

"Christianity offers humanity – help to heal bad neighbors"

Beliefnet (popular religious website) gave their 2006 "Most Inspiring Person of the Year" award to **the Amish**. --for their response to the Oct 2006 massacre of their children at Nickel Mines, --where Charles Carl Roberts entered a one-room schoolhouse & proceeded to shoot 10 Amish girls, 5 of them fatally.

Beliefnet described the Amish response this way:

Incredibly, within hours of the shooting, members of the Amish community were reaching out to the killer's family, giving food and raising money for his wife and children. ..."We have to forgive," an Amish woman told [the] Reuters [news agency]. "We have to forgive him in order for God to forgive us." Another Amish man said of the family, "I hope they stay around here and they'll have a lot of friends and a lot of support."

more than half of those who attended Roberts' funeral were Amish. the killer's widow, Marie Roberts, wrote to the Amish later: "Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need."

this kind of love / mercy - central to Chrn worldview / teaching

Christianity encourages acts of love and mercy:

1. God gives mercy and love before it is earned

Luke 23:33-34, 19:1-10, John 8:1-11, Romans 5:6-8

we could look at Lk 23 - J on the cross, praying for his executioners: " "

could look at Lk 19 - J going to home of Z , notorious, traitorous, greedy .

could look at story in Jn 8 of when relig ldrs brot adulterous woman to J , condemning her. J : "I don't condemn you" --even tho hadn't confessed repented asked forgiveness turned from old life.

or could look at Rom 5 where it is you & I who receive this grace: J dies for you & me while we still God's enemies.

instead, want to read some B passages where:

2. We are taught to give the same mercy and love that God gives
Matthew 5:44-47, Luke 6:27-36

listen to this from Mt 5: *I say, love your enemies! ...⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too.*

& the parallel account in Lk 6:

³² *"Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that!"³³ And if you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much!"³⁴ And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, what good is that? Even sinners will lend to their own kind for a full return.*

³⁵ *"Love your enemies! Do good to them! Lend to them! And don't be concerned that they might not repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked."³⁶ You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.*

Shift to the Epistles

Ephesians 4:31-5:2, 1 Peter 2:20-23

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior.³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

^{5:1} *Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children.² Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins.*

...

whenever Epis specify what thing in J's life we are to imitate it is always J's death / the love & forg he showed.

1 Peter 2 TNIV

²⁰ *...how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

²² *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

obeying the B in this area is very nonintuitive.

we don't instinctively "give mercy and love" when someone "insults" us / causes "suffering."
we don't naturally forgive when have been betrayed / deeply wounded.

rather we want to see that justice takes place.
after all, shouldn't the guilty pay their dues? shouldn't they somehow earn us treating them good?
if we are nice to them before they change, then they might never change. -
-may think can get away w mistreating people.

Jeff Jacoby, a Boston Globe columnist, wrote this after the Nickel Mines massacre:
"[H]atred is not always wrong, and forgiveness is not always deserved. I admire the Amish villagers' resolve to live up to their Christian ideals even amid heartbreak, but how many of us would really want to live in a society in which no one gets angry when children are slaughtered? In which even the most horrific acts of cruelty were always and instantly forgiven?"
--Oct 8 2006 column

what do you think? should we really "give that same mercy and love" that God shows again & again?
is that the way of wisdom? or of foolishness?

Dallas Willard: If you could find a better way than the way J taught, Jesus would be the first one to tell you to take it. And if you don't believe that about him, why are you following him, because what you're really saying is that he would encourage you to believe something that is false.

I want us to look at the wholeness and health that flows out of us obeying what God teaches in this area.
we're in midst of series marveling at instances of God's wisdom seen in the B , feasting on how our faith adds joy and peace to life and really does make our world a better place.

we looked, in one sermon, at how our Christian faith helps us
- give dignity and respect to every human being we meet.
in another:
- be good neighbors--ones who can replace selfishness with caring

& the msg of giving grace & mercy to evil-doers is, I believe, yet another of the incredible advantages Chrinity brings into our world.

I will agree that there are those strikes against Christianity's "acts of love and mercy." --

if we are nice to evil-doers before they change, then they might never change. --may think can get away w mistreating people, w us their next victims.

but that is a risk God takes --& asks his people to take.

-- bec there are worse strikes against not showing love & mercy but only showing justice & punishment.

one of the deepest hopes/longings of humankind is that individuals/tribes/nations to live and work together in peace.

scenes in Micah's prophecy (4:3-4) capture this hope:
- weapons for war/destruction --> agric tools for food production. --
v3 - *They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.*
- v3 goes on: *Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.* The Message: "Nations will quit fighting each other, quit learning how to kill one another."
- v4 - each family have a place to call their own w a vine & fig tree in bib society, this - height of contentment: figs & wine were the "good life."
& further, vines & fig trees were things that took several yrs to grow-- implying stability/security
- *and no one will make them afraid*

the only way toward that vision that Micah presents is thru individuals/tribes/nations showing the same mercy & love that God shows.
To move toward the hope of Human Cooperation and Peace (Micah 4:3-4), we need to move toward giving more mercy (forgiveness) rather than more justice (vengeance)

note: I'm not stating it as a total either-or.
many Menns take absolute position: always forgive/mercy.

I see God showing justice/ judgment too.
- is fact of Final Judg
- to some extent God created/established the "Powers That Be" who check the ambitions of a Hitler as well as check for your seat belt compliance.

but, as we have seen, in this day & age God works to let his love & mercy triumph over his wrath & judgment & justice.
&, as we have seen, Scs call us to "give the same mercy and love" that God gives.

hear why it is so impor for us to let those Scs spk :

1. Forgiveness lets us let go of the past

f-ness brings tremendous benefits to the one doing the forgiving.

in the early days of TV, I'm told there was a popular comedy show known for its far-fetched gags.

among the cast of characters was a burly man who had an annoying habit of jabbing people with his finger.

finally one of the other characters could no longer stand it.

"I'm ready for him," he boasted to a friend. "I put a stick of dynamite in my vest pocket, and the next time he jabs me he's going to get his hand blown off." - *Our Daily Bread* Feb 27 '96

that's pic of un-f-ness: we think it's a way of getting back at one who hurt us. but we end up hurting ourselves more.

gen while we are turning ourselves inside out w bitterness and resentment, one-who-wronged-us doesn't feel a thing.

when someone hurts us / slices fiber of our being, saying words "I forgive you" can be most powerful thing we'll ever do.

eg. author who managed to forgive the man who raped her:

"When you forgive, you no longer go through life emotionally handcuffed to the person who hurt you."

eg. a rabbi who lost his wife, child and parents in the Holocaust :

said he forgave bec he chose not to bring Hitler w him to America.

when we don't forgive someone, every time something reminds me of what-'that-person'-did --I have to re-live it, feel the wrong-ness-of-it-all, have it corrode my attitudes/insides.

fness allows us --as persons or as nations-- to let go of the past.

okay. "mercy and love" makes us feel better.

but does it actually make the sit better??

forgiving sets us free from unfair pain of past.

but does it make the world better??

is it right to f ?

won't pursuing justice make world better place?

no.

2. Where there are long-running feuds, simply pursuing justice does not work

some say: work for justice, set right what is wrong --> peace.

no. "simply pursuing justice does not work"

mercy is needed for Human Cooper / Peace.

Miroslav Volf - born in Croatia. professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School.

lived in E Europe when fighting broke out in the Balkans betw Serbs & Croats.

Volf says he initially thought:

the way to end the fighting is to work for justice.

if a Croat has hurt a Serb, he must make it right. must repair the damage.

if Serb hurt C. make it right.

we must take steps to make a just & fair society.

this is the way to peace betw the two grps .

soon realized it could not work. both grps saw themselves as the ones who had been hurt.

so when try to "even things out" in the name of justice so that peace could come, what one side views as "evening the score," the other views as a new injustice.

each side keeps score differently.

eg. my twin sons tussling.

ever seen two boys who are bros & enjoy wrestling on the living rm floor?

invariably escalate bec rate bumps receive from other differently.

one w accidentally bump other. & the second will then tend to give the other same kind of a bump just received.

& first say "hey, I didn't hit you hard enough to deserve that!"

"eye for eye; tooth for tooth" --bump for bump-- never evens the score, bec feuding people never keep score of wrongs by the same mathematics.

Volf: If we need to bring justice to a conflict before rels can be healed, then never healing.

Volf: work toward peace by working toward reconcil rather than punishment.

full reconciliation cannot come until both sides change.

but even before the-other-party changes, one-who-wants-peace must show love rather than retrib / pun .

brings up 3rd reason need move toward more mercy rather than more justice.

part of dealing w bad neighbors is helping them change.

(is in our best interests. and is in their best interests.)

we want to do what we can to get them to stop doing wrong.

(so rel becomes whole / so can be full reconcil .)

& mercy is crucial in helping bad neighbors change/stop doing wrong.

3. Force is not strong enough to change a wrong-doer; love's power is needed

if you hold over someone's head a club that is so big-they-don't-dare-ignore-it, then you can stop them from doing wrong. / if you have total control, then your force would be strong-enough to stop them.

but how often that happen?

& when it does happen, how long does it happen? what happens when get tired holding club ?

as soon as the club is removed, usually they're worse. bec been resenting it whole time.

so unless you have total control and don't foresee yourself getting tired, it's really a good idea to move toward showing more love & mercy **which can help your bad neighbors change**.

force can only make someone fear to do wrong; it cannot make someone want to do good.

force is not so much too strong as it is too weak. --only achieves the absence of something, never causes the presence of good-will.

force has a hard time making bad neighbors better.

(& an easy time making them worse:

gen the more try to force person to stop behavior, more they resist.

they need to decide themselves that it is wrong.)

only love & mercy can make hearts better.

only it can begin to turn-enemies-into-friends so they want to please us & stop wrongdoing .

so that even when no body-w-club is present, they still want to.

eg ML King didn't try to force white America to act justly; he endured the injustice and kept reaching out to our hearts until we chose justice.

when someone attacks us, as we obey the B , we try to respond, not w rigid fear of potential victim, but w firm gentleness of potential healer. they may continue to be our enemy, to harm us.

but they may turn into a friend who wants to do good.

(plus, only love keeps us from being corrupted by violence.

if we exercise force (particularly total force), what can happen?

Lord Acton: power tends to corrupt, & absolute power corrupts absolutely.

love/mercy/fness not only can redeem receiver but also can keep one-trying-to-stop-wrongdoer from being corrupted by power.)

close w one sad note. & one note of hope.

as a young adult Jeffrey Goldberg quit college and moved to Israel, where he served in the Israeli army as a prison guard during the First Intifada. later returned to US. on staff w *The New Yorker* since 2000.

last Fall Terry Gross interviewed him on Fresh Air.

had written a bk about his friendship w Rafiq, a prisoner in the military prison camp.

one of his convers w Rafiq was Goldberg's insistence that if Palestinians had taken up the nonviolence concepts practiced by Gandhi and ML King, that they might have broken the Israeli occupation in a week.

Rafiq disagreed.

argued that the Israelis are "too brutal" to have responded in a humane way to passive resistance.

Goldberg said, "no, Isr is an open democracy. I don't believe Isr could have taken more than a wk or two of passive nonviolent resistance."

Goldberg says, had this same convers w many Palestinian ldrs .

would explain the moral force of sitting-there-and-taking-a-beating. & how defeated the enemies of equality.

the answ inevitably from many diff Palestinians was:

"you expect us, Arab men, to sit there and let ourselves be beaten by Jews?!"

Goldberg now says his naivete for expecting this of them "stuns him."

passive resistance could never happen there bec of the standards of what makes a man in the Middle East and bec it is very painful for Muslims to be dominated by Jews in particular.

now the note of hope.

one day *Many nations will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of
Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths"* (Micah
4:2).

this prophecy is a signif vision of the fut .
- Micah begins saying describing life "in the last days."
- repeats Isaiah 2:1-4 almost word for word.

can we dare believe that one day even Palestinian men --and men from Texas
and all over the world-- will learn the ways of God and his Christ?

the prophet says this will happen, that the nations will *walk in God's paths* in
which mercy/love triumph over justice/judg .
and that the result will be individuals/tribes/nations living and working
together in peace:
*They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning
hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war
anymore.
⁴ Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and
no one will make them afraid*

may we as God's people do all we can so God's will is done on earth as it is in
heaven until J returns and a new heaven and earth is established.
may we as Chrns teach the world and, more importantly, show a watching
world the wholeness and peace that flows out of the life of a community of
persons striving to put into practice that which God revealed in our faith.