

**ISH**  
**The Avengers**  
**Romans 12:19 - 13:4**

There are times when I simply do not like what I read in Scripture. I know; that sounds like heresy! But it is true. I have especially wrestled like many of you over the clear teaching of Christ about how we are to respond to those who hate us or hurt us. Like many of you, I get angry when someone lashes out at me and I want to defend myself. But I am also the type of person that lets people that I love walk all over me until it almost kills me (a type of enablement). The problem is; it SEEMS like some of what Christ taught actually encourages enablement and discourages ANY attempt at finding JUSTICE. **Matthew 5:38-41 NLT**

**38 "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. 40 If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. 41 If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles.**

The teachings of Christ in truth are very radical. As a result, they have been mocked and misunderstood by skeptics and believers. His words just seem TOO NICE for our dangerous and evil world. But Jesus was no fool, and he knew better than any of us the brutality of a broken world. However, he also made it clear that he was sending us into the heart of that broken world "like lambs to the slaughter." This is a WAR, and we are the soldiers that he sends into battle. He commanded his followers to confront evil courageously with the unlikely weapons of humility, grace, and love. He also made it clear that we will get hurt and maybe even killed as we overcome. Accept that. But when Jesus told us to "turn the other cheek," he was not telling us that there is no place for justice or self-defense in this world. In this passage, Jesus was referring to a backhanded slap, which was an action intended to mock one's personal dignity. It was a personal offense, not a life-threatening attack. He was not saying that you should just let people walk all over you and abuse you. At one point Jesus told his followers to "sell their cloak to buy a sword." (Luke 22:36) **While he was not a pacifist, he still made it clear that self-protection was ultimately inferior to love!** There is a point at which self-defense must give way to self-sacrifice! In the Sermon on the Mount however, Jesus was boldly pushing back against wrong teaching by the Pharisees who taught that you should PERSONALLY respond to every evil by doing the same thing back to the one who did it to you. Jesus said, "NO!" You must learn to "trust in God and take some hits" for the sake of demonstrating grace and love on this earth. He promised that God would one day deal with those who remain unaffected by that grace! But this does NOT mean that God has failed to make provisions for justice on this side of eternity. He has wisely provided PROPER CHANNELS for justice in our daily lives. Paul describes one of these channels in **Romans 13:1-4 HCSB.**

**1** Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God. **2** So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. **4** For government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.

Now, these verses give us ONE EXAMPLE of the way that God provides for justice in this evil world. **There are AVENGERS on this earth.** Here is the biblical concept:

**God allows human authorities to execute limited, impartial vengeance on earth.**

**In order to understand the principle of authorities as avengers, we must make a DISTINCTION between a PERSONAL response to evil within a relationship and an IMPARTIAL authoritative response to evil in society.** In the case of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus rightly put the statement "AN EYE FOR AN EYE" back where it belonged: In a LEGAL COURT! **This is a LEGAL GUIDELINE for impartial authorities that allows them to dispense justice without being driven by personal feelings or personal offenses. Justice must be blind to be impartial.** This is why statues that personify justice show a blindfolded woman holding scales. Judges, not victims, are the proper ones that must try criminals in unbiased courts. **In this way, they maintain civil order so that humans can live in relative peace.** You see, wherever there are people, there will be evil and injustice. So, instead of allowing a response to evil that creates a vengeful, VIGILANTE mindset, God simply empowers certain human authorities and institutions to establish order and restrain evil in daily life. Here are the major categories of authorities in our world: **Family, Government, Church, Employer, and Educational leader.** **Lawgivers and law enforcers, parents, pastors, teachers, and employers are all required to respond to evil and wrong based on moral principles that protect the peace and order of the realm for which they are responsible.** **Ultimately, all authority comes from God, and that authority will at least be respected because of the POWER that it wields. Human beings ignore this principle to their own hurt.** When you rebel against legitimate authority, you should rightly be afraid of the "sword" that it bears. Parents must have the right to discipline their children for wrongdoing, and governments must have the ability to deal harshly with the harmful actions of its citizens, or evil will simply run rampant in society and make civilization impossible. **Christians should be FIRST to demonstrate honor and obedience to authority!** We above all people believe in the necessity and beauty of authority.

The institution of the FAMILY is the smallest, most intimate realm of authority; GOVERNMENT is the largest. Parenting has the biggest challenges in maintaining this distinction between institutional and personal responses. As a parent, you must not discipline or punish your child because he hurt your feelings. That is personal immaturity and parental failure. You discipline him because he is endangering himself or others. As his authority, you MUST deal with his sin appropriately in order to TRAIN him to live well in the family and in society. When you speak as his authority about his behavior and the potential consequences of his rebellion, you had BETTER FOLLOW THROUGH on what you say! That may feel harsh, but it is actually grace clothed in tough love! On a much larger scale, judges MUST impose penalties and punishments when civil order is violated, and policemen must be put in place to protect order on the streets and allowed to use force when necessary. We don't want civil servants who refuse to enforce justice! Also, these levels of authority can – and must – exist in tandem with one another! When a wife is being physically abused by her husband, she does not have the right to abuse him back; but she does have the right to call her pastor and seek counseling or call the police and seek legal protection! Sometimes the best thing that you can do for someone is to let them face the consequences of their actions before the proper authorities! **Let authority accomplish its purpose! Parents, you can show mercy when God leads you to, but you must also be willing to let teachers and employers and policemen punish your kids when they rightly deserve it. This will teach them to respect your authority and the ultimate authority of God! Calm authority can be TERRIFYING!**

As Christians, our PERSONAL response to evil must be guided by grace and love and faith. We have dedicated our bodies to God, and he can use our godly response to evil for his purposes in this world. We must show love to our enemies and pray for them, not react to their actions with violence and vengeance. In his wisdom, God has made provision for the establishment of institutions and authorities in our broken world so that human evil can be confronted, restrained, judged, and penalized for the good of society in at least a limited manner. **But let me address what most of you have already been thinking: THE SYSTEM IS MESSED UP! I agree. When you put authority into the hands of broken human beings, then you get a broken system. I think that the Constitution of the United States is the greatest form of government that has ever existed on earth, but even it is showing the ultimate failure of human justice. There are corrupt judges and brutal policemen and shady politicians all around us! No matter where you live, the world is BROKEN! Remember, Paul wrote these instructions about obeying the government to Christians in first century Rome when NERO was the top political leader! This leads us to another key truth.**

**Human justice is ultimately inadequate for dealing fully with evil and wrong.** This is because all of us are BROKEN by sin. Even the purest and best human judgments are prone to human error, and our limited minds cannot TRULY know EVERYTHING that must be known in order to execute JUST and FAIR punishments and penalties. That kind of vengeance is reserved for GOD ALONE. This is why the Word reminds us to leave the right of absolute vengeance to the righteous hands of a holy God. Here is the truth that should give all of us a righteous shudder:

## **God will avenge all wrong.**

We find this absolute statement in **Romans 12:19 NLT**

**19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.**

God's wrath (his boiling anger) is PERFECTLY just and fair, and he has promised in his Word that he WILL AVENGE every evil deed that is committed on this earth. Every single one. Because God is omniscient, he knows not only the deeds that evil men have done; he also knows the thoughts and motives that were behind those deeds. He has in fact kept a RECORD of every deed that every man has ever done, and that record will be brought forth as evidence in the final RECKONING that all men will face before God. (Revelation 20) Because God is omnipresent, he has not failed to be present when every act of treachery and betrayal and abuse were being committed. "The eyes of the Lord are in all places, beholding the good and the evil." He will repay the evildoer and reward the one who does well. Because God is HOLY and God is LOVE, he has felt the practical and emotional weight of every sin that has been committed against him and against human victims on this earth over the centuries. You know how you feel when you or someone you love has been horribly wronged? So does He! This fuels his WRATH. Scripture says that "God is angry with the wicked every day!"

God has been storing up his wrath and anger throughout the centuries of human existence, and he WILL execute that wrath in perfect eternal form when the proper time comes. God knows how to show mercy and store up wrath in such a way that his mercy will actually become a PART of his wrath on that final moment when it is revealed that NO CHANGE OF HEART was ever going to happen. This is how he is able to "send his rain on the just and the unjust" during these days of darkness and evil and still judge people impartially at the final judgment. He is merciful only as long as HE decides he wants to be. Those of you that THINK you are somehow GETTING AWAY with your dark deeds just because things are going well for you right now should wake up. Your extended days are simply an act of divine mercy that will one day be transformed into ETERNAL JUDGMENT. If you believe that death is the end of all things, then you will probably continue to do whatever it is that you WANT to do! But what if you are wrong, and judgment follows death? That is a risky gamble!

The Bible refers to the final place of judgment as HELL. Jesus told us to "fear the One who has the power to destroy the body and then condemn you to eternal hell." Hell is the place where evil people pay the price for their own sin. This is why the torments of hell are not the same for all people. Just as some people will have greater rewards in heaven than others, so will some people suffer greater torment in hell than others. But know this: No one in hell will escape suffering that they DESERVE. This is why God alone is qualified to execute full vengeance. Human

vengeance truly falls short of what is deserved. Think of a mass murderer who rapes, tortures, and kills multiple victims: What punishment can men give to him? He could be given life in prison, or he could even be executed by capital punishment. (Capital punishment is an institutional act of impersonal justice.) But even the mass murderer's death is not really equal with the suffering and loss for which he alone is responsible. He can only be executed once, and a civil society cannot righteously or accurately dispense exactly the amount of suffering that this vicious criminal actually dispensed. But God is not limited by these human shortcomings. He knows exactly the amount of suffering that each of us deserves. Our suffering will simply be appropriate for the sins that we committed, and there will be NO MORE MERCY and NO END to that proper punishment. This is because an unrepentant sinner would simply continue the dead-end practice of accepting mercy without changing forever! It has to END sometime. The Final Judgment is that time.

But there is another truth that should cause skeptics to gasp in wonder and saints to become bolder in sharing their faith:

**God has already avenged all wrongs.**

One of the most astounding truths of all time is the truth that Christ died for the sins of the whole world. Let that sink in for a moment. Christ died for your sins. He also died for the sins of your enemies. Not only that, he bore the FULL WEIGHT of each of those sins. Listen to some familiar verses again. **Isaiah 53:6 NLT**

3 He was despised and rejected--a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. 4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! 5 But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. 6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

**Romans 5:6-9 Living Bible**

6 When we were utterly helpless, with no way of escape, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners who had no use for him. 7 Even if we were good, we really wouldn't expect anyone to die for us, though, of course, that might be barely possible. 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. 9 And since by his blood he did all this for us as sinners, how much more will he do for us now that he has declared us not guilty? Now he will save us from all of God's wrath to come.

**Christ bore the FULL WEIGHT of God's wrath for every sin that has ever been committed and the full weight of the punishment that those sins deserved.** This means that we cannot even imagine what Christ suffered on the cross. It was more than we could have comprehended even if we had been there to behold it! There was a weight on him that was more than physical. It was DIVINE WRATH. God poured out his wrath on his own Son so that the world could have access to God's forgiveness and freedom. But many choose to REJECT his astounding act of mercy and forgiveness. **Here is the final tragedy of hell: No one HAD to go to hell. You CHOOSE to go to hell by your UNBELIEF.** Your refusal to accept Jesus's blood as payment for your sins is the final evidence that you DESERVE eternal punishment. There is no other alternative because there is NO OTHER SAVIOR.

Oh, that you would come to him in humility and repentance today. He will forgive you. He will transform you into a Child of God who WANTS to be changed into one worthy of heaven, not by right of your own merit, but by the merit of our Redeemer. You will see why we love him so very much!

Saints, rest in the certain knowledge of Divine Justice. Honor and obey the authorities that God has allowed to exist in your life, even as they are imperfect! Let the truth of God's final role as Judge free you to love and serve your enemies, knowing that - if they refuse him - THIS IS AS CLOSE TO HEAVEN AS THEY WILL EVER COME. [Live a life that is so far above ISH that those who are trapped in unbelief around you will not be able to use YOU as an excuse for their unbelief.](#)

Let's pray.