

## **A Brother In Christ Is Executed**

*(Houston Chronicle, 8/2/99)* — Ricky Blackmon, set to die Wednesday for the robbery-slaying of a Shelby County man who was stabbed and slashed with a homemade medieval-style sword in 1987. Blackmon, 41, the first of the half-dozen this month to face the lethal needle, says his death, likely to occur Wednesday because all his appeals are exhausted, is the best thing that could happen.

“Every young man on death row should give thanks to God when they get an execution date,” he said. “If they wanted to punish me, that would be a life sentence. They are giving me a way out. I’m thanking God for it.”

Blackmon acknowledges hacking to death Carl Rinkle, 26, at Rinkle’s Shelby County home in East Texas the night of March 28, 1987, and taking about \$600 in cash and a small pistol. The murder weapon was a 3-foot long serrated-edge steel sword the former sawmill worker made out of a saw blade. He blamed a girlfriend, jealousy, drugs, and a need for quick cash for the attack that left Rinkle butchered. Blackmon’s girlfriend, who had been seen with the victim earlier in the evening, was arrested and led police to Blackmon. She was given a life prison term.

The son of a preacher, Blackmon, who was wearing a black ninja outfit at the time of the killing, said he spurned father’s teachings until he arrived on death row. He’s looking forward to his death. “I’m going to a much better place,” he said. “I’m going to heaven. No doubt in my mind.”

Now, let us hear the rest of the story.

There is nothing good that can be said about this atrocious crime which was a working of Satan in his heart. However, I have made the journey from my home in Conroe, Texas to Huntsville’s Ellis #1 unit a good many times to visit Ricky Don and study the Word of God with him. He constantly studied the Bible and was always thrilled to see me that we might pray and study the Word together for about two hours.

Bob Pulliam, who preaches for the Woodland Hills church in Conroe, made these journeys with me. While I studied with Ricky Don, Bob taught another death row inmate. Ricky was a handsome man with a very clean and neat appearance. He was usually upbeat in spite of the circumstances. At the end of our sessions I would ask the guard to let me buy him a soft drink which was handed to him through a very small door. I never shook his hand. The nearest we came to contact was to place our hands opposite on the heavy steel wire that separated us. I had the opportunity to meet his parents while

preaching a meeting at the 84th Street church in Oklahoma City. They drove quite a distance to attend two nights of the meeting. Not too long after that, brother Blackmon, a gospel preacher, passed suddenly from this life. Of course, Ricky Don could not attend the funeral. They were godly people and according to Ricky they did what they could to bring him up in the right way. Parents should not be blamed for ungodly children when they have done their best to rear them in God's way. Leon Goff baptized Ricky "into Christ" (Galatians 3:27) when he was a young man. After the execution his body was taken to Mt. Pleasant, Texas where Leon Goff and Larry Bilbo spoke at his funeral. A number of preachers and other Christians visited with him on various occasions. David Banning, who once preached at Huntsville and became friends with Ricky Don had been asked to witness the execution. Arnold Cochran, the present preacher at Huntsville, and David spent some time with him on Tuesday and Wednesday before the execution time.

Ricky Don told me that when he was 17 years of age he rebelled against the Lord and his parents and refused to listen to their advice. He said, "Don't blame my parents." "Don't blame the prosecuting attorney, he was just doing the job he was elected to do, nor the jury which simply acted on the evidence they heard. I alone have sinned." Certainly, there were other wicked factors that helped provoke this crime, but he did the deed and he has paid the price of earthly punishment that is ordained by God. Romans 13:1-5 says, *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake."*

He did not try to hide his sins. He is the only prisoner I have dealt with who fully and completely acknowledged his wrong. Most inmates, to hear them tell it, were framed, mistakenly identified, just happened to be in the wrong place, or were abused as a child. Not so with Ricky, who said, "I am guilty, I deserved to be punished."

He was penitent over his sins. If his language was true, and I believe it was, he was as sorry for what he did as the apostle Paul was for persecuting and

killing Christians before his conversion. Ricky constantly apologized and prayed that God would forgive him for his terrible deed.

He was constantly trying to teach others. I sent him *The Messenger* every week. He read every word and passed it around to others. I sent him articles, and others did also, which he used to teach those around him. Sometimes he was discouraged because others would not listen to the truth, but he kept on trying. He wrote many letters to warn young people where he made his big mistake. If I knew of a young person who was getting on the wrong track, I would send him their address and he would send them a letter with some of the best advice one could read. I have read some of his letters to young people in various places and they were astonished. God alone knows how many young people may have been saved from ruin from his letters. Ricky has departed this life by reason of civil punishment, but at the execution hour I could only think of Martin Luther King's words; "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I'm free at last."

Young friends, there are three mistakes Ricky made when he was a young man. I urge you to beware of these three snares.

He decided to leave God out of his life. Of course, God has been back in his life for a decade, for which we are grateful, but there was a time when God was not in the picture. It isn't that he has not repented and that he cannot be saved, but just look at the price he has paid. "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*" (Galatians 6:7). Some of this reaping can take place in this life — what a price to pay. My young friends, don't make this mistake.

He decided that he would not listen to his parents. Children are not qualified to run their own lives, they need the guidance of good parents. Here is the reason why: "*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him*" (Proverbs 22:15). "*My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother*" (Proverbs 6:20). My young friends, don't make this mistake.

He decided to run with the wild crowd. The wild crowd will promise you great fun, but they always bring you to a bitter end. Solomon, the wisest man on Earth, wrote, "*My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us, let us all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in*

*vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof” (Proverbs 1:10-19).*

My young friends, don't make this mistake. Please profit from Ricky Don's mistakes. Learn and profit by the way he turned his life around. He is gone, but his lessons remain. Our sympathy to his mother and brothers and sisters.

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Adapted From W. R. Jones