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Should We Ever Seek Vengeance?

Proverbs 14:29-30: (KJV) ²⁹*He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.* ³⁰*A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.*

"Trayvon Martin"...mention that name and you unleash a flood of emotion and turmoil. This young man was tragically shot to death at age 17 and his death has raised a firestorm of controversy. Was it self-defense? Was it racially motivated? Should his killer have been arrested immediately? Will there be justice? These are all questions that we have no answers for - sorry! What we *do* want to discuss though, is the emotion, reaction and desire by some for vengeance. Is vengeance ever appropriate for us to take? What if justice is NOT served? Does vengeance give closure? What does it really mean to leave things like this in God's hands? Are the Old and New Testament different on this? Stay with us as we look into this important question.

Are justice and vengeance the same thing?

 **Trayvon Story, CBS This Morning**

- *Three weeks ago, the unarmed teen was shot in this gated subdivision in Sanford, outside Orlando. He had been visiting his father after getting suspended from school. Zimmerman, a Hispanic neighborhood watch volunteer, was not arrested. He claimed self-defense. Florida's Stand Your Ground Law expands the right to claim self-defense beyond the home.*

WHAT CAN CAUSE THE DESIRE FOR REVENGE... ???



 **Intro - Evolutionary origins of revenge, Templeton Foundation**

- *We see these dynamics in every culture that has been known to human observers. You would have a harder time finding a society of three-armed people than you would a society of people that don't know the concept of revenge.*

We think God hard-wired into us the concept of justice. What can cause the need for justice to be served? The committing of any wrong as defined by law.

VENGEANCE

Punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offense: RETRIBUTION

REVENGE

1: To avenge (as oneself) usually by retaliating in kind or degree

2: To inflict injury in return for <revenge an insult>

JUSTICE

The maintenance or administration of what is just, especially by the *impartial* adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments



Is there a connection between these definitions and our theme text? Proverbs 14:29-30: Consider this: Vengeance and revenge are personally owned, "I'll get my vengeance!" Justice is the property of everybody. What is the difference between the two?

M REVENGE

Revenge is about "ME" - Justice is about that which is right!

Circumstances Emotions

Revenge is determined by my emotions mixed with circumstances
- Justice is determined by events in conjunction with the Law!



Revenge is personally orchestrated and served - Justice is orchestrated and served through legal channels!

No Justice, CBS This Morning

- Hundreds were at a rally saying there is no justice for Trayvon Martin, in what was called the "Million Hoodie March," Trayvon was wearing a hoodie the night George Zimmerman shot and killed him. (Martin's parents surrounded by supporters) Our son was not committing any crime! Our son is your son! I want you guys to stand up for justice and stand up for what is right!

What does God's vengeance look like?

Nahum 1:2-3: God's vengeance does not sound very appealing! But...He is slow to anger, so His vengeance is controlled. What would one do to avoid it? Leviticus 26:1-2: An idol is anything that gets in the way of God being first...our 401(k), our car, our home, our spouse, our hobby...idols can be anything that take us away from God first. We need to keep things in the right perspective.

Sweet Revenge - Evolutionary origins of revenge, Templeton Foundation

- If you put somebody into an MRI and put them into a game where somebody ends up harming them, and then you give this person the opportunity to harm "in kind" the person who has harmed them, the place where you see the brain activity going on is in an area of the brain that scientists now recognize is the brain's pleasure system. It is "sweet revenge."

Leviticus 26:14-20: Notice all that has to unravel here...this is not just a small slip up in our lives, this is a true turn against God...So, is this revealing a vengeful God? Do we ever ask why God would be like this? Human nature in its fallen condition generally does not react to simple correction alone. God does have vengeance towards His created in certain circumstances, but is it there to beat us down or build us up?

What does "My" Vengeance look like - is it in the "image" of God?

Having looked at the vengeance of God, we now look in the mirror. Obviously we come from a different place as is exhibited by the following account: Genesis 34:1-7

So, what do we have?

- The rape of Dinah, a daughter of Jacob;
- Infatuation;
- A desire to marry and a conference between the fathers; and
- The sons of Jacob entering The Vengeance Zone!



What happens next is a premeditated act of vengeance - the brothers suggest to Jacob that forgiveness and even an alliance will be granted if all of the males of their tribe be circumcised.

The agreement was reached: Genesis 34:25: (NASB) They set up a pre-meditated circumstance where the men were disabled and then murdered in cold blood. This is what vengeance can make us do!



Students make teachers pay, revenge - is it sweet or bitter? www.youtube.com

- *How do you feel when you experience a personal affront of one kind or another? The reaction of many people today seems to be, "I'll make them pay for what they did!" In the United States, a number of junior high school students have filed false charges of abuse to get revenge against teachers who disciplined them. What happens, says the president of the teacher's union in New Orleans, is that once the accusation is made, the teacher's reputation is tarnished. Even after the accusation has been proved false, the damage can linger.*



Genesis 34:30-31

A few observations comparing God's vengeance with our own:

- God's is for our ultimate good - ours is for our momentary satisfaction.
- God's is to focus us on the heavenly - ours is to focus on self appeasement.
- God's is to teach a lasting lesson - ours is to lessen an emotional reaction.

What does the Old Testament's treatment of vengeance look like?

If it comes from God, then it must have a basis in justice: Leviticus 24:15-22: When there is justice, there is no need for vengeance. As would be expected from the Old Testament, there is a very clear focus on justice: ¹⁹Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: ²⁰fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered. ²¹One who kills an animal shall make restitution for it; but one who kills a human being shall be put to death. ²²You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the LORD your God.

Could any of this be construed as vengeance? Perhaps, but the fact that there are predetermined guidelines for the consequences indicates a lack of the emotional skew that comes with vengeance. This is what justice is truly made of.



Revenge is pleasure; origins of revenge, Templeton Foundation

- *It's the part of the brain that is active when somebody is pursuing a goal that they believe is going to lead to a reward. It's not just the plotting - they see some reward out there that looks to be really satisfying if they can just make it happen. It's the same pattern of activation you see in the brain for someone hungry and about to be given a meal, or a drug addict thinking about the drugs they like to use, or someone who is about to have a social interaction they are looking forward to.*

There is a wiring in our brain that feeds that desire for vengeance. We need to fight this urge. Perceived inequity breeds the human propensity towards vengeance and injustice. The Old Testament was full of warnings against it: Leviticus 19:13-18:



Eyewitness uncovered, Fox News

- *We've seen the rallies and heard the outcry. Now we go back to the night George Zimmerman shot Trayvon Martin to death. A witness we have not heard from before paints a much different picture than we have seen so far. The night of that shooting, police say there was a witness who saw it all.*

Proverbs 20:10 Proverbs 22:22 Jeremiah 22:3

What does the New Testament's treatment of vengeance look like?

So we have seen that the Old Testament, while based squarely on the foundation of justice, did not leave room for personal vendetta. The clear defining of justice was a key to being able to identify what can sometimes be a fine line between justice and vengeance.



Eyewitness speaks, Fox News

- *Tonight we are learning more about why cops believe that night George Zimmerman shouldn't have gone to jail. Zimmerman called a non-emergency line and told the dispatchers he was following a teen. He was told not to. From that moment to that shooting, details are few. But this man's testimony could be key for*




the cops. "The guy on the bottom, who I believe had a red sweater on, was yelling, "Help! Help!" I told him to stop and that I was calling 911." Trayvon was in a hoodie; Zimmerman was in red.

Matthew 5:39: Did you ever wonder what you would do in certain situations? Emotions are so hard to control. Jesus is telling us to control that gut feeling and approach it differently. Remember our text from last week? Christian love says, "Love your enemies!" **Matthew 5:43-46:**

- We are to rise way above our circumstances.
- To love an enemy dissolves any potential traces of vengeance.
- To bless and pray for those who hate and abuse you can only be *truly* accomplished based upon our striving for that selfless love towards them.
- Be like God: God is a good and just God to all as shown in the seasons.
- Even when you are being persecuted, God is still a good and just God.

Do we get to choose which vengeance fits our situation?

 **Workplace revenge, revenge - is it sweet or bitter, www.youtube.com**

- *In the workforce, an increasing number of disgruntled employees seek revenge on employers by damaging or deleting information on the company's computer network. Others steal company secrets and sell them or give them away. In addition to the looting of electronic files, old-fashioned theft also remains a staple of worker retaliation, reports the New York Times. To combat the threat of revenge, many companies have resorted to having a security officer escort a dismissed employee to his desk, wait for him to clear out his things, and walk him off the premises.*

Romans 12:14-21: This time the Apostle Paul sets our feet on firm ground: *Bless those who persecute you.*

- Live in harmony with others.
- Don't avenge yourselves; rather, act in the *opposite* manner.
- Overcome evil (vengeance and all that goes with it) with good!
- Vengeance belongs to God and He is in control. He *will* right all of the wrongs.

What roll should vengeance play in our lives?

 **New photo of bloody head, ABC News**

- *There is an exclusive new photo of George Zimmerman from the night of the Trayvon Martin shooting. It is raising lots of new questions. This picture seems to support George Zimmerman's assertion that he felt he was locked in some sort of life and death struggle with Trayvon Martin. In this picture you see two cuts on the back of Zimmerman's head with blood trickling down.*

So all of this talk about the Trayvon Martin killing...what do we *learn* from this tragedy? Suppose you jumped onto one side or the other on this issue and evidence comes out, justice is served, and your point of view is proven to be incorrect. Are you going to, with the same urgency and loudness, proclaim that you were wrong? Do we have the same enthusiasm and passion if we need to be corrected? Repentance is a remedy for vengeance.

As Christians, do we ever get that "I can't wait 'till you get yours" attitude? Sadly even some of the best examples of Christianity have fallen into this pit: **Luke 9:51-56:** God's justice: **Jeremiah 31:28-30:** God knows what is happening, and there is great comfort for our sense of wanting vengeance. God will not let acts go unnoticed or unpunished. **Isaiah 61:1-4:** We can all relate to this subject. We have all had experiences where that sense comes into our hearts and minds. Jesus tells us how he dealt with it - love your enemies and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you and abuse you.

Because we can have the absolute, positive, unrelenting faith that God has it under control, things that are unpunished now will not remain so.

So for us, vengeance is not only a waste of time, it is an attitude and an action that is diametrically opposed to that for which we stand. Let us leave vengeance to shrivel and die and in its place, plant and cultivate the love of God through Christ and thereby find peace!

***So should we ever seek vengeance?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions,
Think about it...!***