

Romans 12:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Paul addresses believers as **dearly beloved** (ἀγαπητοί, agapētoi), his affectionate term for fellow Christians, before delivering a difficult command: **avenge not yourselves** (μὴ ἔαυτοὺς ἐκδικοῦντες, mē heautous ekdikountes). The verb means 'exact justice, punish, vindicate'—personal vengeance is forbidden. Instead, **give place unto wrath** (δότε τόπον τῇ ὄργῃ, dote topon tē orgē)—'make room for wrath.' This could mean God's wrath (don't usurp his role) or the opponent's wrath (step back, let it exhaust itself without retaliation). Either way, believers relinquish the right to settle scores.

Paul grounds this command in Scripture: **for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord**, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35. Vengeance belongs exclusively to God; he alone judges with perfect justice, knowledge, and authority. Humans lack the omniscience, righteousness, and impartiality required for righteous vengeance—our retaliation is always tainted by self-interest and limited perspective. Trusting God to repay means believing he will settle all accounts (Romans 2:5-6, Revelation 6:10). This doesn't negate civil justice (13:4) but forbids personal vigilantism. Faith in God's justice frees believers from the burden of revenge.

Historical Context

Roman law permitted personal retaliation in some cases; honor culture demanded revenge for insults. Gladiatorial combat and public executions satisfied society's appetite for retributive violence. Jewish tradition debated whether 'eye for eye' (Exodus 21:24) required literal retaliation or monetary compensation. Jesus radicalized the discussion: 'resist not evil' (Matthew 5:39). Paul applies this to the Roman church: victims of persecution, slander, or injustice must entrust judgment to God rather than take matters into their own hands. Early Christian martyrs exemplified this, forgiving persecutors and praying for enemies.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Where are you tempted to 'avenge yourself'—nurse grudges, plot retaliation, or demand personal vindication?
2. How does trusting that 'vengeance is mine, saith the Lord' free you from the exhausting burden of settling scores?
3. What injustice or unresolved hurt do you need to 'give place to wrath'—release to God's perfect judgment rather than pursue revenge?

Interlinear Text

μὴ	έαυτοὺς	έκδικοῦντες	ἀγαπητοί	ἀλλὰ	δότε	τόπον
not	yourselfes	avenge	Dearly beloved	but	rather give	place
G3361	G1438	G1556	G27	G235	G1325	G5117
τῇ	όργῃ	γέγραπται	γάρ	Ἐμοὶ	έκδικησις	ἐγὼ
G3588	unto wrath	it is written	for	is mine	Vengeance	I
	G3709	G1125	G1063	G1698	G1557	G1473
ἀνταποδώσω	λέγει	κύριος				
will repay	saith	the Lord				
G467	G3004	G2962				

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 32:35 (Parallel theme): To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

Hebrews 10:30 (Judgment): For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

Proverbs 24:29 (Parallel theme): Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.

Proverbs 20:22 (References Lord): Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.

Romans 12:17 (Parallel theme): Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

1 Thessalonians 4:6 (References Lord): That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

Leviticus 19:18 (Love): Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

Romans 12:14 (Parallel theme): Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Deuteronomy 32:43 (Parallel theme): Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

Matthew 5:39 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

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