

ROMANS (12:19)

Wroom for Wrath

PART 72 – JUNE 11, 2006

THEPAYBACK.COM

Last time we were together Paul said:

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

We were reminded to renounce that natural urge to retaliate.

There's a website called: thepayback.com



- For \$19.99 you can send someone a dead fish!
- For \$24.99 you can send wilted roses or melted chocolates!
- Or, if you're on a budget, for \$11.99 you can send mouthwash & toothpaste, or soap & deodorant with a nasty little letter.

Retaliation has gone high-tech!

We saw two ways to repay evil that are “right in the eyes”: we can repay evil with mercy; or we can repay it with justice.

In other words, when an offense *can* be overlooked we should treat people *better* than they deserve; the way the Lord treats us. And when an offense *cannot* be overlooked, we should treat people *as* they deserve, through an institution the Lord has ordained.

- But we shouldn't take vengeance into our own hands.

Q: Remember how George *the deacon*, got back at Myrtle *the gossip*, by parking his pickup in front of her house for the night?

Paul isn't saying to roll over and play dead if someone pulls a gun on you. In fact, God holds us responsible for protecting and defending ourselves, our families, and those who are vulnerable.

This isn't about preservation; it's about retaliation. In 12:18 Paul warned us to reject payback. Now, in 12:19 he tells us why:

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*

“TAKING” REVENGE

In preparing for this message, I read sermons and commentaries that contained questions like:

Q: Who would you rather have getting even for you, you or God?

Q: Who has more resources in His power?

Well, I know the answer is supposed to be “God,” but the evidence sure seems to point toward *me!* Gossip, slander, insults, poison, guns (*poison-guns*) knives ... brake lines, these are *my* resources! Why does God get to have all the “fun”?!

Q: Why is it okay for the Lord to repay, but not me?

Q: What’s the difference between His wrath and mine?

- My goal is retaliation; God’s goal is redemption.

My wrath is all contaminated with selfishness and sinfulness and short-sightedness. And this creates a “bitter fruit” that poisons both my enemy *and* me. Whereas, God carries out His vengeance with perfect impartiality and unconditional love for the subjects of His wrath.

This is why Paul says:

“Do not *take* revenge, my friends, but leave room for *God’s* wrath”

When I “take” revenge, I’m taking from God.

- A. I steal God’s opportunity to reach and redeem the person.
- B. And I have to face the consequences of my sinful actions.

A BATTLE AGAINST UNBELIEF

All of us have been wronged ... most probably *seriously* wronged by someone who has never apologized. And a *huge* hindrance to letting go of the grudge is a conviction - a *justified* conviction - that justice must be served! The fabric of the space/time continuum will unravel if they can just get away with a thing like what they did!



One of my favorite scenes, from one of my favorite movies, is the climactic confrontation between the bully Biff and George McFly in “Back to the Future”. George did the right thing, protecting the vulnerable. And our pleasure and delight and satisfaction and comfort (that comes from Biff getting his lights knocked out) reflects the fact that God has designed us to desire holy vengeance.

And here's the hindrance:

- We fear that if we let our grudge go, 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:

- It was wrong! It shouldn't have happened!
- It was wrong! It shouldn't have happened!

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.

God takes it *personal*, because this fear comes from unbelief in the certainty that His justice *will* prevail (which is a lack of trust in His capability, willingness, righteousness, and love).

- The battle against a grudge is a battle against unbelief.

It's strange; we tend to view this command as a burden: "I know I *have to* give my anger, resentment, and unforgiveness to God."

But this is a *promise*:

"For it is written: 'It is mine to avenge'"

And this is a *gift*:

"'I will repay,' says the Lord"

This is our rock-solid assurance! Justice will be done!

We can breathe a sigh of relief; God has spoken and we can trust Him!

We don't *have* to be bitter or resentful or miserable!

We're free to be mercy-filled, grace-giving forgivers who help our Heavenly Father reach and redeem the very people who hurt us.

- [Remember] We don't hold a grudge – the grudge holds us.

And when it comes to those who blatantly, unapologetically wrong us, the grudge will only let go if we entrust it to the One who we are *convinced* will make it right.

“HOW” SINS ARE AVENGED

Q: So how can we develop that kind of trust in God?

A: We have to understand how and why He will repay.

First, we must realize how *every sin every crime every offense and every misdeed* will be avenged – even the forgiven ones:

- Some people will pay their debt to God in hell.
- Others will have their debt paid, on the cross.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that the sin goes unpunished. It means that it's punished in the suffering of a Substitute. Reject the substitute, suffer the wrath alone.

Which doesn't mean that we rub our little Christian hands together and take joy in the belief that God's gonna get 'em! If there's *anyone* you'd rather see suffer in Hell than receive God's mercy, you haven't given that grudge to God! And there's something incomplete in your appreciation of His kindness.

Taking revenge or holding a grudge, is an attempt to add either to the horror of hell, or the substitutional suffering of Christ.

“WHY” SINS ARE AVENGED

Now, the *reason* why God is unswervingly committed to avenging sin is because it dishonors the infinite value of His glory.

- Just as a corrupt court is a blemish on a system of justice.
- Unpunished sin would be an indictment against His character.

Every dishonor will be judged and avenged so that the infinite worth of His glory will be upheld and displayed as the ultimate good, the ultimate truth, and the ultimate treasure.

- [Therefore] If I keep a grudge, I doubt the judge!

If God didn't make an unshakable pledge and promise to punish sin, and uphold His glory, there'd be no need for the cross.

He's so devoted to justice He offers to pay the penalty Himself!

- And therein lies the difference between my wrath and His.
- Even while exacting vengeance He's exuding grace & mercy.