

# REVENGE

(With a Focus on Romans 12:19-21)

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## New Testament Greek words related to REVENGE

### **ekdikeo**

To vindicate one's right, to do justice, to protect, defend, one person from another, to avenge one's self; - to avenge a thing (i.e., to punish a person for a thing)

### **ekdikesis**

A revenging; vengeance, punishment

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## This concept can be used in a *good* sense:

- The widow wanted to obtain justice or "legal protection" from her adversary - Luke 18:3,5
  - One of the results of repentance within the Corinthian church: a willingness to deal with flagrant sin (to "avenge the wrong") - 2 Corinthians 7:11
  - Paul would be ready to "punish" persistent disobedience within the Corinthian church, once the church itself was consistent in the matter of obedience – 2 Corinthians 10:6
  - Governments are to punish evildoers - 1 Peter 2:14
  - Other verses make reference to the judgment of God.
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**But in Romans 12, the word is used in a *negative* (evil) sense, and we are told to have a DIFFERENT kind of conduct (*instead of* revenge):**

Romans 12:19

**Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath [anger], for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.**

[This quotation is from Deuteronomy 32:35. It is also quoted in Hebrews 10:30.]

## What type of conduct are we to have?

Romans 12:20

**If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.**

This verse is a quote from Proverbs 25:21-22:

**If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;  
if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head,  
and the LORD will reward you.**

What exactly does it mean to "heap burning coals on his head"? Interpretations vary, depending on one's understanding of Old Testament culture. (See note below.) But Paul makes sure that there is no mistake in understanding his intention, by telling us his intention in the verse that follows!

Romans 12:21

**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

This is nothing different than what Jesus himself requires from us!

Matthew 5:44-45a

**But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.**

Luke 6:27-28

**But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.**

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### **\*\*Note about "coals of fire" - some possible interpretations:**

Here are some possible interpretations of the what the "coals of fire" signify:

1) In many cultures at that time, fire was considered very important. Hot embers could be carried from place to place in containers. In some instances, an insulated container may have been carried on the individual's head. (Then he would not be in danger of burns from the rising heat.) According to this view, the emphasis would be on the good we are to do, especially when the other person is in need.

2) This statement could also be reminiscent of an Egyptian ritual signifying "repentance." According to this view, the good that we do would (hopefully) bring shame and repentance to the person. The focus would be on the "mental pain" the person had, rather than on the physical pain that would be experienced, if the live coals were to actually touch his head.

This second view is probably the more predominant view among commentators - whether or not they make reference to the Egyptian ritual itself. But either way, the context shows us that our goal is to do good to the evildoer - in the hope that he will repent. We want him to become our *friend*, rather than our *enemy*. (The verse is *definitely not* an encouragement for us to hope that he will have a "hotter fire in hell" - that is, that more coals will be "heaped upon his head"!)

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## Questions:

Remember that revenge (in the "negative" sense of Romans 12:19-21) can involve just about anything that goes against the command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It does not have to be restricted to major acts of violence.

### PART 1

Think about times in which you may have taken revenge for wrongs committed against you (or at least wished you could have). Think about times in which you didn't actively take revenge, but passively avoided doing good to the one who wronged you. Both of these choices are sin. Remember that these verses in Romans require not only that you *stop* doing evil conduct, but also that you *replace* that evil conduct with good.

- Why did you do things the way you did? (Look at the "real" reasons, as well as the "excuses"!)
- In such situations, how could you have acted differently? What are some specific things you could have done?
- Are there any past incidences in which you need to repent - perhaps even confess your sin to those you sinned against? (It doesn't matter whether or not they sinned against you. Their sins do not cancel your obligations.) Do something about it soon. (Don't let an unrepentant heart or unconfessed sin hinder your fellowship with God!)

[If you have sin to confess, you very likely have questions about how the person will respond to what you say. Remember: 1) the things we imagine don't always happen, and 2) you are accountable to God for your own actions, not his. If you can, settle the matter in your heart before you talk to him. (But don't procrastinate!) How should you respond if you confess your sin and ask for forgiveness, and the person responds in an improper way?]

- When the next situation arises, think about your options before you act. How can you do the good that verse 21 requires you to do?

## **PART 2**

Think about times in which you may have responded in a manner that was pleasing to God - that is, you did NOT take revenge.

- What can you learn from these *past* situations, which may encourage you or prepare you for *future* situations? What did God use to help you (or remind you) to do the good? [Remember that doing what is truly "good" - good both in action and in the motive of the heart - is contrary to our natural (fleshly) instincts! Romans 7:18. Any time truly "good" things happen, God deserves praise!]
- NOTE: If you do not recall any such situations, just focus on the questions in the previous section. As you learn and practice those things, a time will come in the future, in which you will be able to look back at the ways God has worked in your life!