

Avenge

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”

Romans 12:19

Avenge—This Greek word comes from a word we already know. It is the combination of *ek*, a prefix that means “from or out” and *dike*, the Greek word for justice or righteousness. It means “to execute justice.” There are some implications here that strike at the hearty of human feelings. First, notice that we cannot consider executing justice unless we have the right to punish or take revenge. No punitive action is justified on those who do not deserve punishment. So, the first implication is that there is a perpetrator who is guilty. Secondly, no one is justified in taking a punitive action toward another unless they have the authority to do so. Sometimes the authority is fairly simple parents have the authority to correct their children, for example. Sometimes the authority is much more complicated as in criminal legal cases. But there is always the implication that punishment must come from someone who is granted the authority to execute it.

Paul draws attention to this second implication. Paul does not say that we should not execute justice because the offending party is not guilty. In fact, he says that we should not execute justice *in spite of the person’s guilt*. Why should we forego what seems to be a perfectly reasonable thing to do? Because, Paul says, the real authority is God’s authority. In other words, Paul is telling us that we are to give God His proper place in judgment to give this authority back to God by personal choice.

This really goes against the grain. The natural response of human beings is to defend against attacks and to punish those who hurt them. Jesus and Paul both teach a different approach. Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for them who abuse you.” Now Paul is telling us the same thing. Forego your right to justice. Let God deal with it. Oh, how difficult this is for us! How often do we want to “make things rights” in our own way? How quick we are to get defensive or take revenge! But these circumstances are no different than any other circumstances in our lives. We are called to live according to God’s words, and God says that He will take care of these things. We sometimes find it much easier to trust God about money, jobs and family than we do about that person who really upsets me or hurts me. Do you suppose that God has a different standard for them than he does for us? It’s a good thing that God take punishment upon Himself. I, for one, would have suffered much more than if it were only up to my fellow human beings.