

Pleasant Valley
Church of Christ

3317 Amidon
Wichita KS 67204
(316) 838-4195
www.letjesusleadus.org

Schedule of Services

Sunday

Classes 9:30 am
Worship 10:30 am
Evening 6:00 pm

Wednesday

Classes 7:30 pm

The Pleasant Valley Church of Christ is a non-denominational group of believers who are committed to following Jesus in our attitudes, our relationships, and our worship. If you want the same thing in your life, please contact us. We'd like to help.

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the New King James Version Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Wings



*"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31)*

February 28, 2010

Stealth revenge

by David King

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:17-18).

Students of human nature are familiar with the role that revenge plays in prolonging conflict in society. Barroom brawls, gang shootings, and lovers' rages are all rooted in retaliation. Someone wronged me, so I will get even.

Among civilized people, of course, revenge is considered a manifestation of our baser instincts, and we train ourselves to resist the temptation to retaliate.

Or do we?

This text from the Law of Moses argues that we might not be as noble as we think. Note the close connection between taking revenge and bearing a grudge. This connection suggests that bearing a grudge is simply a more refined strategy for settling a score with an enemy. We may not engage in outright acts of aggression, but we have so many other ways of putting the offender in his place. Think of it as revenge-by-stealth.

What is a "grudge"? The Hebrew word used here means literally "to keep," that is, to hold something close. In this context, of course, that which is held close is the hostile, angry feeling toward one's enemy. It is the harboring of a **spirit** of revenge, the **desire** for one's enemy to suffer for his crimes.

In the New Testament, a Greek word with a similar meaning is used in a setting that

graphically captures the idea. When John the Baptist rebuked Herod for marrying his brother's wife, the woman in question, Herodias, "held it against him and wanted to kill him" (Mk. 6:19). Other translations render this phrase, "had it in for him" (Williams), or more commonly "had a grudge against him" (NASV, RSV, Beck, Weymouth) or "nursed a grudge" (NIV). John's gruesome death was the end result of a woman who could not let go of a grudge against a personal enemy.

Our grudges may not get someone killed, but they can be destructive in so many other ways. Gossip, slander, and backbiting—spread discreetly, of course—all spring from this desire to bring down a rival. We devise elaborate schemes that set up someone to look bad in front of their friends, at no cost to ourselves—and the satisfaction of success is so sweet. Stealth revenge always is.

But no matter how clean our hands may be in executing these covert operations, our hearts are black with sin. It is the grudge itself, the **desire** to harm my antagonist, that condemns.

That's why our text concludes with the second of the Great Commandments: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." It is impossible to hold a grudge against someone we love—even an enemy. When someone wrongs us, we have the right to confront them ("You shall surely rebuke your neighbor"). But whatever the outcome, our response should be motivated entirely from a spirit of compassion and good will, not a spirit of vengeance.