"Leave Revenge to God"

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's website (churchofgodbigsandy.com). It was posted for the weekend of November 14, 2026.

By Reg Killingley

BIG SANDY, Texas—There is something in the human heart that reaches for fairness from the earliest age. Watch children on a playground: one shoves another, and the second shoves back — not because anyone taught him the rules of retaliation, but because something inside him insists that the scale must be balanced again.

Ask two siblings to split a piece of cake, and the wisest solution anyone has ever devised is simple: let one cut and the other choose. The cutter, knowing he might end up with the smaller half, is suddenly motivated to cut with perfect precision.

The rule works because it appeals to a demand for fairness that lives in all of us.

That demand is not something to be ashamed of. The longing for justice is not a flaw in human nature; it's a fingerprint of the God who made us in His image.

The real question was never whether we want wrongs made right. It's how — and to whom we hand the job of making them right.

The apostle Paul takes up exactly this question in Romans 12. His instruction is startling in its simplicity: never repay evil for evil and never take revenge into your own hands. Instead, leave room for God's wrath, because vengeance belongs to Him alone.

Paul isn't saying wrongs don't matter. He's saying something more searching — that justice is real, but it doesn't belong in your hands.

God Takes Justice Seriously

Long before Paul wrote those words, the Old Testament had already wrestled with how to handle vengeance. The famous principle of "an eye for an eye" — found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy — sounds brutal to modern ears, but it was actually a restraint on human cruelty.

Ancient societies had a habit of letting retaliation spiral: a stolen goat could end in a burned village; a slap could ignite a feud spanning generations.

The law of proportional retaliation put a ceiling on payback. It said, in effect, you may not take more than was taken from you.

Historically, this was usually enforced through monetary compensation rather than literal mutilation — which is itself telling, because if you try to imagine what an "equal" eye for an eye would even look like, you run into an impossible problem. Eye damage isn't uniform; harm isn't easily measured; motives aren't visible.

Only a perfectly wise Judge could weigh an offense with total accuracy. We can't. That's the whole point.

Structures, Not Vigilantes

Rather than leaving people to settle their own scores, God built structures: courts, witnesses, restitution laws, and — most remarkably — cities of refuge, where someone who caused an accidental death could flee from an avenging relative and receive a fair trial instead of a knife in the dark.

No conviction could rest on a single witness.

Every seven years, debts were released.

Every fifty years, the Jubilee reset the economic scales entirely.

None of this eliminated justice. It relocated it — out of the hands of the wounded party and into a system designed to be less blind with rage or seeking revenge.

Forgiveness Isn't the Same as Ignoring Consequences

It's worth being honest about what forgiveness isn't. Paul, late in his life, wrote candidly that a man named Alexander the coppersmith had done him serious harm — and then added simply that the Lord would repay him according to his deeds.

Paul named the wrong. He didn't pretend it hadn't happened. But he refused to pursue it himself.

Paul had also once been on the other side of that equation — a violent persecutor of the church before his conversion, present at the killing of Stephen. When he later showed up in Jerusalem as a changed man, the believers he'd once hunted did not seek revenge. They received him.

That's not naivete; it's what it looks like to release an offense without denying it occurred.

The Wreckage Revenge Leaves Behind

Literature has been warning us about this for centuries because human nature hasn't changed.

Edmond Dantès, in The Count of Monte Cristo, spends his life engineering a flawless revenge — and by the time he achieves it, he barely recognizes himself.

Shylock's demand for his "pound of flesh" is, on paper, entirely legal — and entirely monstrous.

The generations-long blood feud between the Hatfields and McCoys eventually consumed people who could no longer even remember how it started.

In each case, revenge doesn't close the account. It opens new ones. The avenger isn't satisfied; he's hollowed out.

What This Looks Like in Practice

So, what does it mean to leave vengeance to God? A few things, in ordinary daily terms.

Stop replaying the injury. Every mental rehearsal digs the groove of bitterness a little deeper.

Pray for the person who wronged you — not because the wrong was small, but because prayer loosens the grip that resentment has on your own heart.

Still pursue lawful justice where it's appropriate; leaving vengeance to God isn't a call to ignore fraud or abuse, but to refuse personal retaliation while using the channels — courts, accountability, honest confrontation — that exist for a reason.

Forgive daily, not as a one-time event but as an ongoing posture, the same way you'd want to be forgiven.

And finally, let the final account rest with God. That's not a threat; it's a promise. Nothing will be forgotten. No cruelty will slip past unnoticed. The Judge of the universe doesn't need our help balancing the scales.

Jesus modeled this from the cross itself, praying for forgiveness for the very people executing Him rather than calling down judgment.

That is the pattern His followers are invited into — not weakness, not resignation, but a quiet yet strong confidence that justice is safer in God's hands than in ours.

May God give us the grace to leave vengeance to Him — to forgive as we have been forgiven, to pursue justice through proper channels, and to trust that the perfect Judge of the universe will ultimately make all things right.