

10 REASONS TO LOVE THOSE WHO OPPOSE YOU:

From elementary school (when I had my last schoolyard “fight,” which I lost) until I became senior pastor of [First Baptist Church Durham](#), I had no human enemies. Yet within 18 months of beginning my ministry at this church, I had dozens who at least wanted me fired, perhaps sued, and, it seems, possibly (based on facial expressions) dead. That experience was shocking to me. My ministry and convictions had earned me many enemies.

God doesn't will for us to give in for an instant on issues of biblical truth. It's not humility but self-serving cowardice that causes us to back down from doctrinal attacks. We must fight like lions for the truth of the gospel—the souls of our hearers are at stake.

I think it's unlikely for a work of church revitalization to go on without overcoming significant human opposition. But God commands us to be humble toward our opponents, entrusting ourselves to him. This is among the greatest displays of grace. And it'll be instrumental in transforming your church.

As personal conduct goes, I believe there are at least 10 reasons we should be humble toward our opponents.

1. Because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).

God detests pride in any form, and if church revitalizers are more zealous for their own agenda than God's glory, he will fight them as much as he will fight the nominal Christians at that church.

But God gives grace to the humble. So humble yourself, and God will lift you up.

2. Because we are sinners too.

Every church leader, no matter how godly, is a sinner saved by grace. We all deserve eternal condemnation. How are we different from those who oppose us? Is there any sin we see in our opponents that we are incapable of? “Who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” ([1 Cor. 4:7](#))

Meditating on God's grace in your own life should destroy any arrogance you may feel toward others.

3. Because God is motivated to fight for those who don't fight for themselves.

In this way, we'll be following the example of Jesus Christ and how he treated his enemies: “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” ([1 Pet. 2:23](#)).

In entrusting ourselves to him who judges justly, we're forsaking the right to defend ourselves. God's wisdom and power in defending those falsely attacked when serving him are beyond our calculation. And God will use our humble suffering to advance his purposes in the church.

4. Because Paul was willing to trade his salvation to rescue his enemies.

In [Romans 9:1-4](#), the apostle Paul made a stunning claim—that, if possible, he was willing to trade his salvation and spend eternity in hell if it would result in the salvation of his Jewish enemies. He had "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" in his heart concerning their spiritual condition.

Paul is a great role model for any leader in church revitalization. His Jewish enemies were hunting him down to kill him. Ours are doing far less. We should see our opponents in light of eternity—and yearn to win them over to Jesus.

5. You can't tell the wheat from the weeds.

In Christ's parable about the wheat and the weeds, the mixed nature of the world—sons of God and sons of the Devil—could not be remedied before the end of the age. The servants offered to pull up the weeds; the master said, "No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them" ([Matt. 13:29](#)).

This indicates that before the end of the age, we won't always be able to tell the difference between wheat and weeds. Paul, the greatest servant of Christ who's ever lived, was initially the most vicious persecutor of Christians on earth. God's grace can win any person at any time. Today's hate-filled enemy may be tomorrow's zealous co-laborer. And it is "speaking the truth in love" ([Eph. 4:15](#)) that God will use to win them.

6. You aren't the issue; God's glory is.

When we pridefully rise up to defend our honor, we act as though that's more important than the glory of God in the revitalization of a church for whom Christ shed his blood.

7. A humble response to attacks will motivate church members to join you.

If you respond to mean-spirited attacks in like manner, it will be obvious to everyone you're no different from your enemies. But if you are filled with the Spirit, speaking only scriptural truths and seeking repentance and reconciliation with every person, quiet observers will be strongly motivated to come to your aid in the church revitalization process.

8. Your enemies may be right...about something.

It's exceptionally humble to listen to your adversaries with the conviction they have something worth listening to. While we may disagree about the most fundamental issues having to do with the gospel or the scriptural principles of healthy church life, they may have a valid perspective God wants you to heed regarding some key aspect of the issues or of your own demeanor or performance. God can speak anytime through anyone.