks for one of your Barrier exams were missing. You approach hospital security to view the CCTV footage but due to budget cuts the camera over the lockers is no longer in use. Your head starts scrambling through who would have done this to you...and you narrow it down to one individual in your clinical rotations who has been boasting that "he hasn't started studying yet", but you can't prove anything.
Your anger towards this injustice flares up quickly. "I spent so long preparing those notes! I missed that party/this event/catching up on rest to prepare those notes!" You contemplate your retaliation and consider spreading a rumour amongst your peers that this person is a cheat and a liar, with the aim of ruining his reputation.
But before doing this you happen to read 1 Peter 3:8-17.
 - a. How will you act in response to your thief?
 - b. If you are honest do the directives of 1 Peter 3:8-17 come naturally to you in terms of dealing with those who inflict suffering on you?
 - c. What does this 'case study event' cause you to pray for in your life as you continue in your training?
3. Consider again the previous situation given in question 3. This evil that has been inflicted upon you – the stealing of your notes – creates within you another emotion as well as the anger.
This other emotion is fear. Fear that you will not have time to reprepare the notes, fear that you can't remember what you had chosen to put in the notes, and most of all, fear that you will fail the Barrier exam and not be able to continue in the course into your clinical years.
This fear drives you to consider stealing someone else's notes so that you can be sure you make up your unfortunate situation.
 - a. Is this the wise way forward? (Consider again v11-12).
 - b. What will be your prayers during this time?
 - c. How can you 'set apart Christ as Lord' in this situation?

Bible Bites

(Suitable to be completed over approximately 20-25 minutes)

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⁸ Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." ¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.'

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