

Introduction

I found the following this week on mastersofrevenge.com:

Let's face it - everyday there is at least one person who really [hacks] us off and while it would be great to ram their head into a roaring fire, it's not exactly practical and there are serious repercussions involved!

That doesn't mean that you shouldn't get revenge though...far from it in fact! Revenge is a natural reaction. It is perfectly normal to want someone to feel the pain and anguish that you feel. After all, why should the person who's ruined your day, your week or even your life get away Scott-free?

The answer is, "they shouldn't" ... and that is why you should get revenge on them. At last [through mastersofrevenge.com], there is a guilt-free way of getting revenge on someone you hate, without any of the dangers of doing it yourself.

The desire for and pursuit of revenge is natural to all humans. Revenge permeates the world in which we live. In fact it characterizes the world ever since sin came into existence. But it is not the way God wants his people to live. And Jesus makes this clear in the Sermon on the Mount.

[Read Text and Pray]

In his second epistle to Timothy and verse 15, Paul urges his disciple to exercise great care in his dealing with the scriptures. He writes, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." God is true. His word is pure and powerful. But when persons mishandle it, it is shameful. We must be careful not to use it for our own twisted ends and fleshly pursuits. Rather we must understand it, interpret it, and teach it as God has given it.

When we misinterpret the Bible, we swerve from the truth and we put infection in the air. Paul warns Timothy that it leads to ungodliness and spreads like gangrene. And that is exactly what had taken place in first

century Judea. The very ones the Jews held up as righteous failed to rightly handle the word of truth. Their teaching was infected by the desires of the flesh, and it had spread like gangrene. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was administering the proper antibiotic. He was countering the false instruction the people had heard with the truth. It was not a new thing. He did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them. We have seen it now with respect to murder, adultery, and truth-telling. This morning we are going to see Jesus administering the antibiotic of truth against the infection the scribes and Pharisees were spreading in regards to revenge.

I want you to see . . .

I. The Infected Teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees

A. Jesus starts out this point in his sermon in like manner as he did the previous 4 points. "You have heard that it was said." He is talking about the infected teaching that the scribes and Pharisees have been passing out.

B. Here is what they were saying: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." The problem with these guys is not that they ignored the OT scriptures altogether. Rather they rooted their teaching in just enough biblical language to be dangerous. You can see what I mean as we look at the three instances in the OT that the eye for an eye statement appears.

1. Exodus 21:22-25. "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound."

This is a statement of civil law for the nation directly from God. We notice the involvement of judges. Payment would be made as the judges determine if there was no harm, but if there was harm, then the law outlines the penalty—payment in kind. This is not license for any Israelite to take justice in his own hands. This is how the courts were to handle the case.

2. Leviticus 24:19-20. "If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done, it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him."

This commandment was given on a sobering occasion. Two men had gotten into a fight and in the midst of the melee one of the men had blasphemed God's name and cursed. And the people had brought that man to Moses. They put him in custody until the will of the Lord could be determined. So, the Lord spoke to Moses telling him that the congregation must stone the man to death outside the camp. And then the Lord proceeded to provide other laws, including this one, by which the people were to be governed. The setting is a civil setting involving an authority who enacts the prescribed punishment of divine law. Again this is not people taking justice into their own hands but how the legal system of Israel was to operate.

3. Deuteronomy 19:21. "Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." If looked at face value and removed from its context, this statement can mean any number of things. But to handle rightly the word of truth, we need to pay keen attention to the context. The context deals with witness testimony when a person is accused of a crime. Here again is a judicial setting. There are judges who are in office. And this verse is answering the question of what to do when there is a false witness. If a careful inquiry leads the judges to the conclusion that a witness is accusing his brother falsely, then the false witness is to receive the harm he intended to bring onto his brother . . . life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc.

These are the three times that "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" occurs in the Old Testament. And in each of these we are presented with a courtroom setting. The laws guide the administration of justice which is enacted in an official, governmental capacity. To have carried out the law handed down by God in these situations would have had at least two effects. First, it would serve as a deterrent. When a society deals strongly with crime, the incentive to commit it is reduced. And second, it would assure that justice was not exceeded. Most people are not satisfied with justice. They want more. God's law helped protect society from people like

Lamech. He was the descendant of Cain who told his wives he had killed a man for wounding him, a young man for striking him.

The laws that stipulated an eye for an eye are in no way given to endorse the idea that human beings should seek revenge for themselves. God knows the human heart. He knows that the human heart is never satisfied with getting back or even getting even through retaliation. No, the human heart wants more than to get even. As MacArthur says, "it wants a pound of flesh for an ounce of offense."

The OT stands for civil justice but it stands against selfish vengeance. Proverbs 25:21. If you enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty , give him water to drink.

Proverbs 24:17. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles.

Proverbs 24:29. Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done."

C. So the Pharisees and scribes did not invent the phrase "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But they wrenched it out of the context of the Old Testament. They infused it with infection and they were wafting through the air.

The contextual concerns that they stripped off, together with what Jesus has to say by way of corrective, indicates the nature of the problem with the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. By itself, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," becomes a license for personal and selfish vengeance. This is what you say as you get more than even. What they were asserting was their right, in fact their duty, to get back at those who got to them. They found a way to manipulate the law of God into a license for satisfying their fleshly desire for revenge.

We can all identify with the burning impulse to get revenge. It happens in little ways and big ways. It happens at work. Somebody in an underhanded way takes your vacation day. It happens on the road. A

crazy driver takes a risk that puts you and your in danger. It happens in the family often in little ways. You know that your husband or wife purposefully did something that they knew would irritate you, and everything in you urges you to return the deed. It happens in church.

But what the scribes and Pharisees were saying is wrong. It was infected. It was infected by selfishness. It was the attitude, "If I don't look out for me nobody else will, so I must look out for myself." And so Jesus sets himself to administer the disinfectant, to wipe away the germs.

II. The Disinfecting Correction of Jesus

Jesus responds in stunning contrast. "But I say to you . . ."

A. Jesus sums up his point with his first sentence, and then he provides examples of how this looks in regard to four areas of personal rights. He sets forth his main concern with an umbrella point which covers it all, and then he illustrates what he means with 4 specific examples.

The umbrella point, that covers it all is this:

"Do not resist the one who is evil."

The scribes and Pharisees had applied was meant for the courtroom to the personal living room. No, says Jesus. What is meant for the courtroom is an eye for an eye. But what is meant for the living room in your personal space is the refusal to take vengeance on people who violate you. "Do not resist the one who is evil." Don't live in defense of your personal rights. Do not seek vengeance. Do not retaliate. Do not store up resentment. Do not act with spite. The one who is evil here is one who is doing meanness toward you. They are treading on your rights. They are taking advantage of you.

B. So then we see 4 examples of Jesus' overall point.

1. The first example pertains to a person's dignity. "If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other one also." A blow to the face is insulting. When Jesus stood before his Jewish accusers, they spit in his face and struck him and slapped him. They were insulting him as best they

knew how. That is what a slap in the face is all about. It is an attack on your dignity. And when our dignity comes under attack, we want to fight back. Yet Jesus says, when this happens, turn the other cheek to him as well. The message is "Do not retaliate; be meek." Do not seek to get even or get back.

Kingdom citizens are to be like Jesus who before his accusers was silent. He kept entrusting himself to God. And that is what citizens of the kingdom are to do as well. Whether our dignity is to be preserved or not is up to God.

2. The second example pertains to being sued. If someone wants to sue you, there is an offense of some kind. If someone wants to sue you, they are charging that you have done them wrong in some way. Jesus says that if a person is suing for your tunic, the kingdom citizen should go beyond that and give his cloak as well. Most people didn't have closets full of clothes in those days. These items were prized. So by giving the cloak as well as the tunic, the kingdom citizen reflects a high value on forgiveness and reconciliation. He is willing to sacrifice personally in order to go beyond what is called for in order to overcome for a wrong he has done.

The tax collector Zacchaeus reflects this willingness. You remember the wee little man. When Jesus came to his house, he said to Jesus, if I have defrauded anyone of anything I will restore it fourfold. Zacchaeus was a thieving tax collector, but salvation came to him. He was changed. He wanted to make things right with those from whom he stole. So he wasn't just going to return what he took; he was going to give back four times as much. That's the kind of thing Jesus is talking about here.

3. The third example relates to the legal right of a Roman soldier to compel a citizen to carry a load for a mile. You are walking along and suddenly a soldier interrupts all the plans you have for a day by compelling you to carry his pack for a mile. This was a living experience of oppression and inconvenience. And the soldiers knew it. But Jesus says kingdom citizens should go a second mile as well. In other words, do not bow up in retaliatory hostility. Exceed what you are compelled to do. Exhibit a

forbearing spirit. Give more than you have to because you are governed by One greater than them.

4. The fourth illustration touches on a reality we all know too well, the tightness with which we are attached to what belongs to us. Now I don't think Jesus means give everything and anything away. Pretty soon you would lack basic needs and be having to ask from someone else. Nor is he teaching that we should not be discerning in giving and loaning. But he is saying, "don't be selfish." Don't hold your stuff so tightly that you refuse those who have needs. Have a giving spirit. Have a loose hold on your personal property for their well-being.

C. Each of these statements by Jesus reflects a loose attachment to worldly things, a willingness to relinquish rights and property if necessary. What Jesus is saying here ties directly to the third beatitude, "Blessed are the meek." In essence, the scribes and Pharisees wanted to legitimize the natural sinful propensity to be selfish, to defend one's rights, to get even with those who do evil. But Jesus is asserting that the kingdom of heaven is not driven by selfishness. And he demonstrated it by the way he came. He is the Messiah. He is the creator. He is the king. But he came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. And that is the way his people are to be. Deny self. Take up our cross every day. Follow Christ. That is not an image of self-protection and self-defense, but selfless service in the interest of others. It is an exhibition of trust in God and his promises and assurances. The assurance of the third beatitude is inheriting the earth. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth."

Blessed are those who do not assert themselves and who do not avenge themselves. They cast themselves on God. They do not conquer the earth. They do not take over the earth. They inherit the earth. They entrust themselves to God, and let go of selfishness and God GIVES them the earth.

Standing before Pilate, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." And just as his disciples did not fight to keep Jesus out of the hands of the Jews, kingdom citizens do not fight to protect their selfish interests in this world

because the earth we inherit is not of this world. This world is passing away.

D. And not only does Jesus exhibit that kingdom citizens hold loosely to this world, but they also entrust personal justice to God. This is faith exerted in life. They are not the arbiters of justice here and now. Paul wrote to the Romans, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

God is just, perfectly just. The God who protects the guilty from over-punishment through the law knows exactly what justice demands. He will never over punish. But he will punish according to justice. And he will punish. That is both sobering and soothing. For the one who resists God, who denies God, who refuses to repent and turn to Christ for reconciliation with God. This assurance is sobering. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of the throne of God, says Psalm 89:14. And God will judge. Psalm 98:9 says, "He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity." Let no one think he will escape the judgment seat of God. Hebrews 9:27 says that it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment.

The only way to escape the eternal judgment of God is to take refuge in Jesus Christ who bore the sins of many. And the way you do that is by faith. Draw near to God with Jesus as your righteousness, your hope and your plea.

E. One more thing. Kingdom citizens hold loosely to the world. They entrust personal justice to God. And thirdly, they overcome evil. Jesus says do not resist the one who is evil, bear with them, give extra to them, go another mile with them, and lend to them. In Romans 12 where Paul is amplifying this instruction of Jesus, he draws it together saying, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

When we respond to the selfish evil intent of the world with selfish evil intent, we are no different. We are overcome by evil. Citizens of the kingdom of heaven, inheritors of the earth are not to be overcome by evil but are to overcome evil with good. When we are meek and show grace,

when we hold loosely to this world and the rights our flesh tells us belong to us, that is when we are not overcome by evil but overcome it.

This again is what Jesus did. He was not overcome by evil. As a sheep is silent before its shearers, so our Lord did not open his mouth. When the entourage sent by the chief priests came to the garden to apprehend Jesus, Peter was ready to fight. He drew out his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Jesus told him to put his sword away. He reasoned with him, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" Jesus was not overcome by evil. He overcame evil with good. He laid down his life for his sheep. He submitted to the evil of the cross to redeem you and me from our sins. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Conclusion

Peter writes that "When [Jesus] was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." And that is the way he calls us, his disciples and citizens of his kingdom, to live. It is not easy. But what an honor to be called to follow in his footsteps. Not being served but serving. Not exalting self but being selfless. Not retaliating or taking revenge, but committing the defense of ourselves to the judge of the earth.