



Misunderstandings

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord” (Romans 12:19)

Undoubtedly all of us have known the distressing experience of being misunderstood. One particularly memorable instance happened to me on the job years ago when I was given responsibility to train a woman who transferred into my department. Although she had a heart of gold, she struggled terribly with laboratory work. Yet I liked this woman and wanted to give her every chance to succeed. Moreover, having successfully trained a number of employees over the years, I felt confident in my abilities as a trainer. Surely she can work out too if given more time, I thought.

But as time proved me wrong, the higher authorities grew increasingly impatient with her performance and wanted to let her go. However, I contested this decision. Unbeknownst to her, I successfully lobbied that she be given further opportunity to adjust.

Yet this adjustment never happened. Furthermore as she continued struggling, a rumor began to circulate in the workplace claiming that I was difficult to work with. Now I’ll admit there were times when I was somewhat direct with her as I tried to salvage the sinking ship. But the heart of the problem was her inability to do the work. Even so, the rank-and-file grapevine propagated the story that her job troubles were due to a lack of patience on my part. Regardless, the higher-ups knew better and finally transferred her to another department with less pressure. Although this was a far more suitable working environment for her, the negative reflection on me lingered for some time afterwards.

Here was a case where I felt misunderstood; it especially stung after I tried to help this woman and lobbied on her behalf. Still, I was vilified by a number of other employees who couldn’t see the whole picture; these friends of hers naturally rushed to her defense and concocted a warped view of the situation.

I resisted the urge to rush out and straighten out those who judged me negatively. Although clarifying a misunderstanding is usually an appropriate action, this was not one of those instances. I reckoned that no good could come forth from any such effort on my part. If they didn’t believe me, I would appear to be exalting myself at the expense of maligning their friend, and this would only hurt me more. If they did believe me, her weaknesses would be exposed to others who really had no need to know of them. So I kept my mouth shut and hoped the whole thing would blow over and die out. Rather than retaliate, I aimed to be polite, professional and pleasant. And leave the rest with God.

I realize how easy it is to feel hurt, bitter, even vengeful when through no fault of our own people misunderstand us. Hurt feelings may be out of our control, yet payback is something we can choose. Hence the Bible instructs us not to seek revenge but instead to leave room for God’s retribution (Romans 12:19). Years later I’m amazed at the wisdom of this, for there’s no way I could have orchestrated what ultimately happened. All of the venom directed at me dried up, and for years now I’ve been on excellent terms with anyone still with the company who had been part of that rumor-mill. Even the woman who left my department stayed with the organization and currently prospers in a position much better suited to her skills. Furthermore she and I, far from harboring any bitterness, enjoy an extremely good rapport today; we even shared some tender moments when we both lost our mothers within a few months of each other. Looking at how it all worked out, who but God could have done this?

Trusting our cares to the Lord is mightier than returning evil for evil, not to mention how vital it is to our spiritual well being. Rather than feeding the vicious cycle, we starve evil’s place in us upon releasing it to God. In addition, not seeking our own retribution paves the way for Him to act on our behalf. Of course we shouldn’t wish for a lightning bolt to strike our adversaries; this isn’t exactly consistent with a character that’s patient, slow to wrath and desires none to perish (2 Peter 3:9). But to really get back at our enemies, the Bible says to return good for bad, for that’s what heaps coals upon their heads (Romans 12:20). Moreover, in reaping what we sow, God returns to us good because we’ve given it to others. This is the cycle worth perpetuating, not evil for evil, but good for evil, for nothing can stop the blessings He pours back into our overflowing cup.

Although misunderstandings seem to be an inevitable by-product of the human condition, being misunderstood has always been a vocational hazard of the righteous in this world. But God’s people are in good company; He has been misunderstood by creation through the ages. From the time when Eve was deceived by the serpent, to the time when Jesus came to his own who received Him not, continuing to the present day when scores of spiritually blind blaspheme their own Creator, righteous God has been misunderstood.

Therefore, when we too are misunderstood but trust God rather than seeking revenge, we reflect the character of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).”

Though misunderstandings are inevitable, returning evil for them isn’t. Every misunderstanding of man ultimately passes, but the righteous judgment of the Lord surpasses.

By Mary Nixon