

The Refiners Fire Lesson 10 4Q 2007

Meekness in the Crucible

SABBATH

Read first paragraph – thoughts? What might be the key to being able to endure injury with patience and without resentment? Is meekness a quality of its own or a fruit of another?

Is it hard to endure injury with patience and without resentment if the person injuring you, you love more than yourself?

Two weeks ago I was at a speaker's conference in Nashville and for part of the conference we were broken into small groups. One of the members of my small group was Kent Whitaker. In December 2003 he, his wife and two sons Kevin and Bart went out to dinner to celebrate Bart's upcoming graduation from College. They gave Bart a \$4000 Rolex as a graduation gift. Kevin, the younger brother drove home and as they approached the house Bart turned back to the car to get his cell phone. (see addendum at end of notes for full story).

As they entered the house a masked gunman shot and killed Kevin, Kent's wife and then as Kent stepped into the doorway, he was shot in the chest but survived. As it turned out Bart had arranged with a long time friend to have his family shot and killed so he could inherit the family money. Bart was arrested and put on trial for murder with the prosecutor seeking the death penalty.

If you were Kent, how would you respond? Would you have any patience and no resentment?

Kent publicly forgave his son and publicly asked the prosecutor to not seek the death penalty. But the prosecutor

sought the death penalty and this year Bart was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Kent told his story, and then went on to tell how through this experience he has supported his son, visited his son in prison and forgiven his son and through this his son said, "If you can still love me and forgive me for all I have done, then I believe God can also." And he gave his life to Christ in prison. Kent states that while he has lost his wife and younger son on this earth and will son lose Bart, he has peace knowing that through all of this Bart will now be with them in heaven and their family will be together for eternity.

Would this be an example of meekness?

What enabled Kent to act in this way? Love – love for his son. The only way we can be genuinely meek is when we come to love others more than ourselves. And this love can only come from being won back to trust in God and opening the heart to the Holy Spirit.

SUNDAY

Read first paragraph – what do you think about the idea of God using us?

Why does God use us? Is it exploitive or for our good? Is it part of our own healing and regenerating that is taking place when God "uses" us?

So with all who bring forth fruit as workers together with Christ: self-love, self-interest, must perish; the life must be cast into the furrow of the world's need. But the law of self-sacrifice is the law of self-preservation. The husbandman preserves his grain by casting it away. So the life that will be preserved is the life that is freely given in service to God and man. {Ed 110.3}

What happens to us when we following God's leading/will for our lives?

It depends – it depends on our attitude in following God's direction:

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints. Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. {ST, July 22, 1897 par. 11}

Thoughts?

Studies on exercise and cholesterol show that people who are forced to exercise in exercising they don't enjoy actually have worsening of their cholesterol levels – Why? Because being forced to go against one's own desire and endure and activity one doesn't enjoy causes the brain to activate its stress management system increasing the stress hormones which causes worsening in cholesterol.

They have done brain scans on people having them play a piano and while playing tracking which neural circuits are firing and then have them imagine playing the piano without actually moving any fingers and the exact same neural circuits fire.

We cannot be healed, transformed, regenerated in character against our will, we must intelligently cooperate. Thus Paul says in Roman's 14, that every person must be fully persuaded in their own mind.

So what happens when we follow God's will? It depends on whether we are in agreement with Him and are following Him

freely or we are simply submitting but really don't want to. If we are in agreement we are healed, transformed and grow to be like Him, if we merely submit we actually get worse and slowly become a rebel.

This is why God cannot win the war by threat, force, physical power, intimidation, but only by truth, love and freedom – Zech 4:6.

MONDAY

Read first paragraph – thoughts? Did God need to be pled with by Moses? Does God know the future? Does He know the end from the beginning? Did He know what Moses was going to do before Moses did it? And did God know how He was going to respond? In other words God never intended on killing the Israelites – then what was going on?

Can angels read hearts and minds? No, if they could none would have been deceived by Lucifer. How were things looking for God's plan of salvation at this particular time? Was it possible God needed to show the onlooking universe that His methods work? That someone, who could murder another human being (Moses age 40), if he spends time with God, getting to know God, following God's methods and principles will be regenerated and rather than killing others, will be like God and willing to give his life that others might live!

Read second paragraph – thoughts?

Does God need to be pled with, by us or Jesus, in order to be gracious, forgiving and merciful?

John 16:26 - Jesus says He will not pray His Father for us because the Father Himself loves us!

TUESDAY

Loving those who hurt us –

This week there has been an online discussion regarding how do we treat our enemies – how do we treat those who would do harm and a specific example was brought up:

If you are at home and a person enters your home bent on raping and killing your family, how do you apply Jesus like love, meekness and “turning the other cheek” in this situation – thoughts?

The following is from this week’s blog:

In a recent discussion I've been following on what should one do when confronted with a horrific situation such as an intruder invading your home with intent to harm or murder your family, the discussion went back and forth between pacifism and justifiable use of violence. Some pointed out Jesus' example of accepting abuse and never retaliating and wondered if this should be our example in such situations. Others argued that in such circumstances violence is appropriate and justifiable.

But there seems to have been several important factors overlooked in the discussion. First, the question is not about how does one act when your own life is being threatened, but how one acts when someone else’s life is being threatened. Secondly, love does what is best for others - love heals, restores, regenerates, protects, builds up and love “compels” to action. And finally we must remember that sin actually damages, destroys, tears down – not just the victims of sin but the sinner himself is damaged by his sin.

Therefore, when Christ was on earth, He suffered but not as a model of how to handle all circumstances of violence and abuse - God acted in different ways many times in other circumstances (Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh's army, 185,000 Assyrians etc). God acted in love, by force, in many circumstances to protect others.

Christ, on the other hand, as a human, had a specific mission and His mission could not be completed in any other way than what He did. With all this in mind we can recognize that, in this world of sin, sometimes the most loving course of action is the course of force.

Example, a psychotic patient who is violent and if not intervened with will kill other patients and staff - medical professionals will use force to restrain this person to protect others, but not just to protect other but to protect the psychotic patient as well. Now, there may be no agenda to kill the individual, the heart desire may be totally on healing and restoring because the psychotic one is your son, but you will still use force, if necessary, to restrain, even if it risks injury. This is protective for others but ALSO for the one being restrained. This is how love acts.

Consider the mother with post partum psychosis who kills her children. While it is obvious that it is in the best interest of the children for someone to use force and stop mother from killing them, would it not also be in the mother's best interest for someone to stop her, even forcibly? And, if you were such a mother wouldn't you even prefer someone shoot and kill you, if that was the only way, to prevent you from killing your children? Sometimes the loving course, in this sick world of sin, is the course of restraining force. Does God use His power to restrain the four winds of strife? To set limits on the powers of darkness? While it is true God cannot win His war with evil by the use of force (Zech 4:6), He does, in emergency circumstances use restraining force in love.

Finally, sin damages the faculties that recognize and respond to truth and some people persist so long in sinful living that they are beyond reach (not for us to decide who those people are, but they are out there). On such unhealable individuals the methods of Jesus have no impact. Therefore, until God brings a full end to sin,

He has ordained earthly governments to use force to maintain order and restrain violent abusers (prison). This is protective for innocent citizens but is ALSO protective for the criminal as it prevents the criminal from further damaging himself.

The issue is not one of specific behavior in a specific circumstance, but rather one of heart motive - are you acting out of love to heal, build up, protect, restore others, including the assailant, or are you acting out of fear and selfishness merely looking out for self or seek vengeance upon another?

WEDNESDAY

Read middle paragraph – “It is terrible to watch...” Thoughts? How is this a dangerous attitude? How is this attitude manifested in the church?

A elementary school teacher in one of our church schools was married to a man who continually physically abused her. She had attempted to get counseling with the pastor but the husband was pious and arrogant and justified his behavior. So after years of this mistreatment she left and filed for divorce. He, in turn went to the conference officials and complained that she divorced without Biblical grounds and the conference committee investigated and ultimately terminated her from employment in order to be just or put things right. – Thoughts?

Read next paragraph “It is not easy to live...” thoughts?

Is the Father in control of all unjust situations? If God were in charge of what happens then would Lucifer have rebelled? Would Adam have sinned? Would humans have crucified Christ?

What bad theology can come from such ideas? Well if God is in charge of everything that happens, then it was God’s will that

a child get abused, it is God's will that a mother or father or child be killed, it was God's will that Adam and Eve sin, it was God who was in charge of killing Christ at the cross and it will be God killing the wicked in the end, thus people wrongly conclude that God is the source of death - but call it justice.

What kind of an ugly God is this? Is God in charge of everything that happens? Is it His will it happen the way it does?

It is not the will of God that men and women should die prematurely, leaving their work unfinished. He would have us live out the full measure of our days, with every organ free to do its allotted work. Many complain of the providences of God when disease and death remove members of the household; but it is unjust to charge God with what is but the sure result of their own transgression of natural laws. {Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene 90.1}

Religion has meant altogether too little to the professed followers of Christ; for it is not the will of God that any one should remain ignorant when wisdom and knowledge have been placed within reach. {Fundamentals of Christian Education 217.1}

It is not the will of God that any shall perish, but that all shall have everlasting life. {Testimonies to ministers and gospel workers 394} – see 1 Timothy 2:4.

THURSDAY

Read bottom paragraph “without cause...” thoughts? How should we act when people in our own church, our own bretheren attack us, misrepresent us, spread rumors about us? Have you ever experienced this?

I have, and the only course I know to follow is to press forward presenting the truth in love and leaving others free.

During Son's Trial, Father Describes Scene Of 2003 Family Murders

by [Bob Dunn](#), Feb 26, 2007, 11 55 PM

In opening testimony in the murder trial of Bart Whitaker, the defendant's father, Kent Whitaker, described how he lay on his front porch with a gunshot wound to his chest, knowing other family members had been shot and wondering if any were still alive.

Bart Whitaker, 26, is on trial for his life in the 2003 shooting deaths of his mother, Patricia Whitaker, and younger brother, Kevin Whitaker. Like his wife and younger son, Kent Whitaker also was shot once in the chest as he entered his Sugar Land home that night, but he survived.

Bart Whitaker is accused of plotting with Chris Brashear, 23, Bart's former roommate, and Steven Champagne, 24, to kill Whitaker family members for the inheritance Bart Whitaker stood to gain. Fort Bend County District Attorney John Healey is seeking the death penalty in the case, against Kent Whitaker's wishes.

Testifying under questioning by Assistant Fort Bend County District Attorney Fred Felcman in the opening day of the trial, in 400th District Judge Clifford Vacek's court, Kent Whitaker, a long-time accountant in a family construction business, said he felt for months there was "an equal chance" that Bart was innocent in the shootings. But shortly after his son's arrest in September 2005 "I realized he was guilty."

Also during his testimony, Kent Whitaker described events that led up to the shooting. During that testimony, and throughout opening arguments in the trial, Bart Whitaker, wearing a gray suit, close-cropped hair, and a mustache and goatee, sat completely still, staring at the table in front of him.

It was Dec. 10, 2003, and Kent Whitaker's family was just returning from a Pappadeaux's restaurant where they'd been celebrating what they thought was elder son Bart Whitaker's pending graduation from Sam Houston State University. Patricia Whitaker had picked out a \$4,000 Rolex watch as Bart's present.

Kevin Whitaker was driving the family back to his parents' home on Heron Way. Since Kevin had his keys with him, he was the first to the front door, followed by Patricia and Kent, who testified that Bart told the others he had to go back to the car to retrieve his cell phone.

Killer In The House

"I heard a loud noise" as Kevin opened the front door and entered the house," Kent Whitaker testified. "I didn't recognize it as a gunshot."

He said he saw his wife walk through the doorway. "She said 'Oh, no,' and I heard another loud noise."

Kent Whitaker said he then "stepped forward into the doorway, and that was where I saw the gunman. If I remember correctly, he had on a dark sweater and a ski mask. He did not say anything."

But he fired again, hitting Kent Whitaker in the chest, the bullet traveling into his shoulder, where it broke his humerus – the upper arm bone.

"When I was shot it knocked me backwards, out of view of the front door, on the front porch," Kent Whitaker said. "When I rolled over, I realized my arm was broken...I realized there was a gunman inside."

Incapacitated and without a weapon, he said he called out, trying to get a response from his sons and wife. Instead, "I did hear a fourth shot," Kent Whitaker said. "And I thought to myself, 'my God, he shot all of us.'"

Bart Whitaker, the last family member to enter the home that night, was shot in the arm but, like his father, recovered. Prosecutors believe Brashear was the gunman, and shot Bart Whitaker as part of a ruse designed to make it appear to police that the family had surprised a burglary in progress.

Kent Whitaker testified that he was lying on the ground for perhaps only 20 or 30 seconds when his neighbor, Cliff Stanley, approached. "He said 'hang on, buddy, help's on the way. We called 911.'"

"By that time I had looked down at my chest, and noticed the red stain was spreading," Kent Whitaker said. He recalled Stanley taking off his T-shirt, balling it up and pressing it gently into Whitaker's chest.

Continuum Of Right And Wrong

Later, paramedics and police seemed to "come swarming out." Kent Whitaker kept asking what had happened to his family, but paramedics wouldn't tell him. Then, he said, he overheard one police officer asking another "what do you want to do with the DOA?"

“So I did know one of them was dead, but I didn’t know who,” Kent Whitaker testified. Then he heard a paramedic say his wife was going to be flown by helicopter to a hospital “and that made my heart jump with joy.” But then he realized one of his sons had to be dead. And shortly thereafter, his wife died, too.

Kent Whitaker testified that for some time he believed Bart Whitaker was innocent in the shootings. “The police had been telling me for some time that he was a suspect...but he was telling me he was not involved,” Kent Whitaker said of his son, Bart.

“I told him I didn’t know where he was on this continuum of right and wrong, but that I was going to stand with him, and he needed to stand up, too.”

Kent Whitaker hired an attorney and a private investigator on his son’s behalf.

But six months after the murders, aware that Sugar Land Police detectives had been talking regularly to some of his acquaintances, Bart Whitaker disappeared.

Felcman said in opening arguments that police learned Bart had paid a man \$2,500 to smuggle him into Mexico on June 28, 2004. Noting that police weren’t informed of Bart Whitaker’s disappearance until nine days later, Felcman asked Kent Whitaker why.

“We wanted to find him before the authorities did. He had not been told he had to stay in Fort Bend County. He had not been told he was a suspect. As far as I knew, he had every right” to leave the area, Kent Whitaker said, adding that at the time, he still “thought there was an equal chance he was innocent.”

Asked by Felcman if he now believes Bart Whitaker induced Chris Brashear to shoot the family members, Kent Whitaker replied that “the shortage of evidence I have seen” leads him to that conclusion.

Bart Whitaker [was arrested](#) at the Mexico–U.S. border in September 2005, transported to Fort Bend County and incarcerated in the county jail in Richmond.

Kent Whitaker described a visit with him there, with bullet–proof glass separating them.

“He said ‘dad, I’m so sorry. I’m sorry for everything.’ I realized he was guilty, and willing to confess,” Kent Whitaker testified.

Christmas Card For The Prosecutor

Kent Whitaker later said “Bart was trying to confess,” but added that Felcman and Bart Whitaker’s former attorney Dan Cogdell “did not seem to realize” it.

Cogdell was later replaced in the case by current defense attorney Randy McDonald.

Under further questioning by Felcman, Kent Whitaker revealed that in December 2006, while Bart Whitaker was in the Fort Bend County Jail, Bart purchased a Christmas card at the commissary, wrote several sentences on it, and sent it to Felcman.

As he entered the card into evidence, Felcman indicated language in the card had been upsetting to him. He asked Kent Whitaker, “Did the defendant ever tell you why I should concentrate on my family?”

“I see where you are going with this,” Kent Whitaker replied. “He told me he missed his family so much...he just didn’t want anyone to lose sight of that... I can’t see any reason it should have been interpreted any way other than the way it was intended.”

Kent Whitaker also said “a lot of time has passed since these things have happened,” adding that Bart “has confessed his sins to Christ, and accepted him as is lord and savior.”

During the trial Felcman played a recording of a telephone conversation during a call Bart Whitaker placed from the county jail to his father, on Dec. 10, 2005, the second anniversary of the murders.

Bart Whitaker referred to an apparent meeting between his attorneys and Felcman.

“Felcman said there were only two options – death or life without parole,” Bart Whitaker said in the taped conversation.

“When I left Felcman’s office, I felt like there was a very positive mood there,” Kent Whitaker replied. “The other possibility, Bart, is that Healey, the head DA, may be looking to just burn you... He may be listening to the police department.”

Bart was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Below are comments from readers regarding the case

1 Jonanna Zeagler – Feb 27, 07:44 PM

I think they should question the father further as a suspect as well. Also I think Bart deserves the death penalty.

2 Cheryl Cox – Feb 27, 10:02 PM

Oh my goodness, you must not know this case or this family to even suggest Kent would have anything to do with this.

Bart might deserve the death penalty but I think they should give some weight to the fathers wishes. He lost more here than anyone.

3 JM – Feb 27, 10:26 PM

He absolutely does NOT deserve the death penalty. Hasn't his wonderful family suffered enough? Just to lose another child? too much!

4 concerned.citizen – Feb 28, 12:10 AM

The pain and anguish Bart has caused his family is horrendous. I live in their neighbor and was home the night it happened. The whole neighborhood was terrified for weeks/months. Bart's evil actions effected many many people....all for money...and the lies and betrayal to his family.....he is a socio-path and must pay for what he did.....

5 Shannon C. – Feb 28, 02:36 AM

To those who think he doesn't deserve the death penalty: He was willing to murder his own family for money. What do you think he would do to yours if he thought he could get something out of you?? People like that don't deserve to breathe the same air that my family does. Or yours for that matter.

6 someone else – Feb 28, 05:56 AM

Kent Whitaker has already lost his entire family. Giving the defendant life in prison won't change that.

7 Sign of the Times – Feb 28, 07:58 AM

If there was ever a crime that warranted the death penalty...this is it. To kill your own mother and brother for money! That is the worst.

8 Elizabeth – Feb 28, 10:42 AM

I have already said something like this on another article, but I think it's relevant to this topic: We don't put to death EVERY murderer. We are only supposed to apply the death penalty under certain circumstances, and this case does NOT meet those specifications. Also, it is inappropriate to traumatize and re-victimize Kent Whitaker by killing his last living child. We are too blood-thirsty in Texas. It needs to stop.

9 someone else – Feb 28, 05:17 PM
you are wrong.

10 TexasRose – Feb 28, 05:41 PM
Bart is NOTa child...

11 John Zeagler – Feb 28, 07:05 PM
It takes a cold hearted, greedy son to sit and eat a meal with his family knowing he had hired someone to kill them in a matter of minutes. If you need someone to throw the switch on this boy, call me,it will make us all safer. We can and should take his life and let God decide about his soul. Its funny how people like this animal only ask for forgiveness when they get caught. I too, think the father should be investigated further, its hard to believe this boy did the things he did prior to this and went completely undetected, or unchecked. Lets not forget Jim Bakkers misguided deeds for money.