

# The Bitterness Game

Jim Elliff

“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone,” God warns.



*Never?*

Like a man who has to move a water buffalo off the highway, “It ain’t all that easy.”

After all, you’ve been deeply hurt, and the pain has been going on a long time. How would it be possible to keep from taking matters into your own hands?

Some persons with rigid spines maintain their bitterness at military combat level for years. Others endure it as their sulking but undying companion till they pass off the scene. Some just coax it along at a simmer, nurturing it through the years, and are only riled up when the hurt is brought to mind through the occasional presence of their old foe. Many want to feel angry as often as possible, as if they are stabbing the person in the ribs every time they have a vengeful thought.

However, the victim is really the one who cannot get rid of his bitterness.

What does God say must be done? Interestingly, He says to *act* rather than *feel*. Here is how He puts it:

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.

“But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19-21)

## 1. *First, there is something NOT to do: Do not take your own revenge.*

Why not? After all, the perpetrator is wrong and you are right. Reason: If we do take our own revenge, we do not leave room for the wrath of God.

When you interfere with the justice of God toward wrongful actions done against you, you actually give the offending person more justification for his actions toward you. But by remaining free of any negative actions toward him, you leave God to do the judging. And judge He will. “I will repay,” says the Lord. Leave room for God’s wrath to take care of the other person. After all, only God knows perfectly what the other person is due. He is the impeccable judge and you are not.

## 2. *Second, there is something to DO: Overcome evil with good.*

By doing so, you will “heap burning coals on his head.”

Most likely the phrase describes the pangs of conscience and regret that will be heaped on the offending person’s head when you act lovingly instead of vengefully.

God is not saying, “Heap it up so that you can make it worse for him,” but rather that acting lovingly toward him as you should will often have a shame-producing effect.

When Joseph acted lovingly toward his brothers who had sold him into slavery, they felt more acutely sorry about their sin. Their consciences were stricken and they were made to think of God’s justice (Genesis 50). So with those who sin against you. Sincerely love the offending person through kind words and deeds, regardless of his thoughts and feelings.

Peter wrote about this kind of action also:

... not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead. (1 Peter 3:9)

Now you have something to exchange for the bitter thoughts that you have been harboring. Do it now!

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