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"Say not thou. I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD. and he shall save thee" (Proverbs 20:22).

The Wisdom of Waiting

Lesson Subject: Vengeance belongs to God.

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"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

There is a natural tendency in people to strike back, to "get even" with one who does a wrong. That is the tendency of the "natural man," man as he is by nature apart from redeeming grace.

It is a mistake for a human being to take affairs in his own hand. His knowledge is imperfect; therefore, he judges by appearance rather than by full truth. He can never execute perfect justice. For one to take matters into his own hands is to compound a wrong.

All judgment and all effort to even the score should be left in the hands of God. The Christian learns that he must wait for God to act. But he must remember that God does not settle all accounts at the end of every month. To wait on the Lord is wise. Therefore, this study is entitled, "The Wisdom of Waiting." It seeks to set out a basic truth: "Vengeance belongs to God."

I. WAIT WITHOUT RETALIATION (Proverbs 20:22)

"Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee" (Proverbs 20:22).

A. Make no personal plans to get even. Never say, *"I will recompense evil."* *"Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will*

render to the man according to his work" (Proverbs 24:29). God forbids such a spirit.

God instructs us to have the opposite of retaliation. "*Recompense to no man evil for evil"* (Romans 12:17). "*Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing"* (I Peter 3:9). Never giving "*evil for evil"* but following "*that which is good"* is the Christian way (I Thessalonians 5:15). Divine love, Christian love, suffers long and is marked by kindness (I Corinthians 13:4).

B. Wait for God to work on your behalf. "*Wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.*" It is not easy to wait. We have impatient spirits which want to see immediate satisfaction. But the Bible teaches us just the opposite. "*Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD"* (Psalm 27:14). Saints of all generations have learned by experience that God is faithful. He will move in behalf of His people.

C. Wait and God will vindicate you. "*He shall save thee.*" Right will triumph. Justice will be done. Vengeance will be executed upon the right person, at the right time, in the right way, and to the right degree. God will bring forth His people and make them shine as His own. Remember how He vindicated Daniel, Mordecai, the three Hebrews in the furnace of fire, the prophet Jeremiah, and many others. You can trust Him to show you righteousness.

Wait for God to act. Wait without retaliation against wrong, whether real or imagined.

II. WAIT WITHOUT ILL WILL (Proverbs 24:17, 18)

A. Ill will rejoices at another's misfortune. God commands, "*Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth"* (Proverbs 24:17). God severely condemned Edom because she rejoiced at the misfortune which befell Judah and refused to help in her distress (Obadiah 12). Job testified of his innocence in not having rejoiced at the destruction of one who hated him (Job 31:28, 29). God warns, "*He that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished"* (Proverbs 17:5). On the contrary, true love "*rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth"* (I Corinthians 13:6).

It is the Christian spirit to wish the best for everyone, and a selfish spirit to wish evil to one whom we do not like.

B. Ill will is a sin. Proverbs 24:18 teaches the surprising truth that joy over another's misfortune may be worse than the offense created by an enemy. It is an indication of how God requires a sympathizing and helpful spirit in His children. No wonder God commanded that all anger, wrath, bitterness, and ill will be put away from the spirit of the Christian (Ephesians 4:31). God's word is, *"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge. . . but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD"* (Leviticus 19:18). That means that a spirit of ill will is sin.

Jesus manifested the right spirit when the Samaritans refused to welcome Him into their town because He was on His way to Jerusalem. The disciples wanted to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them. Jesus rebuked them by saying, *"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them"* (Luke 9:51-56).

Wait on God to act when you are wronged. And while you wait, keep the loving spirit of Jesus.

III. WAIT WITHOUT ENVY (Proverbs 24:19).

"Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked" (Proverbs 24:19).

A. Envy is forbidden by divine command. Envy is a feeling of discontent and ill will because another has some advantage, possession, or something desirable which one wants. It is related to covetousness, greed, and selfishness. God forbids it. Psalm 37:1 is almost the same as Proverbs 24:19. Saying the same thing twice shows how serious it is with God. The Christian walk is *"honestly, as in the day"* and has no place for *"strife and envying."* If Jesus Christ is *"put on,"* there will be no opportunity for the flesh nature to put forth its demands and for its lusts to be fulfilled (Romans 13: 13, 14). *"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another"* (Galatians 5:26).

B. Envy is harmful to your spirit. *"A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones"* (Proverbs 14:30). It causes weakness within the human spirit. It destroys all that is wholesome and enjoyable in life and fills each day with bitterness and emotional pain.

Bitter envying and strife in the heart shows that one is living by a wisdom that is *"earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work"* (James 3:15, 16). That is not what you want in your life. The only remedy for it is the forgiving grace of God in

Jesus Christ.

C. Envy shows lack of reverence toward God. *"Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long"* (Proverbs 23:17). The text sets out two life-styles. One is a life of envy of sinners. The other is the life of fear of the Lord. The two can never be combined. Those who reverence God do not envy sinners; those who envy sinners do not reverence God. Look into your own attitudes and see which life-style you are following.

D. Envy leads to other sins. The jealous envy of Cain toward his brother Abel led to the first murder in human history (Genesis 4:3-8). The jealous envy of ten sons of Jacob toward Joseph led to their selling their brother into slavery in a foreign country (Genesis 37:3-36). The jealousy of Haman for Mordecai resulted in plans for murder and the eventual execution of the would-be killer (Esther 5:9-13). The jealous envy of the Jewish rulers for the popularity of Jesus caused them to pervert justice in seeking the execution of an innocent man (Matthew 27:18). The jealous envy of the Jewish leaders in Antioch in Pisidia, because Paul became such a popular preacher there, resulted in their speaking blasphemy (Acts 13:44-48). Back of those sins of murder, betrayal, perversion of justice, and blasphemy was the sin of envy. Beware! Envy leads to other sins.

E. Envy often brings suffering upon the envious. The men who plotted against Daniel because of their envy against him were themselves thrown to the lions and were devoured (Daniel 6:1-24). History is replete with such occasions. The evil that people intend to do to others often returns upon their own heads with multiplied intensity.

IV. WAIT WITH MERCY (Proverbs 25:21, 22)

A. Mercy will show love to the unlovely. *"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink"* (Proverbs 25:21). Such a spirit will do two things. (1) It will overcome evil with good, as in Romans 12:20, 21. (2) It will show that you are a child of God, as in Matthew 5:43-47. That is far better than taking vengeance in your own hands and trying to get even.

B. Mercy will let God work through conscience. *"For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head"* (Proverbs 25:22). Good must not be done with the desire to make another suffer. It is done in the spirit of loving concern. But the person who has done wrong will be plagued by thoughts of his evil doing as if coals of fire were upon his head. The free gift of love

should be as large as the offense (Romans 5:15). Do right and leave the results to God.

C. Mercy will wait for God to bless in due time. *"The LORD shall reward thee"* (Proverbs 25:22). God has promised, *"He that watereth shall be watered also himself"* (Proverbs 11:25). You should give *"good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. . . . For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again"* (Luke 6:38). The reward for right may not come immediately, but *"thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just"* (Luke 14: 14).

V. WAIT FOR JUSTICE (Proverbs 24:20: 28:17, 18)

A. Justice guarantees that evil will be judged. *"There shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out"* (Proverbs 24:20). *"He that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once"* (Proverbs 28:18).

The day will come when God will judge people's secret thoughts and motives by Jesus Christ (Romans 2:16). The unjust are reserved unto the day of judgment to be punished in a day of fire and perdition of the ungodly (II Peter 2:9; 3:7). He will come with thousands of His saints to execute judgment upon all the ungodly (Jude 14, 15). Evil may triumph today, but judgment is coming.

B. Right will triumph. The judge of all the earth will do right (Genesis 18:25). *"Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved"* while the wicked are destroyed (Proverbs 28:18).

Let the saved say with confidence, *"The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom"* (II Timothy 4:18). No one has that prospect except the redeemed in Jesus Christ. Why should they envy anyone? Why should they take any act of vengeance? They will sit with their Lord in His throne, even as He sits in His Father's throne (Revelation 3:21). That is victory, real victory!

Look back over the major points of this lesson outline. When you are wronged, wait on the Lord. Wait without retaliation, without ill will, without envy, with mercy, and for the justice of God to be shown. That is the Christian spirit.

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

QUESTIONS

1. What is vengeance?
2. What does Proverbs 20:22 teach about it?
3. How does I Peter 3:9 show the Christian spirit?
4. What spirit is forbidden in Proverbs 24:17?
5. What spirit should you show according to Leviticus 19:18?
6. What does Luke 9:51-56 teach about vengeance?
7. What does envy do according to Proverbs 14:30?
8. Why is envy against reverence for God (Proverbs 23:17)?
9. How can you show mercy to your opponents?
10. How can you put this lesson into practice this week?