



Fall Bible Memorization Project

Introduction

Well here we find ourselves taking the last steps of our journey in hiding Romans 12 in our hearts. As is usually the case on a special journey, some of the last steps may be the most powerful, the most memorable. Paul's last words in this chapter are full of power for us as they tie all his thoughts together in one last statement!

Looking at the verses and looking at our lives

In the NIV version, verse 20 begins with the words, "*on the contrary*". On the contrary to what? Throughout the entire chapter Paul has been comparing the way the world thinks with the way we ought to think. I love the way he ends this, by saying "*on the contrary*." Most of us get the picture early on in life that we should not be a "contrary" person, in other words a "hard to get along with" person. We don't like it when people act contrary and well we shouldn't. However this is different. We have a choice between the world's ways and God's ways. Paul is basically saying, "Ok I have laid it out for you in these words of mine, you understand now how the world thinks; it thinks selfishly, pridefully, evilly, with mediocrity, and revengefully." I believe Paul is saying, "live contrary to all of that, you should never get along well with any of that kind of lifestyle." Paul is actually instructing us to be contrary! Partnering up with God in that way can be fun and it can be challenging as I am sure you are well aware.

Before we go any further, let's review how some of the different versions express verses 20-21:

[On the contrary: "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." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.] (NIV)

"Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good." (Message)

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (KJV)

[But you should do this: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. Doing this will be like pouring burning coals on his head." Do not let evil defeat you, but defeat evil by doing good.] (NCV)

Although "*if your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty give him something to drink*" can sound very poetic, whenever you try to live that, you know it can be very challenging! The world tells us to get back at our enemies, to take revenge, to harbor bitter resentment and to keep them an enemy. Paul says on the contrary, invite them into your life and see where they have a need and then do your best to meet it! That is difficult, that is impossible unless you have a renewed mind, a mind that has been transformed by the grace and Word of God.

Often in Christian circles we tend to steer clear of taking direct revenge because that is obviously living against God's standards. We know that God doesn't want us to take revenge. However, we rarely take the next step of inviting our enemies into our lives and then doing our best to meet their needs. That is way more of a challenge and yet God is very clear with this direction for us. That is contrary living. Contrary to everything we feel and every message we receive from the world. Why would God challenge us to do this? I believe the answer is clear and can be seen from two perspectives.

The first perspective is once again a direct reflection of what He has done for us. We were His enemies. Not only did He forgive us, He set Himself up as our servant, ministering to our needs.

The second perspective is communicated right here at the end of verse 20 when it says, "*in doing this you will heap burning coals upon his head*". Over the years I have heard many people say that verse with a sense of revenge, with an idea of "if you do this good to your enemy you are going to really put him in his place and show him how horrible he really is!" And... I would say that for many years, I also thought that myself. However, now two things make me think differently:

1. First, several years ago my husband traveled to Israel and while there he learned a great deal. One thing he learned was that back in Biblical days, in the cold seasons of life, people would travel with a basket of hot coals on their head. These coals provided warmth against the cold and thereby preserved their life.
2. Second, in all the preceding verses of Romans 12, Paul has been cultivating in us a spirit of sincere love and service and forgiveness. Why would he then conclude by encouraging something opposite to all of his former instruction? It just doesn't fit.

I now understand that heaping burning coals upon someone's head is a way of giving them life. It is a way of serving our enemy, of bringing them the life that has been so freely given to us by Christ Himself. When we do that, we are not overcome by evil but we are overcoming evil with good! That takes us to verse 21!

Paul sums up this whole chapter by giving us that very straightforward instruction in verse 21. We all live in this world and the pattern of this world, the thinking that is against God's Truth and is therefore evil, wants to overcome us. It will try often. Whether a thought, an experience, a habit, a circumstance, a trial, or a mistreatment; throughout our day evil comes our way, threatening to overcome us. When we live contrary to evil, in whatever form it takes, then we are overcoming evil with good instead of it overcoming us. When we take action to serve our enemies and serve them in ways that bring life we are overcoming evil with good and being a true reflection of Christ Himself. We can only do that as we transform our minds to think according to God's Truth.

So what happens when you live this way? There is nothing like partnering up with God and what a privilege that He even invites us to do so! When Paul ended Romans 12, he was actually drawing on his rich Jewish heritage and quoting from Proverbs 25:21-22. There is one line from these verses in Proverbs that Paul did not include in his statement. It finishes by saying, "*and the Lord will reward you.*" What a great way to finish out our memorization of Romans 12. We can know that when we choose a lifestyle according to God's Word, the reward is great. There are riches untold, riches unseen that come from living according to Truth. I hope you have found these riches at the end of this journey!

Consider

Can you identify any enemies in your own life? Consider how you might serve them and bring deeper life to them.

- Would you find that challenging? Why?
- What is the first step you can take to do that today?
- Pray for the courage to take that step and then follow through!

In looking back at all of Romans 12 consider some things about your life.

- Do you live a contrary lifestyle, a life that doesn't get along with the world and its ways?
- How do you specifically do that?
- Take some time to look back at Romans 12 and identify some ways that your life is lined up with the teaching in these verses. Celebrate with God about how He has renewed your mind so you can live according to His will!

Pray

"Lord help me to live an "on the contrary life". Help me to be willing to give people life when the world and my flesh tell me otherwise. Help me to not be overcome with evil, but to live out the Truths of Romans 12 and overcome evil with good!"

Romans 12 has spoken Truth into our lives and it will continue to do so as we listen to the Holy Spirit bringing it to remembrance for us throughout our days!