

Transformation or Retaliation

If someone does something wrong to you, it is human nature to want to get them back. We feel justified in seeking revenge when we have been wronged. After all, the Bible even tells us that fighting back is okay, as supported by three Old Testament passages (Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21). These are all based on the “an eye or an eye” theme. Some of the key phrases in those passages are: (1) eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot; (2) the one who inflicted injury must suffer the same injury, and (3) show no pity. Bible scholars tell us that these Old Testament passages represent a principle of “proportionate justice” and that the “punishment should fit the crime.”

Jesus gave us an entirely new way to manage these kinds of situations. He told us to “turn the other cheek.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refuted the Old Testament teachings when He said, *You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.*” (Matthew 5:38-40). Instead of seeking revenge and retaliation, Jesus tells us to respond with forgiveness and grace. It is a higher standard of love.

When we react to evil acts, we are judging those who made them. Jesus said to leave the judgment and the punishment for the evil acts of others up to God. *“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.’”(Romans 12:19). “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”(1 Peter 3:9).*



Let us not be a “slave to anger,” but instead, treat others – even those who wronged you – with love and respect. If we lash out in revenge, we are being sinful, too. It has the potential to perpetuate cycles of violence and revenge. Because of our faith, we can rise above the situation, and our transformation can serve as a witness to others, especially those who have wronged us.

Jesus modeled that behavior when He went to the cross. He forgave them for their acts. His witness has transformed people into believers. We can do that, too.

Question: Following the example of Jesus Christ, what are ways that you can handle situations when others have intentionally wronged you?

Prayer: Dear Lord. It is easy to lash out at people who have wronged us, but it is not what Jesus wants us to do. Give us the patience to forgive others and love people who have hurt us. Amen.

