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April 2011

CITY OF REFUGE

Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal. If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him - - fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him. (Lev. 24:17-20)

The Law of Retaliation (commonly referred to as "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth") as spelled out in these verses written by Moses about 3,500 years ago, was actually a principle designed to prevent extreme brutality in exacting retribution. It had been the practice in that part of the world to take the life of a person who caused injury, and the Mosaic covenant limited retaliation. Revenge was exacted by the person or his family, even when the person causing the injury did it unintentionally.

Then God further limited retaliation by establishing "cities of refuge," as spelled out in Numbers 35 (paraphrased): The Lord said to Moses, "**Tell the children of Israel, when you cross into the land of Canaan, appoint cities to be cities of refuge, so that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there, and so that he may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment. Anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there, but if he strikes him with an iron implement or a weapon or hurls something at him so that he dies, he is a murderer and shall be put to death. The avenger of blood (usually someone of his family) shall put the murderer to death.**

However, if he unintentionally pushes a man so that he falls and dies, or if he throws a stone and accidentally causes a man's death, then the offender may flee to a city of refuge. He must stay within the city limits, and the avenger of blood may not enter that city to exact retribution. The offender will be safe from vengeance so long as he stays within the city limits of the city of refuge. He must stay there until the death of the High Priest, and then he is free to return to his hometown and he is to be free of retribution."

Isn't this an interesting law! Let me give an illustration as if this law were in effect in Colorado today: Bill and Jack are playing one-on-one basketball one evening on the open air concrete court at Canyon View Park. Bill unintentionally trips Jack, who falls and hits his head on the concrete and dies. When Jack's family learns about it, they immediately say, "Kill Bill!" (Jack's family is honor bound to kill Bill, because they live in a culture of vengeance, as is true in much of the world today.) Montrose, Colorado, is 100 miles from Grand Junction, and it is the nearest City of Refuge, so Bill immediately flees there. The case is referred to the Judge of Mesa County, and he examines the evidence, interviews the

eye witnesses, and rules that Jack's death was an accident. But Bill must stay put in Montrose. If Jack's family ever catches Bill outside the city limits of Montrose, they are free to kill him. Bill must stay in Montrose until the death of the current High Priest, Pastor Yamaguchi (a famous Japanese High Priest). High Priest Yamaguchi may live for a year, 20 or 40 years. Once the High Priest dies, Bill is free to return to Grand Junction, and Jack's family is restricted from exacting any vengeance on him.

This is a beautiful type representing our High Priest Jesus, although it is not a perfect example in every respect. When we have committed sins worthy of death, our only recourse is to flee to Jesus, our City of Refuge. When we appeal to His death on the cross, we are ruled by the Judge, God, to be in a protected zone. We can get a fresh start without fear that the avenger of blood, Satan, has any authority over us. Hallelujah!

Just a clarifying word about "sins" and "mistakes:" It is a common practice in the world for people who have been caught or exposed doing something wrong to claim they made a mistake. "Yes," the employee says, "I stole \$500 from my employer, but we all make mistakes!" "Okay," says the teacher, "I admit I shouldn't have had relations with my 14-year old student, but we all make mistakes!" The church has copied this language, and I hear preachers say that God forgives us for our mistakes. As I recall, the Bible never says that Christ died for our mistakes. He died for our sins. We don't want to be judgmental, and we want to be kind, but I think it is wrong to use euphemisms to shield people from the reality that certain actions are wrong and sinful. Stealing is not a mistake, it is a sin. The same is true for murder and adultery and lying. But the good news is that Christ died for our sins, so that if we confess, repent, and turn to Him, we are readily forgiven. (That does not mean, however, that all the consequences for our sins will be erased in this life. If we stole \$500 from our company, we will have to pay the money back and may have to go to jail. If an adult seduces a child, he certainly should go to prison, even though God will certainly forgive him if he repents and turns to Christ.

Now let me return to the subject of the City of Refuge, which was provided as a mercy for those who committed mistakes. Since we are human and all too fallible, we are all subject not only to committing sins, but to making errors and mistakes. Sometimes those mistakes can cause terrible injury to others, as well as to ourselves.

A fine man in our church, Ted, recently gave his testimony about how when he was twelve-years old he accidentally shot and killed his best friend with an "unloaded" revolver, and the

lifetime of tears and regret not only by the boy's family but by him and his family. That one moment of carelessness caused endless ripples of sorrow. (This is just the type situation that in Old Testament times would have resulted in vengeance by the boy's family and would have necessitated that Ted flee to a City of Refuge.)

A few months ago the news reported the case of a woman who became distracted by her cell phone and ran over and killed an eight-year old girl who was walking home from school.

Last year I read about a father, not far from Grand Junction, who let his five-year old son drive an ATV. The little boy ran into a river and drowned.

Another case I remember was when a father backed his pick-up over his two-year old son and killed him. The boy's mother thought he was in the den and didn't realize that the screen-door had been left unlatched.

Not long ago I prayed for a man of about thirty years who was suffering because of what turned out to be a very bad decision. Seven years before he had allowed some friends to talk him into going sky-diving. "Thousands of people sky-dive without any problem," they assured him. So he allowed himself to be persuaded. On his first (and final) jump, he landed badly and shattered his right ankle. After many surgeries, months in hospitals, and enormous medical bills, he had resolved that he would have to live a life of constant pain, disability, and limitation.

There are many other types of situations that reflect mistakes and poor judgment: A friend of mine was at the point of retirement, and he had enough savings so that he and his wife could live comfortably for the rest of their lives. Then he learned about a certain "sure-fire investment" where he could double or triple his savings. As you might guess, it was a Bernie Madoff-type investment, and he lost everything.

I expect you could add to this sad list from your own life experiences and from those of your family and friends. What on earth does our faith have to say about this terrible list? They are not sins, they are mistakes, errors, lapses of judgment by ourselves or others. We have a compassionate Lord who makes provision for our fallibility, and He has provided a City of Refuge named Jesus Christ. Following are some practical steps we can take to bring healing:

(1) Forgive other people. Forgive the drunk driver or careless driver or dozing driver who killed or injured your loved ones. Forgive the well-intentioned friend who counseled you to make that disastrous investment. Forgive the greedy investment banker who counseled you to make an investment, knowing full-well what he was doing. I realize that forgiving someone who has caused such terrible suffering is easier said than done, but our Lord will help us, and we must forgive in order to be free of the invisible chains around our hearts.

(2) Ask and receive from God forgiveness for your lapse of attention or judgment that resulted in terrible injury to an innocent party, perhaps to a member of your own family. It would be good, if it is appropriate, to also ask the injured party for forgiveness, but this must be done very sensitively.

(3) Forgive yourself. Yes, you may have caused terrible suffering to an innocent person and their family, or your own family, but it doesn't do any good, nor does it bring God glory, for you to dwell in endless self-condemnation. Remember, self-hatred and self-condemnation are from the devil, not from God. "In Christ Jesus there is no condemnation." (Please refer to my teaching on Self-Hatred and Self-Condensation, Chapter 14 on my web-site www.GlennBrownministries.com.)

(4) Flee again and again to Jesus, our precious City of Refuge. He said, **"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light, and you will find rest for your souls."**

WHY BEING A CHRISTIAN 99% OF THE TIME IS A DISASTER

I recently read an article in a magazine that impressed me greatly, but I can't find the magazine anywhere and assume I passed it along to someone. (That was a mistake, not a sin, but I am having a hard time not being irritated with myself.) The article was by a very wise Christian businessman (whose name I can't recall) who counsels companies and university groups on ethical issues, and I will share the point of his article as well as I can remember it:

He tells university students that they need to carefully consider what will make them happy in life, because many intelligent, educated men and women end up being rich and "successful" but alienated from their families and miserable. He explained that many intelligent people who can strategize brilliantly in business seem to have a blind spot when it comes to their spouse and children. They don't realize that it takes an investment of time and energy to build and maintain those relationships which are going to be very important to their long-term happiness.

He said it is also important to live in such a way that you don't end up in prison. He made that point not to be humorous, but because of the 35 people with whom he graduated from law school, two of them were currently in prison, including Jeffrey Skilling, a former Vice President of Enron. He said the reason people who had every intention of leading honorable lives can end up in prison, or destroyed in some other way, is because they did not determine at the beginning to be true to their principles 100% of the time. That 1% is what gets you!

He gave an example from his own life. He was raised as a Christian and determined as a boy to devote Sundays totally to the Lord. He was a member of a high school basketball team that had great success and advanced to a state championship game. But the game was to be played on a Sunday, so he told the coach he could not do that. The coach was flummoxed! He could not believe that this boy would not make this one little exception to his rule. Not only the coach, but many people, students, alumni, sports columnists, etc., were incensed that he would let down his team, school, and community because of his conscience. He would not yield. He did not play, and he looks back on that decision as one of the most important of his life. He did not even say whether his team won or lost the game - - because it is irrelevant.

(Who won the Super Bowl in 1991, 1980, etc? If you know the answer, you need to get a life.)

So it is in our lives. Those businessmen or politicians (or whatever) who end up in prison never imagined that was the destination of their lives. But in the course of their career a time of tremendous pressure came. They were pressured to make a certain decision that would compromise their principles. (Those times come to every living soul.) They decided that it wouldn't hurt to squelch their conscience and go along with the pressure "just this once." You know the rest of the story.

Imagine that Joseph had decided to yield to the inducements of Potiphar's wife "just one time." He could have stayed out of prison, out of the dungeon! He could have avoided years of suffering. But he would never have been elevated to Prime Minister of Egypt, and he would have missed the great plan God had for his life.

Think of the people who have decided to try meth "just one time," and became hooked and destroyed.

It is not the 99% of the time that you are faithful to God but the 1% when you are tempted to be unfaithful that will determine your destiny.

GOD LOVES YOU JUST THE WAY YOU ARE? **(Pig-Pen Christianity)**

I have become suspicious of the phrase one hears so often from the pulpit and among Christians: "God loves you just the way you are." Of course I know it is true. "God loved us while we were yet sinners," and sent His Son to rescue us by dying on the cross. Thanks be to God that He loved us even when we were His enemies (God is the greatest example of loving your enemies) and that Jesus exemplified God's love when He cried out from the cross, "Father, forgive them, they know what they do."

Yet so often I feel uneasy when I hear that statement because I suspect there is an unstated addendum: "God loves you just the way you are; therefore, there is no need for you to change."

Consider the prodigal son that demanded his inheritance, lived a debauched lifestyle, and ended up hopeless and starving in a pig-pen. His father loved him desperately, just the way all of us moms and dads love our children. But the father did not search out his son in the pig-pen and take robe and sandals and throw a party for him. His son was destroying himself, and the father could only wait and pray and love and suffer until his son came to himself, changed his mind about life (repented), and came home of his own free will. Many parents live out this parable as they wait for a son or daughter to leave the pig-pen of alcoholism or drug addiction.

Yes, God loves us just the way we are, even while we are still living in sin and rebellion, but He did not send His son to die on the cross so we could stay in the pig-pen. His kindness is intended to lead us to repentance so that we can be saved out of the pig-pen to a quality of life that begins now and extends into eternity.

I have to tell you the truth: I know many "Christians" who are living in a pig-pen, and they seem perfectly at peace, because they have heard time after time that "God loves you just the way you are." I was one of those Christians for many years, and I am so thankful for God's mercy and patience. But I learned that I was in mortal danger during that time, and I was too dumb to realize it.

A few scriptures to meditate on:

- ***If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*** Hebrews 10:26
- ***Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*** Gal. 5:24
- ***If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.*** 1 Peter 2:26

MINISTRY

Once again I have been having my "Breaking Free" or "Breaking Your Chains" seminar in my church here, and we have been having a great time. My seminar always generates a lot of personal counseling, so I am staying pretty busy. My seminar will run for eight Wednesday evenings.

I want to add a note about my trip to the Dream Center in February. Four of us guys from Vineyard worked with Clayton Gollieher's ministry, Hope for Homeless Youth, for a week. The three guys also went out on many outreaches that Clayton's team makes to beaches, sidewalk ministry, etc.

The event I wanted to tell you about is that we got the tremendous privilege of spending our last night there in "Bonnie Brae House." (You can Google that name and learn more.) Bonnie Brae House is on a street named Bonnie Brae, and it is located only 7 blocks from the Dream Center. Let me give you a brief synopsis:

In 1906 a one-eyed black preacher named William Seymour started having meetings in this little house. He was teaching about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, including the gift of tongues. Spiritual manifestations started occurring. One night when he was preaching, smoke started coming out the windows and fire came from the roof and reached up into the sky. Neighbors called the fire department. They could not find a physical fire, and the news got in the Los Angeles Times. The Times, and many pastors, were incensed at his preaching, and also offended because a mixture of races was attending the meetings. This was simply not done in the early 1900's. Great crowds started coming, overflowing out into the street. So many people crowded onto the porch that it broke down, so the little church moved a couple of miles away to a broken-down stable on Azusa Street. Thus began the Pentecostal outpouring that spread over the whole world. (Jesus was born in a stable, and the Pentecostal/Charismatic outpouring was also birthed in a stable.)

The little house on Bonnie Brae is still maintained as a sort of shrine to the beginning of the Pentecostal fire that fell from

heaven. About four years ago a group of pastors from Argentina, including Carlos Anacondia, spent the night at Bonnie Brae House. There has been a great move of the Holy Spirit in Argentina. Once again, fire came from the roof of the little house on Bonnie Brae, and the neighbors (probably different people, unless they are really old) called the fire department.

We learned that a small group could spend the night in the house for \$250, so we four guys came up with \$65 each so we could spend the night there, hoping we would "catch" more of the Spirit, or at least that fire would go up from the roof. (We are such a holy bunch of guys, how could it not?) Much to our surprise, no fire went up. We sensed the Holy Spirit, but not any more than we do at worship in our church.

We napped on the hardwood floor for a few hours and left before daylight to drive back to Colorado in one day. I napped in a little room next to the pulpit of Kathryn Kuhlman! She donated it at the conclusion of her ministry. It is the pulpit she had shipped all over the world as she held Holy Ghost revivals where multitudes were healed. It is a humongous pulpit, maybe eight or ten feet long. She must have had elephants transport it to some of the places she went. During the night, I got up and when I lay back down I bonked my head on the edge of the pulpit, and I was immediately healed! (No, that didn't really happen, but wouldn't it be a great story if it had?)

While we didn't receive any super anointing, we felt that the Lord was pleased with us because we will go to any amount of expense, time and trouble to get more of God. We are hungry for more of God. We are thirsty for more of God. We desperately want more of God. We pray and plead for more of God, more of the Holy Spirit. We seek you, Lord. Have mercy on us, precious Savior.

God Bless,
Glenn

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