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How Sweet is Revenge?

Romans 12:17: (NASB) *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.*



Revenge - the desire for it can be a powerful and even overwhelming emotion. Sadly, thinking about revenge can be a fun, motivating and bonding experience as it occupies our minds with creative and yet often diabolical means with which to carry out our purpose. It is amazing how the development of such a negative action can spur such positive feelings. Wait, if all these positive feelings come from planning revenge then can we rightfully label revenge as wrong? Absolutely! Just because something makes you feel good or empowered or focused doesn't mean that you are becoming a better person because of those things. Remember, Satan felt good and was empowered and focused when he rebelled against God - and we all know how that will turn out! Can revenge ever be good? How do we recognize, manage and direct our feelings of revenge?

The Bible is full of warnings against being vengeful: Proverbs 24:28-29



Introduction, *Psychology of Revenge*, Vanessa Van Edwards

- *My name is Vanessa Van Edwards, and I am lead investigator of the Science of People - a human behavior research lab. Our mission is to figure out the hidden forces that drive our behavior. And today we're talking about the dark, secretive and mysterious science and psychology of revenge. As much as we hate to admit it, revenge is one of those intense feelings that comes up for every single human being.*

Revenge is driven by a level of intensity that is hard to fight.

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary:

Vengeance: Punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offense, retribution

Revenge: 1: to avenge (oneself or another) 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

To be clearly understood, revenge needs to be compared and contrasted with justice. We want to seek justice, not vengeance.

For perspective, we will be referring to the CQ episode from May 8, 2017, "Will God's Vengeance Squash Us Like Bugs?"

GOD'S VENGEANCE LESSON: God's vengeance is designed to fulfill the eternal purpose of reconciliation.

We talked about God's "vengeance" which is entirely different than our revenge.

God's vengeance is for reconciliation. Reconciliation means to bring us back to the lost relationship the human family had with God. The purpose of MY vengeance is to hurt someone.

Zephaniah 3:8-9

We will break revenge and justice into four categories:

- *Revenge is about me - Justice is about that which is right*
- *Revenge is determined by my emotions mixed with circumstances - Justice is determined by events in conjunction with the law*
- *Revenge is personally and passionately orchestrated and served - Justice is orchestrated and served through legal channels*
- *Revenge is about punishing those who hurt your family - Justice is about lawfully trying and convicting the guilty*

Revenge Refocus Lesson: As with any human emotion, we must check our desire for revenge against our desire for that which is right.

Revenge is almost never founded in that which is right. Instead, it is based in that which is convenient, passionate and caused by our rage.

The Jewish leaders were all trying to desperately stifle Paul's preaching - Paul had other ideas: Acts 23:6-14: Being bested by your opponent + others feeling the same humiliation + a



feeling of immediacy = a mob sore losers who will consciously step far beyond justice to exact revenge...

Revenge is determined by my emotions mixed with circumstances

They had no legal right to kill the Apostle Paul. (Side note: They took an oath not to eat until they killed Paul, but God protected Paul for years - did they all starve to death?) Revenge brings us to say and do outrageous things. We end up on a slippery road where we have to continually defend what we have said or done.

Never does the human soul appear so strong as when it foregoes revenge and dares to forgive an injury. — Edwin Hubbel Chapin

GOD'S VENGEANCE LESSON: God's vengeance by definition is purposeful and not reactionary.

Justice is determined by events in conjunction with the law

In his epistle to the Roman Christians, Paul had just written about the casting off of Israel which opened wide the call of the Gospel to the Romans - here the justice and mercy of God shine out! Romans 11:28-36: *The depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God* - We should have no room for vengeful thoughts. Everything is being given to us, even though we do not deserve it. Grace is receiving blessings without deserving them. God gives us hope and direction. We do not have any room for mob mentality if we say we have been called of God.

How do we daily absorb and process the defeats of life? Do we dive into a human reaction or do we step back and enjoy a just and godly panoramic view of what just happened? If we take the principles of Romans 11 that we have been given an opportunity - not because we deserve it, but because God has seen fit to allow us to have it - that is a panoramic view of God's mercy. However badly we might feel about somebody or something that happened, we ought to bask in the glory of an opportunity that is bigger than we are. Sometimes the flesh gets the best of us and our reactions and emotions take over. We must be on our guard! That is why our solution for revenge is the end of Romans 11 and the entire context of Romans 12.

At the end of those verses, Paul specifically deals with revenge and the steps to diffuse it are detailed.

Revenge Refocus Lesson: We all experience loss of privilege or position in our lives that often benefits another. Let us see such loss as a stepping stone towards our ultimate spiritual destination and not as a reason to get revenge on someone.

No matter what the packaging, revenge is always the same basic thing - it is ME showing YOU that you cannot get away with this and that without suffering serious consequences of MY choosing. They say there is no "I" in team - we say there is an "I" in revenge! We have to understand it this way no matter how good it makes us feel in the interim.

Revenge is about me

Luke 9:51-56: Notice the care that Jesus took to be respectful of those who saw things differently...⁵³*But they did not receive him, because he was traveling toward Jerusalem.*

(Source: Biblical commentary by Adam Clarke) They saw he was going up to Jerusalem to keep the feast; (it was the feast of tabernacles, John 7:2) and knowing him thereby to be a Jew, they would afford nothing for his entertainment; for, in religious matters, the Samaritans and Jews had no dealings: See John 4:9. The Samaritans were a kind of mongrel heathens; they feared Jehovah, and served other gods, 2 Kings 17:34. They apostatized from the true religion, and persecuted those who were attached to it.

⁵⁴*When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them? Who is looking for revenge here? Wow - Jesus' own followers! And they pursued it in such a way as to have it come from God in heaven! Their vengeance would be cloaked as "the hand of God."*

⁵⁵*But he turned and rebuked them, and said, you do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went on to another village.*



Jesus' response is plain and powerful: Think in a godly manner and not like children of Satan! He did not come to destroy men's lives; he came to save them. Take the emotion out.

GOD'S VENGEANCE LESSON: God's vengeance will actually be a preserving action for humanity.

Justice is about that which is right

The Apostle Paul continues in Romans - now that you see how utterly blessed you are...Romans 12:1-5: Our just and righteous approach to our privilege is to be sacrificial in intention, transformed in thought, sound in reasoning and humble in participation. Apply these principles and you will find no room for thoughts of revenge to take root.

Revenge Refocus Lesson: Just because we are deeply privileged, we are not given authority to have our thoughts of revenge become weapons of destruction; instead they are tools of growth.

When life happens, when circumstances and conflict and emotions are all in high gear, we must at all costs rely heavily upon the grace of God's providence and the assurance of His Justice being carried out in His time.

Revenge is personally and passionately orchestrated and served

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was an impeccable example of standing firmly upon God's grace and accepting the harshness of life while standing. Stephen was bold:

Acts 7:52-60

There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness. — Josh Billings

The ability to forgive is the ability to put revenge away. The burden is gone.

GOD'S VENGEANCE LESSON: The end of the world as we know it will in fact mark the beginning of the world as we dreamed it!

Justice is orchestrated and served through legal channels

Being alive in Christ by grace only requires of us a foundation of humility! Romans 12:6-16: So much to work towards! So much to live for! This leaves no time or place for revenge - only prayerful humility. Revenge might feel good in the "planning stages," but it will blow up on you. Why not work towards something that, yes, will take effort and energy but will give something great to us in return?

Revenge Refocus Lesson: When tempted by foolish and festering thoughts of revenge, our minds should revert back to the firm foundation of God's plan for us and the privileged role we are positioned to play in supporting the brotherhood through humility.

We are little in relation to the entire body of Christ. Each of us is significant in the eyes of God but are essentially very little. We are all small. But when we put all of our small efforts together and God blesses it, then we have something. If we can look at our lives through those eyes of being small but significant in the sight of God, the idea, thought and process of revenge becomes very repulsive. It would be especially repulsive if our thoughts of revenge were against another of the brotherhood.

Here is an idea...go talk to that person. Humbly let them know what is bothering you. You can begin to build something great; revenge takes it away.

**What about times when someone truly "deserves" severe consequences?
Can we now have revenge?**

Here is where the temptation for revenge is truly deepest, for consequences are obviously appropriate and the hurt perpetrated is lasting. It is here that we must always turn to the simplicity of our theme Scripture and never pay back evil for evil. We must let God's justice come to fruition!

Genesis 34:1-7: Bluntly, Shechem raped Dinah, but he loved her and wanted her as his wife. Jacob's sons (Dinah's brothers) were angry, and rightfully so. They entered the "vengeance zone."



What happens next is a premeditated act of revenge. The brothers suggest to Jacob that forgiveness and even an alliance be granted if all the males of the tribe of Hamor be circumcised. This was a sacred symbol for the Jewish people.

Genesis 34:25: (NASB) *Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male.*

Revenge is about punishing those who hurt your family

The thinking, planning and executing stages of revenge may thrill, but the results are darkness!

 **The best revenge, *Psychology of Revenge*, Vanessa Van Edwards**

- *This one comes from the amazing, prolific Frank Sinatra. In his words, "The best revenge is massive success." The next time you feel the dark tendrils of revenge creeping into your soul I want you to take that intensity and put it towards succeeding. Put it towards your goals, put it towards hustling to get what you want. Get the rewards center of your brain pumping by thinking about how sweet it will feel when you meet your goals. This shifts the focus onto you and your mission and makes the other perpetrator irrelevant.*

To translate this for the Christian, seek your spiritual goals. Seek to be more Christlike. This is what we should be running towards every day. Rather than seeking revenge, seek humility in being a small part in the body of Christ.

Excel in your Christian integrity. Excel still more to serve and please the Lord. Focus on the important things, not the pressing things like revenge.

Evil is always devising more corrosive misery through man's restless need to exact revenge out of his hate. — Ralph Steadman

Once God's vengeance accomplishes its specific mission, it becomes obvious that His vengeance is proof of His pure and righteous love for His human creation.

Justice is about lawfully trying and convicting the guilty

Paul continues and weaves a powerful anti-revenge message into his powerful message of privilege: Romans 12:17-21: *Respect what is right - not what is convenient, not how you feel.*

Please see our CQ episode from August 31, 2014, "What Happens When Life Gets Broken?" about a family coming to grips with an assault on their daughter and the power of forgiveness.

What does *coals of fire* mean?

(Source: Works by Kenneth S. Wuest (1893-1962): In Bible times an oriental needed to keep his hearth fire going all the time in order to insure fire for cooking and warmth. If it went out, he had to go to a neighbor for some live coals of fire. These he would carry on his head in a container, oriental fashion, back to his home. The person who would give him some live coals would be meeting his desperate need and showing him an outstanding kindness. If he would heap the container with coals, the man would be sure of getting some home still burning. The one injured would be returning kindness for injury.

We want to *heap coals of fire* on the head of someone who would do us evil - to give goodness to them. That is what Jesus did.

Revenge Refocus Lesson: Even our most hurtful and traumatic life experiences NEVER warrant revenge - what they do warrant is God's justice done in His way and in His time!

Put the matter into the hands of God and His justice rather than our own revenge. His vengeance brings goodness; ours brings destruction. Do what is upbuilding for you and those around you.

*So, how sweet is revenge?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*