

Selfless Vengeance

Rightly Repaying Our Wrongdoers

October 20, 2024

Today we're *examining* the *best way* to *repay* our *wrongdoers*!

Which *begins* with a most *basic question*: **Are you a fool?** I mean, *Biblically speaking*. In my last "Last 100" sermon, we explored the *Scripture* that says:



It is God's *will* that by doing good you should *silence* the *ignorant* talk of foolish people. – 1 Peter 2:15 NIV

Do you think you are more often in the doing-good-group or the foolish-people-group? To *determine* that *answer*, let's *first examine* this *command*:



Do not *pay* anyone *back evil* for *evil*, but *focus* your *thoughts* on what is right in the *sight* of *all* people. If *possible*, so far as it *depends* on *you*, live in *peace* with *all* people. Do not *take revenge*, dear friends, but leave room for *God's* *wrath*. For it is written, [in the OT] "Vengeance belongs to Me. I will pay them back, declares the Lord." ... Do not be *conquered* by *evil*, but *conquer* *evil* with [doing] *good*. – Romans 12:17-21 ISV



Pretty straightforward. So now let's *examine* how the Lord *defines* a *fool*. You see:

It is to one's *honor* to *avoid strife*, but every *fool* is *quick* to *quarrel*. – Proverbs 20:3 NIV

[Cuz] The *wise* *fear* the Lord and *shun* *evil*, but a *fool* is *hotheaded* – Proverbs 14:16 NIV

[Which is why] A *fool's* *wrath* is *known* at *once* – Proverbs 12:16 NKJ

[Because] A *fool* finds *no pleasure* in *understanding* but *delights* in *airing* his *own* *opinions*. – Proverbs 18:2 NIV

[Because] The *way* of a *fool* seems *right* to *him* – Proverbs 12:15 NIV

[Which is why] A *fool* gives *full vent* to his *anger* – Proverbs 29:11 NIV

[The trouble is] He who *trusts* in his *own* *heart* is a *fool* – Proverbs 28:26 NKJ

[Which is why] The *wise* of *heart* [and tame of tongue] will *receive* *commands*, [like, "leave room for *God's* *wrath*"] but a *babbling* *fool* will be *ruined*. – Proverbs 10:8 NAS

[Because] The *mouth* of a *fool* *invites* *ruin*. – Proverbs 10:14 NIV

So: **Are you a fool? Maybe, sometimes?** Well, let's get a *grip* on it and *act accordingly*! Because:

A *fool's* *mouth* is his *undoing*, and his *lips* are a *snare* to his *soul*. – Proverbs 18:7 NIV

But **what do you do when you're confronted by an opinionated, hotheaded, babbling, fool?** The answer to that is found in the form of one of the best little riddles in the Bible.

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. [So] Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes. – Proverbs 26:4-5 NIV

This is such a great little riddle. Are you aware that Proverbs was written to train us ...

To understand a proverb ... [i.e.] the words of the wise and their riddles. – Proverbs 1:5-6 NKJ

So, **how should you “answer a fool”?** Simple! By **“not answering a fool”!** Cuz when we're confronted by a fool – as previously defined – **not saying what we'd like to say is our only way out.**



But it's so hard to hold our tongue and our temper. **It isn't that we don't trust the Lord to repay;** it's that **we don't like the way He repays.** Specifically, **His patience and kindness and longsuffering.** You know those movies where an old gunfighter, living a peaceful life, comes out of retirement to serve up some well-deserved retribution? Well, we kind of wish Jesus would exhibit a little bit of His Old Testament, raining down fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, side, from time to time. In those emotional moments when we've been hurt, **we don't want Jesus the Son, as much as we'd like to have Jesus the Kid!** But, Jesus the Lord and Savior would say the same thing to us that He said to James and John when they were insulted, by the Samaritan's rejection, and lost their tempers, and said:

“Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.” – Luke 9:54-56 NAS

“Oh. Right.” Zeus was the Greco Roman god, well-known in Jesus' day as the “god of thunder”. He was often depicted with a raised thunderbolt, ready to cast down fire from the heavens to consume his enemies without mercy. Which is why it's so funny, that:

The names of the twelve ... [included] James and John (the sons of Zebedee, but Jesus nicknamed them “Sons of Thunder”) – Mark 3:16-17 NLT

So, **who's your father?** And **how often do you forget what kind of spirit you are of?** Because, the way we treat our wrongdoers says a lot about what we think about the Spirit of our Savior.

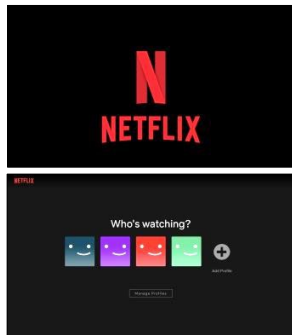


Remember when Texas Hold'em was all the rage? My son Keaton had big poker games in our garage, for college friends, family, and more than a few of you. And one time, I was at a table with a young, arrogant, sore winner type. And I got a great hand. And he did too. But mine was unbeatable. So I played on his pride and reeled him in, till he went all in, boasting that he knew I was bluffing. So I called, threw down my cards, and said, “In your face!” And his eyes filled with tears, and his lip started quivering, and he sat down in awkward silence in full sight of everyone.

And **I suddenly wished either he'd won, or I'd remembered what kind of spirit I was of!** How about you? **Do you reflexively retaliate?** "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 Jesus-the-kid style Bible learnin' – you know:*

"Give, and it will be given to you." – Luke 6:38 NIV

And it turns out, **our retaliation reflex is actually indicative of an innate, God-created, deeply wired desire for justice ... just mixed in with our sinful, burn-'em-to-the-ground, side.** Now, to be honest, I'm not sure if the story I'm about to confess is good, bad, or a messy mix of both.



But, a while back, a *hacker* took over my Netflix account, and *changed* the login and email, and two new profiles showed up. A Comcast lady said I'd have to open a new account, and lose my programming info. So I said, "No thanks." She said, "What're you gonna do?" And I said, "Take it back." And I relentlessly harassed the hackers. I routinely changed their profile names to things like, **"Jesus sees me"** and **"I'm sinning"** and **"Judge me God"**. Daily I'd open their Continue-Watching list and fast-forward through shows to mess up where they left off. I replaced watch-list movies with similar titles, and added every show about Jesus I could find.

Shar would just shake her head and say, "How long you gonna do this?" And I'd say, "Till it's done." And sure enough, a year-and-a-half later, they left. And, you know, I kind of miss 'em.

Paul is warning us to get as much perspective as possible when he says to "focus your thoughts on what is right in the sight of all people" in order to "leave room for God's wrath" in order to avoid – even escape – acting like a fool. Because, **there are only two righteous ways to repay a wrongdoer.** We can, 1) **Repay them with mercy.** If their offense won't cause anyone any further harm, we should try to **treat them better than they deserve.** You know, "love your enemies" and all that. (Lk 6:27) But when an offense will cause further damage if not dealt with, we must, 2) **Repay them with justice.** Which means that we **treat them as they deserve.** So, I leave it to you to decide if the way I handled my hackers was justice – cuz it sure wasn't mercy. Or was it?



Being wired with a deep desire for justice, it rightly feels like the fabric of the space/time continuum will unravel if we allow the wicked to get away with wickedness! And speaking of space/time continuums, who doesn't love the climactic confrontation in Back to the Future, when George McFly, emboldened by a desire to protect the girl in the car, suddenly finds the courage and strength to knock Biff's lights out! But **our universal delight comes from seeing the bully get it right in the eye, in a way that's right in the sight of everyone.**

I've heard pastors ask: "Who would you rather have settling the score, you or God?" Well, I know I'm supposed to say God, but the evidence sure seems to point toward me! He just doesn't seem to do vengeance very well at all. Because, **my goal is usually retaliation, whereas God's goal is always redemption.** And that's the difference. **He hates employing His own wrath,** and only does so as a last resort, and always for the eternal best of all involved.

“As surely as I live,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn!” – Ezekiel 33:11 NIV

[You see] [The Lord] is *patient* with you, [to say the least] not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. – 2 Peter 3:9 NIV

First of all, then, I urge that [requests], prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone ... so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. [Because] This is right ... in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. – 1 Timothy 2:1-4 NRS

The Psalmist was looking forward to the righteous Judge and Savior, when he said:



O Lord, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, O Judge of the earth; ... You fools, when will you become wise? ... Judgment will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it. – Psalm 94:1-15 NIV

[How much] punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who [receives Jesus, but] has spurned the Son of God, [i.e. refused to receive His ways] and has [thus] profaned the blood ... by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? [How do you “not know what kind of Spirit you are of”?] For we know Him who said, [to Moses (Deut 32:35-36)] “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay.” – Hebrews 10:29-30 ESV

And His name is Jesus! And He avenges with **selfless justice**, and **perfect impartiality**, and **unconditional love**, for the very subjects of His vengeance. Because, **His wrath is simply His love in action against a cancer that’s killing His creation**. So pity the fool, don’t act like him!

As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with [doing] good. – Romans 12:18-21 NIV

[Because] He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin. – Proverbs 13:3 NIV

Because, “A fool’s wrath is known at once”. Because, it’s so obviously **contaminated with selfishness and sinfulness and short-sightedness**; which creates a bitterness that poisons both the believer and those we’re called to overcome by winning over by the Spirit of grace. Because, taking revenge – or even just holding a grudge – is **an insulting attempt to add to the selfless justice of Jesus the Son, or worse yet, to subtract from His suffering for their sin**. Every one of us has been wronged in some way. Many, seriously, by someone who may never apologize. But if you refuse to receive your Savior’s ways, by refusing to release your grudge, you’ll see Paul’s warning, to “leave room for God’s wrath”, as a burden rather than a relief. But **this is our rock-solid assurance that the Rock of our salvation has us covered**. Our Savior has spoken! **It’s time to lay down your arms and take up your cross**. Cuz you’re free! If you wanna be – from **bitterness, resentment, and misery!** But if you’re just a wanna-be, you’ll never be. Because, **His wrath contains no thirst for revenge**. He even offers to pay the penalty himself! And therein lies the immeasurable expanse between a fool’s wrath and our Father’s.

So, let’s not just leave room, let’s make room for selfless wrath like that. We’d be fools not to.