

October 2001: Love Your Enemies

by Aaron Greenway

We all saw it on TV that morning, the 11th of September...the whole world watching in horror as two commercial airliners slammed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, bringing the towers crashing down. And then a third which seemed headed for the White House somehow got diverted and hit the Pentagon. And yet even a fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania. President George W. Bush, visibly shaken by the event, took to the microphone to console and calm the shock of the American people. Knowing we had lost thousands of people, this shock continued for a few days, but as the President spoke about justice, that shock turned into anger, anger against those who would dare such a thing.

To be honest, I have never seen my country so united, not to mention all the flags that are being proudly displayed on the storefronts of businesses and automobiles. Now, the President has special forces in Afghanistan searching for one particular man, Osama bin Laden. Just like Sadaam Hussein before him, he is now a hunted man.

When we try to make sense of all that has happened, many emotions flood us and we end up frustrated. All we know is that we “despise” the people who did this. As a result, Moslems all over the country have undergone personal assault. I even heard about a group of people who demanded that three or four Arabs get off a particular plane or they wouldn’t fly. So, the flight staff made the Arabs leave. Fear and anger are now here in a new way. And anyone who is of Islamic faith has become a target.

But, isn’t that the human way to react to this?

Jesus had a few things to say about one’s enemies. For the sake of review, let’s look at Matthew

**“But I say to you,
love your enemies,
bless those
who curse you,
do good to
those who hate you,
and pray for those
who spitefully use you
and persecute you.”**

**– Jesus
(Matthew 5:44)**

5:43-44:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.

Hating one’s enemy is something that obviously had infiltrated the Jewish mind set of that day, perhaps because of Israel’s past histories with the Philistines, the Assyrians or the Babylonians. Being put in captivity or being put under the rulership of the Roman jurisdiction probably did not feed a godly precept, like loving one’s enemies. So, when Jesus spoke of these things, it had to shock the public, because He was telling them to do the impossible. But, those who are born again of the Spirit of the God *must* love *and* forgive those who have hurt them. Recently, my pastor said that there is a great doubt about those who refuse to show mercy in reference to their salvation, because those who show mercy have been shown mercy. And those who don’t show mercy probably do not know what it is.

There are thousands of people of the Islamic faith here in the United States. Many of them are Arabs. Some of them are not. But we have the greatest opportunity to reach out to them than ever before. Can you imagine being a Moslem, being persecuted and then a Christian comes up to you, maybe risking his/her life, and loves you. Do you know how hard that would be? Do you know how hard that would be for *me*? But, somehow, if we are walking in the power of the Spirit of God, then we cannot help but love those who have done us or could do us harm. We see a great example of this when Stephen cried out (while the Jews were stoning Him for preaching the Gospel), “Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60).

God has a purpose in everything. Perhaps, part of the reason for this terrorist attack could be because we, as a nation, have become lax, indulging in sin, thinking we will never be brought to accountability. That is a possibility. But, I am not so quick to side with Reverend Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. I also believe that God sovereignly allows things to happen to turn something good out of it. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if thousands of Moslems were converted to

the grace of Jesus Christ?

I personally don't know any Moslems right now, but I have personally chosen to do something. I am personally praying for the salvation of Osama bin Laden. This man is *not* beyond God's grace. He is *not* beyond God's mercy. What if thousands of God's people began to pray, not that Mr. bin Laden would be killed, not that he would be tortured, but that the love of God, the working of the Holy Spirit would melt his heart. I do believe that Mr. bin Laden needs to answer for his crimes (if he is responsible for the World Trade Center attack), but I believe that he can receive mercy from our merciful and wonderfully gracious God. For Jesus Christ died for terrorists as well as for all the rest of us.

I know this goes against the grain of everything we have been hearing these days. As Christians, we have a higher calling than wearing an American flag and cursing Osama's name. We have a higher calling because we have the power of the Holy Spirit and the opportunity to love and to be a witness when we may not ever have that chance again. Who do you know in your neighborhood? Maybe you could invite them to dinner, telling them, "I will not prejudge you based on what you look like or what others have done of like faith. But I do want to share with you the greatest love story of all time, about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who can wipe away all your sin."

Is this the normal thing to do? Of course it's not! But all this makes us "rebels with a cause," to obey our Master and to love those who hate us, to do good to those who despise us, and to see God do a mighty work in the hearts of people even we might consider unreachable.