“Vengeance Belongs To the LORD

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Please take your Bible with me to the Gospel of Matthew at chapter five. Inside what is probably the greatest sermon ever preached in history is a word on what *not* to do. We all know the feeling that comes over us when someone does something to us we *don’t* feel we deserve. That feeling goes by a lot of names. One of them is “vengeance.”

Here’s what Jesus said in that greatest of all sermons, “The Sermon on the Mount.” Matthew 5:39*“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*

 Doesn’t it amaze you that the very same attitudes that were found in the first century are the attitudes of the twenty-first century? What is even more astounding is that the LORD is so familiar with every heart in *every* age.

Vengeance may be a temptation to you. If it’s not, be very grateful. But, if you are a Believer in Christ, you know that the Bible provides you with a clear word on which holy attitudes you need to bring to bear on your relationships in order to truly enjoy your walk with the LORD.

Today, from the word of God: "Vengeance Belongs To The LORD." Please open your Bible with me to I Thessalonians chapter five. Look with me at I Thessalonians 5:15 *“See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.”*

The natural man thinks on a natural level. He doesn’t see the whole picture. Whereas a Christian can, if he chooses, to look at the entire picture of life around him. So, folks, it’s natural to “render evil for evil.” But, as a child of God, you can ask what is the holy attitude expected of me in verse 15? “See that none of you Christians render evil for evil.

“Render” is an Old English word. It’s found forty-eight times in your Bible in the N.T.

Do you remember this one? Matthew 22:21 *“****Render*** *therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.”*

 How about these words? Romans 13:6 *“For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. (7)* ***Render*** *therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”*

 Have you seen this in your Bible? I Corinthians 7:3 *“Let the husband* ***render*** *unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband”*?

 And how about this one I Peter 3:8 “*Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:(9) Not* ***rendering*** *evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are there-unto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.”*

 What does it mean to “render”? You can see it’s meaning in the contexts where the Holy Spirit uses it. “To render” means:

1) To pay off, discharge what is due i.e. a debt, wages, taxes, even a thing promised under oath

2) To give back or restore

3) To give back with a negative purpose in mind

or 4) To pay back, be vindictive, or to take vengeance

Ever felt like being vindictive? Ever thought you would like to pay someone *back* for what they’ve done to you? That is clearly the temptation to do *evil*. If your goal is to “do them wrong” for what they’ve done to you, you’re about to render (return) evil for evil.

Now, how should you treat someone who deserves your vengeance? Look again at the words of I Thessalonians 5:15. “See that none render evil for evil **unto any man**; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.”

How often have you heard people say “Well, you don’t know so-and-so? If you knew them, you say something different.” The LORD’s way is this “Don’t return evil for evil unto anyone.”

Proverbs 20:22 says *“Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.”*

You can see the process, can’t you?

1. Someone does evil to you (*you* don’t deserve it)
2. Your desire is to pay back, to be vindictive, to take vengeance, to render evil for evil – the natural thing
3. Instead, you apply the Scriptures to yourself
4. Prov. 20:22 – don’t’ *say* it (you’ll likely do it)
5. Don’t pay them back with evil purposes in mind
6. Instead, wait on the LORD. – Prov. 20:22
7. Instead, ever follow that which is good. I Thes. 5:15

How else can a Christian live? Isn’t your goal in your new life in Christ to let Jesus Christ live His life through you?

Let’s look at this just a bit closer. Look at the context of I Thes. 5:15. (13). And **be at peace among yourselves**. (14) Now we exhort you, brethren, **warn** them that are unruly, **comfort** the feebleminded, **support** the weak, **be patient** toward all men. (15) “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.”

In the context you find a group of things God commands your heart to apply; things that you, the child of God, are to perform toward the people around you.

This fifteenth verse, like the verses preceding, is a word of admonition to do specific things towards people in your life.

The feeling is there. The temptation is there. But the decision of your heart is to wait on the LORD because *He* will deliver you. You decide to not return (recompense) evil for evil. And you choose to “follow that which is good.”

Look with me at I Peter 3:8 *“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:(9) Not* ***rendering*** *evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are there-unto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.”*

Instead of doing the natural thing. Instead of doing what your flesh suggests that you do. Respond with “blessing, knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.” That’s the right response.

And so, here’s what the LORD Jesus said about this matter. Matthew 5:43 *“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. (44) But I say unto you,* ***Love*** *your enemies,* ***bless*** *them that curse you,* ***do good*** *to them that hate you, and* ***pray for*** *them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*

*(45) That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?”*

You see, the natural thing may be to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But the One Who lives in you commands you to love those who despise you and hurt you and offend you and cheat you and persecute you.

Jesus also said this. Matthew 5:23 “*Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; (24) Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”*

The key is this: before your quote unquote spiritual duties, like rejoicing, praying, and being grateful, there is the continual need for you and me in “not taking vengeance” even when you feel entitled to it. Look again at verse 24.

He places your attitudes towards people ahead of your worship towards Him.

Think, for just a moment, about that person in your life that has wronged you; mistreated you, maligned you, or spitefully criticized you. We all have people who’ve done such things to us. And, what are your natural feelings about them? Aren’t they negative? Well, who can help those negative attitudes better than the Son of God living in you?

Zero in on your relationships and see how the LORD wants to have control over your responses and reactions. Then, when your heart is settled and you are trusting the LORD to work even those things for your good, then go on to your spiritual works.

First, then, Paul writes this command in a context of your attitudes towards those the LORD has put into your life.

Second, this command is directed to all Christians. But, it’s to be applied to all people. Look again at what it says. “See that none render evil for evil unto **any man**; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, **and to all men**.”

Notice how careful the Holy Spirit is to convey the importance of this attitude. The phrase “follow” means “to keep on following after the good” no matter who the person is or what they’ve done to you.

How many times have you encountered a situation and blew it off with “well they aren’t Christians anyway” as if the fault is with *them*. Well, folks, even if the fault *is* with them, isn’t there a right attitude for you as a Christian to apply to your own heart?

Here are just some of the many times this phrase is used in Scripture. Look at these words from your Bible. Here is what the LORD calls you and me to do, in His strength, towards everyone. Acts 2:45 *“And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them* ***to all men****, as* ***every man*** *had need.”*

I Corinthians 9:22 *“To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things* ***to all men****, that I might by all means save some.”*

Titus 2:11 *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared* ***to all men****,…”*

James 1:5 *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth* ***to all men*** *liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”*

God acts toward everyone with grace and love. And, since He lives in you, so should you. Now, if you treat the people of God with grace when they’ve offended and hurt you, yet you treat the heathen and the unbelievers with disdain, how will you ever reach them with the true love of God?

Folks, the Bible is filled with the right attitudes God wants us to hold in our hearts. And, by the way, these attitudes are always good for us.

Romans 12:17 says *“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of* ***all men****. (18) If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with* ***all men****.”*

I Corinthians 10:33 says “*Even as I please* ***all men*** *in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”*

Philippians 4:5 says *“Let your moderation (considerate spirit) be known unto* ***all men****. The Lord is at hand.”*

I Thessalonians 3:12 says *“And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward* ***all men****, even as we do toward you:…”*

I Thessalonians 5:14 says *“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward* ***all men****.”*

Titus 3:2 says *“To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto* ***all men****.”*

Now it’s true that there is a clear word showing us how to relate to those inside the body of Christ. But that comes *after* your attitude towards those outside of Christ are in order. For example, Galatians 6:10 says *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us* ***do good unto all men****, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”*

And, the same holds true for I Timothy 4:10 *“For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of* ***all men****, specially of those that believe.”*

The word of God is straightforward. We must see our obediences to the LORD in light of our feelings towards those who haven’t yet repented and received the LORD as their Savior. God loves them. Do you?

The LORD points out seven ways you must act towards *all men*. Negatively, don’t render evil for evil unto any man. Positively,

1. Be all things to all people that by any means you might save some of them – I Cor. 9:22

2. Provide honesty in the sight of all men – Rom. 12:17

3. Like Paul, please all men in all things that they might be saved – I Cor. 10:33

4. Let your forbearance be known by others – Phil. 4:5

5. Be patient towards everyone – I Thes. 5:14

6. Show meekness to all – Titus 3:2

7. Do good to all – Gal. 6:10

Folks, the message of I Thessalonians 5:15 is not a suggestion. It’s a command. It’s a word from the LORD regarding your attitude towards anyone and everyone God places in your life. It’s just one of the many things you *must* do to and for other people now that Jesus Christ has come to live in you.

First, it’s natural to have the feeling and the desire to retaliate.

Second, your duty towards others precedes your spiritual duties.

Third, do this towards all people, not just Christians.

Fourth, Jesus is our best and highest example. Look with me I Peter 2:20 “*For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. (21) For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:*

*(22) Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: (23) Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:…”*

Everyone here has been hurt at some time. Everyone has been reviled. To be reviled means “to be insulted, even angrily.” You might never have thought of Jesus as being insulted by people. But He certainly was. And, the Apostle Peter tells us exactly how to respond and to imitate the LORD. (23) Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:…”

The LORD knew the answer to every insult. Here it is. It’s your answer as well. He committed Himself to His Father.

Folks, the natural thing to do is to exercise vengeance. The spiritual thing to do is to commit yourself to the LORD and trust that He is the best Judge. He’s your judge. And He will certainly judge righteous judgment.

If you are here today and you are a Believer in Jesus Christ, and you’ve been insulted. You know the sting of that insult, remember that Jesus Christ lives in you. And He both sees it and He fully knows it. He knows exactly how you feel. And, He is the True Judge. He will judge each of us accurately and fairly. You are called to commit yourself to Him Who judges righteously.

Vengeance is not the way of Christ. Rather, committing yourself to your Heavenly Father to work this thing out is the way of Christ. Make your decision today.

It’s your choice today: the natural response or the spiritual one, which will it be?

You see, Jesus Christ died on Calvary so that you could be completely forgiven of all your sins. Then, as you experience and enjoy forgiveness, you can apply His ways to *your* life. He didn’t exercise vengeance. Neither should you.

Christian, here’s the Prayer of Full Surrender. Pray it today in light of someone who’s hurt you. “LORD, I surrender everything that I am, and have, and ever will be. I take my hands off of my life and release every relationship to You--every habit, every goal, my health, my wealth, and everything that means anything. I surrender it all to You. And by faith I take my place at the

Cross, believing that when the Lord Jesus was crucified, according to Your Word, I was crucified with Him. And from this moment on I am trusting You to live Your life in me and thru me that You might receive all the glory. I thank You now by faith for accepting me in the Lord Jesus”

Now maybe today you realize for the first time what a wonderful Savior the LORD Jesus truly is. If you do, see yourself as you truly are before Him – a sinner deserving of His judgment. Then, see His love as the answer for your sins. He paid the penalty you deserve for sins He never committed.

Here’s the prayer for salvation. If you’d like, you can pray this prayer and receive Christ as your personal LORD and Savior. “LORD, I admit I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus died in my place on the cross. I repent of my sins. I want to be completely forgiven today. I am trusting you right now to save me. Thank you. Amen.

Hymn of invitation: # 373 “To Him Who Sits On The Throne”