

## **CHAPTER 23**

### **SOME FURTHER ADVICE ON DEALING WITH THE WICKED, WHETHER IN CHURCHES OR IN THE WORLD**

*<sup>21</sup> You shall not be in dread of them; for the Lord your God is in the midst of you, a great and terrible God.*

*Deuteronomy 7:21 (RSV)*

*Righteousness guards him whose way is upright,  
but sin overthrows the wicked.*

*Proverbs 13:6 (RSV)*

*I am not afraid of ten thousands of people  
who have set themselves against me round about.*

*Psalm 3:6 (RSV)*

*<sup>11</sup> But let all who take refuge in thee rejoice,  
let them ever sing for joy;  
and do thou defend them,  
that those who love thy name may exult in thee.*

*<sup>12</sup> For thou dost bless the righteous, O Lord;  
thou dost cover him with favour as with a shield.*

*Psalm 5:11-12 (RSV)*

*<sup>6</sup> Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed;  
he will answer him from his holy heaven  
with the saving might of his right hand.*

*<sup>7</sup> Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.*

*<sup>8</sup> They collapse and fall,  
but we rise and stand upright.*

*Psalm 20:6-8 (ESV)*

**Don't try to be "nicer than God", such that you fail to deal firmly with evil people.**

When tackling the wicked, many Christians do not have the stomach to sack a person, or to discipline or expel a church member. Some don't like taking decisive action which might upset someone. Or they feel squeamish about tackling a wrongdoer out of a misguided desire to be 'nice'. A boss or church leader who won't act decisively to sack or demote a worker, or to remove a disruptive or toxic church member, is letting down the present and future victims of that wrongdoer. Those innocent people will then have to continue to suffer at his hands, all because that boss or leader wanted to be 'nice'.

There is a time and a place for showing grace and mercy to those with whom we are dealing. However, that time is only *after* you have come to a conclusion as to what they are, what they did, and whether they are wicked. If you have concluded that they are wicked, then you need to have the 'killer-instinct'. That means you have to be willing to get rid of a person, tell them to leave, sack them, or otherwise confront them. At a lower level, it may involve just telling a person that their attitude or behaviour is unacceptable.

Or it may just mean saying a firm "No" to a domineering person who is trying to control or manipulate others who are unable to speak up for themselves. Those are situations which the vast majority of us don't want to face up to. Indeed, what sane person would ever *want* to do such things? They are

inherently difficult, unpleasant and stressful. Even so, there are times when such things have simply got to be done. You need to recognise those situations and take bold, decisive action when it is right to do so.

That said, when a person says that taking firm action would not be ‘nice’, what they often really mean is just that they are afraid to do it. In that case, misguided niceness is not actually the problem. It is just being used as a pretext to disguise the person’s real reason, which is cowardice. That is a feature which very few people will openly admit to. Therefore they will often use such phrases rather than say what they really mean, which is simply that they were too scared to act.

**You must also consider the welfare of the future people, whom you can’t see, and who are not in the room. Don’t focus solely on the welfare of the person you are now tackling.**

Sometimes misguided niceness really is the issue, and is not just a pretext to hide cowardice. It can result in muddled thinking and a failure to recognise the consequences of *not* confronting someone. The ‘nice’ manager or leader can see how the person sitting across the table would be upset, and even damaged, by being sacked or expelled. They can easily take him into account and be aware of his feelings. But they can’t see, or don’t take account of, the suffering that will be endured by *others* if that person *is not tackled*. Such people are hard to imagine because they are not there in the room.

The actual, tangible person, who is present in the room, right now, is so much easier to take into account than imagined, hypothetical future people. Nevertheless, you must force yourself to consider their needs, even if they haven’t yet joined the company, or the church, or haven’t even been born. Those invisible people need you too. You are also just as responsible for their welfare as for the man sitting opposite you, whom you are tempted to let off the hook. In other words, you are accountable to God for the wrongdoer’s *future* victims and your decisions need to take them into account as well.

**King Ahab angered God by sparing the life of a wicked man, whom God had wanted him to destroy.**

King Ahab of Israel angered God by sparing the life of Ben-hadad, the wicked King of Syria, whom God had wanted Ahab to destroy. Ben-hadad had invaded before and been defeated, but had escaped to fight another day. Later, when Ben-hadad was planning to attack again, God sent a prophet to warn King Ahab because God wanted him to be utterly defeated. However, Ben-hadad was allowed to flee again, for a second time. God had wanted King Ahab to execute him because he was wicked and a menace to Israel. But Ahab foolishly let him go:

*<sup>31</sup> And his servants said to him, “Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings; let us put sackcloth on our loins and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare your life.”<sup>32</sup> So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and went to the king of Israel and said, “Your servant Ben-ha'dad says, ‘Pray, let me live.’” And he said, “Does he still live? He is my brother.”<sup>33</sup> Now the men were watching for an omen, and they quickly took it up from him and said, “Yes, your brother Ben-ha'dad.” Then he said, “Go and bring him.” Then Ben-ha'dad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot.<sup>34</sup> And Ben-ha'dad said to him, “The cities which my father took from your father I will restore; and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samar'ia.” And Ahab said, “I will let you go on these terms.” So he made a covenant with him and let him go.*

*1 Kings 20:31-34 (RSV)*

Ahab’s decision angered God, as He had no wish to show any mercy to Ben-Hadad. So, God again sent a prophet to rebuke King Ahab for letting him go and to say that he was going to have to pay for it with his own life:

*And he said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.'"*  
*1 Kings 20:42 (RSV)*

We need to learn from King Ahab's error. We must not show mercy in situations where God doesn't want us to. As with all things, there is a time to be merciful and a time not to be. We need to recognise when it is the latter and have the courage to "press in for the kill". To fail to deal with the wicked in the way that God wants you to is sin, whatever your reasons might be.

**When you tackle the wicked you must be strong and see it right through to the end. They have to be faced down and completely defeated.**

If you want to tackle the wicked you will also have to persevere. The battles don't end quickly, so you must grit your teeth and keep going for as long as it takes. They have to be 'faced down' and shown that you won't blink, and will never stop, until they have been defeated. They don't expect you to have that kind of resolve, because so few people do. Most of the wicked have had experiences whereby someone began to resist them, but quickly gave up, as soon as things got difficult or dangerous.

They therefore expect more of the same weakness and spinelessness from you. So surprise them by resolving now that you will not stop until they have been defeated and that you will never, ever concede defeat, however many setbacks you may face along the way. You must show the same warlike spirit that the Israelites were told to show when fighting the Canaanites. Also, be willing to be severe, *and even ruthless*, when you need to be, i.e. when it is right to be so:

*<sup>1</sup>"When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Gir'gashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Per'izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites, seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves, <sup>2</sup> and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them.*  
*Deuteronomy 7:1-2 (RSV)*

When God appointed Saul as King of Israel he told him, through the prophet Samuel, that he must be very severe with the Amalekites and "*utterly destroy them*". God knew that that was necessary:

*<sup>1</sup>And Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore hearken to the words of the Lord. <sup>2</sup> Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish what Am'alek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. <sup>3</sup> Now go and smite Am'alek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'"*  
*1 Samuel 15:1-3 (RSV)*

Saul's orders were clear, but he did not obey them fully. In particular he did not kill Agag, the King of the Amalekites. This angered God, because He knew that the safety and future welfare of the Israelites required a very hard line to be taken with the Amalekites. Saul's disobedience on this issue led to God removing the kingship from him and transferring it to David. That shows how serious a matter it is to fail to tackle the wicked properly. It fell to Samuel to finish the job on Saul's behalf. He took a sword and killed Agag with it himself:

*<sup>32</sup> Then Samuel said, "Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amal'ekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past."<sup>33</sup> And Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.*  
*1 Samuel 15:32-33 (RSV)*

**When tackling the wicked always stay calm, keep your nerve and show absolute resolve. Never panic or let yourself be fazed by them.**

It is vital when tackling a wicked person or group to keep your nerve. Never panic or weaken in your resolve, no matter what they try to do to you. The wicked know how hard it is for sincere people to face them down. They will take full advantage of your naivety as well as your fear. Therefore, you must expect to be “got at”. The wicked, and the demons, will try to undermine you, and your evidence. They will also seek to distract you, threaten you and put fear into you. It could be a fear of what they might do to you, or of what others may say.

In my case, it was the fear of making a mistake and accusing the wrong person or doing an injustice. That thought was constantly whispered into my mind. You must expect to feel all of these things, and many more as well. But don’t let any of it faze you. It is all quite normal when you are tackling the wicked. Expect also to be confused and bewildered, and for the evidence to seem incomplete and even contradictory. All of these things will happen because you are being *opposed*. But it is also because you are dealing with a *mixture* of truth and lies, fact and fiction.

Until you become very experienced, these feelings of anxiety and uncertainty will get to you. You will wonder if you’ve got it all wrong, whether you should let it drop, or whether it just isn’t worth the hassle or the risk. Be ready for such feelings, so that you are not caught off-guard. Instead, hold your nerve and keep digging for evidence. Never let the wicked, or the demons in and around them, get you to give up the fight. The very fact that you feel such fear and confusion is actually evidence in itself. It shows that you are on the right lines and that you need to keep going, not give up.

If you weren’t right, then the people and demons who are trying to scramble your thoughts wouldn’t need to bother. So your bewilderment is actually a kind of confirmation and should motivate you to press ahead. When you get more experienced at tackling the wicked you will see how consistent these patterns and methods are. You will get to a point where you actually find encouragement in the very fact that you are being assailed with doubts and fears. You will start to recognise the tactics of the wicked, and of the demons, and to see where it is all coming from.

**Resolve never to let yourself be influenced by fear in any of your decisions or actions.**

It is widely assumed that when it comes to what we fear we can’t ‘*decide*’ anything, as our emotions are outside our control. It may be true that we cannot entirely get rid of the fear itself. However, it is certainly within our power to decide never to *act upon*, or be *influenced by*, our fear. This must be possible, because the Bible commands us not to fear people, even those who may kill us. The point is we are never commanded to do anything which is outside our control. Thus, we are never told to be tall, but we are commanded not to fear people:

*<sup>26</sup> “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

*Matthew 10:26-28 (ESV)*

We can make a decision of our will that, no matter what fear we may be *feeling*, we shall refuse to take it into account when *deciding what to do*. We can resolve now, ahead of time, that even if we do feel fear, we will not let it influence our decision. That is to say we will not allow it to prevent us from taking any action that we would, otherwise, have taken. If you adopt this approach, and make such resolutions before the fear even exists, you will be ready for it. Then, when a fear does arise, you can say to yourself:

“I’m now feeling fear. I’m afraid that if I sack this person, the other staff could be angry with me. Nevertheless, that prospect is irrelevant to the duty I now have to tackle this wrongdoer. Therefore, I refuse to be influenced by that fear in any of my actions or decisions.”

Then just go ahead and do whatever it is that you are afraid of, *even while you are still feeling fear*. This needs to be emphasised because I know, from questioning people, that it is widely believed that nobody can ever be expected to do something if they are afraid. This has been said to me explicitly by various people, and implicitly by even more. There is an unspoken belief that God would never expect us to do a thing if we were afraid to do it. However, that assumption is entirely wrong. We are repeatedly commanded, and expected, to do our duty whether we are afraid or not.

Doing right, obeying God and taking a stand against the wicked, will inevitably lead to trouble. It will be costly, and even dangerous. That may well be frightening, but it is no basis for concluding that we no longer need to do our duty. The wicked are so used to seeing people avoiding a confrontation, due to being paralysed with fear, that they fully expect you to give way to them. Therefore you can surprise them, and throw all their plans into disarray, if you simply stand up to them. They really don’t expect you to do that, because it happens so rarely, as most people are cowards.

That element of surprise when they eventually realise that you are different, and that you won’t yield to their threats, gives you an advantage. That can enable you to confound all their schemes, simply by being brave and immovable under pressure. Therefore use the tactical advantage that the element of surprise can give you when confronting a wicked person. They make plans based on their rational expectations about how the universe works and they then act on those expectations, which are usually correct.

They are therefore relying on your fear, and they intend to use it to get you to back off, compromise, look the other way or alter your evidence. Imagine how bewildering it is when they discover, in the middle of a battle, that their tactics aren’t working and you aren’t diverting from your purpose. It is how a pilot feels when the buttons and levers of his controls suddenly cease to work. Your resolve not to panic and to go ahead, regardless of your fear, can therefore result in the wicked person being seriously caught out, because he was so sure you would buckle under pressure.

In reliance upon your anticipated cowardice, he may have taken other risks, told other lies, made other threats or tampered with other evidence. All of that may then unravel and be exposed, wrecking all of his plans, because of your totally unexpected refusal to give in. The point is that being brave is something you can *decide* to be, as an exercise of your will. Bravery simply means going ahead despite your fear. You can’t decide to be clever, but you can decide to face your fear and to refuse to be influenced by it.

**When you tackle the wicked it must be done without losing your temper, being manipulative, grabbing for positions or acting in the flesh.**

Overcoming the wicked requires you to achieve several objectives at the same time. You must keep your resolve, refuse to panic and aim to defeat them. But you have to do all that without becoming manipulative or losing your self-control. You can’t let yourself act in the flesh, even though they are doing so. No matter what they do, you must never use their techniques. You have to beat them without being like them. These multiple objectives, and the limitations thereby placed on you can make the whole task more difficult.

However, the limitations are also a form of guidance. They prevent you from doing things which might bring some short-term advantages, but which would harm you later on. Losing your temper or your self-control would be sinful in itself, but would also leave you wide open to their counter-attacks. It would also cause you to make mistakes, misjudge people, and over-react to events. In many ways the

wicked actually want you to lose your temper. It is the next best option for them, if they can't manipulate you, deceive you, or intimidate you into silence.

**It's not just the fact of winning that counts. The way in which you win also matters very much to God.**

Keeping your self-control and not acting in the flesh also matter because God is watching. He takes a close interest in *what* you do and say, but also in *how* you do and say those things. In other words, God does want you to win, but He is even more concerned that you should win *in the right way*. Imagine you were an athlete up against rivals who cheat by taking performance-enhancing drugs. The answer is not to beat them by taking more drugs, or better drugs, but by training even harder.

Then you can show that you are even capable of beating the people who break the rules. Of course, you can, and should, help the authorities to catch the cheats, but what you can't do is to 'out-cheat' them. Likewise, we must not attempt to 'out-lie' the liars, 'out-manipulate' the manipulators or 'out-revile' the revilers. You must be effective, but by being different from them, not by being the same. Peter spoke of this:

*<sup>9</sup> Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing.*

*1 Peter 3:9 (RSV)*

Restraint is hard enough in itself, while you are being provoked, but it is even harder if you also have to think about winning the battle. If all we had to do was avoid over-reacting or being carnal, it would be simple. We could just surrender every time and let ourselves be defeated. Conversely, if all we had to do was to win, and we need not be concerned about our methods and motives, that would also be easy. The whole task is made more difficult by the fact that we have to achieve both objectives at the same time. Thus it can take a lot longer to learn how to do all this than we might expect.