

Recompense  
Revelation 22:10-15  
3/6/2016

Vengeance is a tricky thing. Some people think that they can do it and basically become God in the process. The story of *The Count of Monte Cristo* is an excellent example. The main character is Edmond Dantes, and he gets thrown in prison for something he didn't do, and at the instigation of three men who are very jealous of what he has, or afraid of what Edmond can do and of what he knows. Fourteen years he spends in prison and changes into a completely different man. He becomes friends with another prisoner, a priest, who knows about a fabulous treasure on the island of Monte Cristo. Edmond eventually escapes from the prison, finds the treasure and starts to get his revenge. At the end of the book, however, he discovers that vengeance is something that no human being can do correctly. Human beings always escalate when vengeance comes near. There is a reason that God says in the book of Deuteronomy, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." It is because only God can do it in a completely just way without any escalation, and making the punishment fit the crime absolutely perfectly. We can look at God's justice from five different angles.

The first angle is that of revelation. John is told here not to seal up the words of this prophecy, because the time is near. Interestingly, Daniel the prophet receives the exact opposite command in his book. He is told to seal up the words. The difference is the situation: in Daniel's case, the events described were a long way off, and so the people of God did not need to know those things immediately. However, in John's case, since the things John sees are going to happen soon, he is told not to seal up the words. This is a tremendous blessing to us, because if John had sealed up these words, we would never have had the chance to know what God is planning to do, and how we are supposed to be ready for it. From this, we learn a very important thing about God's recompense: God always gives chances for people to repent. The very act of telling us about this, and of making sure that the word gets out, is something that encourages people to repent and turn from their wicked ways. As God says in the book of Ezekiel, He does not take delight in the death of the wicked. As proof of that principle, God reveals to us the way of escape. Make no mistake: all those who perish on judgment day will have absolutely no excuse, for God's justice has been revealed.

This leads us to the second angle on how to think of God's justice. God's justice is inescapable. God uses a rhetorical manner of speaking here as a way of persuading the unbeliever to repent. At first glance, verse 11

appears to be not only difficult, but downright dangerous. Is God really commanding people to go on sinning? I hope that it is obvious to everyone that if we don't understand what God is doing here, then we will really mess it up! We could wind up going home thinking that God is commanding us to sin! However, that is not what is happening here at all. A couple of illustrations will help us to understand what God is doing here. The first one we have already heard. It is the story of "The Wee, Wee Manny and the Big, Big Coo." Eventually the mother comes to realize that the big cow will only ever do the opposite of what Manny says. So, using a little bit of reverse psychology, she tells the Manny to tell the cow to make a big fuss, and kick, and not stand still. The effect on the cow is almost miraculous! It is obviously a Scottish cow. Only Scottish people are that contrary! However, there is another group of people that are just as contrary, and that's rebellious humanity. We always want to do the opposite of what God tells us, and so, here God tells the unbeliever to go on sinning in order to shock him to his senses. What God is saying is that there will come a time when there can be no more repentance. When that happens, the unbeliever will wish he had that time back again, but it will be gone forever. God is giving fair warning here. His judgment is inescapable.

The other illustration that can help here is when a farmer puts up a sign on his property that says "all trespassers will be prosecuted." I'm sure we have all seen these signs around. The idea of the sign is not to encourage people to trespass, but actually the reverse. And just because the farmer says "All trespassers," that doesn't mean that there will actually be any trespassers. The intent of the sign is to try to make sure that there are none. The farmer is trying to create a category (namely, trespassers) of which there are no actual examples. This also uses a bit of reverse psychology.

So, God is not finally telling people to go on sinning. In fact, He is telling people to do the opposite. We all need to hear the warning, for there is nothing God loves more than repentance.

It is important to point out that God is only using reverse psychology for the unbelievers. When God describes the believers here, it is plain that God does in fact desire the godly to go on being godly. So, the reverse psychology only applies to how God is addressing the unbelievers, not how He is addressing the believers.

The third angle on God's recompense is God's revelation of Himself as the One who knows everything from the beginning to the end. There is a reason why God calls Himself the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, and the beginning and the end. The reason for God calling Himself this is that only such a person could possibly hope to judge anything perfectly. The reason why we do not do so well in the area of vengeance is that we

have a very imperfect knowledge of the situation. This was Edmond Dantes's problem in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. At the end, because he does not have all knowledge, he winds up going too far in his revenge. The problem with vengeance is that because we don't know enough, therefore we don't know where and when to stop. Only someone who has been around for an eternity could possibly hope to have that kind of knowledge. That is why God calls Himself these things in verse 13. God was around before anything came into existence. He will always be around in the future. If God is eternal, then He also knows all things.

The fourth angle on God's recompense is the encouragement He gives to repent. Verse 14 pronounces a blessing on all those who do repent. They are said to wash their robes. The only kind of washing of robes that we know of is the washing of the robes in the blood of the Lamb. It is only blood that can make our robes as white as snow. Those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb need fear no recompense from God for their sins, since those sins are the stains that Jesus' blood washes away. For those who repent, there are no sins left for which God will take vengeance. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The fifth angle on God's recompense is that God describes those people on which recompense will be taken. They are the dogs. Now, we have to understand that most cultures of the ancient near east did not think of dogs as man's best friend. Instead, they were scavengers, and they were ceremonially unclean animals. They were not pets. So, John is describing dogs here with negative connotations. The term "dogs" is being used here as a sort of general expression. The rest of the verse describes the various ways in which these people are "dogs."

Sorcery, sexual immorality, murder, idolatry, and falsehood are the various ways these people are described. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list of vices. Let us remember here that John is describing people who are characterized by these sins. Christians are not ruled by any of these sins, though they may fall into temptation on occasion. The question, then, that we need to ask ourselves is not whether we commit any of these sins, but whether these sins are what our lives are all about. The difference between unbelievers and believers is not so much that they sin, although believers can expect to sin less than unbelievers. The real difference lies in repentance. God will, of course, never bring recompense against any of His children. His children are those who repent. Come to Christ, therefore, and receive the washing of your robes, so that they can be as white as snow. Come, enter into the joy of your master. Come with the expectation of the new heavens and the new earth.

There are many ways we can put these truths to work in our lives.

Firstly, we need to see just how important God's Word is. Most of us know this already. However, on God's Word rests the destiny of millions and millions of people. How we react to it is of the utmost importance. We do not want to receive God's recompense for evil. Instead, we want God's grace and favor. Essential to obtaining God's favor is believing and doing what God's Word says. We need to be the sheep who hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and thereby do what good sheep are supposed to do.

Secondly, the fact that God's justice is inescapable ought to make us scramble to escape it, and help others to do the same. For God's justice is only escapable in this life! Even though the future life is for eternity, the only chance to escape God's vengeance is in this life. There are no conversions after death. So, there is an urgency here that we need to have and see.

Thirdly, because God has all knowledge and wisdom, we need to leave vengeance in God's hands. All things will turn out correctly in the end. If we decide to jump in and "help" God in the area of vengeance, we will only make the situation far worse. We need to be humble enough to realize that God's knowledge is far above ours, and therefore we need to bow to that superior understanding of God's. We can be content with hurts against us not being avenged, because we know that God will make all things right one day.

Fourthly, we should not only be encouraged to repent ourselves, but we should also encourage others to repent. Of course, we need to understand the nature of repentance. Repentance is not remorse. It is not just being sad that we got caught. It is not even being sad about the fact that we have sinned, although that is part of it. It is also a turning away from the sin. We need a once for all repentance at the beginning of the Christian life. But we also need a daily turning away from sin. There needs to be an attitude of repentance. Furthermore, we need to have a mindset where we need to repent much more than our neighbor does. We need to see our sin as a big thing, and our neighbor's sins as a very small thing. Usually we have that backwards, don't we? Our neighbor's sins look like mountains, whereas our own sins we tend to minimize. As a result, we usually get angry when someone points them out to us. After all, why should they be all that concerned over what are plainly small things? But do you see what could happen if everyone thought that way? Everyone would walk around being highly offended all the time, because, in their own minds, their own sin is small, but the neighbor's sin is big. If the neighbor thinks the same thing, then you have an excellent recipe for perpetual warfare, not to say feuds! We need to think of our own sin as great, and our neighbor's sin as small.

Fifthly, we need to make sure that the sins listed here do not

characterize our lives. They are all too easy in our modern age. It almost seems as if John was writing in the twenty-first century, doesn't it? Sorcery is on the rise. Our culture is rife with sexual immorality of every description. Murder is quite common, as is idolatry of wealth, comfort, pride, and self. Falsehood is reckoned as being easier than the truth, and so many people tell lies on a regular basis. This should not be us, my friends. Repent and turn, and you need fear no recompense.