

# Wings

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



December 4, 2011

## When Your Enemy Falls

Loving our enemy involves much more than merely not hurting him.  
How much more is the real test of our faith.

“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and He turn away His anger from him” (Prov. 24:17-18).

From a purely human standpoint, there is nothing more satisfying than watching an enemy suffer, especially if we had nothing to do with his downfall. At no cost to ourselves or our honor, we can revel in the fact that our enemy got what he deserved. Ah, sweet justice!

That sense of justice may be sweet, but it's still wrong. Not only should we refrain from actively seeking our enemy's hurt, we should not even wish it, or rejoice when it happens. As with so much in life, it is not just the behavior, but the *attitude* behind the behavior that will condemn us.

Jesus taught that the true measure of a man's religion is seen in how he deals with his enemies (Matt.5:43-48; Lk. 6:27-28). Treating our friends with respect is no challenge. Jesus' command to “love your enemies” may be more difficult to obey, but it's a truer indicator of the genuineness of our faith.

Love seeks what is best for another (Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:13; Matt. 7:12). Applied to an enemy, that means we want him to share the happiness and blessings we enjoy as forgiven creatures. We may hate his evil ways, but we can never hate the man. We pity him and work for his repentance and reconciliation. We do not retaliate when he mistreats us, because we love him, not because God says “don't.” We do good to him out of a genuine desire to help, not to show off our patience. Likewise when his evil deeds return upon his own head and he is afflicted, we will not laugh and jump for joy; we love him too much to enjoy his pain.

A good example of this noble spirit is David. For years he suffered miserably at the hands of Saul. He was hunted like a criminal through the caves and deserts of Judea. Twice David had opportunity to slay Saul and end his troubles, but both times he let his enemy go. Saul finally lost his life in a battle with the Philistines. Did David cheer? Not at all! He wrote a beautiful eulogy to the fallen king: “Saul and Jonathan,

beloved and pleasant in their life, and in their death they were not parted; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul . . .” (2 Sam. 1:23-24). It was that kind of unselfish love that made David “a man after God's own heart.”

Love for a fallen enemy is, after all, a characteristic of God. “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Eze. 33:11). He gave His Son for us while we were enemies (Rom.5:10). We cannot call ourselves children of God unless we imitate the characteristics of our Father.

Learning how to love our enemies, — including not rubbing it in when our enemy stumbles — can have a profound impact on human relations. Troubled marriages can be salvaged, strained friendships can be strengthened, and estranged brethren can be reconciled, if everyone one would take the time to re-examine their hearts: do I really love my enemy, or do I secretly wish for harm to come upon him?

— David King