



BRAD JERSAK

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

Does God Have Enemies?

Does God have enemies? To me, this is a fascinating question, a query that I have had to ponder both theologically and personally.

To answer the question biblically, I'm drawn immediately to two important texts. First, directly from the lips of Jesus Christ concerning the hostility his disciples were sure to face by associating with him:

Matthew 5:44 - *"Love your enemies."*

And the next text was penned by the apostle Paul with reference to our former hostility toward God:

Romans 5:10 - *"For while we were enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son..."*

Both these verses show us that *enmity*—the disposition of being an enemy, in opposition, or hostile toward—can sometimes be one-sided.

So often, we dismiss human hatred, injustice and oppression with a curious and transparent objection that I call *both-sides-ism*. If one side is guilty, we're all too quick to object, "Well it takes two to tango," or "OK, there was an

injustice here, but what about that time when..."

Even in the case of domestic violence, blaming the victim happens all too often and

for some reason, religious authorities are frequently the culprits pointing the finger.

Jesus and Paul, on the other hand, propose that hatred and enmity can be one-sided. While God's enemies (or ours) are those who have chosen to hate, mistreat, or even kill God's Son (or God's children), God refuses to be their enemy. And then Christ calls us to follow his example. Refuse enmity!

While someone may take the role of enemy

toward God or toward us—hostile opponents who seek to do harm—God responds with self-giving, radically forgiving love. We see this revealed most clearly on the Cross of Christ. And it is this cross—to love, pray for and bless our enemies—that Christ calls us to take up ourselves. This is what Jesus means when he says, *"follow me."*

This is perhaps the best way to harmonize Jesus' words, *"Do not resist evil"* (Matthew 5:39) with Paul's exhortation, *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* It's not that we sit by and do nothing in the face of evil. Rather, Christ does call us to action but he rejects vengeance for himself and forbids it for his disciples.

But then how do we eradicate evil? Evil is overcome by love and forgiveness, even if that means martyrdom (as it has for so many). But doesn't that mean evil wins? Not if Easter morning has something to say about it! Evil does *not* win, death does *not* win—because they do not speak the final word. *Love* wins, *Life* wins, *Light* wins. Three beautiful L—names for Christ and for Christ-in-us.

So while others may purpose to be enemies of God, God does not return their animosity. God is the enemy of no one. God is the Redeemer, Saviour and Deliverer of all. As my friend Kenneth Tanner likes to say, with the self-offering of

Jesus, not one more human needs to die for our world to be made right.

That said, there is a non-human enemy toward which Christ has directed his hostility and enmity. His 'last enemy' and ours is *death* itself:

1 Corinthians 15:26 - *"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." And that enemy is put to death by Life himself.* □

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