

A Righteous Vengeance

By Ronald L. Dart

I was taken aback in the early days after the bombing of the World Trade Center when some fairly prominent people seemed to be arguing against retaliation to countries that harbor terrorists. Their case included the usual suggestion that it is wrong to seek vengeance, that mere revenge is a bad thing and unworthy of us. There have always been anti-war activists, but this time they were pretty conspicuous in a general atmosphere that was calling for action right now. Let's bomb something today, a lot of people were saying. I've never seen a nation so together since World War II. Don't get me wrong. I am glad there are people who are willing to demonstrate for peace. But it is clear that there are some misunderstandings about vengeance, and that deserves some attention. Is it wrong for the United States to seek vengeance for the wanton murder of 3,000 innocent souls at the World Trade Center? Should we as a country turn the other cheek?

Let's clarify some issues and deal with some misunderstandings and see where we can go with this. First, let's be sure we know what we are talking about. Vengeance is defined as: "the infliction of injury, harm, humiliation, or the like in return for an injury or other offense received: revenge." Revenge denotes an act of vengeance. As a noun, it means the act of revenging. To avenge means to take vengeance. These things are all related. No matter if you are talking about vengeance, revenge, avenging something—or even retribution, punishment, and justice—you are really talking about the same thing. All these ideas are very closely related. So where is the problem? Where do people get the idea that vengeance is wrong? Well, I don't know where people who don't read the Bible get that idea, but it is addressed in the Bible. And that's our interest in this article. In the Bible, the idea comes from Paul. There is a short passage in Romans 12 where Paul lays this out, beginning in verse 17: "Repay no evil for evil. Have

regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.

Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21 NKJV).

This is simple enough, isn't it? Anyone can understand what we just read. Vengeance belongs to God. We are forbidden to exact vengeance ourselves. So

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Invest in Eternity . . .

The remarkable thing is, you have a choice everyday regarding the attitude you will embrace for that day and the things you will do. Each day of your life you make deposits in your eternal reward. Yes, we are saved by the grace of God, by the shed blood of Jesus Christ for our sins. But your reward depends on what you do daily, the investment you make in God's work, the widows and fatherless, and the poor. As the song goes, "Count your many blessings and see what God has done" for you. Then start making an investment in your eternal reward.

By David Havir III

People can be exhausting. I know that sounds negative, but I think we all feel that way sometimes. Case in point: over the past few weeks, I have been honked at more than I recall ever being honked at before. The most recent time I was honked at was because I wasn't tailgating closely enough to the car in front of me. Or at least, that's how the guy behind me seemed to feel. My first instinct in these sorts of situations is to slow down; I mean *really* slow down. You can argue that this isn't a smart impulse. In today's society, I am probably in danger of being shot. So maybe that isn't the best strategy.

Do I have a right to get angry in response to the situation? A lot of professing Christians will tell you that you shouldn't get angry. And many counselors would probably echo that sentiment and tell you that it isn't wise to get worked up. But that really isn't my point. Did I sin by getting angry at the guy honking at me?

Let's read from Matthew 5: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away" (Matthew 5:38-42 NKJV).

This seems pretty clear cut. People have asked if there is any significance to the three examples given in verses 39-41. Many commentaries believe that there is a cultural and/or social aspect related to the time and place. In a nutshell, the left hand was used for unclean acts and typically was not engaged in any contact with another person. Due to this, if someone is being hit on the right cheek, it is probably a backhanded slap used by the offending party. This was an insult, meant to shame. As far as the tunic and cloak, those were two primary articles of clothing at the time. It mentions a legal aspect here. And as far as the mile, it was the law of the time that a Roman soldier could require a civilian to assist in carrying items for a Roman mile. Many believe this is referencing that. All of that seems to argue for a very pacifist view on life. The beginning of verse 39 says to not resist an evil person. So must we be pacifists? And along that thinking, I must be wrong to be angry. But is it really that simple?

Let's read from Matthew 22: "Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?'" (Matthew 22:15-18 NKJV).

Some translations use the word evil in place of wickedness. Jesus's response was not exactly a meek one. Hypocrite is a strong word. I can't definitively say that Jesus was angry. But that doesn't sound like a timid response. Following Christ's example, I think of a few choice words to describe the guy honking at me. And whether you want to admit it or not, you probably can too.

But I want to go back to Matthew 5: "Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5 NKJV). Now I'm going in circles. Am I supposed to turn the other cheek? Am I supposed to respond strongly? Am I supposed to be meek? I'm confused.

I want to share a story from when I was a boy that may shed some light on this. My father used to take me and my brother to a library when we were young. He would take us in the library and tell us this is where you are supposed to be quiet. Then he would take us back outside and let us scream at the top of our lungs while on the steps. I'm sure that people thought we were crazy. But that didn't matter to my father. He had a point to make, and a wise one at that. That lesson definitely made an impression on me. My father was applying the principle espoused in Ecclesiastes 3... the time and place principle. I think this Scripture is important to keep in mind when you read Scriptures like Matthew 5 and Matthew 22. They don't necessarily contradict each other. They are illustrating different approaches to different situations.

Let's get back to my original question. Is it okay to be angry? Maybe the answer to this question can be found in Ephesians: "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another. 'Be angry, and do not sin':

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do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:25-27 NKJV).

That is interesting. According to this passage, being angry isn’t necessarily sinning. Otherwise, there wouldn’t be a need for a distinction. This allows for a righteous anger. This goes against what a lot of Christians would have you believe. On a side note, it is funny how quickly Christians love to stand up and tell other people that they are sinning. That whole log and mote thing doesn’t always hit home I guess. But such is human nature.

Let’s look at some examples of people who have gotten angry in the Bible, in an effort to see how to be angry and sin not. And as with everything else, let’s start with Christ: “And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Step forward.’ Then He said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they kept silent. And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other” (Mark 3:1-5 NKJV).

It seems to me that Christ was angry that the Pharisees were playing their religious games at the expense of the people in need. How many of you have experienced people playing religious games at the expense of the people? I know I have. This is one example of being angry and not sinning—since we know Christ did not sin.

Let’s take a look at another example of Christ: “Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables” (John 2:13-15 NKJV).

Jesus did a little more than talk in this example. He threw people out and threw around the furniture. Now, we do have to be careful with this passage. People can use this Scripture as an excuse to be a bully. We talked about that in a previous article. That being said, I don’t

think we should swing the other way and ignore these Scriptures. Motivation is probably key here.

We have read two examples where Christ was angry but did not sin. I want to take a look at an example that didn’t turn out well for Moses when dealing with the Israelites: “Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: ‘If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! Why have you brought up the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink.’ So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying ‘Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.’ So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with this rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them’” (Numbers 20:2-12 NKJV).

Moses was angry. Moses may have even had a justifiable reason to be angry. I mean, the Israelites had been a pain for such a long time. But Moses still disobeyed a direct order of God. He sinned. And there were repercussions for those actions.

So we have examples of Christ getting angry and verbally sparring with people when they are hurting the people. We have examples of Christ even getting a little physical when people were using the Temple to conduct business. We have the example of Moses going too far. Taking those things into account, where is the line? I

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where do the misunderstandings come in? One of the misunderstandings is that the prohibition of private vengeance, which is what we just read, is a New Testament idea for Christians and it was somehow different in Old Testament times. I think this is an important distinction. I dare say that a lot of people think that the New Testament is different from the Old Testament on this issue. That vengeance was permitted in the Old Testament, but vengeance was forbidden in the New and that's what we are reading in Paul's letter. But if they thought that, they would be wrong. Here is a passage from Leviticus 19, and this is in the Old Testament Law: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:17-18 NKJV).

This is surprising because, in a way, it is precisely what Jesus told us to do. If we have a problem with a brother, Jesus said we should go talk to him. He said if your brother sins against you, go talk to him alone that you may be able to gain your brother. And the expression "you should not bear any grudge" in Hebrew means literally you should not cherish anger against your neighbor. And you know what that means. When you get mad at someone, you can sit around and cherish it and feed it; you can hold it to your breast; you can get real close to your anger and keep it fired up. This is what grudges are all about. They are about the nourishing or cherishing of anger rather than letting it go. What is interesting is that both Jesus and Paul are teaching out of this Levitical Law when they tell us: don't avenge yourself; do good to your neighbor; and whenever your brother does something bad against you, you go talk to him. Don't hit him. Go talk to him and gain back your brother. So, we cleared up one misunderstanding. The teaching on vengeance is the same in both Testaments, as anyone should be able to plainly see. We aren't dealing with something new. Christianity isn't different from Old Testament Law... it's all the same.

Here is the second misunderstanding. A lot of people assume, and you can tell from the statements they are making, that vengeance as such is bad. But here is the problem. We just read it in Romans 12 verse 19:

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." Here's my question. How can vengeance be bad if God does it? Earlier in Romans, Paul wrote to them and said: "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?" (Romans 3:5-6 NKJV).

That is a fascinating Scripture because basically Paul says God takes vengeance and if he does so righteously, it is permissible. So, when someone comes up to you and says, "well, I just think that vengeance as such is wrong," you can ask, "Really? If vengeance is wrong, if vengeance is bad, why do you think God does it?" And it is right here in the verse in Romans 3 that we just read. Is God unrighteous who takes vengeance? No. If that were true, God couldn't judge the world. And here is the connection between judgment, justice, and vengeance. Let me nail this down for you. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, Paul writes this: "Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels" (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 NKJV).

Do you realize what he said? He said there are people who are troubling you now in the church and God is going to pay them back. Beginning in verse 8 it says: "In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 NKJV).

I can go a lot further than that but this will have to suffice for now. Vengeance is okay. Vengeance is even good because God says so. So, when your friend tells you, "well, vengeance is bad, or this is just mere vengeance," you will say to your friend, "well, if vengeance is not important, if vengeance is not good, why do you think God does it?" Now your friend is likely to come back and ask, "Well, the Bible says we are to love our neighbor. How can you possibly love your neighbor and punish him or take vengeance on him at the same time?" To hear the answer to this question from the Bible, please request a *FREE* copy of *A Righteous Vengeance*.

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think there is a shade of gray that complicates things. Follow me here.

If someone commits an offense against me and then commits the same offense against you and we both outwardly react the same way, I dare say that it is possible that neither of us has sinned. It is also possible that both of us have sinned. And it is possible that only one of us has sinned.

Well, how can that be? It is the same action, and sin is sin! There are definitely things that are sin for all of us. But there are other things that I think depend on where you are coming from. The reasons for being angry, the thoughts behind the anger—these can make the difference between righteous anger and sin. Christ did not sin by kicking out the people from the Temple. But if I kicked someone out of the local congregation, I could very well be sinning.

We all want things simple. We want to be told exactly what we can and can't do. Or at least that's what we think we want. But that is basically what the people had in the Old Testament. And the people were found lacking.

God has blessed us with the gift of freedom: not freedom to do whatever we want, freedom to make mistakes, freedom to strive to follow God's ways. I think we are supposed to spend our whole lives finding the balance when it comes to being angry and not sinning. Hopefully, this gives us something to think about. To realize that it is not only okay for us to get fired up; but that we are supposed to be fired up. And to realize that there is a line that we can cross that leads to sin. But with the right attitude and perspective, we should work on finding where that line is throughout our lives.

Which King Are You Like?

By Allie Dart

Since Adam and Eve were created, men have sinned and done evil in God's sight. We all sin, but how do you handle it when someone so kindly points out your sin? The Bible gives us two very different ways kings reacted after their sins were pointed out to them and led to two very different outcomes. You need to understand the different ways these kings reacted. Do you immediately give excuses for your sin and justify yourself? Ron Dart often said, "As long as you are justifying yourself, God can't justify you." Which of these reactions are more like the way you react when told you're wrong? Let's examine these two kings of Israel's reactions when they sinned. These can equip you to restore your relationship with God while learning the only way you can be forgiven of your sins.

Let's look at King Saul in 1 Samuel 15. Samuel said to Saul, "Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (v. 3). Can you get your mind around that order? How would you react if God gave you a command to kill babies and children? Would you make excuses and say, "the Ten Commandments prohibit

killing—I can't do that—you've got the wrong man." Would you say that King Saul had reasonable reasons to disobey the command? So what did Saul do? Where did he go wrong?

Read the entire story in 1 Samuel 15. Begin with verse 7: "And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. And every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly" (1 Samuel 15:7-9).

How easy was it for King Saul to reason that surely God wouldn't want the best of the animals destroyed? One excuse could have been a religious one—those animals could be sacrificed to God. King Saul thought he knew best; he knew better than this prophet of God. After all, Saul could have thought, I am king—that makes my judgment superior to a prophet.

Samuel was heartbroken to see this kind of human

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reasoning from the man he anointed to be king. It grieved Samuel so much that he cried out to God all night long (v. 11). So what was the outcome of Saul's reasoning? In good faith, Samuel thought he had an obedient man to serve as king over Israel. In verse 13 Saul said he performed the commandments of the Lord. *That was an outright lie.* Samuel asked of Saul, if you've performed all the commandments you were given, why am I hearing the sheep bleating and the oxen lowing? Saul took no responsibility. He blamed it on the people who spared them to sacrifice to the Lord (v. 15). It was a religious thing, so how could it be wrong?

Apparently, Saul's sins stemmed from self-importance, maybe a know-it-all attitude—pride. Samuel asked him, “. . . When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?” (v. 17). Notice in verse 18, it was the *Lord* who sent Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Saul may have easily reasoned that it was just Samuel who was giving him this command and he could be selective in what he chose to do. God's Spirit was taken from him—an enormous penalty for his disobedience, lying, self-justification, and other actions. This is followed by the well-known Scripture you should memorize: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected him from being king” (v. 23). Why? First, he disobeyed God and justified his actions. Second, Saul was unable to admit his sin. He justified his actions rather than repenting of his sins. Continue reading the story in 1 Samuel 15. Notice it cost Saul his kingship and God's Spirit—what an enormous penalty!

Notice King David's totally different attitude when he sinned. He was also King of Israel. He had the same human nature that Saul had and he sinned mightily as well. But the outcome was different. Why? You need to understand why.

You are familiar with the story of David watching Bathsheba bathe on the roof of her house. David noticed how beautiful Bathsheba was. Lust got the better of him so he sent for her and they had sex. As luck would have it, she got pregnant from that one-time fling. She told David that she was pregnant—an unexpected consequence. So what should they do now to cover up this illicit

relationship while her husband was on the battle front? You've read the story how David became creative and brought her husband home for him to sleep with his wife. But Uriah, her husband, was such an honorable man that he refused to sleep with his wife. He said to King David, “. . . and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing” (2 Samuel 11:11).

Uriah was assigned a place where David knew valiant men would be and was killed in the line of duty. Bathsheba mourned for her husband. After the mourning period was over, King David sent for her to live with him. Yes, there were consequences. In 2 Samuel 12, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet, who vividly explained David's sin using a story of the little ewe lamb. David became very angry with the man Nathan used to illustrate his point. Then Nathan told David, “*Thou art the man*” (v. 7). Please notice 2 Samuel 12:13: “And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, the LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” There's much to learn from David's response and attitude. David didn't justify himself, nor make excuses. But there were consequences. Nathan told him the child wouldn't live. That's a big consequence to pay for his sins.

What's the lesson for you? We're just weak human beings and we all sin too often. When that happens, go to God and confess your sin without any justification or excuses. There will still be consequences, but you will have God's forgiveness. Follow King David's example, not King Saul's. Learn from David's prayer of repentance in Psalm 51: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make

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me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit, Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips;

and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar” (Psalm 51:1-19).

Are you a Saul or a David? God honored David’s repentance. He will honor your repentance when you pray from the heart as David did, without any justification.

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Prepare for the Feast of Tabernacles 2017



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booked at \$926.50 per person. This includes great meals, taxes, and port fees. If you are interested in the cruise, please call us at 1-888-BIBLE-44 or email us at david@borntowin.net. Hurry before time runs out on this truly exciting and edifying opportunity!

Words of Encouragement

Bobby Miley passed away in 1998 after his battle with cystic fibrosis. The following poem was submitted to *Born to Win* by Bobby's brother, Randel. Randel hoped that this poetry would serve to encourage. Thank you Randel for submitting the poem. And thank you Bobby for writing it.

The Ways of My Father

Tenderly, my Father speaks to me,
in whispers from above;
and bids me rest within His care,
surrounded by His love.
Silently, my Father walks with me,
I can feel His presence near;
and He hath promised that His own He'll never forsake,
so 'tis needless to worry or fear.
Peacefully, my Father calms my soul,
though the billows of life rage wild;
and reminds me that He's the Master of the storm...
and I am still His child.
Faithfully, my Father chastens me,
when ere I go astray;
and gently guides me with His staff and rod,
back to the narrow way.
Reassuringly, my father comforts me,
though the nights are dark and long;
and gives me a Joy that becomes my Strength,
turning sorrow into song.
Bountifully, my father provides for me,
from Heaven's infinite supply;
and all the riches in glory are mine through Christ Jesus—
though once a pauper, a prince now am I!
Mercifully, yes, ever-so-mercifully,
my Heavenly Father deals with me;
and empowers me with His Holy Spirit,
to be all that I should be.
Patiently, and even willingly!—
in more ways than I can see;
my Father proves His love to be true,
and kind His thoughts toward me!

-Bobby Miley-

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*That the man of God may be proficient and
equipped for every good work.*