

# The Enemy Making Machine

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Date: 18 October 2020

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] In the first century, there's a man named Paul of Tarsus who is so captured and enamored by the vision and the way of life and the words of Jesus of Nazareth that Paul dedicated his entire life to the point of death, to the point of execution. Paul dedicated his entire life to creating other communities, communities across the Mediterranean world dedicated to following the way of Jesus.

Now, the way of Jesus and the way this Paul imagined and envisioned the way of Jesus had to do, at least in part, with communities, fellowships, ecclesias, assemblies of radical inclusion, radical embrace. He was part of a culture that was all about exclusion, that was all about different layers and levels of shame and honor, of privilege and lack thereof. And what Paul dared to do is go from city to city, creating communities, fellowships, ecclesias, assemblies, gatherings, churches, where no matter what your economic status, no matter where you were from, your ethnic status, no matter if you were a master or a slave, if you were male, if you were female, if you were a Jew, if you were a Gentile, no matter any of those things, Paul, following the way of Jesus, was able to create these communities that said you belong together in one place. You could eat together, you could assemble together, you could marry, you could have relationships and friendships, and you were to treat one another with mutual respect and mutual submission. Now, in a society, an empire, a world, that believed the opposite of this. Paul's message was radically political.

It was making huge, massive claims about the way society ought to be structured, which flew in the face of every other philosopher of Paul's day. And it was massively controversial to the point that Paul was in and out of prison most of his adult life and eventually beheaded, executed by the state, for believing in this way and the words of Jesus, that no matter who you were, where you are from, you belonged. Now, as you can imagine, as Paul went around the Mediterranean world, creating these little fellowships of difference, different kinds of people, these little communities that were meant to embody this kind of life, they were little colonies in the Roman Empire of heaven, of what heaven was meant to be like, of what God's rule and reign was meant to be like, the kingdom, the kingdom of God, as Paul went around creating these little fellowships, these communities, these gatherings of folks who were dedicated to the way, the words, the life of Jesus about radical inclusion. As Paul went around creating these, you can imagine that it was sometimes hard to put these into practice and that people wanted to cling to their old divisions. You can be told a million thousand, billion times that we ought to treat somebody who is richer than us or poorer than us in the same way. We shouldn't give them more or less respect. We should treat somebody who is the different gender than us to not treat them that they are worse or better, but they are radically equal. You can imagine that if you've been told all your life that landowners and masters are, have more honor and more dignity and more worth in the economy than slaves, that it's going to be really hard to believe all of a sudden that that's not the case anymore for anybody who is created by God, which, by the way, that's all of us. So we have, I think this is really, really cool, and I think we forget about how cool this is. We have letters, written documents that Paul, this church planter, this man who dedicated his life to creating these different fellowships, these different communities, we have a letter that Paul would write to a church saying like, hey, this is what's going well, this is what's not going so well, this is what you ought to lean into and embrace, and these are the ways that you can improve your way of life, that you can more accurately reflect the way and the will of Jesus. So when we pick up a book like this, the Bible, it's not just like, it's these letters, it's these letters, these historical documents of somebody trying to put into practice the way of Jesus. So the letter that we're looking at today is called 1 Corinthians, because it's the first letter that we know of, the first letter that Paul wrote to a church in the community of Corinth.

And Corinth was a populous and wealthy city where wealth and slave and master had much to do with how you split up society, who was on top and who was on the bottom. And Paul, throughout

this letter, has to deal with all the ways that the old divisions, the old way of life, were coming back to haunt this church. So 1 Corinthians chapter 1, Paul writes this to this church. He says, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and in thought. My brothers and sisters, some are coming from Chloe's household, which Chloe's household means that there was a church gathered in Chloe's home. Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this, one of you says, I follow Paul, and another says, I follow Apollos. Another says, I follow Cephas, which would be Simon Peter, and still another says, I follow Christ, which, you know, is like the first century Jesus juke of like, well, all you guys think that you follow people, but I follow Jesus. I must be that much more holy.

And yes, I'm sure they speak in tones like this. And so Paul continues in chapter 3, he says, brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still worldly, fleshly, living according to the old ways, the sinful nature, mere babies in Christ.

[6:10] I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly, fleshly, following the old ways. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, I follow Paul, and another says, I follow Apollos, are you not mere human beings?

Now, there are many, many, many things that divide us. Many things that separate us, that give us distinctions between each other. Some of us, I mean, they're simple things. Coke versus Pepsi. Omnivore and vegan. Some of them are deeply held values. Omnivore and vegan is probably a good example of that. Republican and Democrat, of course, have to do with deeply held values. We have distinctions, and then distinctions can often turn into divisions. Christians do the same thing, of course. We had this letter from Paul since the first century, and we have yet to take Paul's advice, because it's hard advice to take. To not have divisions, to be united in thought and in mind and in soul and in heart, for us to actually do that is really hard work. Many, many years later, in the 1400s, you had a man named Martin Luther, who was trying to protest against the evil schemes, the bad schemes of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church started to sell what were called indulgences, and indulgences were a way for someone to pay a certain amount of money, and the Catholic Church would guarantee that if someone were in purgatory, that they were paying the price for their sins so they eventually could get to heaven. If you paid money for an indulgence, they could get out of purgatory more quickly. And the Catholic Church didn't have a whole lot of scriptural reason to believe that this was the case, but they were using it essentially as a fundraiser to pay for, like, St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican City. So Martin Luther comes along, and he says, this is junk theology. And his intent, Martin Luther's intent, was not to leave the Roman Catholic Church. He wanted to reform it. He wanted to protest against it and make it better. So that is where we get the word Protestant, the Protestant Reformation. He wanted to protest and reform the church. But the Roman Catholic Church didn't really want to have any of that, and so they excommunicated Luther. They kicked him out, and so off the Lutherans went. But that was just the first domino, and so then somebody else decided to disagree with Martin Luther, and then somebody else decided to disagree with them, and somebody else decided to disagree with them, until we get to America today, where there are more than 20,000 different denominations, all with their distinctions, which turned into their divisions. Distinction and division is in our DNA. Even in our in our DNA as Christ followers, because we are all also enamored with the way of Jesus Christ, just like Paul was 20 centuries ago. And yet we still find ourselves distinguishing and dividing every day of our lives. And even the faith tradition that we were either born into or discovered on our own was also just another child of distinction and division. But disagreement, it's necessary. It's good. We can't all just pretend like we all agree when we don't. We need distinctions, and we need disagreement. And there are some things, don't hear me wrong, there are some things that are worth dividing about.

When it comes to who has worth and who has value, there are things worth distinguishing and dividing about. When it comes to saying that there is such a thing as systemic racism, which is killing black and brown bodies in our country like nothing else, it's worth dividing about.

[10:19] When it comes to saying that folks who are LGBTQ, that they deserve as many rights and as many privileges as somebody who does not identify that way, who is somebody who is straight, that's worth distinguishing and dividing about.

Because when it comes to our value, our inherent worth, the Imago Dei that God has placed inside each and every one of us, regardless of the color of your skin, regardless of the gender that you identify with, regardless of the person that you want to spend the rest of your life with, of who you're attracted to, God has placed the Imago Dei in you.

When someone comes along and says, no, that's actually not the case, and let me tell you why, that is worth distinguishing and dividing about. But what can happen is that distinguishing and dividing can eventually turn into disgust.

And it can eventually turn into dogma. Disgust and dogma are ways that we set ourselves above those that we disagree with, those that we have set off on a different path from.

Division turning into disgust, turning into dogma. It's a way that we fall prey to what this month we're going to call the enemy-making machine.

[11:36] The enemy-making machine is a term I'm borrowing from a missiologist and New Testament professor, David Fitch, who writes in a book called *The Church of Us Versus Them*.

And that's the series we're embarking on this month, which will start today and it will lead us to the week after the election. We all fall prey to the enemy-making machine where we don't only find the things that distinguish us.

We don't only find the things that are worth dividing about, but we also discover and make up the ways that are worth making enemies out of.

Now, enemy is a strong word. Jesus says things like, love your enemies. And us, with our 21st century sensibilities, we hear the word enemy and think, like, I don't have any enemies.

That's a word that we use in the military. It's the word that maybe you use for, like, in the first century, but I don't have any enemies. But I think there are ways that we do make enemies and signs and reminders to ourselves of the enemies that we do make and think about each and every day.

[12:47] And that's what I want to talk about today as we introduce this series, *The Church of Us Versus Them*. What are the ways that we have identified enemies? What are the ways that we fall prey to the enemy-making machine?

And what are the ways that we can escape it? Because here's the main point for today. When we begin to fall prey to the enemy-making machine, when we make other people our enemies, what we're basically doing is letting other people define our identity.

We're letting somebody other than God define who we are and what we're about. And that's what we want to avoid. So, there are three signs that we are inside the enemy-making machine, that we are making people, making the other less than human, dehumanizing them, making them into our enemies, and therefore allowing them to name our own identity.

So, three ways. So, three ways. Way number one. Banners. Banners, you could call them slogans. You could call them signals or master signifiers or dogmas.

And basically what a banner or dogma is, a belief minus practice is a banner. Let me say that again. A belief minus practice is a banner.

[14:13] A banner is a distinction that has become detached from daily living. It's a distinction that's become detached from daily living. It's something that we put out there, something that we believe, something that identifies us, something that we say is true about ourselves, even though it has not made one bit of difference in how we actually live our lives.

Let me give you some examples. The first example that comes to mind for me is the banner of pro-life. Yes, we're going there today. Pro-life is a banner that started out as a way to talk about how folks were going to care for, tend to, pay attention to what was happening inside the womb and whether or not life was inside of there, and if there was, how we were going to care for it.

But that pro-life where it started is a long ways off from where we are today, where pro-life is detached from the rest of that conversation. Are we pro-life for only what happens inside of the womb?

Are we also pro-life for what happens to the person carrying what's inside the womb? Are we pro-life not only for the beginning of life, but also for everything that happens in between all the way to the end of life?

Are we pro-life not just for white people who look like me? Are we pro-life for black and brown people? Folks who experience more violence, more state executions, more extrajudicial killings than anyone else in this country?

[ 15 : 43 ] Are we pro-life not just for those who can carry this banner called citizenship, which again, just a term that we made up and we get to define. Are we pro-life for those who are also on the other side of the border or trying to make their way across the border or who have made it across the border, but we have decided belong inside a cage or a jail?

Pro-life has become a banner because it's become detached from actual ways of daily living. It's become something that we can check off on how we vote or on like a someone versus someone like who you should vote for checklist.

It's become just that and not a way of asking ourselves, how are we going to live our life? Are we actually caring for the whole person, the whole of life, regardless of where they're from or what they look like?

Let me give you a couple more examples. President Obama had a great banner, hope and change. And this is a good example of an empty or a master signifier because no matter who you were, you could insert whatever definition into the phrase hope and change that you wanted to.

And so you could feel like, yes, I'm for hope and change. That could mean a thousand different things, but you could cling on to it, hope for it, and want it to be your banner, your master signifier, even though in a lot of ways it didn't carry a lot of meaning on its own.

[ 17 : 09 ] Another example, repeal and replace, which is the Republican reaction for the ACA or what's commonly called Obamacare. Repeal and replace, it's a great banner because we can cling on to it.

Yeah, Obamacare, it has some weaknesses, we should change some things, we should repeal it, we should replace it. Is there a plan with what we should replace it with? I don't know, but let's get it done.

Pro-science. This is one that Democrats often use. Pro-science, we want to follow the science no matter where it leads, even though, if you look at the research, Democrats can often be just as prone to fall for not evidence-based things as anyone else.

Think about GMOs, think about nuclear power, think about all the things that show up in Goop magazine, okay? Banners are ways that we create dogmas, signals, master signifiers, a distinction that becomes detached from the way that we actually live our life.

This happens in Christianity as well. Things like biblical inerrancy, things like are you rapture ready, things like have you been saved, things like, you know, do you believe in hell, do you believe in heaven, do you believe in fill-in-the-blank, are you affirming or welcoming?

[ 18 : 31 ] These are all forms of banners, things that we can very quickly make a judgment about a church or another person or ourselves and check yes on it, even though it becomes detached from the way that we actually live our lives.

That's a banner. Number two way that we know that we're falling prey to the enemy-making machine, and that's related to it. It's called reverse definition. Reverse definition.

A reverse definition is when we make a banner that only makes sense in relation to those we disagree with. A reverse definition is when we make a banner, a dogma, a distinguishing sign or symbol for ourselves that only makes sense in relation to those we disagree with.

I know many of us can relate to the term ex-evangelical or post-evangelical, and it's a way of saying, like, this is how I identify in relation to what I came out of, what I came from, and that can become a banner and reverse definition because we're not entirely positive what it is we stand for, but we definitely know what it is we stand against.

And, like, this is an indictment against much of American Christianity where we are often known for not what we stand for, but for what we're against.

[ 19 : 55 ] This is something that comes up all the time where we want our faith to be able to say, well, we don't want to be, we don't want to stand for that.

We want our faith to be able to say no to people, whoever we want to. But we're not always positive what our faith is what meant to be building up in a positive sense.

So things like ex-evangelical or ex-Catholic, defining ourselves by what we're not. Now, I'm going to tread carefully here for a second because I know I'm probably going to mess this up. Reverse definition makes who we are tied up in somebody else.

It makes who we are, what we stand for, tied up in the person that we're identifying as the opposite, our enemy, what we don't want to be about. And the solution to reverse definition is to know what we are for, first and foremost, so that we can stand up for what's right and true and just.

This is a good thing. We need to stand up for things that are right and true and just to make this world more reflective of God's reign, of God's justice. Here's where I'm going to tread carefully. [ 21 : 08 ] A phrase like anti-racist. Now, hear me, hear me, hear me. It is good and necessary for all of us to be anti-racist. When racism is so deeply baked in to the systems of imprisonment and jailing and policing and housing and education, so deeply baked in to the American way of life, you have to be actively anti-racist in order to move towards justice, to move our nation in a good way.

But anti-racism cannot stand as a value by itself. Because anti-racism, baked into the name, is the idea that we are against something else.

Anti-racism has to point towards a higher value, something more important than anti-racism.

Otherwise, if we get to a day when racism is not the thing that's baked into our society and our culture, anti-racism won't make sense anymore.

It will become a banner. It's becoming reverse definition. Now, in Christian thought, the thing that anti-racism is pointing to is Genesis chapter 1 and 2, that we are all created in the image of God. It's pointing towards Galatians chapter 3, this thing that Paul was able to say to his different fellowships of radical inclusion, that in Christ Jesus there is no Jew, nor Greek, nor slave, nor free, nor male, nor female. We are all one in Christ Jesus, that we are all children of God.

[ 22 : 36 ] That's the thing that anti-racism is pointing to, and therefore, that has to have consequences in how we live our life and how we push against the forces of racism in our culture, in our society.

But, anti-racism, in and of itself, is not enough. It has to be tied to something broader and deeper and bigger and more divine than that.

So we have to be careful of reverse definition. Reverse definition is a way that we tie up our identities, our worth, our very selves in the personhood of whoever we disagree with.

And that can lead to point number three, the way that we know that we're in the enemy-making machine. That's perverse enjoyment. So we've talked about banners, banners, dogmas, master signifiers, when we make up statements that are detached from the way that we live.

We've talked about reverse definition, when we tie up our values, our purpose, our identity in who we're not, what we're against. Reverse enjoyment, or perverse enjoyment, excuse me, is what was the number one word looked up on dictionary.com when the president contracted COVID.

[ 23 : 57 ] It's schadenfreude. Pleasure at someone else's pain. Perverse enjoyment, when we are happy that someone else is suffering. And we know that we are deep inside the enemy-making machine when we gain joy or pleasure because of our enemies' pain or failure.

We know that we're deeply within the enemy-making machine when our well-being is tied up in someone else losing their well-being.

which means that we are tied up in someone else's defeat or failure. Which means that we are, as a response to being dehumanized, we decide that the best reaction is to dehumanize them back.

When someone tells us that, hey, because of who you are, what you believe, what you look like, who you love, where you went to school, where you grew up, all of those things, if someone dehumanizes us because of those things, perverse enjoyment says, well, then I have no choice but to do the same thing back to you.

Schadenfreude, perverse enjoyment, our well-being tied up in someone else's lack of well-being.

And listen, our sense of being right, remember those divisions and distinctions that are important and good and necessary, our sense of being right, of being tied up in the things that God is tied up in, in terms of the worth and value of all people, in terms of how society ought to be set up so that creation is well cared for, so that people are well cared for, our sense of being right, of being for the things that God is for, should never be tied up in the fruit of someone else being proven wrong.

[ 25 : 52 ] we ought to know what we stand for without having to have someone else being proven wrong. Now listen to what I'm not saying today, friends.

I'm not saying that distinctions aren't important. They are. We need distinctions. We can't all pretend to get along when we actually don't.

Listen, I don't believe that there is a person on this planet who actually believes that we should all just get along, that your truth is your truth and my truth is my truth and I should never push my values and my truth on you.

No one believes that. That's not how society works. When I see someone put, like, kick a puppy, my reaction is like, well, you know, just to each their own. No, I am going to take action against the

puppy kickers.

When I see someone, I ought to, when I see someone take offense to the idea of being anti-racist, of taking offense to the idea that racism is baked into our society, I ought to not just be like, well, you know, that's what they want to believe.

[ 27 : 00 ] Okay, no, I want to push against that. We are all this God-given sense of justice that makes us want to make sure that this world is becoming a more just and holy place.

So, distinctions are important. I'm not saying that they're not. I'm not saying that all we need to do is just find like a middle way or a middle path. Like, listen, there's no middle way or middle path between like caring for creation and not caring for creation.

Like, no, there is a right and there is a wrong. There's no middle path between like being anti-racist and being racist. Like, no, there's just one right choice. Middle paths aren't always the answer. It's not always about compromise. So, I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that you need to be friends with your abuser or your persecutor or those who are actively trying to harm you.

That's different as well. We don't have to be friends with the people who dehumanize us. What I am saying is that there is a difference between actively trying to make enemies enemies and living in such a way that it naturally reveals enemies.

[ 28 : 12 ] Think about the life of Jesus. Jesus is a person who, according to scripture, was filled with the presence of God and went around healing and doing good. We look at the life of Jesus.

What do you see Jesus doing? You see him having radical inclusion, that he would be with Jews and with Gentiles, that he would heal those that society had rejected, that he would go around and he would break the law.

He would break the law by healing on the Sabbath, by eating and bringing people into homes that were not supposed to be there, he was not supposed to be eating with, by touching caskets he wasn't supposed to be touching, by touching sick people that he wasn't supposed to be touching. Jesus went around doing all these things, and guess what? Jesus had a lot of enemies. Now Jesus did not go make enemies, but Jesus lived in such a way in which enemies were revealed.

That's the difference. When we make enemies, we make it all about them. We're giving them the permission to live, take up rent inside our brains, and that's not how Jesus wants us to live.

[ 29 : 26 ] Jesus wants us to live in the same way that he did, filled with the presence of God, going around healing and doing good, and if that makes enemies pop up and say stop it, that's on them.

It's not on you. What I'm saying is that our response to being dehumanized by someone is to not return the favor and dehumanize them right back.

It's to not tie up our identities with what someone else thinks about us. So how do we escape? How do we escape the enemy-making machine? And that's what we're going to be talking about all month, but let me give you three quick previews.

Number one, when it comes to banners, we need to spend at least twice as much time thinking about our own actions and practices than we do critiquing someone else's beliefs.

It is easy to go on Twitter or Instagram or Facebook and make fun of someone else's beliefs. It gets the laughs, it gets the clicks, it gets the likes.

[ 30 : 25 ] It is an easy thing to do and social media has tricked us into thinking that that's the way that we're going to change the world. But friends, friends, when our beliefs become detached from our practices, we're just falling prey to another banner.

So we need to have some sort of accountability system in our lives that makes sure that when we are posting the easy field goal, the easy points on the internet, that we're asking ourselves, yeah, but how am I actually putting this into practice in my own life?

How am I actually making sure that I'm making this world a more just and righteous place for all people, even the people I disagree with? If I can't answer that question in the affirmative that I'm actually living that way, don't score easy points on the internet.

It's not worth it. It's just another way that we're dehumanizing ourselves. Number two, reverse definition, refuse to allow your identity to become swallowed up by what some other person thinks. Refuse to let your identity become swallowed up by what some other person thinks. Are you able to know your own identity, what you stand for, what you are about as a person?

[ 31 : 40 ] Are you able to identify that without mentioning those you disagree with? Are you able to state affirmatively what you are for without even giving a second thought to what you disagree with?

Don't fall prey to reverse definition. And number three, don't fall prey to perverse enjoyment. Schadenfreude, God has never, friends, God has never experienced enjoyment at your pain. God has never experienced enjoyment at your pain. And God has never experienced enjoyment at the pain of even those that we disagree with.

That's not in God's character. It's not in God's nature. The good news of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ is this, that even while we were yet enemies of God, Christ died for us.

That's the good news of the gospel, that even when we're wrong, even when we look back at ourselves 10, 15 years ago and think about all the things that we wish that we had never said, never thought, never felt, never agreed with, God still loved you then.

[ 32 : 48 ] Even when you look back at yourself 10 years in the future looking back on what you think today, God still loves you now and God will still love you then. And even the people who you think are demonic and evil and wrong and are bringing about abuse and terror in this world today, God still died for them.

Christ still died for them. Christ's words forgive them for they do not know what they do are still true even for those who we disagree with.

God has never experienced pleasure at your pain. God only experiences deep sorrow at the pain that we have felt, the pain that we have caused on others, and the pain that others have caused on us.

God experiences sorrow and out of that sorrow Christ gave his life and was resurrected to bring healing to the world.

That is the good news of the gospel, and that is how we are going to begin to escape the enemy-making machine when we stop letting those we disagree with take up free rent in our brains all the time.

[ 34 : 04 ] Almighty God, we thank you for the good news of the gospel that even while we were enemies, you died for us. You showed us the way of self-sacrificial, self-giving love that even while the world spit on you and tortured you and ignored all the signs of love that you gave us, God, you were obedient even to the point of death.

And then, as C.S. Lewis wrote, there was even deeper magic. Because of your life willingly gave, it was as if time worked in reverse, and you were resurrected, showing us that the way of love is the way of life, even when it doesn't seem like it.

And so, God, may we as your people not be defined by what we're against, but may we be defined by what we are for, by being people of love and mercy and forgiveness and an abundant sense of justice that we are working out into the world, that we are not making enemies.

Enemies reveal themselves when they realize that what we are up to is shalom and wholeness and peace and that we will do anything in the name of that peace and love.

So, Holy Spirit of God, would you fill us, anoint us, empower us, and may we follow you into this just and righteous world that you are creating right now through the church, a colony of heaven, and an empire of death.

[ 35 : 30 ] Would you use us to bring upon, bring upon this world new life and new creation? We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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