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May Christians Celebrate When Their Enemies Suffer?

Eric Snow, Sermonette, May 14, 2011, UCG-IA, Ann Arbor, MI

Two Sundays ago, after President Obama announced that the American military had killed Osama bin Laden, some spontaneous celebrations erupted across America.

Across from the White House, hundreds gathered in Lafayette Square to chant “USA” and to sing “The Star Spangled Banner” and “God Bless America.”

Similarly, other joyful crowds suddenly gathered in Boston, at Ground Zero and Times Square in New York, and at some large colleges. So then, how should true Christians emotionally react to the news that the world’s leading terrorist had died?

Would God want true Christians in America to enjoy the death of their nation’s enemy?

But as Scripture reveals, true followers of Jesus shouldn’t react to this news as some of their countrymen did.

S.P.S. Christians shouldn't celebrate when their enemies die since they should love their enemies.

1. Christians should feel relief when justice is done against their enemies, but they shouldn't dance on their graves.

Proverbs 24:15-20, esp. v. 17

Notice that the righteous man prevails in the end. We shouldn't celebrate since God may turn away from punishing him in the future. Note also that this is an Old Testament teaching.

2. If Christians should love their enemies, they shouldn't express glee nor gloat when their enemies suffer and die.

Matt. 5:43-48

Who were the enemies that the Jews were taught to hate traditionally? The national enemy, such as the pagan Philistines, Amalekites, Moabites, Canaanites, etc.

Here it isn't my purpose to recite their awfully sinful way of life that was a major reason for Israel's invasion of the Holy Land under Joshua. But the violence of Israel's wars wasn't meant to be God's standard forever, just as the Old Testament's standard for divorce wasn't meant to last forever. God didn't reveal all his truth at once. Progressive revelation is a true doctrine.

Furthermore, Israel had a physical government in the world that had to use force to maintain law and order. But the church is now totally separate from the state in God's sight during this present dispensation. Christians shouldn't get involved in arresting and punishing criminals, including murderers and terrorists. That's why we shouldn't participate in our criminal justice system's enforcement machinery, such as by working as a judge, a prosecutor, a police officer, etc. This also happens when a juror votes to convict a criminal, which is one more

reason to be very wary about ever serving on jury duty.

If God loves our enemies, then we should too. That means we shouldn't try to take justice into our own hands, and inflict revenge on them or enjoy it when others punish them for their crimes and sins. That doesn't mean we should make it easy for them to hurt us, but it also means that we should let God punish them in due time. Furthermore, unless they were truly called and then committed the unpardonable sin by going back into the world, they will end up in the second resurrection and be given an opportunity to be saved. That means most likely Osama bin Laden likely will see the error of his beliefs and ways one day, repent, and come into God's family. Perhaps that's a really distasteful thought to some of us to think about, but Scripture says nothing to prove otherwise.

3. Let God deal with and punish the wicked in His own time.

Ps. 37:7-11

By God's providence, He may use or allow seemingly natural or normal means to bring about the accomplishment of His will. So a violent gangster might die from cancer or be taken out by another gangster's bullets. Furthermore, God uses the governments of this world to maintain law and order. As a result, He lets man's system of criminal justice to punish truly guilty people during its normal operations: Many truly guilty robbers, rapists, and murderers do get arrested, convicted, and imprisoned. Even in the case of Osama bin Laden, the U.S. Seals who dropped in on his home two Sundays ago arguably served a law enforcement function by executing a notorious terrorist. That perspective raises such political issues as whether major acts of terrorism, such as what took place on 9-11 that killed thousands of people, are acts of war, not just ordinary violations of the law. If so, then the military takes on a protective function similar to local law enforcement. But here I digress.

So in conclusion: Since true Christians should love their enemies, they shouldn't rejoice when their enemies suffer, but should feel relief when justice is done. Instead of taking matters into our own hands, let's allow God to punish the wicked in His own time by His own means.

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