

ESTHER

A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

STUDY TEN

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16

Don't take your cues from what the world will do because it will invariably retaliate with vengeance.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

To slap back when we've been slapped, to trick when we've been tricked, or to mock when we've been mocked—no one needs any training to return like for like. The tit-for-tat impulse grows in us during childhood and lingers through our old age. But no matter how strong the urge to retaliate grips us, we don't have to let it steer us.

God's Spirit grants us the fruit of self-control to help us rein in our temptation to retaliate. Even though retaliation promises sweet satisfaction, no one ever regretted choosing self-control once tasting the honey its peace provides.

If the mere mention of *self-control* gives you a sinking feeling because curbing your impulses is a struggle, take a deep breath and repeat after Paul, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). God has equipped you through His Spirit and with His wisdom to do all He would have you do. That includes self-control.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Let's begin our study of the Word with prayer.

Father, thank You for giving us power, love, and self-discipline through Your Spirit. All these are gifts because of the work of Your Son. I realize that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit because no amount of my own energy can restrain my urge to retaliate. Through this study, help me lay down my will and embrace Yours because it is better—in every way it is better. In Jesus' name, amen.



The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

King Ahasuerus' first edict, devised by wicked Haman, gave the Jews' enemies the right to murder and plunder them on one awful day which Haman determined by casting lots or *purim*. It was March 7.

After Haman died, however, Esther pleaded with the king to issue another “decree that reverses the orders of Haman” (Esther 8:5). The king authorized Mordecai to write a second edict that, on the same date, gave the Jews the right of self-defense against those who attacked them. How would the Jews use their new right? Would they see the second edict as a license for revenge? Let's find out.



Observation: Hope and Freedom for the Jews

Observation helps you discover the author's main points by picking out the main verbs and looking for the flow of thought. The author examines three core events in [Esther 9:1–16](#). Take a moment now to read this passage slowly.

Victory in the Provinces—Esther 9:1–4

In Esther 9:1–4 what significant details do you observe?

The author also interpreted the events for the reader. Below, write how the author imparted the theological meaning of these events.

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16

Victory in Susa—Esther 9:5–14

Now observe Esther 9:5–14 and record any important details you discover.

What were Esther's two requests of the king?

1. _____
2. _____

Outcomes and Limits—Esther 9:15–16

Lastly, examine Esther 9:15–16 and record your observations below.

Remember, biblical authors sometimes repeated themselves to emphasize their points. What did the author repeat in this section?

Self-control frees us from slavery. Self-control stops habits. It checks us. It halts us. A car, no matter how beautiful, attractive, or expensive, if it lacks brakes, is a dangerous thing on the highway. A car without brakes is a life without control. It goes too far, and it brings damage and terrible, tragic hurt to other people.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16



Interpretation: God’s Power and Plan

Interpretation helps us find the meaning of the text. Let’s see what principles about relating to God and dealing with our enemies emerge for us to learn.

God’s Power to Change People and Circumstances

So much had changed in such a short time. The heart of King Ahasuerus changed toward the Jews from antagonism to support. The power in the palace shifted from Haman to Mordecai, the new prime minister. For months, the Jews lived under a cloud of doom, but suddenly the sun broke. March 7 changed from a day of defeat to a day of victory, from a day of dread to a day of hope, from a day of bondage to a day of freedom.

What reversals did you observe in *Esther 9:1–4*? What principle can you write about God’s power? How does He want you to relate with Him in light of His sovereign control?

God’s Plan for Relating to Our Enemies

The author of Esther provided a case study of how God allows for self-defense while limiting retaliation. The Jews didn’t allow their freedom to go too far. They attacked only “anyone who tried to harm them” (Esther 9:2) and “those who hated them” (9:5). They gathered as a unified force throughout the provinces to “defend their lives” and gain “relief from all their enemies” (9:16). Living freely was their goal, not taking wholesale revenge.

Also, while they were given the right to take whatever they wanted from their enemies, the author emphasizes three times that they didn’t take any plunder (9:10, 15–16).

What principles can you draw from their example regarding self-defense and self-control?

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16

Built into the heart of those ancient Jews, though in Persia all those years, was a long-term restraint coming from holy Scripture that held them in check. What's the point? They were free to strike back without reservation, certainly free to go the full distance in retaliation. But the Jews deliberately applied self-control. They refused to treat their enemies as they had the freedom to do. They held back. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Rest from Our Enemies

Sandwiched between the two statements about the Jews not taking plunder lies an easily overlooked but significant Hebrew phrase. The author wrote that the Jews “gained relief from all their enemies” (Esther 9:16) or gained “rest from” their enemies (9:16 NASB footnote). This statement emphasizes God’s promise to give the Jews *rest* from their enemies (sometimes translated *relief* throughout Esther). Below we will examine a few verses that develop this major biblical theme.

Record what the following verses say about *rest*.

Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:9–10

Deuteronomy 25:19; Joshua 1:13–15 (Don’t miss the reference to Amalek, the ancestor of Agag, who is in the lineage of Haman.)

2 Samuel 7:1–11

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16

King Solomon could not retain the rest God gave him and his people because he pursued other gods. God raised up prophets to bring the wayward Israelites back to Himself. Review these two passages in Isaiah in which God promised a future rest for His people.

Isaiah 11:10; 32:17–18

After developing a quick historical overview of God’s promise of rest to His people, it gives new theological meaning to the Lord’s adored offer, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Can you now see more clearly the theological significance of *rest* used by the author of Esther in 9:16? In Esther, *rest* means to be undisturbed by enemies. In other words, the term means to be free to enjoy our work—our God-given purpose—in the same way God did when He “rested on the seventh day” of creation (Genesis 2:1–3).

Rest doesn’t mean inaction but performing the *right* action—of doing what God made us to do. Further in Scripture, *rest* takes on a deeper meaning: Christ’s peace in us because of our relationship with Him—the chief reason for which God made us.

Don’t carry out your own revenge. If I could get on my knees to make it more effective, I would. Please, lay down your arms. I’ve never met a human being who was an adult who didn’t have somebody he or she could blame for something. We’re all, in that sense, victims of abuse, victims of mistreatment, victims of wrong words, victims of misunderstanding. Don’t carry out your own revenge. Remember the Lord is your defender. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Self-Control and Rest in Christ

To exercise the kind of self-control displayed by the Jews and promised by the Spirit, we must enjoy a profound, supernatural rest in Christ. We would grow weary if we tried to avenge ourselves of every snub. Three principles help us move spiritually toward this rest in Jesus, so we won’t be tempted by the bitter root of retaliation.

1. *Remember you are a Christian, which means you are different from the world.* God has given you resources unavailable anywhere else. Enjoy His presence, comfort, and peace.

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16

2. *Remember, as a Christian, you are part of a family.* You are a child of God. We take our direction from His grace rather than retaliatory instincts.
3. *Remember the Lord is your defender.* As Paul declared:

Never pay back evil with more evil. . . . Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. 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. . . .*

Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.
(Romans 12:17–19, 21)

Do you feel retaliation's pull? If so, consider speaking with your enemy first and pursuing peace with him or her. Before you do, however, prepare how you will address the situation and pray for the Lord's blessing on your efforts of reconciliation. Record your plan and desired outcome below.

Do you know others right now who are in constant conflict, trading mutual attacks in a never-ending cycle of retaliation? Record your prayer for those people.

God's Spirit gives rest to the unsettled soul and releases us from the deep desire to retaliate. How remarkable was Jesus' cry from His cross, "Forgive them" (Luke 23:34). His love for others, even for His enemies, was unfathomable! He has the power to make reconciliation possible, and He will extend that power to the one who asks because He is good.

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for peace that conquers conflict and for joy that expels anger. Christ has purchased for me all the riches I could ever want, so please fix my mind on who I am in Him and the hope I have in Him. Satisfy me with Your presence so I will exercise supernatural self-control that forgives rather than retaliates. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and revised by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1989, 2018, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Study 10 • Page 8

