**“WHAT ABOUT?” JUSTICE** by Andy Diestelkamp

Have you ever noticed that when informing, instructing, or correcting someone (especially about a matter that is not particularly pleasant) that there is often a defensive response that points to others with a “what about” question? When one of my parents would tell me to do a chore, I know there were times when I thought it manifestly unfair that I was chosen for the task. “What about Laura or Suzy or Lance?” That was my attempt to suggest the inequity of *me* being burdened and them unburdened. To me, fairness would require that my siblings also be burdened.

These “what about” responses are often used in an attempt to avoid hard work or personal responsibility. When I instructed my children to help me pick beans in our garden, it was not surprising to hear the “What about?” line employed. (We reap what we sow.)

Having attained the status of a grandparent, I have three generations worth of experience in observing and practicing the human tendency to deflect calls for action or points of emphasis by using distracting techniques and technicalities. These methods are employed by adults as well as children.

This has been happening from the beginning of sin. We all know the response of Adam when God confronted him about his eating of the forbidden fruit. “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate,” (Gen. 3:12) is a classic attempt to shift blame. What about Eve? What about the fact that *God* gave her to Adam? Surely we can see that such maneuvers are lame attempts to avoid focusing on the point being made. Granted, there were others to be blamed (Eve and Satan), but that reality did not diminish Adam’s sin.

Consider the tragic account of King David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent cover-up that resulted in an innocent, fiercely loyal, mighty man of David being killed in battle according to plans delivered by his own hand (2 Sam. 11). While this is a scandalous low in the reign of David which precipitated all kinds of trouble for the remainder of his life, we are nevertheless impressed with the sincerity of his repentance after being confronted by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 12) and as powerfully expressed in Psalm 51. Yet, imagine if David’s response to Nathan’s “You are the man!” (vs. 7) was “What about Bathsheba’s bathing on a rooftop?” While readers of the account may differ on whether or not Bathsheba was complicit in the affair, it is impressive that David did *not* attempt to deflect from the powerful point made by Nathan’s parable of the lamb. This is an example of why David was called a man after God’s own heart (cf. 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). May we all respond so humbly when confronted with our own sins, whatever they may be and regardless of the sins of others.

Recall the post-resurrection conversation which Jesus had with Peter when He asked him if he loved Him. It seems that Peter got a little impatient with being asked at all, let alone three times (Jn. 21:15-17). It was after this that Jesus proceeded to inform Peter of the manner in which he would die and then said, “Follow me” (v. 18,19). You *do* recall Peter’s reactive reply. Referring to another who was following them (“the disciple whom Jesus loved”), Peter said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?” Jesus replied, “What is that to you?” In other words, Peter’s deflecting question was immaterial to the point being made, and so Jesus reiterated “You follow Me” (vv. 20-22).

There is much to be learned from these examples and many applications that could be made. Allow me to make just a few, and I challenge you to not respond to them with “What about \_\_\_\_\_.” First, a point of clarification—I am *not* saying that others should not be held accountable for their part in sinful problems. My point is simply that God is looking for humble and contrite hearts who don’t distract and deflect from their obligations or sins. Yes, this certainly applies in all directions and to all sides of an issue. However, we can’t control the response of others. We can only control our own replies.

So, if your son is guilty of behaving like Shechem, don’t defensively say, “What about Dinah?” And if your sister is guilty of behaving like Dinah, don’t justify your vengeance with “What about Shechem treating our sister like a harlot?” (Genesis 34). Defensive deflecting and distracting from making applications to ourselves or our own friends and family in a matter is not helpful to repentance and rectifying the issue at hand.

So, how would *you* feel if your daughter/sister was the victim of a sexual predator and your cry for justice was met by others with “What about men? They are victims too.”? While that observation is certainly true, as a reply to your legitimate, specific plea, it is a statement that does not logically follow (non sequitur) and thus has the effect of deflecting or distracting and thus minimizing your present primary concern. It would undoubtedly anger you.

Similarly, when people shout that “black lives matter” in the context of a cry against perceived racial injustice, the retort of “What about me? All lives matter,” sounds like a deflecting dismissal of the specific plea being made. Since most of us who are deficient in melatonin are in total agreement with the truth of the phrase, and, in context, the phrase is *not* being used to mean that *only* black lives matter, then the better response is not to deflect but affirm. Black lives *do* matter because black lives are made in the image of God (cf. Gen. 9:6; Acts 17:26).

Now, I am not naive to the political agendas that are behind many of the organizers of protesters (on the left and right) calling for what they believe to be justice on a variety of issues. We are not ignorant of Satan’s divisive devices (2 Cor. 2:11). Just as we have seen violent opportunists attach themselves to otherwise peaceful protests, we know that political opportunists (on the left and right) will likewise invent and/or attach themselves to phrases like “black lives matter” or “make America great again.”

So, instead of taking sides among worldly parties and being so easily “tossed to and fro and carried about” by the politicians and media, we must affirm the truth in love (Eph. 4:14,15). Therefore, let us not be dismissive of true statements with “what about” rhetoric. Let us rise above the fleshly fray in solidarity with Jesus Christ alone because, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

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