

FLIPP3D.

DEVOTIONAL

The Flipside of Revenge | Matthew 5:38-48

By Kevin Glenn, North Arlington Area Pastor

When reflecting on how to identify the 'flipside' of revenge, a number of valid options come to mind. Some might state that the flipside of revenge is 'to bless'. After all, in Romans 12:14 Paul states "bless those who persecute you" by extending unconditional kindness and care during our enemies' time of need (v. 20). Others might very well point to today's passage in Matthew 5 to find multiple 'flipsides'. For instance, does 'pacifism' (at least to some degree) accurately reflect the flipside of revenge? When struck, "turn the other [cheek] to [your adversary] also" (v. 39). Or, what about the notion of humble generosity to your enemy's illegitimate demands – rather than seeking personal defense (vv. 40-42)?

As Jesus continues, a seemingly more radical flipside can be found. "But I tell you: *Love* your enemies and *pray* for those who persecute you." (emphasis mine).

Truth be told, all of these could serve as legitimate 'flipsides' to revenge. But I would like to propose one additional option I believe undergirds them all. Trust.

Ask yourself the following question. Is it possible for me to: truly bless my enemies with acts of loving-kindness, to respond to them the way of the pacifist, to serve and give to them generously, to love and pray for them, etc unless I have resolute trust in the righteous, sovereign Judge over all creation? If I truly trust in God's character and faithfulness, I know he will respond to my 'persecution' in a manner intended for my good and worthy of his glory. 'Trust' in him frees me to transfer my desires for revenge into his administration. And lest we forget, it is he who asserts the exclusive prerogative to avenge. "It is *mine* to avenge. *I* will repay." (Deut. 32:35; emphasis mine). "Do not take revenge...but leave room for God's wrath..." (Rom 12:19).

Speaking of wrath, need we be reminded that *all* of God's wrath for *all* of our sin was judiciously poured out upon his Son and our Savior on our behalf. Rather than 'avenge' his righteousness upon us personally, he transferred our penalty upon Jesus and chose instead to shower us with his mercy, grace and love.

The more I meditate over where I would be (in every respect) apart from God's unmerited favor...I see a shadow of myself reflected in the very eyes of those with whom I've sought revenge. And suddenly my heart begins to break over their spiritual and emotional brokenness; just as I continue to heal over mine. In love, I find myself praying for God's mercy for my enemies *first* and justice/revenge (at his discretion) a *distant* second. My daily challenge is simply to love my enemies as an overflow of God continuous love for me; *and* to trust him with the full and final outcome.

So, how about you? How fully do you trust in your heavenly Father? To what extent is your trust in him demonstrated by your loving-kindness of those who stand against you?

Born and raised in Arlington, Pantego Bible Church has been Kevin's life-long church home (1971). He began his vocational calling by wearing a variety of ministerial hats as a PBC staff member from October 1998 through December 2002 before attending Dallas Theological Seminary full-time. Prior to his return to the church staff, Kevin earned an M.A. in Christian Education as well as an M.A. in Biblical Studies. On January 1, 2006 Kevin rejoined our staff and presently serves as the Area Pastor for North Arlington. Kevin and his wife Holly were married in 1995. Kevin and Holly recently adopted a baby from Ethiopia Sahara (2011) from Ethiopia. They are presently on an extended waiting list for a baby girl from China as well.