

Sunday, May 25, 2014

**“If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.”  
(Job 31:29-30)**

In the 31<sup>st</sup> chapter of Job, Job is clearing himself of a multitude of heinous sins, including wantonness, vanity, deceit, covetousness, adultery, respect of persons, trusting in money, idolatry, having a revengeful spirit, and pride. Today I would like to focus on this notion of having a spirit of revenge, specifically as it pertains to rejoicing at the destruction of our enemies. It is of utmost importance to the sheep of God to not displease Him, and indeed, that is part of the definition of fearing Him. So let us examine what God teaches us in His Word and learn what He requires of us.

Job said that he did not rejoice at the destruction of those people who hated him. He did not lift himself up when evil found his enemy. He did not wish a curse on his enemy's soul. There are many similar verses in the Bible, such as:

**“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see *it*, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.” (Proverbs 24:17-18)**

**“Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: *and* he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.” (Proverbs 17:5)**

**“They rewarded me evil for good *to* the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing *was* sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. I behaved myself as though *he had been* my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth *for his* mother.”  
(Psalm 35:12-14)**

**“As for me, I have not hastened from *being* a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips *was right* before thee.” (Jeremiah 17:16)**

Likewise, there are many verses in the Bible that say that we should rejoice in the destruction of our enemies:

**“The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily *there is* a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.” (Psalm 58:10-11)**

**“When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, *there is* shouting.” (Proverbs 11:10)**

**“Rejoice over her, *thou* heaven, and *ye* holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.” (Revelation 18:20)**

This rejoicing at calamities that befall our enemies has different senses. In one sense, it is sinful. In another sense, it is godly. It is similar to the idea that we are supposed to love our enemies, but we are also supposed to join our brother David and hate them with perfect hatred:

**“Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.”  
(Psalm 139:21-22)**

We cannot hate the enemies of God in the sense that we have malignity or ill-will or personal revenge towards them; we’re supposed to love our enemies. But we can and must hate them in the sense that we do not want to be associated with them and their rebellion against God, we are disgusted with their proud sinning, and we are grieved (or, are sorrowful) for the hardness of their hearts. Consider the following words of David:

**“Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law...I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.”  
(Psalm 119:136,158)**

And we have the example of our Savior:

**“And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.”  
(Mark 3:5)**

Just as it’s a sin to hate our enemies for wicked reasons, it is likewise a sin to rejoice at the destruction of our enemies if it is due to malignity, ill-will or personal revenge towards them. And may I add that if it’s sinful to behave this way towards the notorious

enemies of the church, how much more sinful is it to behave this way towards someone who's not? The example we have from Christ is:

**“Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”  
(Luke 13:2-3)**

Human beings are vengeful creatures. When we perceive that someone has wronged us, our default position is revenge. By nature, when we see an enemy destroyed, we are inclined to rejoice about that for all of the wrong reasons. This is a grievous sin, because “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Romans 12:19).

Not to rejoice at the destruction of our enemies is part of loving our enemies. Joseph Caryl says:

*“Not to rejoice at the destruction of an enemy, doth show a very great degree of love and goodness to them, yea in some cases it is all that love which we are to show, and all the good we are bound to do to an enemy; for though we are to love Enemies, yet we must not give out all our love to them. There is a love of pity, and there is a love of delight; a love of complacency, and a love of compassion. The love which we are to give out to enemies, is a love of pity and compassion, not a love of complacency and delight; for no man is bound to take his enemy into his bosom, and to give him an opportunity to ruin him, nor is any man bound to do good to his enemy, as to enable him to do him hurt. So that, not to rejoice at the destruction of an enemy, may carry the full sense of the Law, commanding us to love our enemies.*

*Again, I answer, that, often through the shows and shadows of pretended love and doing good to an enemy, the heart of man is deceived. For while he saith he loves his enemy, he doth only say so. And whereas some think they love an enemy, because they do not actually attempt to revenge themselves upon him, or to take away his life, this also may fall short of any the least degree of love to him: but not to rejoice at the destruction of an enemy, is a convincing argument of love to him & signifies much more than merely to abstain from hurting or destroying him. So that, both the sincerity and strength of our love to an enemy is most discernable in our not rejoicing at his fall.”*

One of the attributes of wicked men is that they rejoice when trouble comes to the Lord's people, whom they call their enemies. David talked about this repeatedly in the Psalms. For example:

**“But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: *yea*, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew *it* not; they did tear *me*, and ceased not: With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.” (Psalm 35:15-16)**

This is also a theme that commonly comes up among the enemies of Israel. For example, the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Philistines, Tyre – all of these were prophesied against because they took revenge on the Jews, or they had vengeful hearts towards the Jews, or they rejoiced when the Jews were cast down.

**“But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress.” (Obadiah 12)**

And this is what the wicked men do when the two witnesses die in Revelation 11:

**“And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.” (Revelation 11:10)**

This is a wicked thing done by wicked men, and should not be emulated by the people of God. Godly men should not indulge their sinful passions, but rather should “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5) and “make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14). Caryl says:

*“If but a thought stir amiss he checks it, and will bring it in subjection. He watches the motions of his mind as much as or more than the motions of his outward man: this is spiritual walking indeed, when we look to our joys, and to our sorrows, when we look to our hopes, and to our fears, when we look to regulate and moderate these inward workings; this is an argument of a spiritual man indeed.”*

There is a sense, however, in which we must rejoice over the destruction of an enemy. Moses and Israel did it at the destruction of Pharaoh and his host, David did it at the destruction of Nabal, the Jews did it at the destruction of Haman, Deborah and Barak did it at the destruction of Sisera and the king of Canaan, and the people of God will do it at the destruction of Babylon. And we’ve seen Psalm 58:10,11, where the righteous

rejoice and wash their feet in the blood of the wicked. In what sense is this a righteous and a godly thing to do? There are many senses wherein we should rejoice:

1. Because God is glorified
2. Because the wrath and justice of God is displayed
3. Because the church has been delivered from an oppressor
4. Because other oppressors of the church may see it and stop oppressing
5. Because it manifests to all men that God is sovereign and is ruling the world
6. Because the elect of God are given a fresh reminder that He will deliver us from our enemies, thereby encouraging us in our service to God
7. Because a display of his wrath on the wicked may be a means by which one of His sheep is called

These are all good reasons to rejoice, and there are probably many more. In fact these are things that we must rejoice about and thank God for, and we should not back down at all in rejoicing about these things. It is never a good reason, however, to rejoice because you're happy that someone is in misery, or because of your hatred or desire for vengeance.

The Bible teaches both sides (that is, there is a sense where we must not rejoice, and there is a sense where we must), and these two sides must happily abide with one another.

We have all seen the fruits of what happens when you take either one of these sides too far. There are some who say that we can never rejoice at the destruction of the wicked, which results in them denying the sovereignty and righteous judgments of God. There are some who say that we must rejoice at the destruction of the wicked, and use that to justify their sinful feelings of revenge.

Again, Caryl:

*“When God smites the wicked, we should grieve at the misery of him that is smitten, and congratulate the justice of Him that smote him; that so we may neither show ourselves revengeful towards man, nor unthankful towards God.”*

There is nothing wrong with grieving or sorrowing for such a man, because of the horror of the thing, or because we know that he should have repented, or because he has no excuse, or because we recognize that he brought it upon himself by disobedience and

hardness of heart, or because we consider the state of his eternal soul – but this sorrow must be mingled with preaching the truth, and glorifying God. And it must not be taken too far, like David did when mourning over Absalom.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He wept over it, but that didn't stop Him from prophesying of their doom and preaching to them.

**“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things *which belong* unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. And he taught daily in the temple.” (Luke 19:41-47)**

And note that on another occasion, just after prophesying of the doom of Chorazin and Capernaum, He rejoiced and offered up a thanksgiving:

**“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”  
(Luke 10:21)**

Because of our sinful human nature, it's very easy to transition over from a righteous rejoicing to a sinful rejoicing, so we have to be on guard in everything that we say or do. There is not a soul here who has not fallen into that trap. So I would like to conclude with a piece of advice from Joseph Caryl:

*“When thine enemy falleth, think thus: I myself am either like him or worse or better than he. If thou art better, then consider who made thee to differ. If thou art but such a one as he, much more if thou are worse than he, remember, that thou hast cause rather to bless God, and wonder, that thou art spared and standeth, then to rejoice that he is smitten and fallen.”*

I love you. Amen.