

Our Place at His Place

Resisting the Urge

September 27, 2020

Welcome to where we're learning to resist the urge to retaliate!



Do you reflexively strike back? “Aim your high-beams at me, will ya?!” *Flash! Flash!* “Ok then.” “Cut me off, will ya?!” *Honk! Honk! Tailgate! Hit! Skid! Crash!* “Ok then.” We just wanna teach ‘em a little Bible learnin’: “Give, and it shall be given unto you”! (Lk 6:38)



There's a website called: thepayback.com. For \$19.99 you can send someone a smelly dead fish! For \$24.99 you can send wilted roses or melted chocolates! And if you're on a budget \$11.99 gets you mouthwash & toothpaste, or soap & deodorant, with a nasty little note.



Our payback reflex is indicative of an innate, created, desire for justice ... just ... mixed in with *sin*. So we gotta fight the urge. But **resisting an urge to retaliate is like resisting an urge to urinate**. Want the Scripture?



The beginning of strife is like releasing water; **[Ever had to go really bad?] therefore stop [lit. hold back] contention before a quarrel starts. [Or God will have to mop up your mess; and you'll justify their sin. And]**



He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, *both* of them *alike* are an *abomination* to the Lord. – Proverbs 17:14-15 NKJ

If ever there was a sobering Scripture to hold onto to help you hold back your indignation and your insults, this is it! Paul warns us to counteract and combat this compelling instinct.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. **[Fight the urge. Be the better person. And]** Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. – Romans 12:17 NIV

That's what I *want* to do: give ‘em something “right in the eyes”! Well, there are actually two Biblical forms of payback that are “right in the eyes of everybody.” First, we can **repay ‘em with mercy**. Whenever an offense *can* be overlooked *without* causing anyone any further harm, we should **treat them better than they deserve**. You know, “*love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you.*” (Lk 6:27-28) That'll knock ‘em right in the eyes! And when an offense *can't* be overlooked without causing further damage if not dealt with, then we're obligated to **treat them as they deserve**, which means we **repay ‘em with justice**.

Poor George, a kind, soft-spoken elder in his church. His truck broke down in front of a bar, so he left it for the night. Well, Myrtle, the church gossip, told everyone George was a drunk; because “common sense” dictated what was going on. When George found out, he didn't try to defend himself; he simply drove to Myrtle's house and parked his truck there for the night.

That's a great story; but is it God-ordained justice? Sadly, no. Know why not?



The Lord only shares *that* authority with **God-ordained institutions**, not **self-willed individuals**. Five quick examples: **Parents** are called to lovingly discipline their children to help them develop a clear sense of right and wrong. **Elders** are called to correct and restore those under their care. **Teachers** are called to evaluate and designate good grades for good work, and poor for poor.

Managers are called to reward hard work, and penalize laziness. And **Legal systems** are called to appoint police to detain, lawyers to defend, Judges to decide, and jails to deprive.

The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted ... – Romans 13:1-2 NIV

And so **we show mercy as individuals and justice as institutions**. But, when Paul says “right in the eyes of everybody,” he’s not including those doing the “rebelling”. Which is why he then ADDS something reassuring as well as challenging.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. – Romans 12:18 NIV



You see, **even if I'm willing to be merciful, peace may not be possible**. In an odd way, that's reassuring. It lifts some of the burden off of my shoulders. I'm glad it's in there. But, then there's that emphasis on “as far as it depends on you” business. **True forgiveness is a superpower**. A super-natural power wherein **you absorb the pain and give grace in His name**.

But, how do you *know* if you've gone “as far as it depends on you”? *Especially* with those who remain impossible to “live at peace with”? Well, get your pencils ready, because I've got **four dead ends** “as far as it depends on you” when making peace with *them*.

When they're unreachable. If they're deceased it's literally a dead end! Plus, they're already resting in *peace*. So don't beat yourself up. Same goes for the living who can't be located. Or, **when they're unwilling**. If they won't acknowledge their role and responsibility *and* demonstrate remorse, what more can *you* do? Also, **when they're unsafe**. If they pose a danger to you or those in your care, keep your distance! And likewise, **when they're unlawful**. If making peace by *their* definition requires you to **violate your faith**, or to **deny the truth**, or to **do some wrongdoing**, that kind of peace is not an option.

However, if they're **clearly reachable**, *and* **relatively harmless**, *and* **potentially willing**, you owe it to yourself, to them, and to the glory of God to do, as far as it depends on *you*, whatever it takes to live at peace with *them*. Time to don your superpower suit, and ...

Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. – Romans 13:14 NIV

Now, **Paul isn't saying to roll over and play dead** if someone pulls a gun on you. In fact, the Lord holds us individually responsible for protecting and defending ourselves, our families, and those who are vulnerable. **This isn't about preservation; it's about retaliation.** And Paul now goes on to explain *why* we should want to resist the urge to retaliate.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is *mine* to avenge; I *will* repay," says the Lord. – Romans 12:19 NIV

I've heard pastors say: "Who would you rather have getting even for you, you or God? Who has more resources?" Well, I know the answer is supposed to be *God*, but the evidence sure seems to point toward *me*! We've got Facebook, social media, texting, gossip, slander, insults, poison, guns (*poison-guns*) knives ... brake lines ... I could go on. What's *He* got?! And why's *He* get'a have all the fun? **What's the difference between His wrath and mine?**

Well for starters, **my goal is retaliation and God's is redemption.** He doesn't seem to do revenge very well. But then, *my* wrath is all contaminated with **selfishness** and **sinfulness** and **short-sightedness**, which creates a bitter fruit that poisons both my enemy *and myself*. Whereas, our Father carries out *His* vengeance with **perfect impartiality** and **unconditional love** for the very subjects of His wrath. So **when I take revenge, I'm taking from God.**

Every last one of us has been wronged. Most of you have probably been *seriously* wronged by someone whose never properly apologized. And a *huge* hindrance to letting go of the grudge is a conviction – **a justified conviction – that justice must be served!**



Having been wired for the desire for justice, it feels like the fabric of the space/time continuum will unravel if they get away with what they did!



One of my favorite scenes is the climactic confrontation in Back to the Future, when George McFly, wanting to protect the vulnerable girl in the car, finds the courage to punch Biff in the face. And our universal delight and satisfaction that comes from seeing the bully getting his lights knocked out (you know, "right in the eyes" *our way*), reflects the fact that **Dad has designed us to desire holy vengeance.**

Problem is, **we fear that if we let go of a grudge, justice won't be done.** So we hold onto our animosity and hostility and bitterness and resentment. And we play the drama over and over in our head. And we think of things we could say or do to put them in their place – or better yet, to show others their true colors. And **the Lord is not pleased.** Dad takes it *personal*, because **our fear is based in unbelief in the certainty that His justice will prevail.**

But this command isn't a burden; it's a promise! "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." This is our rock-solid assurance from the Rock of our salvation! **Justice will be done.** Breathe a sigh of *relief*; **Dad has spoken.** Now you can **rest in your trust.** You're free, if you wanna be, from **bitterness** and **resentfulness** and **misery!** But if you're *just* a wanna-be you'll never be.

He wants to free us to be **mercy-filled, grace-giving, super-powered forgivers who absorb pain and exude love** and help our Heavenly Father reach and redeem the very people who've hurt us! And oh, **the Lord is pleased**. And proud. Because, Dad takes *that* very personally too.

Remember: **we don't hold the grudge, the grudge holds us**. And when it comes to those who've blatantly, unapologetically, wronged us, that grudge will only let go when we entrust them to the One who we are convinced *will* make it right. Which *doesn't* mean we rub our hands together, knowing that God's gonna get 'em!

In fact, if there's anyone you'd *rather* see suffer than receive undeserved salvation, that grudge has still got'cha. And **there's something lacking in your love for God's love**. And Dad takes *that* personally as well; because taking revenge and holding a grudge is a vain attempt to add either to the horror of hell, or the substitutional suffering of Christ for their sin. So, fight the urge!

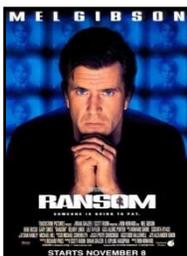
If your enemy is hungry, *feed* him; if he is thirsty, give him something to *drink*. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. – Romans 12:20-21 NIV

If I allow someone's sin to govern my emotions so that my bitterness, my misery, or my depression is owing to *their* evil, then I am being overcome by evil. So, **if I justify my sin by their sin they win**. So when you encounter evil, know that you're at a spiritual fork in the road: **you can react to evil or respond to Christ**; but those are your only two options. And you are forced to choose which will be your dominant authority. And in the heat of the moment, it's oddly easy to temporarily forget just how dominant Jesus' authority *is*! He set up headquarters in Capernaum, which means: the **village of Nahum**. And, in ...



The book of the vision of Nahum ... **[he writes]** The LORD is a *jealous and avenging* God; the LORD takes *vengeance* and is *filled with wrath*. The LORD takes *vengeance* on His foes and *maintains His wrath* against His enemies. **[On the flip side]** The LORD is *slow to anger and great in power*; **[but]** the LORD will *not* leave the guilty *unpunished*. – Nahum 1:1-3 NIV

Yikes! Is that *You*, Dad? We can get hung up on verses like this, because my jealousy and vengeance is so *contaminated* with sinfulness, stupidity, and short-sightedness that it poisons my enemy *and* me! And we read this and think, "I didn't know God was like *that*!" Instead of thinking, "I *know* His nature; so how's *this* fit?" And we need to remind ourselves that **God's wrath is a core component of His goodness**; whereas **our wrath is a core component of our badness**. So, our hang-up isn't with the Lord, but with our own lack of understanding.



Ever see Ransom? A rich man's son is kidnapped, and the father is convinced his child will die regardless of whether or not he pays two million dollars in ransom. So he goes on TV with this big pile of money and tells the kidnapper that he's *never* going to receive it; and instead it's a bounty on his head, alive or dead, until the son is safely returned. **The father is filled with righteous wrath and protective jealousy**. And we connect on an intense emotional level, because his response is an expression of deep love and justice and courage.



And **we're designed to desire and delight in altruistic vengeance**. And yet, we're quite incapable of dispensing it on our own. God's jealousy is untainted with envy; His vengeance contains no thirst for revenge. And His wrath is protective and redemptive. And as Nahum says, unlike me, "He's slow to anger".



Like a great physician, **His vengeance is always a last resort**. But when He can no longer be **protective** or **corrective**, He'll be **destructive** (of evil), like how a doctor destroys cancer.

I [the Lord your God and Savior] will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs; **[but whatever you do, don't try to do that for Him]** – Hosea 13:8 NKJ

Let a man *meet* a bear robbed of her cubs, *rather* than **[meet]** a fool *in* his folly. ... **[Know why?]** The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts. – Proverbs 17:12-14 NKJ

And only Dad can know when grace can no longer be granted, and the time for righteous, redemptive, wrath has come. But know this: **every sin, every crime, every offense, every misdeed, will be judged and avenged**. Know why? To uphold the infinite worth of the glory of His nature as the ultimate good and the ultimate truth, and the ultimate treasure that it is!

He's so devoted to justice, He offers to pay the penalty Himself as our ransom!

And therein lies the immeasurable difference between my wrath and His.

Even while exacting vengeance He's exuding grace and mercy.

And we need to leave plenty of room for wrath like *that*.