

Bin Laden Death Divides Christians on Theology

✖ When it comes to the death of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, Christian leaders hardly have a unified voice.

Indeed, while some are rejoicing in the spirit of Proverbs 11:10—When the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. But others are indignant that Christians aren't leaning on the Matthew 5 edict to "love your enemies."

Matthew Barnett, co-founder of the Dream Center in Los Angeles, tweeted this message to his followers: "Disappointed in the pastors who would not rejoice that a man similar to Hitler was removed last night."

On the other hand, Brian Zahnd, pastor of Word of Life Church in St. Joseph, Mo., tweeted something altogether different: "If bin Laden's death is seen as justice exercised by the sword of the state, fine. But Christians must not relish revenge."

As Mark Rutland, president of Oral Roberts University, sees it, Christians are always a bit queasy about rejoicing over the death of anyone, but monstrous evil has at last been dealt with in the death of Bin Laden.

"It is the responsibility of governments to protect their citizens and punish evil-doers. What is interesting is the proximity of bin Laden's death with David Wilkerson's," Rutland told Charisma News. "Bin Laden was a radical whose life was filled with hatred, violence and mass murder. Wilkerson was, in his own way, also a radical whose life was given to redemption, love and healing grace."

Rick Bezet, senior pastor at New Life Church in Conway, Ariz., isn't addressing whether it's right or wrong to rejoice at the

death one of America's archenemies. Rather, he's looking for the spiritual lesson—and he found it in the book of Galatians, which, as he points out, was authored by a former terrorist-turned-Christian named Paul.

"We are all dead without Christ and without our freedom. I thank God for a country that fights for freedom and that stands in the trenches in order that we may be free," Bezet says. "Interestingly enough, Osama bin Laden lost his physical freedom 10 years ago when he was forced to be on the run daily in order that he may survive. Without freedom in Christ, we may be breathing, but with no life. May we never forsake the gift of life and the privilege of freedom, both physically and spiritually."

John Stemberger, the attorney that represented Rifqa Bary—a young woman who ran away from her Ohio home in 2009 claiming her Muslim parents planned to murder her for following Christ—offers a reason why the rejoicing over bin Laden's death may soon end: retaliation from the enemy.

"The death of Bin Laden is a decisive and strategic victory for the United States and the fine men and women who serve in our military forces," Stemberger says. "The family and friends of 9/11 victims can all have a greater sense that justice has been done on the earth to the mastermind of one of our nation's most horrific tragedies. While we celebrate this victory, we must continue to be vigilant because terrorism will continue to be a threat well into the future."