

Who is my enemy?

Who is my enemy? Who is *your* enemy? Who are *our* enemies?

It is important that we know the answer to these questions.

Why? Because I say so?

Of course not! But because Jesus Christ says so:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ (Matthew 10:34-36)

Jesus quoted the last part of this from the last part of Micah 7:5-6 which gives the very same message:

Do not trust in a friend; do not put your confidence in a companion; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom. For son dishonors father, daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own household.

To me, these are among the most frightening prophecies in the whole of the Bible. But what do they mean? Should we take them literally? Will members of our own families really become our enemies?

In some cases, this *has* happened already in God’s church – many times! How many church members have *you* known in your time in the church whose spouse, children or parents fiercely turned against them – and even disowned them – when they came into God’s truth – and in doing so, perhaps, in effect, rejected the family religion and traditions?

We *all* faced that possibility, didn’t we? Maybe it happened to you. To some extent it happened to us too. Tricia’s parents and close family members all but disowned her when she – as a sweet sixteen year old – fell in with a lanky twenty-one year-old “religious nutcase” and announced to her loved ones that she would no longer be keeping Christmas, etc.

Thankfully, after a few distressing months, they saw sense and asked themselves, “Is this worth losing our daughter over?” and came up with the right answer. We all got on famously after that mercifully-short episode. Of course, I realize that there are many other members who have not been so blessed and their rifts have never been healed.

But could there be more to Micah’s and Jesus’ prophecies than this literal interpretation?

National family

Quite often in the prophetic scriptures, physical families are representative of national families – more specifically, of course, the nation of Israel.

A few weeks ago, I sat down one evening after a busy day, and I watched my DVD of the thought-provoking 1984 science-fiction movie, “2010 – The Year we Make Contact.”

Please let me assure you that, although this is a science-fiction movie, it is not of the demonic kind like “Alien” and the like; nor is it of the violent or comic book type like the “Star Wars” series. The story written by the late Arthur C. Clarke deals with very serious subjects and they is meant to make one think.

I won’t bore you with the whole story (as I dislike people telling me movie plots); but in “2010,” the world is portrayed as being on the brink of nuclear World War III – no, not between the Western nations and the Middle East or between the professing Christians of the Western world and the world’s Moslems – but between the United States and its old adversary as it still was in 1984 when this movie was made – the communist USSR.

Fiction? Yes, of course. But watching the movie again after such a long time made me think. Back in 1984, when the movie was released, who were our national enemies? The USSR, yes. And Communist China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, plus a handful of other states that were Communist then but are no longer so.

Fast forward 27 years to 2011. Except for North Korea, our falling-out with the Communist nations seems to have calmed down considerably. The Cold War officially ended in 1991. We can’t say that we – i.e. our western democracies – really *like* the Russians at this time; but our international relationships with them are not nearly as bad as they were and, for our ultimate good or evil, we sure are all having an economic love affair with the Chinese, aren’t we? Witness the manufacturing origin of the vast percentage of goods we buy at our Wal-Mart and other stores. Witness President Obama cow-towing to the Chinese president Hu Jintao during his recent (January 2011) state visit to the United States.

Let us re-wind sixty years to 1941 – to a time *before* our falling out with the Communists. Who were our sworn enemies before them? Germany, Japan, Italy and the other Axis powers. Look how that has turned around! Look how much we love them now – economically, that is! One sees as many – if not more – German and Japanese vehicles on our roads than our own relatively inferior domestic brands!

We in the churches of God have generally considered Russia, China, Germany and Italy to be Gentile nations. Certainly not part of modern Israel. Not our national brothers. Not part of our greater Israelite family.

Although we may have had some minor tiffs with our Israelite brother nations in more recent years, we have generally gotten along quite well.

But this wasn't always so. Let us go back even further and we will see that, over the years, our modern Israelitish nations have indulged in some serious intra-family squabbling. Without getting into too much detail, I will just mention a few

There was the War of Independence – also referred to as the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) which pitted the United States (Manasseh), France (Reuben), the Dutch Republic (Zebulun), Spain plus some American Indian tribes against Great Britain (Ephraim), some German states and some other Indian tribes.

Then there was the eight hundred years of on-again-off-again wars from 1066 until 1815 between Britain and France.

Then there is what is perhaps the worst kind of war – Civil War – the killing of one's own national brothers. The American Civil War (1861-1865) and the English Civil Wars (1642-1651).

During all those times, “the other guy” – whether Israelite or Gentile – always represented the Axis of Evil. He was **the enemy!**

Who are our national enemies right now? Who represents the Axis of Evil right now? Surprisingly, the answer depends on who you talk to! According to former U.S. President George W. Bush who coined the term “Axis of Evil,” it was Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Disagreeing with his boss on this, John R. Bolton (former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations) stated that it was Cuba, Libya and Syria. Also disagreeing with her boss, Condoleezza Rice (former U.S. Secretary of State) said that the “Outposts of Tyranny” were Belarus, Zimbabwe and Myanmar.

Of course, George Bush's Republicans are out and Barak Obama's Democrats are now in. Many conservatives seem to think that *all* Moslems – even the peace-loving ones living in our countries – are now the enemy. Some go as far as to opine that there is not such thing as a peace-loving Moslem.

Some have even stretched this opinion to include the illegal aliens crossing the Americans' southern border from Mexico. This is quite a stretch seeing that most Mexicans (89%) are Roman Catholic, and only a very few are Moslem! It is not much more of a step to stretch this even further to include *legal* dark-skinned immigrants from Mexico and other countries - and then from there to anyone who is dark-skinned! And this does happen! These are the points of view of many Americans – including some members of God's true church. Have the KKK got their own way at last in the U.S.A.?

Hey! Let's turn our guns on the U.S. President! He's dark-skinned, isn't he? He must be a plant! Is he really American? Yes, he was born in Hawaii; but isn't he really Kenyan? He must be our enemy too!

How paranoid do we want to get with our conspiracy theories? Does God want us to spend our lives looking over our shoulders in fear of our enemies – both real and imaginary? Let God's Word answer:

Do not say, 'A conspiracy,' Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. (Isaiah 8:12-13)

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (I John 4:18)

Again, this is no joke! This is happening, and is the mind-set of some members of God's church too (despite His many New Testament warnings against respect of persons) to the point that some of our faithful members who happen to have dark skin have been very much offended. This should not be!

Spiritual family

So again, who is our enemy? We have looked at potential enemies in our *physical* families and our *national* families. Now what about our *spiritual* family? Surely not! God forbid!

Just think for a moment about the state of the church of God right now. Take a realistic look at the squabbling that has taken place over the past few years both within and between so many of the churches of God. This is where I get concerned when I read Jesus' words in Matthew 10:36: "A man's enemies will be those of his own household."

Here is one scenario: A member has disagreements with the leaders of his Church of God group and parts company from them. Then, after he leaves, his former friends and allies-in-the-faith – his former "brothers-in-arms," as it were – suddenly turns against him and, illogically, they become enemies!

Should our former friends become our enemies just because we move from one tribe of spiritual Israel to another? Let us quickly review II Chronicles 15 – just to allay any fears that some members may have done something wrong in moving from their former tribe of spiritual Israel:

Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For a long time Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; but when in their trouble they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!"

And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the LORD that was before the vestibule of the LORD. Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. (II Chronicles 15:1-9)

This is a very encouraging scripture, showing that if a person decides to move from one tribe to another – if it is for the right reasons – God will bless the move. When these Ephraimites, Manassites and Simeonites moved from their home territories to Judah so that they might be closer to God, did their countrymen then treat them like enemies? Or did they treat their countrymen like enemies? No. Not that we know of. There is no mention of any such animosity from either side.

Neither is there any mention of their countrymen accusing them of “leaving Israel” because of their move to another tribe. Although there certainly were occasional squabbles at other times between various tribes, generally they always recognized each other as fellow Israelites.

Should not New Testament Israelites who move to other spiritual tribes also expect the fellow-members of the spiritual tribes in which they formerly dwelt to look upon them in the same way – as fellow spiritual Israelites – spiritual brothers and sisters – who have chosen to move away from their former dwelling place in order to be closer to God? And vice-versa! Should not those who have made a move continue to recognize the members of the church group that they have left as fellow-spiritual Israelites – spiritual brothers and sisters?

God knows who are His children and who are not. In most cases, we do not need to make such judgments.

Of course, this is where the potential for an offence comes in. By leaving one's former group, a member is saying – or rather implying – that his former group is not as close to God as he would like them to be – or that they are going in a direction that he considers to be somewhat unscriptural. His action of leaving unintentionally implies that he considers their church group to be to some extent inferior.

But inferior to what? To *his own* ideas of what the standards should be? Hopefully not! Hopefully to what he knows *the Bible* standard to be – what *God* says the standard is – the standard of God's holy Word.

Isn't this judging? Yes, it is! But it is the *right kind* of judging. In John 7:24, Jesus clearly commands His brothers and sisters to “judge righteous judgment.” There are many other scriptures through which God tells us the very same thing.

Those Ephraimites, Manassites and Simeonites of II Chronicles 15 made a righteous judgment. They looked at the spiritual direction of their own tribes and their relative closeness to God. They compared them with those of the tribe of Judah. And they made a righteous judgment that they would be better off and closer to God if they made the move.

Do some church members look upon those who leave their church group as enemies? Hopefully not many do so; but I believe that at least some do – judging from reports of sudden cessation of communication between former friends and loved ones. This may be compared to a closure of diplomatic relations between nations who fall out with each other.

Love your enemies

What then are we to do? What does God's Word tell us to do? What did Jesus Christ clearly command us?

At least thirteen times in His Word, God tells us to love one another – in every case using the Greek word “agapao.” Let us quickly review them:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (John 13:34)

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you... These things I command you, that you love one another. (John 15:12, 17)

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:8)

But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. (I Thessalonians 4:9)

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. (I Peter 1:22)

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. (I John 3:11, 23)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. (I John 4:7, 11-12)

And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. (II John 5)

Who are we to love? One another! Does this “one another” only include those of *our own* tribe of spiritual Israel? Our own “branch” of the Church of God? Of course not! The tribes of physical Israel were something like the states and provinces of the modern United States and Canada. There were no border posts preventing a resident of one tribe from travelling into or through another. Such travel occurred before and after the holy day seasons every year as the Israelites left their home territories and travelled across other tribal territories to keep the holy days in Jerusalem.

Likewise, in God’s eyes, there are – or should be – no boundaries between the various tribes of spiritual Israel. We should all be loving one another!

What about those who began treating you like an enemy when you left their tribe of spiritual Israel? Must you love them too? Absolutely! Yes!

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, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5: 43-45)

Let us take a quick look at Luke’s version of this teaching of Jesus:

But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. (Luke 6:27-35)

Who were the Jews' enemies back at that time when Jesus spoke these words? The Roman conquerors, of course – headed at that time by Tiberius Caesar. After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension in 31AD, the cruel Caligula took over as Roman emperor in 37AD, and later by the even more cruel Nero in 54AD. Then there were the Edomite royal line of puppet kings – the Herods, with their own brand of cruelty and animosity against the Jewish people. Let us not forget the rapacious tax collectors who worked for the governments and, as Jesus often implied, the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees were also enemies from within the very family of Judah.

The apostle Paul emulated Jesus' words with this instruction which was probably written during the reign of Emperor Claudius:

**And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:
(I Thessalonians 3:12)**

Jesus commands us to love our enemies and, through His servant Paul, to love all men.

Who is the REAL Enemy?

So who is our *real* enemy? Is it the people of “the world” generally? If so, would this include all of our neighbours in our subdivisions? Are they all lurking behind corners just waiting for an opportunity to pounce on us and do us harm? I don’t know about your neighbourhood; but I don’t see any evidence of this kind of behaviour in ours!

When thinking about our relationships to the unconverted people of “the world,” we need to remember Jesus’ example of love and service to them. We need to remember His parable of the Good Samaritan – who was a citizen of the people most despised by the Jews of Jesus’ human lifetime. We need to look upon the people of the world with love, considering them as Jesus did – as His brothers and sisters of the Second Resurrection.

Who else could the real enemy be? The Russians? The Chinese? The Mexicans? The Afghans? The Iraqis? Moslems generally? The European Union? The Germans? OK, yes, maybe some of these, both partially and eventually!

Or could it perhaps be the Roman Catholic Church and her daughter churches – all the professing Christian churches? OK, yes, maybe some of these too, both partially and eventually!

What about the ministers and members of one’s former fellowships – those who one has parted company with due to serious disagreement? What does God’s Word say?

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you... But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (II Thessalonians 3:6-7, 13-15)

Yes, there *are* human enemies – enemies of God and His people – enemies of righteousness. But in various scriptures, these are noted to be “of the devil.” Here are just a few examples:

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? (Acts 13:8-10)

So now, as we are getting close to the answer, let's hear from Jesus once again:

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this'... Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. (Matthew 13:24-28, 36-39)

The real enemy is Satan – the devil!

Let us look at the Greek word for “devil”: “diabolos” – elsewhere translated as “false accuser” or “slanderer.” He is prone to slander and false accusations. One Bible version says that he is prone to malicious gossip. He is a calumniator, which means that he makes hurtful, untrue comments about God’s people. He is a traducer, which means that he maligns God’s people by making malicious, false or defamatory statements against them. He is the prince of the demons, the author of evil. He persecutes good men, deceives and estranges mankind from God and entices them to sin. Are not these things what a real enemy would do to us – in order to bring us down and to lose our crowns?

What name did God give to the devil originally? “Lucifer” was *not* his original name. “Heylel” was the name God gave him. It means *brightness, light-bearer, shining one, morning star*. It stems from the word “Halal” which can mean *Praise, Glory, to flash forth light, Shine, Commended, Celebrate, Give, and Renowned*.

But on the down-side, it can also appropriately mean *Boastful, Mad, Foolish and Rage*.

We know that Heylel was overcome with vanity and boastfulness and instead of praising God and giving Him the glory, Heylel turned to desiring the praise and glory for himself. So God changed his name to **Satan**.

This word is translated in some Bible verses as “adversary” or “withstand.”

Since his rebellion, Satan has become the superhuman adversary of God and the people of God. He is the one who withstands, opposes and attacks. He is God’s opponent, the arch-enemy of all that is good.

Interestingly, the root of the name “Satan” is from a word meaning “to resist.” I write “interestingly” because of the way God had two of His writers express certain verses:

And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. (Zechariah 3:1 KJV)

The Hebrew word for “resist” here is “satan”!

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:1-7)

Through James, God tells us to “resist the resistor” and if we obey this command, God promises us that the enemy – His arch-enemy and ours – will flee from us.

Let us not focus excessively on our human enemies. Yes, of course we must obey Jesus’ commands to watch and pray. We know very well that, as the end times get closer, our arch-enemy, Satan, will be turning up the heat and influencing his human allies – our human enemies – the Beast and the false Prophet – more and more. But their fate is sealed. We just have to make sure that we recognize them when they appear on the scene, and that we maintain our boundaries against them and resist them.

Are they here now? To some relatively minor extent, maybe they are. But their full power is not yet in place. Let us beware of claiming – as some have done and are doing – that certain prophecies have been completed when scripture and logic tell us that they obviously have not.

With help and strength from God, let us spend our energies resisting our real enemy – Satan the Devil.

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