

Friend or Foe?

“Stick ‘em up!” cried the boy. “Are you friend or foe?”

The two boys were having fun playing, ignorant of the seriousness of war, or of the fear that an apparent friend was really an enemy. Sadly, there are circumstances when it is important to try to establish whether someone is friend or foe.

During the second world war, radar-based systems were developed to identify friendly aircraft, but it was much harder to identify hostile aeroplanes. Nowadays with terrorist activity, it can be difficult to identify foes. Similarly, it is not easy to identify spiritual foes.

Jesus and Enemies

Jesus was betrayed by one of his supposed friends, the disciple Judas Iscariot (see Matthew 26:14–16). Jesus knew that this would happen. He had few friends and he said:

You are my friends if you do whatever I command you (John 15:14).

In the days of Jesus, Israel was under Roman occupation, which the Jews hated. Despite at least two of the gospels having been penned by Jews,



there is no record of Jesus describing the Romans as enemies – human politics was not his concern. He does, however, use ‘enemy’ language when describing opposition to the word or will of God. Nowadays this can be seen in propaganda which denies God’s existence, or ignores what He wants from humans.

God and Friendship

Many people who believe in God are confident that He loves them whatever they do. However, in the Bible there are only two people whose relationship with God is described as friendship.

Abraham is specifically called a “friend of God” (James 2:23) and we are told that God talked with Moses “as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11). If God loved everyone unconditionally it is extraordinary that there are not more occasions when God is referred to as our friend, or people as friends of God.

In contrast, there are occasions when people are referred to as enemies of God (e.g. Numbers 10:35). Moreover, there are things that God positively hates, including pride, lying and violence (see Proverbs 6:16–19) and practices that are ‘abominations’ to Him (Deuteronomy 12:31).

The Bible does say that God loved the world, and that in submission to His will, Jesus died to save people. However, it is clear that this is conditional and Jesus can only save those who respond to the gospel message.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not

perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

The angel Gabriel told Mary, “*he will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21); that is not **all** people.

Sin and Enmity

It is not pleasant to think about sin, which is disobedience to God, but we must. Even the kindest, most selfless person is a sinner, and sin inevitably leads to death.

When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death (James 1:15).

This is very serious. The dreadful fact is that all people are naturally enemies of God because of the way that they think and act. Paul wrote:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

He stated that, before their conversion, the believers at Rome were enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Even some professing believers were still enemies (Philippians 3:18–19).

The apostle James taught that “*Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (James 4:4).

This is extremely strong language. Surely none of us wants to be an enemy of God. However, this is our natural state. By nature we are wicked. This is because in the Bible the word ‘wicked’ refers not just to those who do what we consider to be dreadful things, but to everyone who is godless.

We need to understand how God views us, our ways and our thinking and what He wants. Moreover, we cannot work these things out for ourselves, because our whole way of thinking is instinctively godless. To deny or reject God’s way of life and therefore His supreme and unequivocal authority is to be wicked. To do things ‘our own way’ in the way we enjoy or ‘think best’ is wicked.

Paul graphically described his struggle against human nature as a war (Romans 7:23). We are our own worst enemy, and without responding to the gospel message we are without hope.

At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

What Can We Do?

Amazingly, God has provided the solution. No matter how heinous our sins, they can be forgiven if – but only if – we truly repent (read 1 John 1:5–10). We can therefore go from foe to friend.

There are therefore two distinct sets of people: those who are trying to please God, and those who are not. The latter are His foes. Jesus also warned about people who falsely claimed to be his followers (Matthew 7:21–23). They remain His enemies.

It is a frightening thing to be an enemy of God. So it is utterly amazing that God offers us eternal life. He really is a God of mercy and compassion. However, like the boys in the game we all need to ask ourselves where our allegiance lies and whether we be “friend or foe”.

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