

# Do Not Avenge Yourselves, but Give Place to Wrath

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of leaving vengeance to God and not taking it into our own hands, as it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'.*

**Duration:** 43:48

**Scripture:** Romans 12:17-21, Romans 13:4, Romans 13:10

**Topics:** "Gods Justice", "Christian Forgiveness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a powerful story of a family tragedy where a father and two brothers were killed, leaving behind a 13-year-old daughter and their mother. The speaker emphasizes the importance of loving others and being transformed by the love and mercy of Christ. He prays for a heart inclined towards mercy and forgiveness, rather than seeking revenge. The sermon also highlights the concept of God's vengeance and justice, quoting the verse 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay' from Deuteronomy 32:35. The speaker urges the congregation to have a deep-rooted faith in God and to spread His name and message of mercy and justice.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). Romans chapter 12, verses 17 through 21. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Let's pray together. Father, what a light we would be, and how salty we would be.

We would be like a city set on a hill, a light on a lampstand, tasty and preserving if we lived like that. If we didn't return evil for evil, if we didn't take vengeance into our own hands, if we gave glasses of water to our enemies and food to our adversaries, if we overcame evil with good, what a light we would be. How you

would shine in this world if your people loved like that.

Oh God, I pray that by the Holy Spirit and through the blood of Jesus Christ and in the agent and power of your word, you would transform our minds and our hearts so that we incline to mercy and not returning evil for evil. Oh, that we might be so broken by our own sin and so ravished with the unspeakable love of Christ that we didn't deserve that it would be morally impossible for us to take offense quickly when we are wronged. And Lord, grant us to grasp the meaning that vengeance is yours and you will repay.

So come and teach us now these things and make them real in my heart, my family, my neighborhood, this church, these networks of people. Oh God, grant, I pray, that we would become like Romans 12, 17 to 21. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

We have grown accustomed in the modern western world to assume that we all have a certain set of inalienable rights, life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. And we assume in addition to having them that they will be, should be, ought to be protected by law and that means if necessary by force. And when those rights are contradicted or we don't get them, there rises in us a rage that is sometimes unspeakably great.

This should not be happening. I do not deserve this. This will not happen to me.

I will get this fixed. There is such an amazingly widespread assumption after centuries of liberty and law in this land that it is a simple given. I have rights.

You can't treat me certain ways. And if you do, I will take you to court and make this right. That's just the assumption in American and the western world.

Such rights do exist, I believe, built into human nature with relation to other human beings. And I think they exist in the world in experience because of centuries of influence from a Christian worldview that has permeated western culture. And this is the fading reason why so much freedom still endures in the world.

But here's what we need to make clear. Such rights were not assumed in the first century. Christianity was born in a world of totalitarianism, absolute dictatorship and totalitarianism.

And for the first 300 years of Christianity, this faith of ours had no legal legitimacy or protection. And everybody knew, therefore, for 300 years that to sign on to the declaration Jesus Curios, Jesus is Lord, could be fatal. Anytime a Caesar decided, uh-uh, Kaiser Curios, Jesus is not Lord, Caesar is Lord.

Anytime, and it happened, it cropped out over and over again. That was reality. It was normal.

It was not surprising. They didn't get bent out of shape like, we've got rights in the Roman Empire. They didn't.

So Peter put it like this in 1 Peter 4, 12. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you. It isn't strange.

What's strange is about 300 years without it. That's strange. In view of the way Jesus talks about his disciples being maligned and persecuted in many places today, to be an open Christian is to be persecuted.

Let me give you some news reports. I want you to hear Romans 12 in a first century context. I want you to feel what these words would mean in Rome, India, February 18.

New information has emerged regarding last year's kidnapping of Manulaban Dinana, the wife of an Indian pastor. Dinana married pastor Dharmesh Ninama was kidnapped May 4, 2004 by a group of Hindu fundamentalists. Iran, February 17.

Yesterday, a Tehran military court sentenced Iranian Christian pastor Hamid Pormand to jail for three years, ordering his immediate transfer to a group prison cell in Tehran's notorious Evin prison. Eritrea, February 16. Another, we're talking days ago, not 1919.

Another 31 Eritrean Christians have been jailed over the past 10 days, making a total of 187 arrests for, quote, illegal Christian activities since the beginning of the year. Fourteen members of the Kali Hiwot Church in Adi Tekblezon were apprehended February 4 during a Bible study at the home of their pastor. Indonesia, January 11.

More than 30 churches in West Java, Indonesia, are still searching for approved worship facilities after objections from Muslim neighbors forced them to close last year. Nigeria, February 3. Muslim militants pronounced a death sentence on five Christian students expelled from public school in November for conducting an evangelistic outreach. The families of two of the students, Miss Hanatu Haruna Alkali and Abraham Adamu Misal, were attacked on January 26 when militants went to their family homes intending to kill them.

Colombia, January 19. Guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC, remain firm in their refusal to hand over the body of a beloved Roman Catholic priest they abducted and shot and buried last month. Oh, Bethlehem, how we should pray for our brothers and sisters.

We have closer links, closer heart personal links with those people than the pagans on either side of us in our neighborhoods. Let's pray that God would give them the grace to obey Romans 12, 17. Repay no one evil for evil.

Let's pray that they have the grace to obey Romans 12, 19 to 20. We'll get to you in a moment. But right now, I'm just trying to help you feel what it would be like to read this chapter there.

There, 21st century, first century reality. Let's pray that, beloved, never avenge yourselves. Leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Oh, how we should pray for them. We should pray that they would have transforming grace, humble faith, Christlike love to be that radical for Christ's sake. You know, God has been really good in the Bible and in history, both old and recent, to give us portraits of Romans 12 to admire and to be inspired by.

You remember one of them, probably, Graham Staines and his wife. Graham Staines, in January of 1999, was with his boys, Philip, 10 years old, and Timothy, six years old, in Manoharpur, Orissa, India, doing an outreach, sleeping in the back of their little vehicle, having done evangelism, when they were surrounded by a mob of radical Hindus who set their car on fire and burned all three of them alive to death. And they were found with their charred bodies holding on to each other in the back of this vehicle.

Graham Staines had been in India caring for lepers for 34 years, just loving the people in the name of Jesus. He was the director of the leprosy mission of Baripada, Orissa. What is so remarkable about this event is that the response of his wife, Gladys, was on the front page of almost every newspaper in India within a week.

When she was interviewed, she said, I have only one message for the people of India. I am not bitter, neither am I angry, but I have one great desire that each citizen of this country should establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who gave his life for their sins. Let us burn hatred and spread the flame of Christ's love.

It had an amazing effect on many in India. Everybody thought that here she is now in her mid-fifties, that she and her daughter would go back to Australia where they were from. And she said in response to that question, My husband and our children have sacrificed their lives for this nation.

India is my home. I hope to be here and continue to serve the needy. But the most remarkable thing of all, and I want every... Kids, you listen real carefully, and teenagers, listen real carefully to the next one minute.

She had a daughter. So two brothers were killed, 10 years old, six year old, and the daddy, they're dead. All they got is mommy left and the girl.

She's 13. She's 13. And she was asked how she felt about her father's murder.

And here's what she said. Quote, I praise the Lord that he found my father worthy to die for him. Now, I long to so preach, so pray, so lead that these young people, you young people grow up to be like that.

To have roots sent down so deep into God and into Christ and into love and into grace and feel so undeserving ourselves with no rights before God at all that we would have the liberty when our most precious husband and father is burned alive to say within a week, I praise the Lord that he found my father worthy to die for him. Oh, that God would grant us a passion to spread His name, His great sovereign mercy and justice everywhere. And to pray for those who suffer, for mercy and justice, mercy and justice, how should they mingle in our lives? That's the challenge of Romans 12 and 13.

Notice both of them. As I read again, verse 19 following, look for justice and look for mercy. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine.

I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. And if he's thirsty, give him something to drink.

For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do you see mercy and do you see justice here? You are mistreated. Do not return evil for evil.

You are wronged. Do not take justice into your own hands. No.

Verse 19 says, leave it to the wrath of God. Give place to the wrath of God. There is vengeance.

There is justice. All things will be set right. Either your adversary will pay his debt in hell, and you cannot increase, therefore, his suffering with yours.

Or your adversary will have his debt paid on the cross of Christ because he repents and believes in Jesus, and you wouldn't want to try to increase that suffering by your own. Therefore, justice will always be done. In God's universe, forgiveness never means that one single sin goes unpunished.

Don't ever have the conception in this universe that forgiveness means a sin goes unpunished. No sin goes unpunished. Period.

No exceptions. Every sin that has ever been done will receive its due recompense, either in hell for those who have spurned their substitute or in the substitute, Jesus Christ. Those are the two options for how your sin will be punished.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is that the Son of God has come into the world to make a way for punishment to happen, but not to you. What an opportunity. Everybody deserves hell and will go there forever bearing the burden of their just vengeance.

Or you can fly to the cross where God poured out all the wrath on Jesus owing to those who come. If you come, you may have it. And if you stiff arm the Lord Jesus and go another way, thinking you're not so bad or there's no hell, you will bear your sin.

Justice will be done in this universe. Oh, what an amazing thing this text teaches. What about all those people who have wronged you, killed your father, your brother, sins? Not found out.

Nobody seems to know. Nobody seems to care. And they have rejected the substitute, Jesus Christ.

What becomes of them? I'm going to spend a whole message. I'm not sure whether next week or the week after on wrath, because this statement, leave it to the wrath of God. Vengeance is mine.

I will repay. It's so powerful, so frightening, so staggering, so amazing. We don't talk too much in this church or in any church I know of about the wrath of God.

We do not talk too much about it. And it is a reality you do not want to meet. And to help you not meet it, I'll come back to that sentence.

But let me give you just a glimpse here. It says vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

Justice will be done. Punishment will be meted out. Wrongs will be addressed.

Vengeance will come. And then he quotes Deuteronomy 32, 35. Vengeance is mine.

Mine. There is one being in the universe to whom the right of all punishment belongs. One.

You're not it. One being, one and only, has the final, ultimate, decisive right to punish. And anybody to whom he appoints that right.

Look at chapter 13, verse 4. This is coming several weeks out. He is God's servant. The military, the government, the police force.

He is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid. For he does not bear the sword in vain.

For he is the servant of God and avenger. There's the word again. Vengeance is mine and my servant if I give it to him.

And he doesn't give it to you. He gives it to the police and the courts. That's a sermon that's down the line away.

But I wanted to mention it because I knew, I know that you're sitting there thinking, he's saying only God has the right to do vengeance. Does he believe in justice on earth? And I know you're there. And so am I. And so is the apostle Paul.

That's coming in its due place. But for now, I'm going to say vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. Mine alone.

That's so crucial because it gives us a cultural, global way of understanding subordinate powers to which we should submit. But if I keep talking about this, I'm going to give that sermon that's coming later. Get the profound meaning of vengeance is mine and belongs only to me, says the Lord.

Here's the most profound thing. It means that built into the structure of reality, this world, this universe, God, man, everything that exists built into it, woven into the fabric of reality is an absolute divine commitment to justice that will always be done. No exceptions.

If that were not the case, the cross would not have been needed and hell would not be needed. And the cross and hell are massive biblical realities. You wouldn't kill your own son if it weren't necessary.

Why is it necessary? Vengeance is mine. I'm a God of justice woven into the universe is the fabric that no trampling on my glory, no dishonoring of the infinite worth of my name will ever go unpunished. Oh, this is big.

Jesus Christ, the Son, God, the Father, the Holy Spirit, the Trinitarian reality from all existence have been infinitely just by their very nature. Listen to Nahum chapter one. The Lord is a jealous God and avenging God.

The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. That's who he is.

Oh, how meaty mouth we have become in the 21st century with the God is love banner. Yes, that's in the Bible. And it is absolutely true.

And guess what? That is not all he is. The Lord is a jealous and avenging God. Nahum chapter one, verse two, or Deuteronomy 32, 43.

He avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. Or Isaiah 59, 17. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, helmet salvation on his head.

He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. He wears vengeance in his battle. So his very nature is an unswerving commitment to uphold the worth of his glory so that every time we minimize that glory by neglecting it or poopooing it or ignoring it or blaspheming it or disobeying it, anytime we bring reproach upon the infinite glory of God, his justice kicks in powerfully to say, that will be punished.

That will be punished, which means every day of our lives, we are doing things worthy of being punished. Every moment of our lives, we are doing things worthy to be punished because we are not loving the Lord our God with all of our heart and all of our soul and all of our strength and all of our mind. We are coming

to 50 percent, 60 percent, 30 percent every day and the other percent is a dishonor to the infinitely valuable glory of God and he cannot truck with such dishonoring.

His justice says, that will be punished. Bethlehem, give thanks for Jesus. Give thanks for Jesus.

Love Jesus. You have no hope to stand before this God without Jesus. It's coming.

Revelation 6:10, Graham Staines, Philip and Timothy join the martyrs under the altar and here's what they say. Oh, sovereign Lord, holy and true. How long before you will avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? That's what the martyrs under the altar in heaven today say to God.

Parentis, I am also going to preach a sermon on the imprecatory Psalms. The Psalms, like the one we read this morning, raise me up that I may repay my enemies. What's that? Perfected saints saying, how long, oh Lord, till the vengeance fall on earth? What's that? Is that what a perfected person can say? And I might suggest it's what only a perfected person should say.

But we'll be back to that at some week out there. I haven't got this arranged in my head yet. It just all has to be dealt with.

Revelation 19 to here it comes. His judgments are true and just for he has judged the great prostitute. That's Babylon.

That's representative of all great centers of godless power. Who corrupted the earth with her immorality and he has avenged on her. The blood of his servants.

Revelation 19 to you do not want to meet Jesus when he comes. The second time on his white horse with the sword coming out of his mouth wielding. A hewing and harvesting the weeds and casting them into the fire.

You do not want to be among those weeds. You want to be in the barn watching. So it's coming.

And now my question is how does this work for you practically tonight today to keep you from taking vengeance on those who've wronged you? How does it work? Let's focus on the word for in the middle of verse 19. Beloved never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God. For this is the the ground the basis.

This is the way you're able to do it for it is written. Vengeance is mine. I will repay.

Now here's what that implies. That little word for implies that one of the motivations. In our hearts.

For why. We can't return good for evil. One of the motivations for why it's so hard not to strike back not to plan vengeance.

One of the reasons it's so hard is because deep down in our souls. There's this warranted justified desire that justice be done. And it doesn't look like it's going to be done if I just say okay.

I won't count it anymore. I won't think about it anymore. I won't see with it anymore.

I won't hold a grudge anymore. We we we feel like if I do that. Nobody knows except me how bad that was.

That's unbelievably talking. God knows how does it work is this is this saying. Oh, I get it.

If you want to get your enemy. The God get it. Kind of rub your hands like this gleefully hoping that as you give the cup of water got striking with lightning.

I don't think so because. Listen to Proverbs 24 17. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls.

Let not your heart be glad when he stumbles lest the Lord see it and be displeased and turn away his anger from him. No, the way it works is this. All of you in this room all of you have been wronged in your life.

Nobody has not been wronged and many of you. Let's reduce it down a little bit. Now, many of you have been seriously wronged by people who have never apologized.

Nor done anything sufficient to make it right and one of the deep hindrances to your letting hurt and bitterness go. Is the conviction that if you let it go justice isn't going to be done and justice ought to be done the fabric of the universe is going to unravel if I just treat this person like I treat everybody else or even better than I treat everybody else. He's got everybody deceived.

He's got everybody deceived thinks he's a good guy. He's a jerk and nobody knows about it and he's getting away with it. He's getting away with it.

It's one of the hindrances to forgiveness. We just can't let it go. That's not the only problem we have in forgiving.

It's just one. I'm dealing with one tonight. We can't do that.

We can't let this go this wrong that we've been done. We hold on to the anger. We play the story in our mind over and over again.

It never should have happened. It never should have happened. It was so wrong.

It was so wrong and he's just happy as can be and I'm in misery. I'm thinking like a divorce. He's got that young chick.

The kids like going there for Christmas. I've got debts galore. This text is for you.

All you who are carrying a seemingly legitimate grudge. You were wronged. Massively wronged.

Justice ought to mean the death of the other person. It ought to mean that. You feel that to let it go, to lay it down, would mean there's no justice or he's going to get away with it or no vengeance is in the world and you're wrong.

This text is in the Bible for you so that tonight, today, when you walk out of here, you can lay it down and know God's going to pick it up. If you lay down your rage, your anger, you're playing it over and over again in your head. If you lay that down, it doesn't get lost.

God picks it up. Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

Let me take care of it. That's huge. Oh, how I want you, Bethlehem, to enjoy this liberty, because you know what? In the liberty of a laid down grudge.

Love can happen. You've been wondering, what can I love? What can I love? What can I love like I ought to love? There seems to be a blockage to my love. And one of the answers is you just keep holding on to that wrong.

You might even be making God the whipping boy. Or a husband or a son or a business partner. Or an old boyfriend just picked you up and dropped you like a stone, got you pregnant.

Just there's 100 pains in this room of injustice that was done to you. And then you can lay it down because God's going to take it up. And as you lay it down, you can walk out of here with a huge burden lifted.

And in that freedom, love can happen. It can happen. Close with a testimony.

My testimony. In 1974, as many of you know, my mother was killed in Israel. And as I've pieced the story together from those who were there, she and my dad were in a bus sitting in the first seat behind the driver.

And a VW minivan full of drunken Israeli soldiers with lumber on top, loosely tied, swerved out of their lane and hit the bus in the front corner. And the lumber came through like missiles. And 10 days later, when she was flown back to Atlanta from Tel Aviv, and I read the death certificate, it said, lacerated medulla oblongata.

And I said, thank you, at least that it was quick. I nursed my dad back to health for a month, taping with scotch tape, the lacerations on his back, pouring in hydrogen peroxide, pushing the wounds together, taping them with scotch tape so they heal from the inside out. If you knew, as some of you do, the nature of my growing up years with my dad away and my mom, everything, you would know how big that loss was at age 28.

But as a tribute to the mighty mercy of God, I can bear witness that I don't hate those soldiers. I feel no hatred for them. I don't wish them evil.

It occurred to me as I was thinking recently, probably most of them are about my age now. One was killed, I heard. Most of them are about my age, a little younger, maybe five years younger.

I was trying to compute. I was 28. They're soldiers, so they're probably in their mid-20s.

So they're now in their 50s somewhere in Israel today. And it occurred to me that the gospel might reach them and that they would be with me in heaven. And how do I feel about that? I feel really good about that, with my mom in heaven, with me in heaven.

How do you feel about your adversaries? Are you thinking, you know, if Christ got to them and saved them, they'd be with you forever. Are you relating to them now in a way that would make it hard to relate to them then? That's not a good idea. It's going to be so embarrassing to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and they say, you, I don't like you.

I've been mad at you all my life. That's not a good idea. You should be praying that God would save them.

So I commend to you, as one who has lived since 28, not carrying that grudge, I commend to you this life. It is a free and wonderful life. And in the life of freedom, God, if there is some vengeance to be done there, I just hand it over to you.

And if there's salvation to be done there, I pray that you would do it. May the gospel reach these men who, in their drunkenness, caused my mother's death at age 28 so that she only knew one of my five children. Let's pray.

Father, on this Lord's Day morning, I ask that burdens would be lifted. I pray that you would take this amazing promise. Vengeance is mine.

I will repay and let every person in the hearing of my voice lay down every grudge, rage, anger, bitterness, resentment story going through their head over and over. It shouldn't have been that way. It shouldn't have been that way.

It was wrong. It was wrong. May they lay it down.

And would you give wonderful liberty. And in that field of liberty, would you cause great love to grow so that we, from the heart, can give a cup of cold water to our adversary in the hope that our light would cause them to glorify our Father who is in heaven. Lord, make Bethlehem a light set on a hill, a city that cannot be hidden.

Work a deep, deep work in our hearts, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. To give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission.

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