

PRAYING FOR A TERRORIST?

President Obama said the world is a better place because of the death of Osama bin Laden. After the announcement that bin Laden had been killed by special American forces in Pakistan, many people, especially Americans, rejoiced. One news report told of at least one person who rejoiced that bin Laden was finally in Hell. Pictures of Americans cheering and rejoicing were broadcast around the world. To many Muslims, these were pictures of “Christians” rejoicing in violence done to a great Muslim leader.

What should have been a true Christian’s attitude toward bin Laden and other terrorists? Does Christ really want Christians to rejoice when anyone goes to Hell, even a terrorist?

Over 900 years ago, professing Christians fought what is known as the Crusades in an attempt to deliver Jerusalem from the Muslims. Many church leaders encouraged men to go fight the “heathen.” Some essentially promised “Heaven” for those fighting the Muslims. They violated Christian teaching in sending an army in the name of Christ. Ironically, some Muslim religious leaders today are promising terrorists “Heaven” for killing “Christians.” Muslims have long looked upon Christians as perpetrators of violence. In their minds, it is only their duty to return violence for violence. When strict Muslims look upon “Christian” America, they see immodesty among its women and the toleration of drinking, even among professing Christians. These things would be forbidden to them.

How many Muslims have seen Christians exemplifying the teachings of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:9: *“That women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array”*? Do they know from the example of today’s Christians that the New Testament says, *“Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit”* (Ephesians 5:18)? Few Muslims would know what Jesus said about how Christians should treat their enemies. “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). They have seen few, if any, Christians putting that to practice. How many professing Christians actually prayed for bin Laden and other terrorists? How many truly love their enemies?

In no way do genuine Christians want to condone acts of terrorism, but at the same time, they do need to portray Jesus’ teachings on love for all mankind, even toward enemies. The New Testament teaches us to pray for government authorities as they exercise the role that God has given them. However, we are also to pray for our enemies.

Romans 13:4 says that government authority is, “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” The Christian does not protest the government’s responsibilities. God calls the Christian to work in the spiritual realm, not in the political realm. Christians have another message, not a message of revenge but a message of love even toward terrorists and other enemies. The message of love toward enemies takes on very practical aspects according to Romans 12:20, 21: *“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.”*

The world would be a different place if all Christians would exemplify Jesus’ teachings on love and prayer for enemies. In our world, even professing Christians tend to think that they need to support government action to reform society and get people to do what is right. They do not realize that far more good could be done when

people allow God to control their lives and direct their actions. Far more good can be done as Christians pray for their enemies than if they retaliate against them.

What might happen if more Christians prayed for their enemies? How much were the prayers of God's people involved when communism fell in Eastern Europe and in Russia? Various communist regimes fell from within even without war. The Bible says that God "*ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men*" (Daniel 4:17). God "*changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings*" (Daniel 2:21).

On a personal level, we can help change the attitudes and speak to the lives of those who are our enemies. If more Christians would focus on proclaiming the truth found in Jesus Christ, how might that speak to the lives of the enemies around them and even lead some of those enemies to faith in Christ? Consider praying for the spiritual needs of the terrorists who threaten our world. Pray for your own personal enemy who lives next door. "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*" (Romans 12:18).

~Roger Berry