

## LOVE YOUR ENEMIES, BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU!

(Luke 6:27-36, cf. Matt 6:43-48)

You have heard it said – *The enemy of my enemy is my friend*. This sounds like an extension of rivalry from one person to another. There is a reason why Revenge sells. From Kill Bill to Star Wars we see stories of people who are driven by revenge. Revenge is something deep within us. We want to see justice done for wrongs done to us, but we fantasize having it done our way. You've heard the phrase, *"Revenge is a dish best served cold."* "*Served cold*" implies that revenge is sweeter when one who seeks to revenge takes time, to put pieces together, and then strikes. But we have God's Spirit within us who calls on us by name; *James, where are you? Where are you hiding? Why are you meditating evil in your heart?* -Just like called for Adam in the Garden of Eden. Yes, revenge inclinations come and so do fantasies of carrying out revenge. That's why the apostle James 1:15 says, *"After the desire has been conceived (in the heart) it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown, it gives birth to death."* Is your thought for revenge already conceived in its 1<sup>st</sup> trimester? Don't you hear the divine voice calling for you? God is telling us to change lanes. *For with God everything is possible.*

This brings me to the Mosaic Law in the Bible (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:19f; Deut. 19:21) and also found in Hammurabi's code written about 1800 BC- the *Lex Talonis* –the law of retaliation: *An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and etc.* This law was designed to bring fairness in society to bring an equal limited injury to a perpetrator. It was the beginning of the law of mercy. One who takes a tooth, his tooth is to be taken out for the wrong done, but not two teeth for one tooth lost. *"An eye for an eye, a tooth..."* was not the minimum but the acceptable maximum retaliation. The death penalty was based on this principle---*Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on a testimony of witnesses... You shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of murder, he shall surely be put to death.* Num. 35:30f. No ransom money could be paid for the crime of death.

Revenge generated the taking of the law in person's own hands. Sometimes a family would seek revenge to avenge the life taken by killing a relative or two although the relatives had nothing to do with it. It is not uncommon in the Middle East, *Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and even Israel*, to practice revenge. For one Israeli killed by a Palestinian, for example, Five Palestinian lives are taken to avenge the life of the Israeli lost.

The Law of Retaliation, (*Lex Talonis*) was put in place to stop people from taking the law in their own hands. It gave Judges and courts to judge justly and restrain people in societies from excessive brutality.

But the Lord says, *"I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you."*

Jesus does not condone hatred or revenge. We are not to repay evil for evil. We are to *love our enemies and pray* for them. We are to love the unlovable Retaliation is out of question.. Elsewhere, the Bible says, “*Do not say I will pay you back for this wrong. Wait for the Lord and he will avenge you* (Prov.20:22); “*Make sure that nobody pays wrong for wrong...but always be kind to each other;*” (1Thess. 5:15). *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*” (Eph. 4:32)

Without God’s help humans cannot resist retaliation. Seeking revenge seems to be easy. But it is costly on the conscience. It consumes the mind; It destroys the inner self; It brings a person to self-pity; It causes insomnia (lack of sleep); It may cause partial or full insanity or paranoia; Ultimately one may end up harming his/her own body and mind (psycho-somatically).

Jesus makes even harder, “*Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*” This means: If a person is right-handed he and slaps you on your left cheek because you are facing him, in order to strike you on your right cheek, he must swing the same right hand back to strike the right cheek with the back of the arm. It is a humiliating cowboy type strike. It is an act of violence. It seeks to impose authoritative dominance over the victim.

Proud fools would call you a weakling if you didn’t retaliate. The wise would honor you for your wisdom. Indeed, Jesus calls for wisdom. Referring to one’s response to a person who compels you to go one mile-- *Go a second mile* just to prove you are wiser. Again if someone demands to have your coat, Jesus advises that you should prove yourself wiser by not withholding your shirt also. The idea is to bring peace in the midst of chaos while protecting your life from a violent person.

Learn not subject yourselves violence. Wisely, try avoiding a violent person. The Lord calls on you to practice wisdom for the sake of safety. Sometimes we may give up our immediate rights for the sake of peace. “*Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*” (Jas 3:18.) Avoid violence by not seeking revenge but peace. If no bones are broken or no greater harm is done, avoid a violent person who might kill you.

Remember, we are the covenant community. We are followers of Christ, namely, Christians. We are therefore obligated to follow the Lord’s teaching.

The Lord says, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest in your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Loving the enemy though does not mean having an emotional love with that person. Loving the enemy refers to a genuine concern for their eternal salvation or condemnation. For Christians, mercy and grace are appropriate ways to respond

to whoever wronged us. You know: Mercy is withholding punishment from someone who deserves it. Grace is lavishing gifts on someone who doesn't deserve it. Do both! However, we can't stand idly while evil doers continue to commit evil deeds. Rom. 13:1-2 says, *Everyone must submit to the governing authorities ..., for there no authority except that which God has established...* In either way, we must honor God and seek to stay safe. Calling the Law enforcement staff to do what God ordained them to do is equally important. However, our first move must always be to *Love, Pray, and Bless* our enemies. Amen!