



Answers for a Changing Culture

07 What Does the Bible Say About Retaliation?

Christians are not called to get even when they are wronged. We entrust justice to God, respond to evil with good, and use legitimate authority for protection and justice without pursuing personal revenge.

EMBARK

*Someone insults you, so you insult them back. Someone embarrasses you, so you look for a chance to embarrass them. Someone hits you, so you hit them back. Someone treats you unfairly, and suddenly all you can think about is making sure they get what they deserve. Retaliation feels natural because it promises to restore the balance: **You hurt me, so I will make you hurt too.***

*Sometimes we even dress retaliation up as justice. "I'm just standing up for myself." "They need to learn a lesson." "They started it." "I'm only giving them what they gave me." But Scripture makes an important distinction between **seeking justice** and **getting even**. Justice asks, What is right, and what should legitimate authority do about this wrong? Retaliation asks, How can I make the person who hurt me hurt too? Before asking, **"When am I allowed to fight back?"** we need to ask, **"What does God want my heart to do when someone wrongs me?"***



1. Why does getting even feel so satisfying when someone has hurt or embarrassed us?
2. What is the difference between wanting a wrong to be corrected and wanting the person who wronged us to suffer?

EXAMINE

READ Matthew 5:38–42

3. What Old Testament principle does Jesus quote in verse 38?
4. Does "an eye for an eye" permit revenge, or limit punishment to fit the offense?
5. What do the slap, lawsuit, and forced mile have in common, and what right is Jesus asking His disciples to surrender?
6. Does "turn the other cheek" ignore evil, or reject personal retaliation?

READ Matthew 5:43–48

7. How does Jesus tell His followers to respond to enemies and persecutors?
8. How should God's kindness toward the undeserving shape how we pray for our enemies?
9. Why is loving only people who treat us well insufficient to reflect the character of our Father?

READ Romans 12:17–21

10. What does Paul explicitly forbid in verses 17 and 19?
11. What does it mean to "leave room for God's wrath"?
12. According to verses 20–21, what should replace retaliation?
13. How does trusting God to judge rightly help us overcome evil with good rather than retaliate?

READ Romans 13:1–4

14. Who is given authority to punish wrongdoing in this passage?
15. How does this help us distinguish personal vengeance from legitimate justice?
16. Why can Christians reject revenge while still seeking protection and involving proper authorities?

READ 1 Peter 2:19–23

17. How did Jesus respond to mistreatment, and to whom did He entrust Himself?
18. How does Jesus' example show that refusing retaliation is an act of faith rather than weakness?

EXPOSE

We misunderstand “an eye for an eye”

The Old Testament principle was not permission for personal revenge but a limit on punishment: **justice must be proportionate to the offense**. Jesus goes further. His followers are not to insist on personally settling the score.

The issue is not whether wrong matters, but **who gets to repay it**.

We confuse justice with retaliation

Justice seeks what is right. Retaliation seeks the satisfaction of making someone hurt because they hurt me.

Refusing revenge does not mean ignoring wrongdoing, remaining in danger, or eliminating consequences. Christians may seek protection, report wrongdoing, and involve legitimate authorities. Romans 12 forbids **personal vengeance**; Romans 13 gives authorities responsibility to address wrongdoing. We can seek justice without seeking revenge.

ENGAGE

Step 1: Identify what you actually want.

When I think about this person, do I want the wrong corrected—or do I mainly want the satisfaction of seeing them hurt?

Step 2: Refuse to repay evil with evil.

Am I about to say or do something primarily because “they did it to me first”? Would this action still be right if revenge were removed from my motive?

Step 3: Decide whether protection or authority is needed.

Is someone in danger? Is this wrongdoing serious enough that a parent, teacher, church leader, employer, police officer, court, or other legitimate authority should become involved?

Refusing retaliation does not require refusing help.

Step 4: Entrust judgment to God.

Can I leave the final settling of accounts with the One who knows everything, judges impartially, and has promised that evil will not ultimately escape His judgment?

MEMORIZE

Romans 12:21, CSB “Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.”

Remember... *Christians are not called to ignore evil or eliminate appropriate consequences. Scripture distinguishes personal vengeance from legitimate justice. We may protect ourselves and others, establish boundaries, report wrongdoing, and involve proper authorities without seeking revenge. When we are personally wronged, however, we refuse to repay evil with evil. We entrust final judgment to God, seek the good even of our enemies, and overcome evil with good.*

We confuse nonretaliation with passivity

“Turn the other cheek” does not mean allowing evil to continue unchecked. Jesus forbids the instinct that says, **“You hurt me, so I get to hurt you.”** Sometimes the right response is to leave, intervene, protect someone, or seek help from parents, teachers, church leaders, employers, or civil authorities. Ask: **Am I trying to stop what is wrong—or trying to get even?**

We let evil determine our response

Retaliation allows another person's sin to shape ours: *You insult me, so I insult you. You hurt me, so I hurt you.* Paul says instead, **“Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.”** God says, **“Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay.”** We can tell the truth, pursue justice, establish boundaries, and protect others while leaving final judgment with Him. And Jesus presses deeper than outward restraint. A person can refuse to hit back while still burning with hatred. The goal is not merely **“Don't get even.”** It is: **Entrust justice to God and seek good even for the person who wronged you.**

Step 5: Respond with deliberate good.

Instead of asking, “How can I make them pay?” ask, “What good can I do without pretending the wrong was acceptable?”

- Can I speak calmly?
- Can I refuse the insult?
- Can I pray for repentance?
- Can I show undeserved kindness?
- Can I pursue justice without hatred?

Step 6: Pray for your enemy.

Can I sincerely ask God to restrain this person's evil, bring them to repentance, protect those they might harm, and transform them by His grace?

Step 7: Examine the heart beneath the response.

Am I simply controlling my outward behavior, or is Christ changing what I actually want? *Do I want justice—or revenge? Do I want repentance—or suffering? Do I want to overcome evil—or return it?*