

Stealing From God

(No, this is *not* an article about giving... just stick with me.)

A prominent Houston cardiologist, Mark Hausknech, MD, was biking to work two weeks ago when someone shot and killed him. Who would do such a thing to a well-respected heart surgeon who has saved hundreds of lives?

Backtrack to 1997. Dr. Hausknech lost an aging woman during heart surgery. That happens when you are a heart surgeon. Humans simply don't control every aspect of life. But the patient's son, Joseph Pappas never forgot the incident, nor forgave Dr. Hausknech for what he apparently must have perceived as some sort of malpractice. ***Now, 21 years later, Mr. Pappas stalked and killed the life-saving surgeon.***

This horrendous act lead police to find him Friday. During the confrontation Mr. Pappas chose to end his life rather than face other consequences. How often it is that our revenge on others rolls back onto ourselves!

Humans often, but mistakenly, call it "pay back" or even "justice." God calls it revenge and He is very serious about it. In Romans 12:14-21 God addresses these types of situations. In v. 19 we read, "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.

Did you catch it? Never ***take*** your own revenge! Why "Vengeance is Mine" – there is it – vengeance belongs to God, not man! When we ***take*** it, we are taking that which belongs to God – ***stealing!*** When we take vengeance, we feel justified, perhaps even glorified. In reality, we are literally stealing from God, Himself!

The cure for this thievery is also included in the passage. Consider the entire context (and notice that blessing your enemy is God's command):

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ "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 on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Tall order? Absolutely! Possible? Totally. The strength to follow this command is found where we find all of our strength... at the foot of the cross.

-Ray Wallace