

I was watching a crime drama with *She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed*. Five minutes into the show, she pointed to a particular woman, and declared that she was the killer. I asked how she would know. She said that she could guess that the unlikely woman was the killer, because that is how things are portrayed in the T.V. shows nowadays.

SWMBO observed that, despite the fact that the absolute majority of all murderers are male in real life, the media present to the viewers 50% chance for the killer being female, probably because most crime story writers are male. I tend to agree with her: I do not believe that the scriptwriters wrote their stories that way, because they were feminist-oriented.

She went on to tell me that the media love to put the sensationalism into their products, in order to boost the ratings. Usually, they show gratuitous violence and sex at the beginning of the show, in order to capture the attention of the

impressionable viewers who will stay through the commercial breaks.

She further commented that, while the main male actor is allowed to gain weight, show up with a scruffy look, or be less than good-looking, the female counterpart is always expected to remain young, svelte, well-kempt, and attractive. And it was only the matter of time the favorite female detective showed up for work in a tight fitting tank top with a plunging neckline, and in a pair of high heels. Did such an outfit ever bother you?

I don't know how many people are actually bothered by this view which the media have on women: that women are equally as vicious and as frequent killers as men, and that seasoned female law-enforcement officers are not much more than attention-hungry women. It is obvious that the writers/producers believe that such images of women are entertaining.

Yet, those crime stories my wife chooses seem to be entertaining enough to me, despite the aforementioned facts. It is easy for me to ignore the glaring falsity of the equal opportunity for the female murderers which the script writers created for the viewers. It does not bother me that the producers of the show could not find good-looking and buff leading actor to play the role of male detectives who could not be seen in a tight fitting tank top and pants; I just enjoy the plot, as it thickens. Yet those female images that the media created are fixed in the minds of the viewers, thanks to the visual reinforcement on weekly basis.

It is this point that we need to give it a few more minutes of thought. No one seems to be bothered by the fact that the chance of the killer being female is unrealistically high. It would not have been such a case, if criminals were portrayed mostly by Blacks. There would have been uproars, if the Jews were portrayed as scheming immigrants. It appears that the

media found out that it was no longer profitable to hold on to the old social and racial stereotypes.

But such stereotypes tenaciously persist, when it comes to female gender. And these images in the media do influence the way boys see girls, and the way men expect the women to behave. The integrity of a female person is reduced to certain body parts and looks. And the children would grow up with these preconceptions in their minds. Exactly who should be accountable for this social phenomenon?

Another area that is oft tolerated is the absence of the minorities in T.V. sitcoms. There is a popular T.V. sitcom with the New York City as the background. You do not see a single minority person in the show. I have been to the City many times, and let me assure you, there is hardly any place in New York City where you cannot see a minority person.

Yet the shows are interesting to watch, even though I know that

the producers of the shows intentionally skewed certain elements in the reality of life, and presented an entirely unrealistic segment of the society as we know it. Why is it that I can still laugh at the jokes and the foolishness in the shows?

Things have certainly improved since 1950's, as far as people's willingness to be respectful towards others, and to acknowledge one another, is concerned. People are behaving at their best, because it would now cost them dearly, both financially and politically. There is a difference, however, between the enforced good behavior and the genuine good behavior.

As long as one harbors certain opinions or beliefs, the good behaviors can turn to bad in a flash, when the threat of the financial or political damages are perceived to be sustainable. The sectarian violence is one good example. When a dictator, or a repressive government, rises and falls, all the internal tension suddenly flares up, and the

enforced good behaviors disappear. We saw tribal and sectarian violence in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan Iraq, and elsewhere.

As long as the human heart holds the grudge and hatred, the violence will find its way out, when the opportunity strikes. Repentance is not just the change of the outward behavior: it goes deep into the spirit of the person. Not only in the spirit of the offender, but also in the spirit of the victim, as well. Grudge and Hatred do not pick and choose in whose heart to dwell, and the cycle of violence never stops. And that is universal point of the teaching of Jesus Christ, when he first proclaimed:

“Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Mt. 3:2).”

Every one needs to repent, regardless.

Repentance is the message that Jesus proclaimed in the beginning of his ministry. Repentance is the same message

Jesus proclaimed, after he resurrected from the dead:

“...and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47)”

I searched the Bible to see how many times the word, *repent*, and any of its derivatives occur. It occurs 59 times in 55 verses of the New Testaments, and 27 times in 26 verses in the Gospels.

While searching the Bible, I discovered an interesting fact. Did you know that the word, “repent,” or any of its derivatives, occurs not a single time in the Gospel according to John? Jesus in John’s Gospel does not challenge the readers with the imperative of repentance, as he does in other three synoptic Gospels.

How does the following sound to you?

Since Jesus died on the cross for your sins once and for all, you do

not have to bear your own cross or be burdened with guilt. Since you are set free from your sins, you do not need to worry about repentance. Just hold on to the assurance of your salvation, and enjoy your blessings and the gifts of life. That is the essence of the Christian faith, and if you believe this, then you are saved.

How does that grab your ears? What you just heard from me, however, is called a false teaching. It is in the human nature to focus on that which is more interesting and comforting than that which is burdensome and painful. Often we hear this fallacy: “I’ve decided to forgive myself.” First of all, if I have done something wrong, it is the one who suffered from my wrongdoing who should forgive me. Secondly, I should repent, before I forgive myself. Nevertheless, it is sweet to delude myself and absolve my own sin. It is basically a sham way of saying. “I turn the blind eye on myself.”

Such ability is not so different from the viewers’ ability to

ignore the false ratio of female killers in the T.V. shows, and still enjoy the plot. The T.V. sitcom is still enjoyable, if we forget the premise that no minorities live in New York City. We could enjoy the crime drama, if we accept that female detectives do show up at work in tight tank tops and heels, in the desperate hopes of getting noticed.

Life is still enjoyable, if we ignore a few things that Jesus asks us to change, too. If we ignore the plight of others, if we ignore our sense of justice—that nagging, ethical sensitivity no one seems to want, we can enjoy our lives quite well. Having fun with other interesting people are a lot more enjoyable, if we would just forget those who are hungry, poor, discriminated, defrauded, oppressed, jobless, foreclosed, homeless, tortured, maimed, and those who caused all these.

No one enjoys the sensation of guilt, whether it was imposed upon by others, or whether it was voluntarily felt. The teaching of

Jesus is unique in the sense that it demands repentance from everyone. If we have done nothing wrong, we have no reason to feel guilty. If we have no reason to feel guilty, then we have nothing to repent. If we have nothing to repent, then we have achieved the perfection in God's eyes—that is assuming that we see and know about ourselves exactly the way God sees and knows about us. In short, it means that we claim to have the same discerning power as God does.

If no one needs to repent, will the families all by themselves grow into more loving and nurturing ones? Will the society advance into a just and righteous society all by itself? Will the wars cease, the tortures stop, the suicide bombers shed the explosive, and the terrorists renounce their violence all by themselves? And will the world evolve all by itself into a better place to live for everyone?

As far as Jesus is concerned, repentance is the essential

requirement for the admission into the kingdom of God. There is no forgiveness *apart* from repentance. Repentance is not just an outward change in the behaviors, but the transformation in the spirit of the person. It is not just the manner or the etiquette, but the perspective and value that need to change: the spirit within determines the action without.

Unless our spirits transform in the fundamental level, we remain unrepentant. If we do not want to repent, then that is the moment we decided to stop transforming and growing.

It is rather easy to change small things—like cutting down on coffee, fatty food, and sweets; getting off the sofa and exercising; volunteering to help others, etc. But it is not as easy to change how women are portrayed, how minorities remain invisible, how the society treats people of other sexual orientation, politics, religions, big money, and cheap oil—especially when our interests depend on the way

we treat others. Something drastic needs to take place within, before we could expect external things to change, before Miss America contestants eventually bring the world peace.

The book of Ephesians points to the nature of the Christian struggles in the chapter six:

¹² For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The Christian struggle tends to be lost in petty things of life. It can be lost in finding the matching drapes to the new furniture, in frantic calling for the babysitter Friday evening, and in berating the one who cut into the line ahead. It tends to get lost in contending with the flesh and blood of the ugly and loud neighbors on the other side of the fence.

Conversely, The Christian struggle can be lost in more weighty things of life. We can gladly take care of our neighbor's dog while they go away on vacation, but adamantly oppose the bill that would allow equal rights for everyone.

The Christian struggle is, as Ephesians points out, something larger than our own immediate lives. It may be even larger than the aggregate of our lives. It could be as small as a woman or a black man casting the first vote, and it could be as large as electing a new president who will bring a sweeping change in the way the government treats its own people and other nations.

There is no need for Christian struggle, when Christians are on the side of the principalities and the powers of this secular world. The principalities and the powers never repent. They are not individual human beings with conscience or feelings. As long as you are on their side, you can do many things with no ethical accountability.

The Christian struggle requires us to repent, so that we might be cleansed in our spirits, so that we might be empowered by the Holy Spirit, in order to overcome the spiritual wickedness, the power structures, and those rulers who are capable of casting darkness over the nations and the whole world.

Those are the Christian issues worth struggling, and a small number of Christians has continued to witness to God's forgiving and redeeming grace from Jerusalem to the ends of the world. Today, they continue to witness that God still calls us to repentance and forgiveness of sins, despite these things that affect countless number of people. The Christian struggle matters to Christians, only when they decided to repent. Otherwise, they remain part of the principalities, the powers, the world rulers, and spiritual wickedness that cast darkness over the world.

We are witnesses of these things.