

HIGHER LEVEL RESPONSES

Dr. Fred Fourie ~ Sunday, August 12, 2007



1 Thessalonians 5: 12 -22 But we **appeal** to you, brothers and sisters, to **respect** those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; **esteem them very highly in love because of their work**. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to **admonish** the idlers, **encourage** the fainthearted, **help** the weak, be patient with all of them. See that **none of you repays evil** for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. **Rejoice** always, **pray** without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not **quench** the Spirit. Do not **despise** the words of prophets, but **test** everything; **hold fast** to what is good; **abstain** from every form of evil.

There is a saying: **"Speak when you're angry--and you'll make the best speech you will ever regret."** Apparently, the early Christians in Thessalonica were a difficult bunch and not easy to get along with. When we hear how Paul admonishes them, we must conclude they did not have much respect for their spiritual leaders and they had many arguments with one another. **When evil came their way, they promptly responded with even more evil.** Anyone messing with any of them - could expect real trouble coming their way. Paul simply had to tell them: See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Well, not only the early Christians, but through the ages also people like us are **quick** to anger; **quick** to take revenge and **quick** to respond to injustice with greater injustice!

Let us make this somewhat more personal. **How do you respond when you have reason to be angry?** A very tolerant looking old man was running to catch his bus. Just as he seemed to be gaining, the bus driver, with a **purposeful smirk**, pulled quickly away from the curb, splashing a shower of muddy water over the old man. Taking out his handkerchief, this kindly man softly murmured, **"Well, may his soul find peace."** Still more softly he added, **"And the sooner the better."**

We are all so very familiar with, as Paul calls it, **"repaying evil for evil."** Just listen to people arguing. It usually begins when someone says **something nasty** to another. Normally the other party then reacts by reacting with a remark even nastier. From there on it becomes like a **downward spiral**. **I can be nastier and meaner than you can!** When people look for trouble **we make sure that, they get it!** Our first reaction is to **draw** our swords and **descent** to even **lower levels of response**, joining the wolf packs and act like wolves!

Moreover, many of us have **doctorates** in dealing with those differing from us. Teaching them lessons, as we say, putting them in their “rightful” place ~ no matter how small or insignificant the difference. **We set conditions.** We will only restore relations on our very own conditions. Peace, OK, but then it has to come “**quickly**” from two sides. We take no risks. We do not even give one extra step. **We only greet those who extend their hand first.** We proudly tell others about how short our fuses are. It does not take much for us to let them have it! If someone wants to be nasty - **we are quick to show that we can be nastier.** Differences of opinion so easily become open hostility. We live in a world of **downward spirals!**

Do you know that Jesus teaches a better way? Let us call it **upward spirals!** That is, **showing love when hate seems to be called for!** It happens when we **put away** our swords, **turn** the other cheek, when we refuse to be pulled down to a lower level - and ascend to higher levels of response, soaring like an eagle, **ignoring that which is petty and unnecessary and unworthy.**

Paul begs us and Jesus demonstrates with word and deed that there is a different, a better, and a more godly way! Jesus never reacts on the same level as his opposition. He **takes sides** for the losers when no one else seems to care. He **disappears with a degraded tax collector** into a sinner’s home in Jericho and emerges with a **repentant son of Abraham**, willing to repay all the wrong that he had done. He comes between a **fallen woman and her executioners** and sets her free from death, shame and sin. He **refuses to desecrate the temple** while others profit. He teaches **seventy-times-seven forgiveness** for those who trespass against us, while we feel that even seven times is plenty. He tells Peter to put his sword back into its sheath and not to defend him with earthly might.

Turning the other cheek is not only what he teaches but also what he does during his final earthly journey. He turned the other cheek even when darkness came and the agonizing journey to the cross took place! In Potter’s film version of Jesus a moment is portrayed when Pilate strikes Jesus on the cheek. Sadly, Jesus smiles and offers his other cheek. He demonstrates the power of his words with his very life. Jesus chooses to break the chain of hate and revenge and surprises people with his precious acts of love, hope and forgiveness.

This is what our faith is all about! Following Jesus and seeking better ways to deal with one another. Jesus beckons us to follow him, rise to higher ground, and respond in different ways. Jesus took the very first step. **That is the secret!** Someone has to take the first step, **someone** has to do the unexpected and break the downward spiral of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. **Love bids us to take the first difficult steps to break through the chain of hate and out of the paralysis brought about by the old way of responding to the world around us.** We can overcome alienation by creating a climate for true and radical change. Jesus always finds a way to soften the hard lines on the faces of his opponents. When you and I live our faith, **we will not fall in the trap of being sucked into a downward spiral.** We will, for Jesus’ sake, **take the first step,** lift the level of conversation and **begin an upward spiral!**

Do you know what happened to the great composer Georg Frideric Handel who made this world of ours a better place by giving us the "Messiah?" Handel went through a long and painful process before he could compose the Messiah. His early life was a frantic routine of living on the edge of a debtor's prison day in and day out, running day and night just to stay even? When he was 52 years old, Handel suffered a stroke and lost the use of his right arm. He could no longer accompany his operas. His bad health forced him to take a break. During that period of rest, he grew in faith and expressed his experiences with God in uplifting music. From his grateful soul, beautiful and inspirational music flowed and he only had to pen it down! **He began to live the upward spiral and soon discovered that he could reach out and touch the face of God. Somehow, Handel's connection with God brought forth "The Messiah."** To this day audiences reverently rise and stand in awe and respect when listening to the "Halleluiah Chorus." Handel lived, composed and said with all his life and talent, **"I know - yes I know - that my Redeemer lives!"**

Living the upward spiral is a complete new level of being and living for those who used to live in the shadows, burdened by fear and unable to find real live. Jesus reached out to his opposition, and today to you and me, in order to lift them and us to a higher and better level.

Christ is the One who resurrects, who calls into our graves of sin where we are buried under loads of guilt and debt and calls us back to real life! He said, **"Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

AMEN



**"I AM THE LIGHT
OF THE WORLD."**

WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NEVER
WALK IN DARKNESS,
BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE."

JOHN 8:12