

Who is your Enemy?

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Who is your enemy? There's a lot of options these days: that political party ruining the country. Dogmatic family members. The church. The ball and chain spouse. But are those our *real* enemies? Confusion about enemies goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, where we see four characters and a lot of finger-pointing. Let's take a fresh look at this story to get our bearings, and discern our enemies from our friends.

God

The first character on the stage is God. In the beginning *God* (1:1). He speaks everything from nothing, what theologians describe as *ex nihilo*: out of nothing. The Lord God is no son of Asgard, Loki, who *reproduces* objects out of thin air; no, God *produces ex nihilo*. He creates *beautiful things*: mountains, rivers, trees, and precious stones. *Good things*: fruit, companionship, barbecue I mean livestock. Notice the emphasis on the good and beautiful in the description of: "*Trees pleasant to the sight and good for food*" (2:9). God also speaks *true things*: be fruitful and multiply, tend and work the garden. He gives purpose: work and worship. And to top it all off, he doesn't retreat from his creation; he moves *toward* it. Walks in the garden with them, speaks with them. They hear the *vox Dei*. The voice of God. He is a God of fellowship, communion, speech, and he delights to know us.

Adam and Eve

God loved Adam & Eve to the uttermost, set them loose with good purpose and gifts. And perhaps the greatest sign of his love was his warning, *Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. This tells us he invites them into a relationship based on *trust* not performance. Trust me you don't want to eat from that tree, but from all the other trees eat your hearts delight. Given God's character they have every reason to trust him. But they do the one thing God told them not to do. A serpent approaches and tempts Eve to eat from the one tree God prohibited. Sinking her teeth into the fruit, the juice still rolling down her chin, she invites Adam into her folly. *Everything changes*. A crackle of thunder in the distance, the wind begins to blow fiercely, they hide. Genesis 3:8: *the sound of the LORD God walking in*

the garden in the cool of the day. The word sound can be translated *thunder*; the word cool is the word for *wind*; and day can be rendered *storm*. Add it all up and you've got: *And they heard the thunder of the Lord God riding into the garden on the wind of the storm*. The Rider of the storm appears in 2 Sam 22:11: *He rode on a cherub and flew; he was seen on the wings of the wind*. When the divine storm rider appears in the Bible, it is associated with *judgment*. Humanity's rebellion reveals another facet of God's holy character, **justice**. Now what if God didn't ride in on the storm? If there was no judgment. He just strolls up and says, Did you eat from that tree? Don't worry about it, no big deal. They wouldn't know *when* to trust him. Why? Because his word and character would be unreliable; not just. They wouldn't know when to hide and when to stroll. Life with God would be walking on eggshells. You see the more just a person is, the more trustworthy they are. The holier the easier to trust. It's why character still matters for politicians, supreme court judges, and pastors. The public wants someone they can trust. Here we've got unimpeachable character, a holy God! So why do we distrust him? Because like Adam and Eve, we listen to other voices. Eve listened to the snake; Adam listened to Eve. They welcomed a voice other than God's voice. Is there anything wrong with listening to other voices? Not at all. Any voice good beautiful or true is an echo of God's voice. It's the *privileging* of other voices over the *vox Dei* that brings us harm. Eve privileges the voice of the serpent, "*Did God actually say...*" She welcomes a seed of doubt. Eve doubts God without basis, questions what she known to be empirically and relationally true all her life: God is benevolent, gracious, just. So why hide? Because she welcomed a seed of doubt where she should have watered a seed of trust. This wrecks *relationships*. Early in marriage we would get into a conflict, and my wife start to speculate about something I *might* do. She doubted me. I learned to gently say: *I'm not your enemy. I'm for you*. And then I'd back it up as we sorted through her doubt and fear together. Over the years we've nurtured a deep, satisfying relationship by watering the seed of trust. But if you nurture distrust. Leap to conclusions. Live in fear, you'll become enemies. No common ground to build on. *Water the seed of trust not the seed of doubt*. Most of all, do this with *the most important* relationship in your life. *Privilege* God's voice. *Trust* his words, after all, he's got the character to back it up.

The Snake

There's a scene in the Hunger Games when Katniss Everdeen is tempted to turn against her friends to survive. Confused and threatened, bow drawn, she's about to shoot Finnick when he says to her, "Katniss Remember who your real enemy is." Who is your *real* enemy? Is it your spouse, your friends, your family, your church, world? No, it's the Serpent. Revelation identifies him, [And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world](#) Rev 12:9-10. *Deceiver of the whole world*. Hardly one another. Jesus describes him as the father of lies. He is your true enemy. That temptation to gossip, to lust, to doubt God—lies. Satan is not reliable. He never keeps his promises. Lust, gossip, and doubt do not satisfy. The Rider of the Storm knows this so when he rides into Eden he tenderly asks Adam & Eve questions: *Where are you? What have you done?* But he gives the true Enemy no such dignity. God simply pronounces his sentence: [Because you have done this cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life](#) (3:14). God assigns blame, not to Adam and Eve, but to the Serpent, *because you have done this*. Now there are consequences, but He makes our true Enemy eat dust. Puts enmity between his seed and the seed of the woman. And in fact, promises to crush the Serpent's head. Where have you placed enmity? Between you and Satan or you and your spouse, you and your family? You and your church? Is your bow pointed in the wrong direction? *Remember who your real Enemy is.*

The Church

God, A&E, the Serpent, and now the Church. Ephesians describes the Church as God's new humanity. How do we live not like the old but the new? First **remember God's character**. He has given us good, beautiful and true things. He is benevolent and he is just. He's furnished you with every reason to trust him. But to remember his character we have to relate with him. Read biblical stories and look for God: his mercy, justice, faithfulness. Remember God's character; he is deserving of your trust. Second **remember who your enemy is**. It's easy to get confused, turned around in the conflict, thrown off by temptation, and end up drawing our bow on others. Satan wants us to believe others are our enemy. But our battle is not against flesh and blood but principalities and powers. Dark forces. Lift up your shield of faith against the fiery darts. In the ancient world, leather shields were

soaked in water to extinguish fiery arrows. When we put our trust in God's words, our Enemy's arrows are snuffed out. Trust in God's voice. Bank on his promises. Believe his words. Finally, **remember who your true Friend is**. God makes a promise in v. 15: **he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel** (15). It's the *protoevangelion* (1st gospel): Christ will deliver a fatal blow—why?—because it's to the serpent's head, but in the process be bruised on the heel. Christ achieves victory over our real Enemy at his own cost. *Greater love has no one than this: that he lay his life down for his friends.* Bruised so you can belong, crushed so you can be covered, died that you might live! Though bruised at the cross but not beaten in the resurrection. Christ remains true. Have you failed to trust him, turned your back on him, doubted his words, distrusted his character, privileged other voices? Jesus will not turn his back on you; he will never gossip about you, and he will never regret you. Christ lays his life down to vanquish the Enemy for you. Will you trust Christ? Come to him for forgiveness! Put your whole life and faith in his hands? There is no greater friend. Know your enemy *but trust your Savior*.