

Tough Question

Does God Hate My Enemies?

Hey, Tim Perry here, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church welcoming you to Week 16 of Tough Questions.

This week, we're going to look at the question of enemies. How does God deal with his enemies and how does God deal with our enemies? It's an idea that we call imprecation.

Now before we get to that, I want to put in a little commercial here for this Reader's Guide that many of you might have purchased back at the beginning of our Project 4:4 experience. The Reader's Guide is meant to help guide you through the whole year of reading through the Bible. But I want to put in a plug for it because I think there is really helpful information in here that will help you read the Bible. If you didn't get a chance to get one of these Reader's Guides, you can hit on a link right underneath this video, and it will take you to the PDF version of this Reader's Guide. It's a little skinnier than this because it just has in it the articles that will help you with Biblical information. Stuff like what is the Bible and how is it arranged. How do I read the Bible? What are some strategies for studying it? Charts and timelines to help you place where things are at in the Bible, and then a series of articles on the different kinds of literature that are in the Bible and how you can read them most effectively.

Now I mention all of that because this week in the Project 4:4 Reader's Guide, you'll encounter a one-pager on how to read Old Testament Psalms and Proverbs – the wisdom literature in the Old Testament.

Well, so much for my commercial – I want to get us on to our question this week, which is enemies. God kill my enemy – do him in – wipe him out! Where does that come from and what does that mean in scripture? Have you ever had anybody in your life you would consider an enemy? Well, it turns out that the writers in scripture had enemies, and they went to God with their feelings of anger and frustration toward their enemies. As we're reading Project 4:4 this week, we encounter the imprecatory Psalms as we read. These are Psalms where the writer is saying, "God deal with bad people."

Here are a few examples out of Psalms 5. *"You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil. With you, the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies. Bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors."* So the Lord strongly dislikes wicked and evil people as well. *"Declare them guilty, oh Lord (the writer goes on to say). Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins for they have rebelled against you."*

From Psalms 7 – “Arise, Oh Lord, in your anger. Rise up at the rage of my enemies. Oh righteous God who searches minds and hearts. Bring to an end the violence of the wicked. God is a righteous judge – a god who expresses his wrath every day. If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword. He will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons. He makes ready his flaming arrows.” Have you ever felt like that toward somebody who is a subtle enemy of yours?

Psalm 10 says this – *“Break the arm of the wicked and evil man. Call him to account for his wickedness that he would not be found out.”*

So what is the essence of imprecation? Imprecation is the opposite of intercession. Intercession is a word that Christians use to describe how we pray for people. We intercede for someone else when we stand in the gap between God who has what they need and a person who doesn't have what they need – and we ask God in compassion to please meet that person's need.

Imprecation is just the opposite. We stand in the gap between a person who is a significant perpetrator of evil – whose actions are causing all kinds of damage and pain – whose attitude is one of settled hatred toward God, and we say, “God give them what their actions deserve. Give them the judgment and the punishment that the evil in their hearts warrants.” That's at the heart of imprecation. It's a very bold way to ask God to act on behalf of something that's not right that we see happening around us.

Look at all these Psalms that are Imprecatory Psalms. There's a dozen of them listed here, and if you look them up and read them – you'll get a really good feel for the kinds of circumstances – the kinds of people – where it's appropriate to ask God – confront their evil – turn their evil back on their own head.

Now, one question remains in my mind as I study and read about the imprecatory Psalms, and it might be a question you have, too. That sounds good for God to deal with bad people, but how does that square with Jesus? Do you remember those famous sayings of Jesus out of the Sermon on the Mount? (Matt. 5:43) *“You have heard it said, Love our neighbor and hate your enemy, but I tell you – love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your father in heaven.”*

Or what about this one? (Matt. 5:38) *“You have heard that it was said, eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*

These passages get us to think more deeply about the issue. It's not simply a matter of saying, “I hate that person and I want God to do them in.” It's a little deeper than that.

Let's look at two or three things that we can conclude. First of all, we have to ask the question, “Who is the real enemy in the first place?” Psalm 139 says this, *Oh,*

that you would slay the wicked, Oh God, Oh men of blood, depart from me. They speak against you with malicious intent. Your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you? And do I not loath those who rise up against you, as I hate them with complete hatred. I count them my enemies." So here, it's not uncategorically somebody whose doing something bad or uncategorically somebody we don't like, but it's someone who's a very enemy of God himself. So it's not just our personal little pet enemies out there who run around and make life miserable for us – it's people whose settled character is in opposition to who God is. That's who's worth really making an enemy with, scripture tells us.

And as if we're the ones who should judge that, the writer of the Psalm I was just reading – Psalm 139 – goes on to say this: *"Try me, search me, Oh God, know my heart. See if there is any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."* So if our attitude is one of humility, then we can go to God with these bold prayers of confrontation against evil and say, "God give the evildoer what he or she really deserves."

Second of all, God is the one who has the authority to deal with his enemies. He hasn't given that authority to you and me. He hasn't made us moralistic vigilantes who can go a round zapping anybody we want and mouthing off at anyone we want who makes us feel bad. No, it's God with the authority in his holy character to deal with His enemies.

Lastly, it's OK to give your enemy over to God. That's the safest place for your enemy. The imprecatory Psalms remind us that in the human experience, we are going to get to a point of great frustration with those who work evil in our world. And rather than taking that on ourselves – rather than compounding that hatred toward that person ourselves, go to God with those feelings. Go to God with that frustration. Go to God with that natural anger that wells up in us and give it over to God. It's much better for us to give our enemies over to God than to try to deal with them ourselves – to try to confront them ourselves – and turn ugly and evil in the process of trying to confront evil ourselves.