

Born to Win

Does Crime Pay?

by Ronald L. Dart

Ronald L. Dart: You've heard the expression, "Crime does not pay." Do you believe that that old saw is true? Does crime pay or does crime not pay?

Russ: If you can be President...

[Laughter]

Ron: Now what was that, Russ? "Only if you're president?"

Russ: No, I said "You can be president, so it must pay."

Ron: Russ says crime *must* pay. What do you think, Mac? Do you think crime pays?

Mac: Well, it's like Bill said. If you don't get caught.

Ron: So it is a function or a question of being caught or not caught as to whether it pays.

Mac: No, it doesn't pay.

Ron: Crime *does not* pay. Crime *does* pay. We've got...yes, Bob?

Bob: We have to determine what the word "pay" means.

Ron: What constitutes a payoff?

Bob: Yeah, one's a physical payoff—a temporal, physical payoff. And one's a long-term, spiritual payoff.

Ron: Okay, so your but your version of it is that in *this world* crime pays, but look out for the next one; it's going to get you there. Yeah, Leo?

Leo: What about all these little towns in Texas that try to get a prison so they can have that money coming in?

Ron: Okay, so crime pays the people who *punish* crime. That's a novel approach to it. Allie?

Allie: Well, didn't David say that he looked at the Wicked and thought they prospered; then he went to the house of God and saw the end thereof?

Ron: Yeah, that's the 73rd psalm, and I want to come back to that here in a little bit. Does crime—just looking at it in a sociological...let me put it to you more specifically: Is it better to tell the truth or to lie? What do you think, Maxine?

Maxine: It's better to tell the truth.

Ron: Better to tell the truth. But what if a lie will get you out of trouble, and the truth will leave you in it? Still better to tell the truth. Well now, the next question is: On what basis would you conclude that?

Maxine: Because if you tell a lie to get out of trouble, it seems like you just continue to have to tell lies.

Ron: You will have to tell more lies. In other words, the lie will become a part of your life, in a sense.

I was listening to Dr. Laura driving home from work the other day, and I was struck by one thing that she said that I had never really thought of before. A man called in, and his daughter was wanting to change high schools. And she was wanting to change high schools because he had gotten really, kind of, in trouble at the old high school. And she kept...you know how Dr. Laura is if you are a listener to her...she pressed about what the trouble was. And the trouble was his daughter had stolen some things from some of the other girls and, I guess, had gotten caught at it. And she wanted to just transfer to other school. And Dr Laura made the point (which all of us, I think, would probably agree with as a moral concept) that the thing for her to do is to *face the problem* and to engage in *rebuilding her reputation where she was*—in the old school—rather than running away from it.

And I think, as a generalization, most adults would say they agree with that in principle. Although, in fact, an awful lot of us don't do that even as adults. In small or large ways, we run *away* from things rather than facing the things. But she brought up something that, somehow or other, had escaped my thought in this regard. If you run away from a problem like that—you go to the new high school—always, in the back of your mind, is the worry, "What's going to happen if and when *these* people find out about my past?" And that worry would be with you. You would think about it at night when you went to bed. You would think about it some night when you woke up—when the body and all that is kind of at a low ebb, and a thought comes to the mind, and you can't get back to sleep, and you lie awake half the night worrying, "What's going to happen when this *new* group, in the *new* school, finds out that I was a thief in the old school." That in actual fact, you would be better off *in this realm*...now, let's talk about *this world*, right now, here and now. You are better off, in this world, here and now, to face the old problem in the old location where they *know* you.

And her response was: If somebody comes up to you about the fact that you stole, you say, "Yes, I did, and I've never regretted anything more in my life. And it hurts me to have you bring it up, you know, but if that's what you want to do, okay. But I just want you to know that I'm sorry I did. I wish I never had. It was a terrible, terrible mistake." And you go on. The fact is that, if you live a *constant* life, an *honest* life, and it's *plain* that you regret your mistakes, people will get over it. And you will be a *known* quantity, and you won't be sitting there worrying what's going to happen when my reputation catches up with me. Then if you leave and go on to another school, what might come on behind you—even if it *does* come along behind you—is the fact that, "Yeah, she did. But she straightened it out, and stood on top of it, and stood tall, and everybody was very impressed with the way she handled it." So your reputation, which you have rebuilt, can stay with you as you go on to the new location. And I thought that was really an interesting thought; never had occurred to me.

I think a lot of people evaluate this question—whether it's better to tell the truth or a lie—based upon two criteria. One is whether or not it will help me. And secondly, will it be found out? What are the probabilities of it being found out? Now, let's just for a moment...Maxine's value system is so based on the Bible, that she cannot even *conceive* of the other alternative—of deciding it's better to lie than tell the truth. But in this world, here and now, is it better to lie or tell the truth if lying will get you in trouble, and telling the truth will get you out of it, and you won't get caught? Now, you're a little bit vague about that, because you depend very heavily on the idea that there is another world besides this one, don't you? Yes, Faye?

Faye: Oh, I'm sorry. I was just thinking.

Ron: Oh, you were just scratching your head? Okay. [Laughter] Mac? Were you just scratching your head or were you going to say something?

Mac: I guess there's a lot to that question.

Ron: There *is* a lot to that question.

Mac: If somebody would get killed, for instance. It's a lot better off to lie, I could say, that get somebody killed. That's the extreme case.

Ron: Okay, let me move the question just a little bit off-center. Is it profitable to steal?

Unknown #1: If you don't get caught.

Ron: If you don't get caught. Is it profitable. Yeah?

Bob: From his standpoint, yes. But also, from a spiritual standpoint, God will bless you if you obey him and curse you if you disobey him. So, from a spiritual point, he may not prosper. He might prosper more from earning a small wage than stealing. In the long run, God's going to, maybe, give you a bigger wage later.

Ron: Yeah, Bonnie?

Bonnie: Is there a difference between a small, white lie and a regular lie?

Ron: Is there a difference between a small, white lie, and a regular, garden-variety lie?

Bonnie: You know, like if you don't want to hurt someone's feelings, if they say, "How does this look?", or something, and you know there's nothing they can do to change it.

Ron: That's an interesting thought. Of course, the scripture—the commandment—is:

Exodus 20

AKJV

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

And the question is: You've got a Jewish girl hiding in your attic, and the German soldiers at the door, and you say, "No, I've never seen her." Are you lying in the sense of: Are you "bearing false witness against your neighbor." I don't know about you people, but I'd lie, and hope I was good at it. Was Mac back here?

Mac: I was going to say that you have to live with all your sins forever. You never forget them.

Ron: Yeah, you do. Let's say we're raising a boy. We've got a boy in the household. He's just coming out and going into junior high, and will be facing a lot of decisions in his life along the way. A lot of temptations will be coming his way. And we're going to approach this boy from two directions. One is from the Bible; one is from God—right from wrong, you know, and so forth. But we might want to go further than that. We may want to help him to try to understand the implications of this as far as *this life* is concerned. The question that sometimes comes up when you are dealing with...you'll see it in movies or television programs that carry a moral or something. Somebody will say, "Hey, we could do this and *no one will know*." And the reply is what? "But *we* will know. *I* will know."

Now, what are the implications of that, when I ask you, "Is it profitable to steal, even if you don't get caught?" Then the next question is, "What do you mean 'get caught'?" Because the fact is that, just because...Now, are you sc-. You're ready now, Faye? [Laughter]. Okay, what were you going to say?

Faye: No, I was going to say: At one point (and I was not a kid; I was like 18, 19 years old) I stole a pair of earrings. And I wore those earrings *one time*, and I felt like I had a beacon around my head saying, “These aren’t hers! These aren’t hers!”, and I never wore it. I was too self-conscious of the fact that I had stolen them.

Well, what you have done...it is not merely what you have *done*, it’s what you have *become*. You are now a thief. The question for the boy, in a way, is: Do you want to live your life as an honest man, or do you want to live your life as a thief? Because the truth is (Faye is an example of one who did, but) most people don’t steal once. If they steal once and they get away with it, they steal again and again. And so they *become* a thief. Hartzell?

Hartzell: I think you need to define stealing. If I go into the grocery store, and they’ve got a bunch of grapes there, and I pick one grape out and take it and and bite it to see whether it’s good or not, am I stealing? Let’s define what’s stealing.

Ron: Good question. Is it your intent to purchase the grapes if they are good?

Hartzell: You’d have to take it just for the fact that I know of people (I don’t think I’ve ever actually done it) but I’ve seen people go in, they’ll take a grape—with no intention of finding out if it’s good or bad. They’ll have Brach’s candy; they’re individually wrapped. People will walk by and pick up one piece of candy. If you would accuse them of stealing, they’d probably get all upset. But is it not stealing as much as if it were a hundred-dollar bill or a thousand-dollar bill?

Ron: Yeah, it is. It really is. And it goes to the core of what you’re...I remember someone made this point to me when I was very young, and it stuck with me all these years: What happens if *everybody* does what you’re doing? Well, pretty soon you’ll have an awful lot of scraggly-looking grape things sitting down at Brookshire’s in the fruit section—no grapes on them. (Which would be very unfortunate.) On the other hand, if your purpose is to find out if the grapes are good or not, you taste one and you buy them, Brookshire’s isn’t going to care at all. They’re not going to care. To some extent, it has to do with what the people who have it out there expect you to do. And if they consider it theirs, and you’re supposed to buy it, and you take it, you’re stealing. Simple as that. John?

John: The second gleanings on the field [**Leviticus 19:9–10; 23:22**]. Christ and the disciples going through the field [**Matthew 12; Mark 2; Luke 6**].

Ron: Yeah. What’s the difference between the law which permits you, if you’re wandering through your neighbor’s field where grapes are growing, as you go through the field, to take off a bunch of grapes and eat them as you wander on his field—which *was permitted* by the Law [**Deuteronomy 23:24–25**]. What’s the difference between that and taking one at Brookshire’s?

Unknown #2: Need. You need it at the time.

Ron: You need it at the time. Okay, well, maybe you need it at Brookshire’s. [*Chuckles*].

Unknown #2: No, that’s different. You’re in a store where you could purchase food.

Ron: Yeah. Because, see, the prohibition in the Bible is against harvesting your neighbor’s crop. In other words, you can’t steal his crop. But if you’re hungry, you can eat in his field. But you can’t carry it home with you. But I think that you have to realize that the harvest in Brookshire’s has *already* been harvested; it *belongs* to somebody. I don’t know what Brookshire’s attitude is toward people who do that. I imagine they turn a blind eye to it rather than make an issue out of it. But the *character* issue is: What happens if everybody does this? And what kind of a person does that make *me* if I do this? I think it’s really kind of interesting to think about that.

Would you make more money in business by cheating than by being honest? Yeah, probably could. How would you go about impressing upon the mind of your boy...He's 13. His voice has changed (maybe not completely). How would you go impressing upon the mind of your boy that making more money in business by cheating than by being honest *really* does not work? What would you tell him about that? Because you do need to do that, don't you? You don't want to let a teenager come up through your home, and go out the doors of your house to get a job in the world, and at no time during that time get a set of values. Yeah?

Unknown #3: How about being a good example to him?

Ron: That's one very important thing—the way you conduct your business—but that goes to what kind of person you are.

Unknown #4: Well, you could tell him if he ever gets caught cheating or lying it will ruin his business from there on. It would spread through the neighborhood or through the public, and they'll say, "Well, that guy lies to you or cheats you." And they'll go somewhere else.

Ron: Yeah. The truth is that cheating in business really does not pay, at a certain level.

Unknown #5: Over the long term.

Ron: Over the long term. Of course, as John Maynard Keynes said, "In the long run we are all dead", but still your point's right. The other side of the coin is that's a generalization, but the truth is there are people who have made *millions* by cheating other people. So you've got to allow for that. You've got to realize that just telling your son that, "Well, no, it didn't..." (And as a general principle in business—especially small communities, small business, face-to-face work—that your reputation as an honest businessman is gold in the bank. And you lose that, and you might as well forget about it. But, again, you have got to go *beyond* that with the young man because there are too many people in this world who have made a lot of money by cheating and stealing and lying. And they are out there.

You think about the little black kids coming up in their community. And you talk to them about hard work and playing by the rules. And the guys that are out there on the street peddling drugs are driving Jaguars and Cadillacs and have got a roll of money in their pocket this big; they can peel it off and give it to you. How are you going to convince that kid that lying, cheating, breaking the law *doesn't pay*? It's not an easy task, when you think about it, but it is a task that *must be addressed*. We have to address it in the church. One of the things we're trying to do with the Sabbath school materials is to begin at the very earliest age, so there's never an age when a child does not remember beginning to learn some of the principles and values of your Bible. For *the Bible* is the thing, really...you know, Maxine was just totally uncompromising on this one a while ago when I asked her about that. The reason she was is because of that book she's got in her lap there. And I think that the Bible is so much a part of her character and upbringing that the idea of running any other way...to tell the truth or tell a lie? "No, it's always better to tell the truth."

We're not talking here about the "necessary" lie to save a life or something of that nature. That's a different...that's an *ethical* question. We're talking about for self-profit. We're talking about lying to help or save *yourself*. In those circumstances, it is universally bad. But the question that has to be dealt with is, really: Why it is so? So you've got to think about it. If you're going to teach this boy coming up in your home the difference between these things, you've got to address the fact that bad people do get ahead in this world. And you've also got to find a way of impressing upon his mind that he does not want to *be* a bad person. Because that is a penalty in and of itself.

Is the use of intimidation or fear effective in business—in the business world? Works, doesn't it? But does that mean you ought to use it? Well, no, it doesn't. We all know that. But, then again, we have to keep in mind that crime—and a lot of things that we would consider bad behaviors—*do seem to pay* in this world, for some time. Now, there is an idea—a concept—out there in the world called the just-

world hypothesis. And that is the idea that the world, basically, is kind of a just world. Do you believe, for example, that things even out in the long run? Most of you do believe that. Well, *you're wrong*. They don't. Not in this world. They simply don't even out in the long run. Just because a person lives an evil life in this world does not mean that he's not going to get old and die in his comfort, in his bed in peace and quiet; where the honest man—a truth-telling man—who never would hurt a flea, winds up in his bed dying of cancer, gasping out his last breath in total agony.

Now, there was a book written sometime ago titled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. I read the book and I was disappointed in it. I thought that it really grabbed hold of the wrong end of so many questions (but that's another issue, altogether). I think in some ways...I know we have a hard time dealing with it—why bad things happen to good people. You've got an upright family—a righteous family—and somebody kidnaps and murders their little girl. It just is not fair. Things like that shouldn't happen in this world. But that guy will get his in the end. So in the end, when all is said and done, there's a just world. It does even out in the long run, no? Not in this life; I'm sorry. It does not. The guy who kidnapped that little girl and carried her away could wind up being filthy rich and, again, dying in his bed in peace and quiet, when he's an old man, with no giant health problems except just getting old. It could happen. It *does* happen that way in this world.

But I have often thought that, by far and away, the *more interesting* question is: Rather than “Why do bad things happen to good people?”, “Why do *good* things happen to *bad* people?” Why is that evil people seem to get away with it in this world. And they do seem to get away with it a great deal. In fact, sometimes you get the feeling it's more often than not (unless you're living in a dream world, not paying a whole lot of attention to what's going on around you). So you believe, and *tend* to believe (and, I think, a lot of people grow up assuming), “Well, things all even out in the long run. They'll get theirs in the end.” But I don't think they understand what they are *depending on* for that to take place.

Now, Allie mentioned earlier the 73rd psalm, and I want you to go back to that. I want us to take a look at this, because there is a very important—fundamental—truth in this psalm that we need to understand. Because here is a man who became *profoundly troubled* by, not the question of “Why do bad things happen to good people?”, but “Why do *good* things happen to *bad* people?” He said:

Psalm 73

RSV

¹ Truly God is good to the upright,
to those who are pure in heart.

We've just established that, right off the bat, that this is a truth.

Psalm 73

RSV

² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had well nigh slipped.

“I was right at the edge of the cliff, and I was ready to go over.” Why?

Psalm 73

RSV

³ For I was envious of the arrogant,
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Now, there is a very great danger in our lives, and I think this is something important to pass on to the next generation. The great danger is that we will, in the process of looking around us in the world and

saying, “Crime *does* pay. Lying *does* seem to work. You *do* sometimes get to keep what you stole.”—and you see these things ticking off one after another—and, in the process of moaning and groaning about the unjustness of it all, you are making the mistake of being envious of the prosperity of the wicked. That in just the very fact that we moan and groan and say how unjust the world is suggests the possibility of envy. It just shouldn’t be that way. He said:

Psalm 73

RSV

- ³ For I was envious of the arrogant,
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- ⁴ For they have no pangs;
their bodies are sound and sleek.
- ⁵ They are not in trouble as other men are;
they are not stricken like other men.

Now, I don’t want to pick on our president, but someone was drawing a contrast between him and why they thought that he would just sail on through his second term, whereas Nixon resigned during his second term. And the argument that he made (for whether he was right or wrong, I’ll let you give that some thought) was that Nixon had a sense of shame. That he basically *knew* that he had done wrong. And he could not just lie his way out of it. I mean, a man with no shame would have burned the tapes before anybody ever found out about them. A real criminal—a real dedicated criminal—would have just gotten rid of those things and got them out. Well, this guy was arguing that President Clinton won’t do that type of thing because he has no shame. (I’m not going to sit in judgement of the president. That was this other person’s judgement of him.)

But the point is that people who have no shame—people who are really dedicated criminals—they are not troubled by the things that they do. *You are*. You tell a lie; it’s going to bother you. You steal something; it’s going to bother you. It bothered Faye, with what she talked about. It bothered her deeply, and she couldn’t go on. A *real* criminal is not bothered by it *at all*. For the upright type of person, though, the guilt that goes along with that will just eat us up inside. And, as he says:

Psalm 73

RSV

- ⁵ They are not in trouble as other men are;
they are not stricken like other men.
- ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; [...]

You see the image of some of these drug dealers down in Miami going around with great gold chains around their neck, *flaunting* the wealth that they have gotten illegally. And nobody can do much about it, because they can’t prove how they got it or where they got it. But there they are. And you’ve got little boys running around the ghetto in this country, sometimes, that live in poverty-stricken homes—have no money coming into them at all—and they carry around a big wad of bills, and sometimes drive a fancy car for which they paid cash. Where did they get all of that, do you suppose? They got it from drugs.

Psalm 73

RSV

- ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
- ⁷ Their eyes swell out with fatness,
their hearts overflow with follies.

⁸ They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.

“You try to do anything to me, I’ll get you. I’ll get your family. Your children will never know it, but they’ll get run over by a car in the street one of these days if you talk.” They threaten people just freely.

Psalm 73

RSV

⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.

What an image of a big-time drug criminal (or even a small-time drug criminal)—somebody who has made an *enormous* amount of money, and made it legally. “Well, boy, they’ll get theirs in the end, won’t they?” Well, maybe. Maybe, they will, and maybe they won’t. But I will tell you this: If they *do* get it in the end, it will not be because the world is just. It will not be because kismet or fate caught up with them. It will not be because the automatic results of this all brought them down. Now, the automatic results of what they are doing (which exist) are the destruction of their character, and the changing of them into a different kind of person. But a lot of that kind of person get old and fat and die on their deathbeds in peace, whereas people who are righteous and honest die in agony (or die under the feet of men like that, who trample them underneath). He says:

Psalm 73

RSV

¹⁰ Therefore the people turn and praise them;
and find no fault in them.

And *you know* it is true. The fact is that an awful lot of people see these people succeeding, and they admire them for their success. They admire them if they’re a corporate raider, who goes buying out businesses and causing small stockholders to go belly up. They admire them, frankly, if they’re drug dealers. They admire them if they’re successful in business, no matter what they do. They just step on people. “Boy, he really has made the money.” And making the money is the thing that causes people to turn to them and not to find fault in them.

Psalm 73

RSV

¹¹ And they say, “How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?”

Well, they know God exists. But they’re not concerned about God. Now, I want you to tell me something: How is that possible? How could they come to that conclusion? Why would they say to themselves, “God doesn’t know.” What do you think?

Unknown #6: Because they haven’t received any punishment.

Ron: Nothing’s happened. Nothing has happened.

Unknown #6: They’re very ignorant of the Bible.

Ron: Well, or don’t *care*. Or maybe they *know* the Bible. Maybe, they know what the Bible says; they just don’t believe it. Because, after all, the Bible says that he who takes up the sword shall die by the

sword [Matthew 26:52]. “And, let’s see, I’ve got 13 men I’ve killed on contracts, and nothing’s ever happened to me...except get richer.”

Unknown #7: Unless God performs some kind of an act on this earth, they will *never* believe.

Ron: Not only performs an act on this earth, performs an act *on them*. That they make a connection. How else are they going to make the connection, and even know that it’s not bad luck? Leo?

Leo: Look how many generals have died in bed.

Ron: Yeah. Generally speaking, the generals do, because they’re not on the front line. They’re not up there to get shot like the dogfaces are. Right. He said they just don’t think God knows, because nothing happens to them. Now, what are you going to say to a kid who is beginning to develop this mentality: God doesn’t know and God doesn’t care. How you going to address a 13-,14-,15-year-old who hasn’t necessarily said this, but is getting into this kind of an attitude? What do you think? Some of you have raised kids. John hasn’t, but he still has an opinion.

John: You can instill fear in them. Because, a few weeks back, I saw this program on the news about “scared straight”. They had a bunch a teenagers who were problematic at their high schools, and brought them into the prison system. And they had certain prisoners there really show them what it was like—really try to scare them and say, “Hey, sooner or later, if you keep going the path you’re going, you’re going to end up here. And this is what it’s going to be like.” There has to be some kind of fear instilled in them. So if you’re not going to be fearful of God, there has to be fear of the legal system—that sooner or later, it’s going to catch up with them.

Ron: Yeah, “scared straight” has been effective in some cases, in some cases, because the kids have an idea of prison and so forth that they’ve gotten from movies and what have you. And it’s not very realistic at all. Mac?

Mac: Although it’s very hard to determine...for instance, all these floods up in Seattle and California, Upper Mississippi, and Florida where the hurricane hit...I guess there’s a lot of innocent people being affected there, too, but [unintelligible].

Ron: Yeah. Leo?

Leo: But how many people, when God gives them the just punishment, don’t realize where the punishment comes from?

Ron: See, this is one of the big problems that you have. It’s the fact that God caused it to rain on the just and the unjust. “Okay, there’s a big drought. Is that because I’m a thief? My neighbor is not a thief, and he’s suffering from this drought just like I am.” How do you address that problem? Alright, let’s go back at it. Why doesn’t God slap a thief down where he stands? Why doesn’t he hit him right away?

Unknown #8: We have free choices.

Ron: We have free choice; that’s correct. What about the question, though, of somebody in whom God takes an interest? Why doesn’t he chastise them right away?

John: I’ve heard you mention in sermons many times that he wants to give them time to turn around. And there’s a certain grace period, so to speak. Just like Sodom and Gomorrah. They got to a point where he was fed up with it and he had to do something about it.

Ron: Sodom and Gomorrah [Genesis 18–19] is an interesting illustration of this. Because that city...by the time God actually got around to doing something to it, this was not a new thing going on in town. This hadn’t started in the last couple of weeks, right? How long do you suppose Sodom and Gomorrah had been in roughly the same condition they were in?

Unknown #9: Probably thousands of years.

Ron: I doubt if it's *thousands*, but certainly 100 years is not beyond the possibility of saying that they had gotten pretty corrupt 100 years ago or, say, 50 years ago, or even 25 years ago. Now God is coming down at this long last time. Why now? Why not earlier? Well, God does, basically, give people room to make mistakes and to suffer in this world.

I *do* think one of the areas that I would approach with a young person is in the area of self-respect. Because, if you approach it strictly from a point of view of rewards and punishments, a lot of times they're going to weigh up the rewards and punishments to decide the risk/reward principle says I should go ahead and do it. And if you took a look at the crime statistics, you might be forced to agree with them: the number of crimes that take place compared to the number of arrests, the number of arrests compared to the number of convictions. And the chances of you committing a burglary and *ever* doing any time for it are really rather remote. So if you use risk/reward I don't think you're equipping the child very well. I *would* say that there are some kids that do need to be scared. I agree with that. Because they've gotten far enough down that road already that you've got to get the *attention*. And unless or until you can get the child's attention, you have nothing. Bonnie?

Bonnie: If you don't base the child, younger than that, in the right principles, how are you going to start at 13?

Ron: Well, you've got to start where you are.

Bonnie: Yes, but if you've had them before then...

Ron: But again, if you've had them before then, and you've just now *come to it yourself*, and they're 13, you've got to start where they are. Renee?

Renee: You said approach it from a view of self-respect. But if they don't know right from wrong, then why would they have self-respect for doing what was right?

Ron: That's a good question. The whole thing has to come together. I mean, without knowing right from wrong (or having a feeling of right from wrong) they're not going to know. And if *we* get them in Sabbath schools, for example, when they've been in a family for years and no groundwork has been laid, it's going to be extremely difficult. But at the same time it's very important, I think, to know where the real issue is; that the real issue does not lie in a risk/reward ratio. Because the numbers are not on our side, in the risk/reward. The numbers are never on our side. What is on our side is the fundamental character issue.

Of course, the existence of God, the Law of God, and the fact that (while the world is not just) *God is just*—that's very important. A person has got to come to believe that, and believe in God. And it's not very hard, believing in God, to believe that he is just, is it? You can make that step fairly readily—that God is just and fair. And if God is just, he *cannot allow* some of these things to be left alone, finally and definitely, can he? He *has* to deal with them to *be* a just God.

Hitler, for example—who blew his brains out in the bunker and had his body burned—cannot be allowed to have an end like that. That's not good enough. And I was struck when I read a book about Nuremberg. There was a picture in it of the long cellblock where they had Göring and all the war criminals at the Nuremberg war trials. And at the door of every cell there was an MP. And they were not standing there at parade rest, with their back to the cell door, guarding it. They were turned, looking in the bars, watching the prisoner all the time. Do you know why? So they wouldn't commit suicide.

Now, let me ask you this. Potassium cyanide, from what I gather, is a very *painful* means of committing suicide—very caustic, very painful. Hanging is very quick and, as far as anybody's been able to determine, is essentially painless. Because it's like getting hit on the head; you go instantly

unconscious. (When the hanging is done properly; not just strangling you.) But when it's done that way, it's very quick and it's over with instantly. Why would a man choose potassium cyanide rather than hanging? Because they did, and that's what they were worried about.

John: Quote-unquote “self-respect” or pride or dignity. If they don't want to give, you know, they're going to stand on their own and fall on their own.

Ron: Bob?

Bob: They may feel, in their arrogance, that they made the last decision themselves and weren't controlled by their captors.

Unknown #10: Hanging could be a little more degrading?

Ron: Hanging...you see, quite a few of the German officers *pleaded* for the right to be shot rather than hanged. And it was not a question of pain; it's was a question of dignity. They wanted to retain *some* level of dignity. And I thought all that was really very interesting, but I was also struck by how many of them wanted to commit suicide before they got arrested and before they were imprisoned. And I *really* think that there is something that, even in the worst of us, really is fearful of standing before the judgement of just men. Self-respect...I really believe that even among the most terrible criminals there is a certain *kind* of self-respect—that they just don't want to have to face the condemnation of just men. And that's what those guys in Nuremberg would have had to do.

So I *think*, I think that you will find that there is a level of self-respect that can be touched in most of these young people. That there is a realization that, okay, fine, nobody else will know that you have lied, but you will *be* a liar. No one else will know that you have stolen, but you *will be* a thief. And you will *continue* to be a thief until you repent of it and develop the character to respect other people's property and not steal. I think that there's something in here that we really need to give some thought to. Now, continuing on a little further in this passage, “Behold,” he said, having said all this:

Psalm 73

RSV

- ¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.
- ¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
- ¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken,
and chastened every morning.

“I mean, all I have got to do is *lift a finger* and God chastens me! I do *anything* and it goes bad. I'm sick. I have this problem. I mean, my life is a mess! And these *wicked people* out here; their life is working. Why do I have to go through all this?” David says:

Psalm 73

RSV

- ¹⁵ If I had said, “I will speak thus,”
I would have been untrue to the generation of thy children.

That's an *interesting* statement. “If I had allowed myself to think this way I would have been *untrue* to the generation of your children.” And that's where the important thing is. It's that we must not allow our children to grow up thinking this way. And we can help it. We really can help it. Sure, the children have minds of their own. Sure, they can make wrong decisions somewhere in life. But the truth is that

we can *make* a difference in the life of a child as they're growing up. They're young, they're impressionable, and certain values *can* be implanted in them at a very early age. He said:

Psalm 73

RSV

¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,

He said, "It was just almost more than I could get to get my mind around."

Psalm 73

RSV

¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God; [...]

And he doesn't explain (and I'm not entirely sure) what going into the sanctuary of God *did* for him. But he says:

Psalm 73

RSV

¹⁷ [...] then I perceived their end.

"I finally understood the end of all this thing." Because the truth is that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses. That it really isn't in Jaguars, and bank accounts, and mink coats, and gold necklaces, and so forth. There really is something else going on in all of this.

Psalm 73

RSV

¹⁸ Truly thou dost set them in slippery places; [...]

And, you know, this is, I think, a very great truism: that these criminals who go around with their gold chains and driving their fancy cars *do* stand or sit in a *very slippery* place. A lot of people envy them—what they have got. A lot of people envy them who are just as willing to cut their throat as they would be to take their next breath. They live in danger. They *are* in slippery places. They are in danger of being caught and punished and put in jail for the rest of their lives for their crimes. They live a *very tenuous* existence. And the truth is that, if I were put in their shoes, I could not live. I could not be proud. I could not be comfortable. I could not have peace of mind. They *seem* to be able to do it, but *I* couldn't. There's no way that I could.

Psalm 73

RSV

¹⁸ [...] thou dost make them fall to ruin.
¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!
²⁰ They are like a dream when one awakes,
on awaking you despise their phantoms.

Now you can envy them a little bit. But when you wake up, you're going to despise them. And you're also going to realize that all they are is just a phantom—just a ghost that appeared in the night.

Psalm 73

RSV

- 21 When my soul was embittered, [*I actually got a little bit bitter about this.*]
when I was pricked in heart,
22 I was stupid and ignorant,
I was like a beast toward thee.
23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee;
thou dost hold my right hand.
24 Thou dost guide me with thy counsel,
and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but thee?
And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee.

Nothing, on earth, that I desire besides you. And so, for me, to be envious of the wicked...and I think that what he means by being “envious of the wicked” is this sitting around, agonizing over, and being frustrated with why it is that the wicked prosper in the world. “Lord, why do you let that happen?”, is in a way an *envious* statement—an envious thought. And he says to himself, “What do I have that I desire besides you?”

Psalm 73

RSV

- 26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.
27 For lo, those who are far from thee shall perish; [...]

And what he means by that is they will pass into oblivion. They will be no more. No one will remember them. Their mind will be destroyed and gone. They will be oblivious, forever.

Psalm 73

RSV

- 27 [...] thou dost put an end to those who are false to thee.
28 But for me it is good to be near God; [...]

It's good enough to be near God.

Psalm 73

RSV

- 28 [...] I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,
that I may tell of all thy works.

Now, when you think about this for a minute, it's pretty evident, I think isn't it, that the psalmist is not merely thinking in the here and now. He is realizing that there is a judgement day. There is a time for the balancing of the scales. There is a time when people *are* going to have to face their works. There is a time when the righteous are going to *know* the end of the wicked, and see their judgement, and realize that God *is* just and that God *is* righteous. It's an interesting and, I think, a very important concept that he develops in the 73rd psalm, and it's one that I think has troubled a lot of people down through a long period of time. The two sides of the coin: Why do bad things happen to good people and, just as important, how do you deal with the fact that good things happen to bad people. Any last-minute questions? Yes, sir.

Unknown #11: Something that kind of bothers me a little bit about this kind of question: We're talking about a young boy—our son or somebody else that we know's son—and we live in a so-called "Christian nation", quote-unquote, and supposedly they know a little bit about what's right and wrong, and we have laws against all this (we were talking about the drug business). Well, what about some young boy them same age in some South American country that has never been subjected to anything remotely concerned with Christianity? And he is involved with raising marijuana or some drug. Now, there's got to be some differences, to *me*. It seems there is a difference in God's sight of these two boys. One's selling drugs in the United States where, theoretically, he knows right and wrong because it's against the law; some boy in South America that, perhaps, does not know this, because it's *not* against the law.

Ron: Well that's a difficult question, because you have this question at every possible level. You have it all the way to Asia where they have never heard the *name* of Jesus Christ. South America—there's a good chance he's Catholic, or at least been exposed to Catholicism. Then you have the Asians who have not been exposed to God or Christ in any way or shape, form, or fashion. And what is God going to do about those people? It's a *troubling* question, and one that we've addressed in other times and other ways. Sometimes you have to come down to where the point is: There's not much I can do about that one. The question is: What *can* I do about the kids that are closer. You know, you've got to start where you are. You've got to deal with what you can deal with. And I think that's the approach that we have to take. And then, I think, in our prayers and our thoughts with God we have to talk a little bit about what he's going to do about those kids. And the impression I get from the Bible is that he, even at the end of this life, is not finished with him.

Unknown #11: I think there's an old adage that kind of fits in here and goes along with my thinking: that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

Ron: Oh yes, because the responsibility comes along with the knowledge.

Unknown #11: Because, if I don't know *all* the answers...

Ron: Well, there is a passage of scripture that says:

Luke 12

AKJV

⁴⁷ And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will [*did good*], shall be beaten with many stripes.

⁴⁸ But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.

So there is a *clear* statement in Jesus' word about the accountability of people who *know* as against the accountability of people who don't know. *Justice*. God is just. God is fair.

Christian Educational Ministries

P.O. Box 560 ❖ Whitehouse, Texas 75791
Phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44 ❖ Fax: (903) 839-9311
❖ www.borntowin.net ❖

Does Crime Pay?
ID: 97B3