

Avoiding Revenge Tactics (vv. 17-21)

VERSE 17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone (μηδενὶ κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἀποδιδόντες, [*adj.dat.m.s. medeis never + adj.acc.nt.s. kakos evil + prep anti for + adj.gen.nt.s. kakos evil + pres.act.part.(imper) apodidomi return; repay; “pay back”*]).

Respect what is right in the sight of all men (προνοοῦμενοι καλὰ ἐνώπιον πάντων ἀνθρώπων [*pres.mid.part.(imper)nom.m.p. pronoeo have a mind to do; “Respect” + adj.acc.nt.p. kalos good, right + prep. enopion in the presence + adj.gen.m.p. pas all + noun gen.m.p. anthopos*]).

VERSE 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (εἰ δυνατόν τὸ ἐξ ὑμῶν, μετὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων εἰρηνεύοντες [*part. ei if + adj.nom.nt.s. dunatos possible + d.a.acc.nt.s. “it” + prep ek + pro.gen.p. su “on you” + prep meta + adj.gen.m.p. pas all + noun gen.m.p. anthropos + pres.act.part.(imper)nom.m.p. eireneuo be at peace*]).

VERSE 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord (μὴ ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδικοῦντες, ἀγαπητοί, ἀλλὰ δότε τόπον τῇ ὀργῇ, γέγραπται γάρ, Ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω, λέγει κύριος [*neg me + pro.acc.m.p. heautou “your own” + pres.act.part.(imper)nom.m.p. ekdikeo avenge + adj.voc.m.p. agapetos beloved + conj. alla but + aor.act.imper.2p. didomi give + noun acc.m.s. topos place + d.a.w/noun dat.f.s. orge wrath + pf.pass.ind.3s. grapho write + conj. gar + pro.dat.s. ego I + noun nom.f.s. ekdikesis retribution + pro.nom.s. ego “mine” + fut.act.ind.1s. antapodidomi repay + pres.act.ind.3s. lego + noun nom.m.s. kurios*]).

VERSE 20 “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK (ἀλλὰ ἐὰν πεινᾷ ὁ ἐχθρὸς σου, ψώμιζε αὐτόν· ἐὰν διψᾷ, πότιζε αὐτόν· τοῦτο [*conj. alla + part.ean if + pres.act.subj.3s peinao hungry + d.a.w/adj.nom.m.s. exhthros*]).

enemy + pro.gen.m.s. su + pres.act.imper.2s. psomizo feed + pro.acc.m.s. autos + part. ean if + pres.act.subj.3s. diphao be thirsty + pres.act.imper.2s. potizo give to drink + pro.acc.m.s. autos]; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD [τοῦτο γὰρ ποιῶν ἄνθρακας πυρὸς σωρεύσεις ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ [pro.acc.nt.s. houtos + conj. gar + pres.act.part.nom.m.s. poieo do + noun acc.m.p. anthraz charcoal + noun gen.nt.s. pur fire + fut.act.ind.2s. soreuo heap + prep epi upon + d.a.w/noun acc.f.s. kephale head + pro.gen.m.s. autos])."

VERSE 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (μὴ νικῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ ἀλλὰ νίκα ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν [*neg. me + pres.pass.imper.2s. nikao overcome + prep hupo + d.a.w/adj.gen.nt.s. kakos evil + conj. alla + pres.act.imper.2s. nikao + prep en + d.a.w/adj.dat.nt.s. agathos good + d.a.w/adj.acc.nt.s. kakos*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 17-21

1. To not render evil for evil means that we are not under any circumstances to indulge in vindictive retaliation (cf. 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9).
2. Self-defense is bonafide.
3. The next command (v. 17b) has to do with our behavior before the cosmos.
4. We are to conduct ourselves in such a way as to elicit the approval of people.
5. We are to be law-abiding and respectful of the laws of the land (cf. 2 Cor. 8:21).
6. Failure in this regard brings reproach upon the body of Christ.
7. The exhortation to live at peace with all men (v. 18) carries with it a reservation.
8. The words “if possible” indicates that it may not always be possible to live at peace.
9. We do not have to sacrifice the directive will of God to live at peace with certain individuals.
10. Both passive and active resistance is legitimate.
11. We are to do everything reasonable to live at peace with the cosmos.
12. Never should discord be traced to us.
13. In v. 19 by addressing the Roman saints as “beloved” Paul is solicitous of them not to take their own revenge.
14. This is how Paul demonstrates his affection and “parental” concern to these believers.
15. We are to leave matters in God’s hands when at all possible.
16. If a criminal offense is committed against us report it to the authorities.
17. As it is their responsibility to exercise God’s wrath against crime.
18. The law allows for self-defense.
19. The wrath mention here is God’s wrath over evil doers.
20. Paul supports this admonition with an appeal to Scripture.

21. Deut. 32:35 is an assertion of divine prerogative.
22. We are not to try and play God, but to cast our cares on him when evil is rendered against us.
23. God has all the facts and He has the ability to bring divine judgment against those who seek to harm us.
24. When a believer is a victim of this kind of undeserved suffering the path of trust in God is the way to go.
25. Let Him retaliate.
26. God knows the right time and way to bring wrath against those who come against us.
27. Avoid retaliation as taught in Prov. 24:29.
28. Jesus set an example in this regard as he endured those who persecuted Him (cf. 1 Pet. 2:23).
29. Where opportunity presents itself follow the formula of verse 20 which is a quotation from Prov. 25:21 & 22.
30. Also, note Lk. 6:27-28 as our modus operandi when suffering by our enemies.
31. Doing well towards an aggressor, if opportunity presents itself, results in divine wrath falling on him.
32. Burning coals on the head is figurative for severe divine judgment.
33. If such a situation occurs where the believer leaves room for the wrath of God and it falls on an enemy do not rejoice in this.
34. This is taught in Prov. 24:17 & 17.

END: Romans Chapter Twelve
February, 2023
Jack M. Ballinger