

The Wild Card That Trumps all the Others

A preacher I watch often, Dr. David Jeremiah, said that among all the great religions of the world, Christianity has one exclusive doctrine that sets it apart from all the others. He agrees that most have positive moral tenets, but only Christianity offers forgiveness. Hearing that really set off a rush of agreement in me, because without forgiveness, few if any could expect to live in peace, much less receive salvation.

Consider the countless wars, murders, feuds, vendettas and conflicts that flow from the refusal to forgive, and the subsequent resolve to seek revenge. Consider the play *Hamlet* and the tragic demand his father's ghost makes upon the young prince's life when he says, "The serpent that did take thy father's life now wears the crown." Then he adds. "If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, revenge this foul and most unnatural murder."

That is tantamount to a death sentence, because killing a king meant automatic damnation. No wonder Hamlet laments his tragic fate: "Oh cursed spite; that ever I was born to set it right."

The ghost may indeed be the devil, as Hamlet suspects, because his demand for revenge runs exactly contrary to, forgiveness. In act 5 after Hamlet and Leartes fatally wound each other with unbted poisoned swords, the dying Leartes pleads, "Exchange forgiveness with me noble Hamlet; mine and my father's death come not upon thee, nor thine on me." "Hamlet replies, "Heaven make thee free of it."

Leartes understands the crucial need for forgiveness, and that is something some religions do not welcome. Some even seem to make revenge almost a central requirement. Hitler in his Nazism accuses the Jew's for killing Christ, to justify his insane holocaust. Obviously a total lie, since all who have ever sinned share that

responsibility. In the The Bible, God makes it clear, “Vengeance is mine,” saeth the Lord.

In several places we are reminded to forgive: The big one is Jesus’ praying from the cross, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Then there is His injunction in the Lord’s prayer, “And forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.” Finally, Jesus warns his disciples, “And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have aught against any, for if you forgive not others their trespasses, neither will my Father forgive your offenses.”

In this regard, we are specifically warned not to take offense, (I Cor 10:32) I remember my mother’s “sitting on brood” with real anger aimed at a Fairmount cop who shot her dog when he got out and ran away. That rage robbed her of many hours of God’s peace because she found that killing so unforgivable. But that rage only affected her; the cop remained clueless.

We are reminded by theologians that brooding over an offense may even open the door to self imposed sickness. Perhaps the cure for much of our discontent lies in heeding Jesus’ promise: “I will keep them in perfect peace, whose minds are stayed on me.”

Many famous tragic figures in great literature: Captain Ahab, Heath cliff, Othello, even Abner Snopes, died from unforgiveness. Even the present Israel-Hamas war came largely from Hamas’ absolute refusal to forgive and therefore commit the barbaric October 7th slaughter of innocents.

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