

SO WHERE IS GOD IN ALL OF THIS?

A friend was talking to me about a case of an abusive pastor and the way that he was treating many in the church, and he asked, "Where is God in all of this?". The answer, of course, is that He is just where He has been all along; He lives in you.

In order to deal with this subject we must understand the nature of God and the rules under which He and we operate. When God made man, He made him with a free will. This allows us to fellowship with Him. If we had no ability to decide whether we wanted to fellowship with God or not, then we would be little more than robots; and one can not fellowship with a robot. We can also decide whether we will obey Him or not. When people behave contrary to the will of God, people are hurt. But what is the alternative? Do you think that we should be like marionettes dancing to the tune of angels that pull our strings so that we do not make any mistakes? Would you have God strike people dead when they get out of line? What about when you get out of line? What would be the population of the earth if that plan was followed? God is just but He is also long suffering, and aren't you glad that He is? The real question is, how are you going to react to all of this? Both of you are tested here. Will the other person repent of his bad behavior? And will you be Christ-like in your response? What would Christ do if He was in your situation? Well He was, and we have the answer in I Peter 2:20-23, ***"For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;"***. I want to spend some time with these verses because there is much there. When you are going through these kinds of trials with other people, you must focus, not on the behavior of the other person, but on your behavior. You have no control over the other person's behavior, but you do have control over yours. God holds you accountable for your actions not for those of the other person. They

must answer for that. We are told in these verses that Christ is our example in these situations. So what did He do? We are told of three things that He did; He trusted the outcome to God who is the judge, He didn't sin through deceit, and He didn't revile when He was reviled. To revile is to defame, or to vilify someone. If you allow yourself to be controlled by things that are beyond your control, then you are, by definition, out of control. Do not invest your time and energy in those things that are not within your ability to change. We usually think that persecution only comes from outside the church, but this is not true. Jesus was betrayed by Judas who was one of the inner circle of His friends. He warned us in Matthew 10:21-22, ***"And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death."*** The apostle Peter said, ***"Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds,"*** II Peter 4:14. The thing that I want to focus on here is Peter's attitude toward retribution for the wrong that he suffered. He was content to leave that in God's hands. So where was God when Peter was suffering wrong from Alexander? Right where he was before it happened; abiding in Peter, and Peter was willing to let Him handle the situation. The most dangerous time for us is the time just after we suffer persecution. It is then that we can begin to want to see "justice" done. We can become impatient and try to exercise judgment on our own and in that way we become the one engaging in the persecution of the other person and we become no better than they are. Or we can be overcome with pride when we are vindicated. David was a great example to us about leaving the retribution to God. Saul tried to kill him many times and David did not raise his hand against him. Even when it was within David's ability to kill Saul, he never raised his hand but committed that to God. There was one time when David yielded to the temptation to execute his own revenge. We find the account in the 25th chapter of I Samuel. David and his men had protected the herd of a man named Nabal, and it was the custom that Nabal would give them something in return when the sheep were sheared. David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep and so he sent some men to collect for the protection that they had provided. But Nabal treated them with disrespect and sent them away with nothing. The men returned to David and told him what had happened. David and his men put on their swords and we read in verses 21 +22 ***"Now David had said, 'surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in***

the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him." Nabal means (fool) and he lived up to his name. Nabal had a wife named Abigail who was wise. When she heard what her husband had done, she assembled a great many provisions and had them loaded on donkeys and told her servants to go ahead of her with the gifts to intercept David and his men, and she followed. When she came to David, she dismounted and fell on her face before David and this is what she said; *"On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him, but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, since the Lord has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies, and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. And now let the gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you all your days. And should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And it shall come about when the Lord shall do for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and shall appoint you ruler over Israel, that this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the Lord shall deal well with my lord, then remember your maidservant."* (1 Samuel 25:24-31) Now notice the humble way in which David replies to Abigail. (verses 32-35) *"Then David said to Abigail, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and*

blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed, and from avenging myself by my own hand. Nevertheless, as the Lord God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male.' So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and he said to her, 'Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and have granted your request.'" David

acknowledged that he had planned to do wrong, and that he was stopped by the wisdom of Abigail. Does this sound like a leader of men to you? What kind of leader would admit that an unarmed woman would call him to task and cause him to repent? The answer is simple; he was a man after God's own heart. So where was God in all of this? He was in Abigail, He was in David, and ten days later Nabal was dead because, **"the Lord struck Nabal, and he died."** (verse 38) David took Abigail as his wife, he knew a good woman when he saw one, and David turned the revenge business over to God, where it should be, and He took care of it. We read in Romans 12:17-19, **"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, Be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the Wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."** When we involve ourselves in getting revenge, we usurp God's rightful place and set ourselves up in God's place, and we make of ourselves our own god. I know that this sounds strong, but how else would you put it? If we seek our own revenge, knowing that it is God's prerogative alone, then are we not accusing Him of being less than adequate to carry out His perfect justice? At that point, do we not cease to be followers of God, and become His judge? There seems to be no end to the arrogance of man when he seeks to defend himself. There is yet another part to this revenge thing. This may be the hardest part of all. As we continue to read in Romans 12, we read, "But **if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.**" (verse 20) To forgive your enemy and to do good to him is your job in the Justice of God, and vengeance is His. Don't get the two confused.

The story of Peter's miraculous release from prison in the 12th chapter of the book of Acts is exciting and often told and often

preached about. It is easy to see where God is in this story which starts in verse three with Peters arrest. But what about the previous verse? Verse 2 reads, ***"And he had James the brother of John put to death with the sword."*** So where is God in all of that? The answer is the same as it was for Peter. God was with him. How do I know that? Because I read in Hebrews 13:5b, ***"He Himself said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,'"*** Some would ask why God spared Peters life and not James'. But we loose track of the fact that Peter's life was not spared. Peter is dead. His death was only postponed. Herod is held responsible for the death of James and the vengeance is up to God and He is fully capable of carrying it out. Both James and Herod have reaped their reward. If you could talk to both of them today, you would see that James won and Herod lost.

My dear friends, I admonish you to release the settling of your wrongs to our Lord who alone has the right and ability to judge righteously. Do good to all, and forgive all. In Romans 8:33-34 we read, ***"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."***

Christ doesn't ask us to do one thing and He does another. He has practiced what He preached. Before he ever came to earth, we read about His actions with regard to how He handled retribution in Isaiah 50:6-9, ***"I gave my back to those who strike Me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out My beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. For the Lord God helps Me, therefore I am not disgraced; therefore, I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He who vindicates Me is near; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other; who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps Me; who is he who condemns Me? Behold, they will all wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them."***

I ask you; who's reputation is better ? Christ's, or His accusers? God vindicated Him and He can, and will, vindicate you as well if you trust Him to do so.

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