

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Demonizing the Opposition

When people disagree with each other, there is a temptation to exaggerate the differences and impugn each others' motives. We only hurt ourselves when we do that.

“And many of them said, ‘He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?’ Others said, ‘These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’” (Jn. 10:20-21).

This exchange among the Jews who heard the teaching of Jesus illustrates a common mistake that people often make when pigeon-holing those with whom they disagree. Notice that some refused even to listen to Jesus because they had concluded “he has a demon and is mad.” By labeling Jesus as the very epitome of the devil himself, any possibility of bridging the gap between themselves and Him was lost.

Today, we call this strategy “demonizing the opposition,” and employ it to great effect. Political discourse is loaded with it, particularly around election times. Politicians accuse each other of the most sinister motives in an effort to discredit their opponents in front of the electorate (“why do you listen to him?”). Married couples employ the same device when explaining their problems to a counselor. Whatever qualities may

have attracted them to each other in the beginning are now gone, replaced by the most despicable attitudes and behaviors—at least judging by the language they use to describe each other. Each party is convinced they are now married to a demon. Until the partners can move beyond such alarmist rhetoric, reconciliation will be almost impossible.

The truth here, of course, is that the opposition is almost never as bad as we make them out to be. By painting our opponent in the worst possible light, and ignoring any positive qualities that might exist, we create a caricature of the real person. We may convince ourselves that we’re dealing with a devil, but the more likely reality is that we are dealing with another human being, a creature possessing many of the same traits, ambitions, longings—and flaws—as ourselves. As long as we fixate on the flaws, even to the point of exaggerating them, we blind ourselves to whatever good qualities or ideas our opponent may possess.

And by refusing to expose ourselves to what is good in others, we rob our-

selves of the opportunity to grow from that good. What Jesus taught may have sounded strange to His critics, but by labeling Him as a demon, they never gave themselves the chance to see the wisdom of what He was teaching. We make the same mistake when we demonize those with whom we disagree. They are not nearly as evil as we portray them—and might even have something worthwhile to say, if we would just take the time to listen and understand.

Notice that in our text, those who demonized Jesus were countered by others who sought to evaluate Jesus more objectively: “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” These folks may not have been entirely convinced yet, but at least they allowed the possibility that this was something they needed to seriously consider. God can work with people like that.

In the end, demonizing the opposition is usually just a way of avoiding the hard task of confronting the need for change in our own lives. The real demon is not our opponent, but ourselves.

– David King