

## *How to Really “Even The Score” (v. 10)*

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In the Middle Ages, when the great lords and knights were always at war with one another, one lord resolved to revenge himself upon a neighbor who had offended him. On the very evening when he made this resolution, he heard that his enemy was to pass near his castle protected by only a few men. It was a good opportunity to take his revenge. He spoke of his plan in the presence of the chaplain who vainly tried to persuade the lord to give up his desire for revenge. The good man explained how wrong it was and what a grave sin it would be, but the lord would not listen. Finally seeing that all words had no effect, he said, “My lord, since I cannot persuade you to give up this plan, will you not at least consent to come and pray with me in the chapel before you go?” The duke consented and they knelt together. The mercy-loving chaplain said to the revengeful warrior, “Will you repeat after me the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples?” “I will do it,” replied the duke, and he did accordingly. The chaplain would say a sentence, and the duke would repeat it. All went smoothly until he said, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.” “I cannot say that,” replied the duke. “God cannot forgive you, for He has said so. He Himself has given you this prayer. You must either give up your revenge or give up this prayer. Go now, my lord, and meet your victim. God will meet you at the great Day of Judgment.” The iron will of the duke was broken. “No,” he said, “I will finish my prayer.” The duke had come to understand the tragedy of “getting even”!

The evil emotion of “revenge”! It is known too well by all and commonly expressed and generally applauded. The “rights” of a person to avenge himself has become a license for slander and even murder! So lax has society become regarding the immoral nature of revenge that our young children are subtly being encouraged to nurture the sinister trait of “getting even.”

Because revenge is accepted and encouraged, its heinous character is seldom exposed. “‘Revenge’ is a cruel word: ‘manhood’ some call it, but it is rather ‘dog-hood.’” This comment reveals the dark nature of revenge. In all of man’s evil practices, none is darker than his desire for revenge.

Perhaps there is no better text to discuss this evil emotion than the book of Philemon. A slave had fled, taking valuable property belonging to his master. These valuables would never be returned. Upon discovery of the slave’s flight and his thievery, the master must have experienced anger, hurt, and bitterness. The master’s mind must have been occupied with thoughts of recapture and punishment of the slave. After some time had passed, the thief and theft were faint disturbances to his thoughts. But one day out of the blue, the thief returned bearing a letter and asking for total forgiveness! The very name “Onesimus” would have brought to Philemon word associations such as thief, traitor, criminal, and fugitive. The biting memories of his past wrongs would be as salty water upon an open wound. All of the plans and desires for punishing the thieving slave suddenly became a real

option. Think of the desires that would normally arise for revenge and retaliation! Here was a great chance for Philemon to “even the score”!

How would you or I have responded? The issue of a runaway slave who had stolen property is a far and remote issue—it is easy to say what we would have done! Today, the desire for revenge is stirred by different matters. We are still faced with the same dilemma as Philemon, only our plotting for revenge and retaliation centers on: someone getting a promotion that we deserved; another taking credit for our accomplishments; a coveted award which was not bestowed on us but on another; a malicious gossip making us the object of slander; etc. The desire for revenge can spring up anywhere from the kitchen to the ballpark! We are constantly faced with the appealing prospect of “getting even” with someone simply because he “deserves it.” Such an attitude is too easily encouraged and accepted, even by Christians! We need to listen to what God says about this evil emotion.

### TWO DIRECTIVES REGARDING GETTING EVEN

Each day is lived by choosing one of two standards of conduct. We choose between God’s or Satan’s. When it comes to revenge we find two directives addressing it, and one must be chosen.

*Satan’s directive feeds the desire for revenge.* Undoubtedly, Satan kept Philemon reminded of the disloyalty and desertion of Onesimus, the value of the stolen property, the irreplaceable nature of the stolen objects, the personal insult,

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and the legal justice that he was due. A steady diet of these thoughts would soon make a hard heart. Such a directive led David to make one of the worst mistakes in his life. Being spurned by Nabal’s contempt, David was ready to “even the score.” Only the godly intercession of Abigail prevented David from making a tragic mistake

(1 Samuel 25:10-13, 33). Satan’s directive is accepted by too many today. Far too many simply take matters into their own hands and “even the score.” They thus fail to obey God’s directions (Romans 12:19ff.).

*God’s directive seeks to replace bitterness with a sweet forgiveness and understanding (vv. 16, 17).* Philemon was encouraged to remember that he had certain “debts” erased by forgiveness and mercy (vv. 18, 19). Paul reminded Philemon that Christian influence had far-reaching consequences on others (v. 20). The fact of mercy received is a focal point in God’s directive regarding revenge. All who have followed God and claim Him as their Father must demonstrate mercy (Micah 6:8; Luke 6:36). The directive of God is more difficult to practice than the directive of Satan, but God’s will must be followed!

### TWO METHODS REGARDING GETTING EVEN

Choosing one of the two directives will cause us to choose between two methods for dealing with revenge in our hearts. Paul reminds Philemon of these two methods and his reminder speaks to our lives as well.

*We can choose retaliation.* We can strike out and hurt another as we have been hurt (Exodus 21:23-25). We can press our case to the legal limit and justify the spirit of revenge without actually calling it that. This method promises “satisfaction” but never delivers it. As one has observed, this method of dealing with revenge “is like the feeding of a cancer: the man is restless until it is done and when it is, every man sees how infinitely far he is from satisfaction.” This method of dealing with the desires for revenge is never acceptable to God (Matthew 5:38-42).

*We can choose forgiveness.* This is the only acceptable option for a Christian. The saint must realize that this world is not “fair” and he should never be expected to be treated “fairly” by the world. The Christian is to deal with the temptation of revenge in a far different way than the world deals with it (Proverbs 24:29; Luke 6:27-37). By choosing to admit the unfairness of another’s act upon us and permit it to have no retaliatory influence upon our lives, in a sinister way, is the only accepting way of dealing with the evil desire of “getting even” (1 Thessalonians 5:15). A high official in England once went to Sir

Eardly Wilmont in great anger and told him a story of great insult which he had received. He closed by asking him if he did not think it would be manly to resent it. "Yes," said the judge, "it would be manly to resent it; but it would be God-like to forgive it."

## TWO TEXTS REGARDING GETTING EVEN

The first text is Romans 12:17-21. The Christian is never excluded or "protected" from the temptation of revenge. Things will happen that will stimulate this evil emotion. Knowing that situations will arise that can foster the desire to "even the score," we are exhorted by this text to:

... Guard our thoughts lest they cause us to concentrate on thoughts of revenge (v. 17b; Psalms 39:3).

... Do whatever we can to be at peace with others and, if it is impossible, let them alone (v. 18).

... Give God time to correct the wrongs done to us and never take matters into our own hands (v. 19).

... Be active in helping those we are apt to be resentful toward (vv. 20, 21).

The second text is Philemon 17-20. The Christian saint is to remember that Philemon had a "just" cause for revenge, but he also had a duty to be merciful in regard to personal insults and injury. Philemon was exhorted to possess the attitude commanded in Colossians 3:12-15.

## CONCLUSION

Revenge has been termed "the sweetest morsel in Satan's pantry." It is appealing. Its seed is sown in the wounds of personal insult and begin to fester in silent thoughts. It matures in bitterness and brings forth the dark fruits of anger, malice, and hatred.

May all become aware of the destiny of the vengeful person. The Holy Scriptures are quite clear in telling us what happens to those who allow the evil emotion of revenge to control their lives (Ezekiel 25:15-17; Amos 1:11, 12; Proverbs 26:27; etc.).

A boy had done wrong and confessed it to his father. He was punished by being confined to bread and water for three days. For two days his plate of dry bread and cup of water was set

before him instead of his usual food. On the morning of the third day, his father asked how he liked his meals. The child replied, "I can eat it very well, Papa but I don't like it much." After a

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few moments of silence, the child asked, "Can't you forgive me, Papa?" "No, sir, I cannot. My word has passed, and you must take your three days as I said." The question was repeated, "But can't you really forgive me, Papa?" "No," was the answer, "I cannot break my word." The boy then said, "Then, Papa, how could you say the Lord's Prayer this morning?" The father was immediately struck with the child's reproof, ordered the bread and water removed, and then said with evident pride, "My boy, you have preached me a better sermon than ever I heard in all my life."

—John Kachelman

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## *The Gospel's Mighty Power (Philemon 10)*

Paul's simple admission regarding Onesimus, "whom I converted while in chains," is a marvelous testimony to the gospel's power. Even locked in jail the gospel was powerful!

1. There are many things which try to "chain" the gospel but *all* are ineffective! Politics, error, false doctrine, indifference, rebellion, etc., all fail to curb the gospel's power.
  2. The gospel is not bound by man's restrictions.
  3. The gospel is powerful even when man is impotent.
  4. The gospel is not hindered by man's disabilities.
  5. The mighty power of the gospel is brilliant as it converted a runaway slave through the preaching of a chained prisoner.
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