

September Briefings

Matthew 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor^{and} and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." One of the most difficult commands God has told his people is to pray for our enemies and those who persecute the church, God's own people.

In the first century and prior, Israel the Jewish, people were persecuted by their enemies year after year, century after century down to our present day. Their enemies were not those who simply insulted them, but who wanted to kill them and destroy their culture and religion. Telling them to pray for their enemies is akin to telling Christians in Iraq, or Afghanistan, to love and pray for ISIS, Taliban or Al-Qaeda.

Yet this is what Jesus asks. He knew it would one day require Christians to pray for Islamic terrorists, those who torture and kill the Bride of Christ. Jesus calls and enables His people "not to be enemies of those who may be enemies to us. From there perspective, we are their enemies, but from our perspective, they should be our neighbors." (Jn. McArthur)

If you think that's difficult, if you don't want to pray for or bless terrorists, radicals and those who are destroying our country, you're not alone. Remember Jonah? He was sent to Nineveh to warn them to repent or God would destroy them. Why did he run (sail) in the opposite direction? He hated those who persecuted his people. They were like ISIS, brutal and haters of God and God's people. Also, because he knew God to be gracious, loving and patient. Jonah 4:2 *He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*



Like Jonah, we want our enemies to receive their just desserts, not mercy and forgiveness, but misery, removal from their position and witness their fall. How would all the Christians who prayed for Hitler during WWII feel if in the end he truly repented and was forgiven all his atrocities? They may very well have felt cheated as if it was unfair for God to forgive such a monster. They would probably complain like Jonah. But this is exactly why we should pray for our enemies, for God to show the same grace and mercy he has and continues to show us.

How can we pray? Pray for their conversion. While it is unlikely and rare, it is the will of God who died for them, loves them and can change the heart of a terrorist or progressive. Consider Saul who killed and persecuted the church.

We can pray the evil they do be restrained. Asking God to bless them involves the end of their evil and destructive behavior which would benefit themselves and others. The restraining of their evil may come from a change of heart, a change in circumstances or even death. However, we should heed the words of Proverbs 24:17 *Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice.*

Remember too, we were former enemies of God and I'm sure someone was praying for us to receive God's mercy and grace. Of course, if anyone refuses the grace of God and only hardens their heart toward Jesus Christ then they will indeed receive divine judgment that is due everyone who rejects Him as savior.