

"What is Cruel?"

Well, what is meant by the question, **"what is cruel?"** Recently I heard of an experiment conducted with children (though I'm not sure of their ages and the details): the experiment was to assess their reaction after viewing a video of puppies being harmed, followed by a video of people being harmed. From the experiment, the outcome or results was that the children were much more bothered or upset by the puppies than the humans. I let you figure this one out...

Whether humans or animals are subject to harm, the question (and perhaps resolution) arises as to what is cruel? Is it cruel to kill an animal so that humans have food? I don't think so. But is cruel just to kill an animal for sport? Maybe so; but is it alright if self-defense?

**"War is cruelty.
There's no use
trying to reform
it, the crueler
it is the sooner
it will be
over."
- William Sherman**

The answer to these questions and a basic view of cruelty has to do with environment and context; it may fit one of those "nature versus nurture" debates. For a soldier like Sherman, the destruction of war was indeed cruel - as war itself. He obviously had not doubt that the ravages of war were cruel, but he knew that such feelings or understanding could end the war...and prevent further cruelty.

To this present time, the ethics or behavior of Sherman is much debated with the negative view(s) leaning toward the southern states; namely, Georgia and South Carolina. I can recall T-Shirts with a silk-screened image of Sherman and the caption reading, "The Devil went down to Georgia". Besides Lincoln, he may have been the most hated figure of the war for the south.

He not alone in his views however - as some of his contemporaries (on both sides) shared and expressed such views (of war). Robert E. Lee said, "It is all that war is so terrible - lest we should grow too fond of it." With only one additional quote, the fact remains that all combat soldiers understand what cruel conduct encompasses war whether it be the deprivations of the troops, displacement of the non-combatants, and death to both. It has been said many times over that war is cruel.

In the 1960's the folk trio, Peter, Paul & Mary produced a song entitled, "**The Cruel War**". In the middle of the Vietnam War, much protest was being staged on the home front; and perhaps this song was just one of many that described the lamenting of long-distance love...and the uncertainty of the future.

When war (of any kind) confronts us, the reaction can be mixed; there is some excitement about the matter but, on deep reflection, is the sorrow that is certain to follow the cruelty so understood by those who have (and do) wage war.

The Bible tells us that in **The Last Days**, there will be "wars and rumors of war"; but other detrimental developments will occur as well. The "love of many will grow cold" (of die); families will basically commit war against themselves; and turmoil and despair will abound. Yet even with this foretold condition is the offering of God to all those who believe; those who have died whether on the battlefield or elsewhere; and those who remain alive in body.

Cruelty is not limited to war however as the basic definition is "to inflict pain or suffering". Thus we can find cruelty beyond the apparent violence of war to extend even in the most unlikely places and, of course, subject to the nature, nurture and other factors that influence perspective and opinion. Words (language spoken) can be cruel. Behavior (of one toward another) can be cruel when emotional pain and suffering occurs.

Sometimes a cruel outcome is not intended - or even desired; but sometimes we say the wrong thing or what we say is misunderstood. Then there are those times when words are intended to "bite" - to deliberately hurt another whether we speak the truth or not. Words are so powerful that language can even start wars.

To reflect on a memorable children's song, "be careful what you speak" - just as you should be careful what you do (action), what you think, and what you hear. **Think before speaking, that your words will not be intentionally cruel.** As for those who speak cruel words to you; the best you might be able to do is to try to ignore them; or you might try singing Elvis Presley's song, "Don't be cruel..."