



"Heat not a furnace for your foe so hot that it do singe yourself."
—William Shakespeare

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Bin Laden's Death and Our Reaction

This week has seen the announcement of the death of terrorist mastermind and al-Qaida head Osama bin Laden at the hand of American commandos at his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. While details about the raid have been changing since the late-Sunday night announcement by President Obama, the consistently reported facts have been that Navy Seals dropped in by helicopter into the compound, putting down all resistance, and killing the terror chief with shots to the head and chest when he refused to surrender. His body was photographed at the scene and then taken to a U.S. army base in Afghanistan before being transported to the *U.S.S. Carl Vinson*, an aircraft carrier, for burial in the Arabian Sea.

In immediate response, large crowds gathered in Washington, DC, and in New York City, both cities that bore the brunt of the September 11, 2001, attacks by bin Laden's al-Qaida terrorists. Students from nearby universities gathered in front of the White House on Sunday night to celebrate the death of America's number-one enemy. A similar gathering of predominantly young people took place at Ground Zero, where [the World](#) Trade Center towers once stood. There, the crowd recited the Pledge of Allegiance and sang "The Star-Spangled Banner." One man climbed a light pole and popped open a bottle of champagne to celebrate, while another waved an American

flag. Bagpipers played "Amazing Grace" to the emotional bystanders, who immediately responded by chanting, "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"

For their part, reporters and pundits have been dancing a fine line in their coverage of this story. While it is obvious that they are pleased that bin Laden is no longer a threat to America and her people here and around the world, many of them seem unsure how to react. Do they appear gleeful and proud of their country and armed forces? Or, not wanting to appear too jingoistic and offensive to Muslims, do they take a matter-of-fact approach, staid and serious? Most have opted for the latter.

Ordinary citizens have also expressed some confusion over the matter, especially those who are more religious. They know that [Jesus](#) teaches, "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" ([Matthew 5:44](#)). How are [Christians](#) supposed to react to news of this nature? Should we cheer and pump our fists into the air, saying, "Yeah! Got him!" or should we express sympathy for the "victim"—or somewhere in between? What is the godly approach?

Scripture presents a variety of examples of reactions to the fall of enemies without a great deal of commentary to guide us in our own responses. For instance, in pursuing the Israelites across the Red Sea, thousands of Egyptian soldiers died when the walls of water crashed down upon them. [Exodus 14:30](#) reports, "So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore," and the following chapter chronicles the jubilation of the Israelites as they sang and danced in victory.

Another example can be found in the story of the reign of King Jehoshaphat of Judah in II Chronicles 20. Reports came to him that a huge army of Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites were marching on Judah. In [faith](#), the king gathered his army and positioned them where the allied column would most likely strike, but in the morning, when they went forward to meet the enemy, they found a corpse-strewn battlefield. The troops of Ammon and Moab had attacked the Edomites among them, and the two sides had destroyed each other! [II Chronicles 20:27-28](#) reports, "Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go

back to Jerusalem with [joy](#), for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies. So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the LORD."

It should be noted that in each of these cases [God](#) was responsible for the deaths of their enemies. He was the one who had given them victory, and their praises, celebrations, music, and dancing were directed toward Him. They were not glorying in themselves or even in their nation or their armed forces, but in God and His deliverance of them from their enemies. This is a crucial point in determining how we should react: Praise belongs to God.

A few verses specifically comment on rejoicing over a fallen enemy. [Proverbs 24:17](#) is probably the clearest of them: "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him." What he describes is a kind of malignant pleasure over an enemy's misfortune. The proverb suggests that God may be more inclined to punish the callousness of His people than to continue meting out His wrath against their enemies.

Obadiah 1:12 provides similar warning in the example of the Edomites' perfidy when Judah fell to Nebuchadnezzar: "But you should not have gazed on [*margin*: gloated over] the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress." God sees this sort of gloating as particularly evil. A reading of Amos 1 confirms that God deals severely with those who treat their enemies cruelly.

In his defense of himself, Job cites the fact that he did not participate in any kind of dancing on an enemy's grave: "If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, or lifted myself up when evil found him (indeed I have not allowed my mouth to [sin](#) by asking for a curse on his soul) . . ." ([Job 31: 29-30](#)). To him at this point in his life, it was a mark of pride that he had not stooped to this level of evil jubilation. He saw it as a sinful act.

Finally, David's example at the death of his enemy, Saul, found in II Samuel 1, is quite poignant and instructive: He wept and composed "The Song of the Bow" in honor of Saul and his son Jonathan, commanding the song to be taught to the children of Judah. David had a famously tender heart—a

characteristic that set him apart ([I Samuel 16:7](#)) and mirrored God's own heart ([I Samuel 13:14](#))—and at the death of his enemy, he considered all of Saul's past wrongs as paid for in the justice of death.

Perhaps the sense of justice served is the balance we should aim for. Rather than rejoice that he is dead and curse him to the Lake of Fire, we should thank God that He has allowed justice to be done and beseech Him to deliver His people from further acts of wicked men. In this way, we will overcome evil with good ([Romans 12:21](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Would Our God Do That?](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

God's character is not all sweetness and light. Sometimes He has to be a God of judgment and vengeance. The distorted perception of Jesus as a weak, effeminate, and ineffective Savior fails to take into account Paul's revelation that the so-called stern God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament—at times, a consuming fire. The blowing of trumpets on the Feast of Trumpets suggests 1) the giving of the Law (the code upon which justice rests), 2) that God is drawing near, and 3) judgment is coming. We must respond by repenting, being watchful and sober, and yielding to His merciful correction.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Hating Evil, Fearing God](#)

by David C. Grabbe

II Corinthians 6:14-16 contains a strong warning against mixing evil with good. As Christians, we must be careful to avoid having anything to do with things like Halloween that are evil or glorify it, even if it is "just in fun."

Highlighting Proverbs 8:13, David Grabbe explains how the fear of God plays a significant role in helping us rid evil from our lives.

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