

Transforming Daily
“... coals of fire on his head ...”
Romans 12:20

Anyone purposefully make you angry lately? Have you felt the sting of fiery darts or maybe felt the blade of a knife, metaphorically, stabbing you in the back (I don't know, maybe you have experienced it literally). As long as there are people and sin in the same proximity opportunities will exist to accuse and attack one another. In many cases, it is brother against brother, regardless of being naturally and/or spiritually related.

In the text of Romans 12, Paul is specifically addressing one's foe potentially being offensive to a believer. However, irrespective of the source of tension and conflict, the believer is to, “if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (v.18). In doing so, it is as if heaping coals upon their head. Why is that the case? The one causing the conflict more than likely is trying to get a rise out of you. They are anticipating you to conduct yourself as they have been conducting themselves. Therefore, when the believer doesn't accommodate that anticipated or expected reaction by the foe, frustration sets in.

From time to time, this text is subject to some humorous anecdotes on the part of the one being offended. The humor is found in the motive behind the kind response of the believer. In some cases, a believer will use the motive of heaping coals on the offender's head for why they don't react as anticipated by the offender. That isn't quite the way Paul meant this passage to be applied. The result of heaping coals on a foe's head is not supposed to be the goal, but the natural or supernatural outcome. So when a believer says, “I'm just going to be kind to the individual who has offended me in order to heap coals upon his head,” that isn't the right reason for being kind. But instead, because it is the predisposition of the believer to show Christ-like (Christian) kindness to begin with, the offender will naturally or supernaturally suffer disappointment and disgust. In other words, they won't get the better part of you.

This passage is one of those passages that is easier to preach than to live. It is the natural response to retaliate against any attack. Someone might say, “Don't I have a right to defend myself?” There is a difference between retaliation and self-defense. That's why verse 19 says of the Lord, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” You have to make that decision for yourself.

Is someone antagonizing you? Does someone seem to have it out for you? Do you feel like you can't escape the blindsiding remarks or undermining comments? Keep on shining through with the love of Christ. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (v.21). And by all means, remember what it feels like so that you aren't the one receiving coals of fire on his head.