

# BaptistWay: Enemies

July 3, 2015

• *The BaptistWay lesson for July 19 focuses on Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:17-21.*

All's fair in love and war.

Psychologists tell us war really is inverted love—at least, I think they would tell us this. Not wanting to look that deeply into ourselves, we prefer to think of war in terms of good versus evil. When we objectify war outside ourselves into a battle between the forces of good and evil, we see there potentially is no end to war because in this world, there seems to be no end to evil—and too little good.

In order to maintain the battle lines between good and evil, we have to determine who is good and who is evil, who is friend and who is foe. In these days of insurgency, we have learned just how difficult it is to make a distinction between the two, leading us right back into the murky waters of ourselves, that place we hoped to escape by drawing a clear line in the sand between us—obviously good—and our enemies—obviously evil.

Then Jesus ruins the whole game.

## **Love your enemies**

Jesus comes along and says, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28). And Paul—who we don’t know whether to befriend or disown—echoes Jesus’ crazy talk: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. ... Do not take revenge. ... ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink’” (Romans 12:17, 19, 20).

Just when we had the lines firmly drawn, Jesus and Paul dash it all.

We find it hard to turn Jesus into an enemy, being he is God and all that; so we turn on Paul, who so obviously sees things through hazy glasses. We simply can't live without a clear line between who is right (us) and everyone else who are clearly wrong (them). With Paul's talk about doing good to our enemies, he inches ever closer to the other side of the line. It's what he said about love a few sentences earlier that keeps us from shoving him completely into the enemy camp.

But Jesus ... Jesus we can't dismiss so easily. Even if we find it extremely difficult to put his words into practice, they still haunt us, bouncing off the walls of our minds in an incessant whisper: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31).

Can we redefine "enemy?"

No, no we can't. Jesus doesn't.

Well, that's a relief. Or is it?

### **'Enemy' is a two-way street**

We have enemies. We have foes, nemeses. We have those who hate us and whom we hate. We have those who are hostile toward us and toward whom we are hostile. But wait! This definition of "enemy" means this enemy business is a two-way street. Someone acts toward me in a way I deem hostile—and it may actually be hostile—and I determine that person to be an enemy—at least, to be my enemy. Without my determination, there are no enemies—and I mean this in the least narcissistic way possible.

There is some degree of self-regard here. While we do have corporate responsibility for our dealings with one another, we must each face up to our own individual culpability. We must each answer for what we have

done to our enemies. We are not excused by going along with the crowd. There are no proxies in this war.

Jesus does not try to change the definition of “enemy.” Instead, Jesus commands us to change our regard for and behavior toward our enemies. Yes, Jesus acknowledges we really do have enemies.

And how could Jesus not acknowledge the reality of enemies? Paul reminds us we were once enemies of God in our minds and through our evil behavior (Colossians 1:21), and it was while we were enemies of God that Jesus died for us and brought us back together with God (Romans 5:8-10). With talk like that, we can’t help pulling Paul back into the fold.

Yes, it is precisely to such talk that we should give greater attention.

### **We were once enemies of God**

We were once enemies of God in both our thoughts and our actions. We were enemies of God by commission and omission. Yet, though we regarded God as an enemy of our desires and treated God with hostility and hate, God sent Jesus to do for us what God would have us do for him. In Jesus, God does good to those who hate him, blesses those who curse him, and prays for those who mistreat him. In Jesus, God turns the other cheek. In Jesus, God gives us the shirt off his back.

And through us, God intends to continue doing good for those who hate him, blessing those who curse him, and praying for those who mistreat him. That, we like. It really is nice.

Oh, and God also intends, through us, to continue turning the other cheek. That, I could have simply left off, but then I wouldn’t be telling the truth.