

The Danger of Becoming What You Despise

The German philosopher Nietzsche warned, “Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster... for when you gaze long into the abyss... the abyss gazes also into you.” Poet William Blake also addressed this danger, “The iron hand crush’d the Tyrant’s head, And became a Tyrant in his stead.” (*sic*, “The Grey Monk”).

This notion is not without biblical precedent, for Paul wrote, “*Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted,*” Galatians 6:1.

It’s easy to become one who complains about those who complain. It’s easy to ignore or even defend abusive violence enacted upon the abusively violent. It’s easy to become prejudicial, oppressive, and mistreat based on race or occupation those who have used prejudice based on race or occupation to oppress and mistreat. These things must be easy to do for so many of us seem proficient.

But it’s hard to make necessary distinctions without which we would be led to complain about those who have not complained. It’s hard to be willing to see and distinguish those who are abusively violent from those who do a sometimes necessarily violent job with care and compassion. And it’s hard to see and treat others without broad-brushed stereotypes and prejudices. After all, if it were easy, wouldn’t more people do it?

We aren’t endowed by our Creator with the ability know another’s heart apart from the “fruit” that is apparent, cp. 1Samuel 16:7 and Matthew 7:16-20. But when we who are opposed to prejudice-based, violently abusive and oppressive behavior act with prejudice to violently abuse and mistreat others, have we not become that which we oppose and despise? Have we not fallen prey to the notion, “*Let us do evil that good may come?*” The rest of Romans 3:8 needs to be included in this regard, “*Their (or “our” as the case may be) condemnation is just.*”

Our admittedly difficult task- if we believe God, love our fellowman, and hope for heaven, is to:

- “*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone,*” Romans 12:17;
- “*Respect what is right in the sight of all men,*” Romans 12:17;
- “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men,*” Romans 12:18;
- “*Never take your own revenge,*” Romans 12:19;
- Treat our “*enemy*” better than he deserves, Romans 12:20 (cf. Matthew 7:12); and,
- “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,*” Romans 12:21.

Please cogitate, meditate, and then replicate. If this sounds too simplistic a solution for the “Gordian Knot” problems of our present world, remember that it doesn’t have to be “untied”- the rope can be cut on either side. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)