

Payback!

Righteousness & Relationships Part 14 Matthew 5:40-42 7-4-10

Summary: Pay back an insult with continuance of friendship. To those who feel wronged go above and beyond to make it right. To those who commandeer your time give extra. These are attitudes, not absolute rules (must be regulated by other principles in Scripture). Overcome evil with good like David did.

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Matthew 5:38-42 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Review: Turn the Other Cheek

For a little over a half year now we have been studying verse by verse through the Sermon on the Mount, which is a sermon that is about righteousness in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The long awaited King has arrived, and the question is, “What are the standards for citizens of this Kingdom? And the short answer is – They are the same as the OT. But it takes a whole sermon to explain that because the Scribes and Pharisees had done such a terrible job at interpreting and applying the OT Law. So Jesus is correcting them. And one of their misapplications was from the “eye for an eye” commandment. They interpreted that in a way that allowed for vengeance in the heart. And so in v.38 Jesus puts a stick of dynamite under that approach and blows it to bits.

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Do not retaliate. Do not return a slap for a slap, do not return an insult for an insult, or cold shoulder for a cold shoulder, or a bad mood for a bad mood, or a sharp tone with a sharp tone. When someone is inconsiderate toward us or hurts us or offends us, in our flesh we want to make them pay. Jesus says, “Don’t.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has some interesting insights about that. He observes that when you get into a fight with someone most of the energy the other person has is drawn from your resistance. If you do not resist and do not retaliate – they lose all their steam. It is no fun to wrestle someone who is not wrestling back.

Imagine a bee that would miraculously get a new stinger every time you slapped it. If it stings you once and you just leave it, it will die. But if you swat at it, it gets a new stinger and can sting you again. That is kind of what evil is like – it gets recharged by your resistance.

“The only way to overcome evil is to let it run itself to a standstill because it does not find the resistance it is looking for. Resistance merely creates further evil and adds fuel to the flames. But when evil meets no opposition and encounters no obstacles but only patient endurance, its sting is drawn, and at last it meets an opponent which is more than its match. ... then evil cannot find its mark, it can breed no further evil, and is left barren.

...Evil becomes a spent force when we put up no resistance. By refusing to pay back the enemy in his own coin, and by preferring to suffer without resistance ... violence stands condemned by its failure to evoke counter-violence.”

That’s a good insight – and it is biblical.

Proverbs 26:21 As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Proverbs 17:14 Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

Participating in a fight just pours fuel on the fire. And for those of you who like a good fight –

Proverbs 17:19 He who loves a quarrel loves sin

Turn the other cheek – Don’t give up on the person

So we don’t resist. Instead we turn the other cheek. What does that mean? My focus last week was on non-retaliation, but I think turning the other cheek implies more than that. Jesus does not say, “If someone strikes you on the cheek just walk away.” When someone offends you or insults you or hurts your feelings, you do not walk away; you expose your other cheek to them. In other words, you give them further opportunity to hurt your feelings.

Our natural reaction is to want to protect ourselves from being hurt again, so we distance ourselves from the person – if not geographically, at least emotionally. But Jesus says, “No – when they slap you in the face once, expose your face to them again.” Do not bail out on a relationship or retreat just because the person hurt your feelings. Be willing to be hurt again – an again and again.

I am not talking here about physical violence. The issue here is an offence or insult. If there is physical violence I believe Scripture permits you to flee. But if it is emotional abuse, we can just absorb it and be patient with the person and continue to show love.

That is the attitude of people who love God. It was the attitude of Abraham, who rushed to rescue Lot after Lot had taken the best land for himself. It is the attitude of Joseph, who generously forgave his brothers and tearfully loved them after they had sold him into slavery. It is the attitude of David who honored Saul even while Saul was trying to kill him. David, who wept bitterly when his enemies became sick. It is the attitude of Stephen, who, lying crushed beneath the bloody stones, asks that the sin of stoning him not be laid to their charge. It is the attitude of Paul, who said of all those who deserted him in his time of greatest need, “May it not be held against them.” It is the attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "Father, forgive them."

The Attitude of Generosity

Now, some of you hear that and think, “You’ve got to be kidding me. I am experiencing all this emotional abuse and you expect me to just lie there and take it? I can never fight back, never resist, never flee – I just sit there like a wet noodle and do nothing?” No, that is not what I am saying.

In fact – you know what? Go ahead, get some payback. Pay them back for what they did to you – and pour it on thick. Learn to fight back – and win! Let’s face it – you are going to get into some fights – arguments, disputes, quarrels, conflicts – what are you supposed to do, just lie there and do nothing? No – if someone hurts you, you can pay them back for what they did.

In fact you *must*. You should always pay them back. “You mean Jesus allows that?” Yes, I looked really hard into this text and I found a loophole that allows for payback. Not only does He allow it, He even gives us some specific examples of how to pay the person back for what they did.

39 someone strikes you on the right cheek...

How do you pay them back for insulting you? By giving them another opportunity to insult you.

41 If someone forces you to go one mile...

How do you pay him back for that?

...go with him two miles.

40 if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

They take your tunic, how do you pay them back? With your cloak.

Payback of Possessions (cloak and tunic)

Back then people wore two garments. First they would put on a long shirt – like a nightshirt, and over that they would wear an outer tunic that doubled as a blanket at night. That inner shirt was the tunic and the outer coat was the cloak. By law you could not take a person’s cloak because they needed that to stay warm at night. (Ex.22:26-27) So to give up both your tunic and your cloak would be to go beyond what the person could have a legal right to sue you for.

And one thing I never noticed before is that in v.40 the person has not sued yet. It says **if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic...** No legal action has been taken yet. This person just feels wronged by you, and thinks he has a case and would like to take you to court. And Jesus is saying, “Instead of fighting, just settle up with him in a generous, magnanimous way. Give him even more than what he’s asking for.” Pay him back for what he did – but pay him back with generous love.

I am sure we have all done this at one time or another. Someone feels wronged by you, and you ask what it would take to make things right, and they tell you something, and you go above and beyond what they say just because you really want to make things right. That is what Jesus is talking about here.

I do not think the point is the literal cloak and tunic. Those were the only two garments they wore. So if you did not have your tunic on, and you did not have your cloak on, you did not have anything on. So Jesus is saying, “If someone sues you for the shirt off your back, take off all your clothes and give them to him.” Jesus is not trying to promote indecent exposure. He is simply using a graphic picture to show us a generous attitude. Do whatever you possibly can and go way out of your way to make things right.

Payback of time and service (the extra mile)

So how do you get payback? The first example Jesus gives is an assault on your dignity – a slap in the face. Pay the person back with patience and continued friendship. The second is an assault on your

property – taking the shirt off your back. Pay that person back by giving even more than what he feels you owe them. Then Jesus gives a third example – an assault on your liberty.

41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

A Roman soldier¹ had the right to commandeer whomever he wanted to carry his gear for him. So in this example Jesus is talking about being conscripted by an official for some public duty. Walking a mile (and back) would take about 40 minutes.

Can you imagine if we had this in our country – random forced labor? An occupying anti-American military force who had the authority to commandeer you and your car for whatever errand they want at any time? You are on your way to an important meeting, and all the sudden some soldier says, “I need you to drive this package to Boulder.” “Boulder? I don’t have time to drive in to Boulder right now I’m on my way to...”

“You’re on your way to jail if you don’t drop what you’re doing and take this package to Boulder right now.”

You can imagine how the Jews felt about that arrangement.

Now, there were legal limits on this system. The maximum distance a soldier could make you carry his pack was one mile. So Jesus gives an example of a soldier pushing you to the limit of what the law allowed and then says, “If they force you to do the maximum, pay them back by voluntarily doubling it.”

Authority

The first example was a hostile person – who slaps you in the face. The second was an offended person – who feels wronged by you and thinks you owe him. The third is an authority. Here he is not necessarily angry with you or hostile toward you, he is just a government official who probably does not even know you.

For some people this is the hardest one. There are some people who, if someone insults you, you can let it roll right off your back. Someone feels wronged by you, you can understand, and you will graciously work it out with them and make things right. But an authority infringing on your freedom – that just galls you to the core of your being. There are some people who just resent anyone telling them what to do.

Again, it goes back to our God complex. “I am the captain of my ship, master of my soul. I decide where I go and what I do, and I don’t want anyone telling me what to do.”² That attitude is absolutely antithetical to Christianity. At the center of Christianity is a King who requires that you bow the knee in humble submission – to Him and to all human authorities to whom He has delegated authority.

That is why it takes a supernatural work of God for someone to be willing to come to Christ, because resenting authority is part of the human condition. Children resist the authority of their parents, wives chafe under the authority of their husbands, men complain about the authority of their bosses at work, church members ignore the authority of the elders, and citizens resent the authority of the government.

And all that happens even if it is a good authority commanding good things. But when it is an evil authority requiring oppressive things, that makes it that much harder. Rome was an extremely wicked and oppressive authority, and Jesus says, “Volunteer to carry the soldier’s pack twice as far as he requires – even if he is already pushing it to the limit of the law.” Why? I love the statement by T.W. Manson : “the first mile renders to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; the second mile...renders to God the things that are God’s” You do it for the Lord.

¹The mile was not a Jewish unit of measure – it was a Roman distance. It was a distance of just under 5000 ft., so it was very close to our mile.

² That’s such a prevalent attitude these days that there are some churches that try to accommodate people like that. So they hire “preachers” who don’t preach – they just “share.” They never authoritatively command you to do anything. They just share their thoughts and feelings, and, if they are really feeling bold, might make a suggestion once in a while. If you take that approach you can get a lot of people in your church – the problem with it is people who refuse to bow to God’s authority in their lives can’t be saved. The Christian life is a posture of submissiveness, and if you’re not into submission then Christianity isn’t for you.

And if that sounds demeaning to you, remember that He is the Head and we are the body. Who receives greater honor – the athlete, whose body takes orders from the head and carries them out exactly; or the person whose arms and legs call their own shots and just spasm out of control – independently from the rest of the body? If you see someone with Parkinson’s, whose hands are shaking out of the control of the brain do you say, “Good for those hands! They are independent and don’t take orders from anybody – I admire them”? No – you feel compassion for the person, and the medical community is working hard to seek cures for that because it is a disease.

Intrusions on your time

It is hard for us to relate to this because random forced labor is illegal in the United States.³ But on the other hand there is a sense in which we have all experienced it. It happens every time someone does something that costs you 40 minutes of your time. People commandeer our time every day. Think about a high pressure salesman who shows up at your door or calls on the phone. Or someone at work is careless and creates a problem that you have to clean up. Or some needy person you know calls on the phone and talks for 40 minutes right when you were trying to relax and unwind. Or your spouse requires some of your time – or your kids. There is no end to the line of people waiting to commandeer our personal freedom. We tend to want to keep Jesus' example in the first Century so we do not have to deal with it. We think, "Oh, if I were a Jew back then and some Roman soldier conscripted me to carry his pack for a mile, I would go the extra mile with a smile on my face!" – but we resent having to walk down to the park with our own kids. Who are we kidding?

Jesus is not giving us a mere behavioral procedure; He is giving us an attitude that should mark every aspect of our lives. And it is an attitude of generosity and kindness toward those who take from us – or, toward those who are simply in need.

Giving to the Needy

42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

If you run into someone in need – be openhanded and generous.

Deuteronomy 15:7-11 If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. 8 Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. 9 Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin.

Every 7th year in Israel all the debts were canceled and all the slaves set free. So if you are three months away from the cancelling of all debts, and so you will not help your neighbor out of a jam because you will lose all your money – that is forbidden.

10 Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. 11 There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

So whether it is a person who has insulted you, or who has been offended or hurt by you, or an authority or someone commandeering your time, or simply someone who is in need – be generous. We have been given grace and mercy, haven't we? We have experienced the surprise of unexpected grace – shouldn't we extend the same? Is there anyone in this room who could possibly ever give more than you have received?

The Application of Generosity

So that's the basic attitude. And it is an attitude that Jesus is talking about – not a strict rule. If you turn this into a mere rule instead of an attitude you make it impossible to obey. You could not possibly give to everyone who asks.

³ The 5th Amendment forbids the deprivation of liberty or property without due process of law

And even if you could, it would be wrong to do so. There are some contexts in which it would not be wise or loving to go above and beyond what the person is asking for. In fact, in some cases – many cases – in which it is not a good thing to even give them anything at all. Jesus did not give everything that was asked of Him. In Luke 12 someone asked him to serve as an arbiter between him and his brother to settle a dispute and Jesus refused. (Luke 12:13-15)

Do not give beyond your means

There are other factors to consider when you are deciding how to apply your generosity in specific situations. Jesus is not telling us to ignore other principles in Scripture. For example, He is not giving us a blank check here to renege on all our other commitments in life. You have a responsibility to take care of your family, to pay your bills, etc. Jesus is not giving us permission here to default on those responsibilities just so we can pacify someone who wants to take all our money. We are to be generous, but generosity is to remain within the range of what we can afford. In 2 Cor.8 Paul is urging each of the Corinthians to pitch in for the gift that is going to the poor people in Jerusalem. But then in v.11 he says each one should give

according to his means 12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

It is generally not wise to spend beyond your means – even if the spending is for the sake of generosity. There are some exceptions to that, but as a general rule that is the path of wisdom. Do not give what you cannot afford to give. If you give what you cannot afford to give, and then become dependent on other people to give to you to keep you afloat, you are presuming on other people's money.

Do not give in a way that harms the person

Another thing to consider when giving a gift is the law of love. Sometimes it is loving to give and other times it does more harm than good. For example, it is not loving to assist a thief in his sin. It can be unloving to give in a context where the gift is likely to be misunderstood. If it is a situation where it is not likely to do anything to reconcile your broken relationship, or bring any other benefit to the person, then often the most loving thing to do is not to give anything.

In the State Parks they tell you not to feed the bears – not because they want you to be cruel – just the opposite. It is actually an act of cruelty to feed them in some cases, because they get so they cannot take care of themselves. And it makes them dangerous. They see humans as sources of food, and so they lose their natural fear of humans and they end up being a threat to everyone.

Some people are like that. Giving to them just makes them dangerous. In some circumstances it can just train them to manipulate people in order to get things.

Do not give in a way that feeds wrong desires

Along those same lines we should also avoid giving in a way that accommodates wrong desires. I think that's probably why Jesus didn't give what was requested in Luke 12.

Luke 12:13-15 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

The person was asking for something out of greed, and if Jesus had given what he asked it would have only fed his greed.

Do not give to those who will not work

Aside from that there are principles in Scripture about who we should give assistance to. In 2 Thes.3:10 we are told that if a man refuses to work, do not let him eat. If he cannot work, that is one thing. But if he *refuses* to work, you are not doing him any favors by financing his laziness.

Those are a few examples of the factors that need to be taken into consideration in our generosity. Jesus is not requiring us to just obey every whim of our enemies. He is not telling us to throw wisdom out the window and renege on all our financial responsibilities, or to give even when it is unloving to do so. He is simply giving us a general principle to govern our attitudes.

Generous attitude

Do we still need to take all those other factors into consideration in our generosity? Yes, but the attitude of the heart makes all the difference when you are applying those factors. The goal is to have a heart that wants to love and wants to give and wants to be generous and will do so unless it is restrained by some other principle. The stingy, selfish heart is hoping it does not have to give. It combs through all those other principles looking to find an excuse not to give. It is only when the heart is looking for an excuse to give that the principles will work properly. If your heart is looking for an excuse not to give you are pretty much guaranteed to always find one, and you will never be generous (except to friends and family and those who treat you well or who seem to deserve it).

Give to help change your attitude

“What if my heart is selfish – what do I do about that?” How do you change from having a selfish, stingy heart to a loving, generous heart? The most important way is to increase your love for Christ, and then spend time thinking about Christ’s love for that person. And that will tend to cause your heart to love that person.

“What about in the mean time? While I am working on getting my heart right should I hold off on giving so I’m not a hypocrite?” No. Actions of obedience can be a great help in the process of changing heart attitudes.

One time I had a guy borrow a commentary from me, and then forget to return it. When he moved he just packed it up with all his other things. The time came when I needed that commentary, so I asked him about it and told him that if he would send it to me I would pay for the shipping. So he chose the most expensive shipping option and sent it registered mail and then sent me the bill for the postage.

The initial reaction of my flesh was not something I am proud of. It was not a lot of money, but having something like that done seemingly just out of spite just really irritated me. I was angry, and the knee jerk reaction in my heart was the temptation to give him a very cold response.

But before I had a chance express my vengeful heart, the Holy Spirit put me in a full nelson, convicting me of that sin, and would not let me go until I repented. And so I sent him a check for the postage plus an extra \$50 gift. And doing that that really did help my heart along. Obviously something like that does not automatically make you love a person. You can give a gift and resent them even more than you did to begin with because now they are costing you money. So it is definitely not automatic. But making an effort to be generous can function as a kind of training wheels if you are doing all the other things Scripture presents as ways to awaken love in your heart.

The Warfare of Generosity

There are a lot of religions and religious teachers who have talked about holding back on revenge, but you are hard pressed to find any religion that talks about loving your enemies. But Jesus is not content with mere non-retaliation. He not only forbids revenge, but then He ratchets the whole thing up to a much higher level and calls for love and generosity toward those against whom you are naturally inclined to retaliate and strike back. Jesus says, “Go ahead and strike back, but strike back with generosity and kindness.”

If they hurt your feelings, give them continued friendship. If the issue is money or material possessions, give the person even more than what they think you owe. If it is a matter of personal freedom

– go the extra mile. Do even more than what is required. If someone needs a loan – if you can, make it a gift.

At the beginning of the sermon I told you it is OK to fight back when you get into a quarrel or dispute. It is not only OK, it is required. God commands us to overcome evil.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil

1) You are commanded to win the fight.

Notice the only command in the verse: **Overcome**. You are commanded to win. Pull out your biggest guns, because you are commanded to win. Overwhelm your opponent. If he hits you with a peashooter, pull out a .38. If he fires a rifle shot, respond with a tank. If he gets a tank, drop a nuclear bomb. Don't be content to lose.

2) Your opponent is not the other person.

Second, this enemy you are fighting and that you are commanded to overcome is not the person who is hurting you. It is not any person at all. Your opponent that you are to defeat is *evil*.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood

Is it OK to be in a fight? Sure – but not with your husband. And not with your wife or your boss or neighbor or person at church or anybody who has flesh and blood. But aside from that, sure – you can go to war all you want against evil.

3) The only weaponry you are permitted to use is “good.”

So you are commanded to win, the enemy is evil and not the person, and then a third observation - there is only one weapon you are permitted to use. **Overcome evil...** with what? (**good**) You cannot use your fists, you cannot use harsh words, you cannot use revenge or nagging or manipulation or a cold shoulder or the silent treatment. The only weapon you are allowed to use is **good**. And that makes perfect sense, because if the enemy is evil, then obviously you do not want to introduce more of the enemy onto the battlefield by adding your own evil. Trying to overcome evil with evil is like trying to put out a fire with gasoline. The only weapon that works against evil is good, and so that is the only weapon we are permitted to fight with. That is the weapon powerful enough to do it.

Those three principles make for some interesting warfare. The person hurts you, and the war has begun. You are never to fight against that person, but you do declare all out war on the evil. So he hurts you; you blast him with kindness. He does not accept your kindness and fires off some more evil – time to pull out the big guns. Now you double and triple your kindness and acts of love. As much as he escalates evil, you escalate the good until the evil is annihilated, and you win your brother's heart.

David

One of the most striking examples of this in all of Scripture took place between David and Saul. In 1 Samuel 24 David is running from Saul, and Saul is pursuing David, and neither one of them realize they are actually headed straight for each other. Saul is headed to the Crags and David is coming from the Crags and their paths intersect in a place called “the sheep pens.”

I don't know if David saw him coming and hid in a cave, or if he was already in there at the time, but in v.3 David and his men are way back in this huge cave, and they watch Saul's army pass right in front of the cave. So they are in there trying to be silent, trying not to move a muscle as they watch thousands of heavily armed soldiers passing right in front of the cave. And then, to their horror, Saul's army stops.

But then, what happens next, need not be described – except to say it was a relief to both David and Saul.

3 He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself.

Saul wants a little privacy, so he goes into this cave. And of all the caves in the whole nation of Israel he happens to pick the one David is hiding in. He thinks he found a private cave and it turns out all his enemies are in there.

The literal translation is he “covered his feet,” which is Hebrew for going #2. Now look down at the end of v.4.

4 David crept up unnoticed

The word translated “**unnoticed**” is the same word used in Judges 4:21 of when Jael snuck up on Sisera while he was sleeping and drove a tent peg through his temple, and the description of what Saul was doing resembles the activity of Eglon at the time he was assassinated. So the writer of 1 Samuel here takes terms from Judges 3 and 4 that are connected to two famous assassinations. It might have had a similar effect as the phrase “grassy knoll” does for our culture. Saul is sitting there like Eglon and David is sneaking up like Jael. The writer is painting a picture in your mind of an ideal assassination opportunity. If this were a movie the ominous, “Someone is about to get killed” music would be playing.

And it all makes perfect sense to David’s men.

4 The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'"⁴

To them that is an undeniable stroke of providence and a sign from God that they are to kill Saul. (Be careful about hearing God’s voice in coincidences. We are not in a position to dictate to God what He means by what He does. If you want to hear God’s voice go to Scripture.) Anyway, the assassination theme music is playing, and David’s men quote the prophecy, and now here comes David sneaking up on Saul, but then David does something totally unexpected.

... and cut... off a corner of Saul's robe.

I am thinking Saul must have taken his robe off and set it aside, so I doubt he is wearing it at this point. Still, this is a pretty stealthy move. David knew how to move in complete silence.

5 Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.

How could he be conscience stricken for doing that? Compared to what they were trying to get him to do this was nothing. But David’s conscience does not measure the rightness or wrongness of an action by what other people would do. He measures it by the principles called for in God’s Word. And God’s Word calls us to respect and honor those in authority over us.

Cutting Saul’s robe was sin. The royal robe was a symbol of kingship itself. Cutting it was a slap against the very office of Saul. It is like tagging the presidential seal with graffiti or something. It was an act of disrespect.

In fact, it is essentially the same sin that David’s men wanted him to do. They differed only in degree. The men wanted an extreme act of rebellion and David instead does a little act of rebellion. But it is still the sin of rebellion against the King.

So David is conscience stricken immediately. He does not spend weeks or months or years trying to justify it. Immediately he accepts the fact that what he did was wrong.

⁴There’s no record of this prophecy in Scripture. It may be that they just interpreted the circumstance as a prophecy. Or more likely there was a prophecy, but they are misinterpreting it. It probably applied to some other situation. And even if it did apply here, the prophecy was that David could do to his enemy as he pleased. And that’s exactly what David did. What pleased David – what he desired to do – is to show his king honor and respect and loyalty.

6 He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." 7 With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul.

That word “**rebuked**” in v.7 means to rip in half. David tore into them with his words.

Controlling those men in a context like this would not be easy. They believe this is God’s will and they do not back down easily. David has to get tough. Whoever makes the first move toward Saul David steps right in front of him. “Lay one finger on God’s anointed and I’ll rip you in half.”

But Saul is oblivious to this whole drama. He still thinks he is alone in there.

7 ...And Saul left the cave and went his way.

Saul finishes up, grabs his robe which now has a slight alteration, and walks out of the cave.

David’s men are disappointed. But at least this will buy them some time. As Saul and his men head up into the high mountain Crags where David just came from, David and his men can go the opposite direction where Saul just came from. That is the last place Saul will look, and so this will buy them a lot of time.

All they have to do is wait a little while, then take off up the road to the north. But guess who spoils that escape plan.

8 Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul

One thing about following David – it never gets boring. You do not have to worry about him being overly predictable. Another near miss, another narrow escape, they are home free, and you walk out there and call out to him? His men are probably thinking, “Aren’t there easier ways than this to commit suicide?”

8 ..."My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. 9 He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? 10 This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the LORD's anointed.' 11 See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. 12 May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. 13 As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you. 14 "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? 15 May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

You know what David is doing here? He is overcoming evil with good. He was not interested in overcoming Saul. All that would have taken was one blow from the sword in the cave. But David does not want to overcome Saul; he wants to overcome the evil in Saul’s heart. And it works.

16 When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud.

This is the great King Saul – standing there crying. This is the man who watched Doeg slaughter the entire city of Nob - children and babies and women – without saying a word. His heart was as hard as granite, but it was softened by David’s love and respect. There is incredible power in repaying evil with kindness.

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

The worse someone treats you the greater power and opportunity you have to touch their heart.

This section is the longest speech ever recorded by Saul and every word in it is exactly right. It is hard to believe these words are coming out of Saul's mouth. This whole speech is so unlike him. He has felt remorse before, and he has been apologetic, but usually he mixes in a lot of rationalization and excuses. Here there's none of that.

17 "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. 18 You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. 19 When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. 20 I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. 21 Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

He humbles himself just like Jonathan and speaks to David as his superior, and begs him for mercy in the future. And that happened because David obeyed Ro.12:21 1000 years before it was written. Look back at v.17.

17 "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly.

Lit. "You have done good to me and I have done evil to you." In other words, "You have overcome evil with good."

Benediction: Hebrews 6:10-11 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.