

## How to Love Someone You Can't Stand - Bible Reading: **Romans 12:9-21**

### Introduction:

#### A. **Matthew 22:34-40**

1. I don't have much problem with the "Love the Lord" part of this passage, but I must admit that I have had some neighbors (whether physical or in this sense "love thy neighbor" concept that are nearly impossible to love.
  - a. Does God really expect me to love them?
2. Matthew 5:43-48
  - a. Sure sounds like we have to learn to love the unlovable!

#### B. Saying you need to love the unlovable is much easier than it is to do it in reality.

1. Illus: A college professor told the following story on himself. For years whenever he saw a parent scolding or punishing a child, he would tell them, "You should love your boy, not punish him." One hot summer afternoon the professor was doing some repair work on a concrete driveway leading to the garage. Tired out after several hours of work, he laid down the trowel, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and started toward the house. Just then out of the corner of his eye he saw a mischievous little boy putting his foot into the fresh cement. He rushed over, grabbed the boy, and was about to spank him severely when a neighbor leaned from a window and said, "Watch it, Professor! Don't you remember? You must love the child!" At this, he yelled back furiously, "I do love him in the abstract, but not in the concrete."

#### C. Loving those we find irritating is not easy.

1. Doesn't seem natural. So how do we do it?
2. We must have the capacity to do it, or else God would not have asked us to do it.

#### D. Will consider some principles from **Romans 12.**

1. But first,

### II. **Recognize that your burden is not unique.**

#### A. You are not the first & only person asked to love the unlovely, or deal with unreasonable, difficult people.

##### 1. Consider David with Saul

- a. The man threw a spear at him! Not once but twice. (**1 Sam. 18:10-16 & 19:8-10**).
- b. Sent men to kill him (**19:11-17**), went himself (**19:18-24**), sent his son to kill him (**20:1-11**), and chased him for years.
- c. Yet, on two occasions David deliberately chose to spare Saul's life (**1 Sam. 24:1-7; 26:1-ff**) and even grieved when he died (**2 Sam. 1:11-ff**).
- d. When was the last time someone threw a spear at you? sent hired assassins after you?
- e. Last time, out of jealousy someone turned against you? hurled hurtful words at you? plotted behind your back to get other people not to like you?

#### B. Consider the apostle Paul

1. Escaped his own countrymen by being let down through an opening in the wall in a basket (**Acts 9:23-25**).
2. Stoned in Lystra and left for dead by some of his own country who had hunted him down (**Acts 14:19-22**).
3. While in prison, he was deserted by all of the disciples with the exception of Luke (**2 Tim. 4:9-11**).
4. When was the last time you got run out of town by an angry mob? were stoned or imprisoned? deserted & left nearly alone?
5. Last time openly made fun of you because you tried to do what was right? ridiculed because you took an unpopular stand? tried to exclude from "the group?"

C. Consider, Christ our Lord

1. Came with the purest & greatest of motives (**Luke 19:10**), yet was rejected (**John 1:5, 11**), even in his hometown (**Luke 4:16-30**).
2. Falsely accused on all manner of wrong doing and often had His motives called into question (ie. breaking Sabbath when healed man **Matt. 12:9-14**).
3. Finally, betrayed, deserted, arrested, misunderstood, beaten, mocked, insulted, and then murdered in the cruelest of fashions.
4. When was the last time you arrested on totally false charges? beaten? murdered?
5. Last time someone twisted your motives for trying to do what was right? insulted you, mocked you? tried to hurt you or your reputation with trumped up charges? was just flat out mean to you?

D. Take courage from the fact that you are not alone!

1. **1 Cor. 10:13**
2. **Heb. 12:1-3**
3. Jesus has not asked you to do anything that He did not do Himself!

### III. People Aren't Your Problem

A. Our struggle is with evil

1. **Eph. 6:12**
2. Challenge is to see the evil rather than the person. Separate the sin from the sinner.
3. Satan will use the sin the lives of others to tempt us to sin. Will use the non-believer as well as those of our own spiritual family. (**Matthew 18:21**)
4. **Rom. 12:21**

B. God specializes in healing bad relationships

1. In light of **Rom. 3:23** it shouldn't surprise us when someone treats us badly. Because all have sinned, everyone has the potential of inflicting hurt.
2. People are going to do bad things to us – that's unavoidable. What is truly significant is how we respond to it.
3. When bad things happen, we must remember that we are not to be overcome by evil, we are to overcome evil regardless of the form it takes.
4. Remember seeing a bumper sticker years ago that read, "God is greater than any problem I have."
  - a. If we look to Him we can find the will, the strength & the strategy.
  - b. I am convinced that **Rom. 12:14-21** helps us to find & understand that strategy.
  - c. "The real test in golf and in life is not keeping out of the rough, but in getting out after we are in." (John Moore) God will "lead" us to still waters AND through the valley of the shadow of death. Look to Him!

C. Must choose our weapons carefully – good not evil!

1. **2 Cor, 10:4**
2. If we are going to out duel the Devil we must choose our weapons carefully. Carefully choose the weapons we use to aggressively attack evil.
3. Should not use evil when wronged for at least two major reasons:
  - a. Evil is not as powerful as good.
    - (1) Indiana Jones – threatened by man with a sword. What did he do? Took out his gun & shot him. Used his more powerful weapon.
    - (2) **1 John 4:4**
  - b. Our objective is to destroy evil, not create more of it.
    - (1) Doing evil puts you on the wrong side.
    - (2) When we return evil for good, we play right into the enemies hands.

D. Respond with aggressive good

1. Faith without works is dead. Love in the absence of deeds is not love at all. It is not enough for us to simply refrain from doing evil, we must set out to aggressively do good.
  - a. **Rom. 12:14**
  - b. **1 Cor. 4:11-13**
2. Consider the example of the Good Samaritan:
  - a. First two (priest & Levite) -- encounter the wounded man & chose not to get involved. Didn't hurt, but didn't help. Refused to get involved because involvement would require something of them.
  - b. Samaritan asked a different question. "What will happen to me if I don't help?" Was willing to help his enemy!
  - c. Good is when you get your focus off yourself and look at someone else (even if you can't stand that person.).
3. What is going to happen to the world if WE don't do good?

#### IV. **Manage your mouth – bless & don't curse**

- A. Must strive for the discipline to control our words as well as our actions.
  1. Doubt that any of you have walked up to the person at work who has been gossiping about you & punched them out. Drive by shooting because someone spoke harshly to you.
  2. Controlling our actions is usually not nearly as difficult as controlling how we react verbally to someone.
  3. James 3:2-ff
  4. The starting place for this battle is in your mouth. The first step to overcoming evil and loving those you can't stand is to win the war of words.
- B. What is meant by cursing?
  1. Three ways we could be guilty of "cursing" as used in this context:
    - a. Ask God to damn another person, treat them harshly – ask God to curse them
    - b. Say mean, hurtful things about a person to someone else – curse them before the ears of another
    - c. Hurl verbal abuse directly at them
  2. "Stick & stones may hurt by bones, but words will never harm me."
    - a. I Remember saying that when someone was saying bad things about you? Not true is it!
- C. What is meant my blessing?
  1. It is the opposite of what we have just been talking about. Saying good things about a person – to them, to others, to God. Seeking good things for them.
  2. I know of no better way to bless a person then to pray for them. May not change them, but you and your attitude may change in the process.
  3. Consider these examples:
    - a. **Luke 23:34** - Jesus on the cross
    - b. **Acts 7:60** - Stephen while being stoned
    - c. **Job 42:10** - after being slandered by his friends
    - d. **1 Cor. 4:12-13**
  4. To the world we will seem like fools when we say good things about those who do evil to us.
    - a. (This doesn't suggest that we ignore their sin or excuse away their sin – we simply discipline how we respond verbally to it.)
  5. **Matthew 12:37**
  6. In our conversations, we need to listen to what we are saying.
    - a. Managing our mouths is easy to understand, but tough to practice.

#### V. **Put yourself in the other person's place and try to understand their feelings, thoughts, and position. (Romans 12:15-16)**

- A. Usually, it is not a question of whether or not it was wrong.
  - 1. It was wrong. But why did they do it? That questions needs to be answered.
  - 2. Stephen Covey – “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”
  - 3. Understanding the person’s reasons will help you discipline your reaction.
  - 4. Won’t take away the hurt or make the person’s actions right. However, it will make it easier for you bless & curse not.
- B. Understanding reasons & being sympathetic will often open up your heart.
  - 1. Covey’s story of man in subway with out of control kids – had just come from hospital & wife had died.
  - 2. Passengers look disgustedly at him while he did nothing to control his kids.
- C. Understand their thinking & sympathize rather than being harshly critical
  - 1. Some people do inappropriate things to get noticed & get attention. Knowing how they think will help you return good for evil.
  - 2. Strive for the discipline to restrain the impulse to be critical or lash out until you have gotten to know the person, what motivates them and how they think.
  - 3. Again, this does not mean that we ignore the sin or excuse the sin.
    - a. Understanding a person’s thinking or motives does not lessen the reality of sin.
    - b. However, in many of the situations we face, our task of returning good for evil will be made much easier.
- D. Join with others in their emotions.
  - 1. Spouse comes home from work & is a terrible grouch. Barks at you and then sits down to completely shut you out. Hurts right?
  - 2. Why are they in such a bad mood?
    - a. They need your empathy not your criticism.

VI. **Never, never, never take revenge (Romans 12:17-19)**

- A. Revenge is not on “our end of the stick.”
  - 1. Revenge is even one of the names God wears (Yahweh Gmolah)
    - a. **Jeremiah 51:56**
    - b. **Deut. 32:35**
  - 2. Vengeance always belongs to God and never belongs to us.
  - 3. Revenge is not bad. It just isn’t our job!
  - 4. Not taking revenge does not mean that we sit back and let evil walk all over us. Letting God take revenge doesn’t mean that we never say an action is wrong or do something about it.
    - a. **Eph. 5:11**
    - b. **1 Tim. 5:20**
  - 5. We are not in the “punishing” business – that’s God’s job.
- B. We must trust God to right our wrongs.
  - 1. There is never a time when we need to put on the judicial robes and right the wrongs done to us. Never. Never. Never.
  - 2. If God is the judge, then we need to trust Him. He will take care of the situation. He sees everything, knows everything, and is well equipped to be the judge.
- C. Why should we let God be the judge?
  - 1. As mentioned, it just isn’t our job & God can do a much more efficient job.
  - 2. The person may repent and your actions might interfere with that process.
  - 3. Taking revenge is sinful and brings you under God’s condemnation.
  - 4. In his book, A Tale of Three Kings, Gene Edward talks about throwing spears.
    - a. Saul throws a spear at David & what does David do besides duck? Or rather what doesn’t David

- do? He doesn't throw it back.
- b. Resists the temptation to seek revenge.
- 5. Do you get the point? Lots of spears are thrown at us – penetrating words, cutting deeds – what do you do? Don't throw back!

**VII. Plan ahead to do something beautiful (v. 17b) ---- (Read from NASV - “Christian Counselors NT” - “plan ahead to do what is fine in the sight of all men.”)**

A. “Plan ahead”

- 1. Someone has wronged you & you know you are going to see them again.
  - a. What do you do? Sit down, think this situation through, get some ideas and come up with a plan.
- 2. Master the situation rather than letting the situation master you.
- 3. **1 Thess. 5:15** “seek to do good to one another and to all”
  - a. Don't simply do or say the first things that comes to your mind (or mouth). Plan ahead. Pray ahead. Search and search for the right thing.
  - b. We are involved in a battle – don't face the enemy without a battle plan!

B. Do What is beneficial

- 1. Last word variously translated – right, honest, fine
- 2. Isn't this what God did for us? (**Romans 5:6-9**)
- 3. Plan some kind word, kind deed – show that you are different. You will not be overcome by evil, but will rather overcome evil with good!

C. In the sight of all men

- 1. Your response should be so profound that it not only moves our enemy, but also others who observe it.
- 2. Reaction of the centurion at the death of Jesus, “Truly this was the Son of God.”
- 3. Think of the times in the life of Jesus that His enemies could not find anything in His life that was grounds for accusation.
- 4. We need to think through the situations where we are most likely to blow up, clam up, avoid, say sarcastic or unkind things, and plan out a strategy for what we are going to do the next time we see the person. This will astound and confound friend and enemy alike.

**VIII. Don't seek to win the war, seek to win the peace (Romans 12:18)**

A. Live at peace with EVERYONE – that's the goal!

- 1. We should strive to win the war, by planning good things, and also win the peace.
- 2. A cease-fire does not make for peace.
- 3. **Hebrews 12:14**
- 4. Our goal should be the restoration of relationships – turning enemies into allies.
- 5. **Matthew 5:9**

B. If it is possible . . .

- 1. Doing everything we have talked about thus far is no guarantee that our relationship will be healed and prosperous. We may manage our mouths, see things from the other person's perspective, never take revenge, and plan beautiful responses and find that the difficult person under consideration simply becomes more difficult.
- 2. There are limits to our efforts in seeking peace.
  - a. We cannot take control of the other person's reactions.
  - b. Must not compromise Biblical values & morals for the sake of peace
- 3. If you do good to a person who has wronged you, one of two things will happen:
  - a. They will change.
  - b. They won't change.

4. That's pretty simple. If they change, that is what you wanted. If they won't change, at least you can live with yourself and God because you did the right thing.

## IX. **Make room for God (v.19)**

### A. "Give a place for Him"

1. God really can do something to heal broken relationships and bring peace. Nothing is too big or too bad -- make Him the "third party" in broken and hurting relationships.
2. It's kinda' like setting a table for you and the person who is being difficult.
  - a. Set a place for God. If both parties conducted themselves with an awareness of the presence of God would things change? What if only you recognized this reality?
3. Don't crowd God out! Turn to prayer. Talk to God at the first sign of trouble.
4. Let me suggest three reasons why God can help you with bad relationships.
  - a. God judges
    - (1) You are in no position to judge the difficult person – don't know what's in their heart; don't know what they deserve.
  - b. Your knowledge of any situation is at best partial – God knows all.
    - (1) **Hebrews 4:12-13**
  - c. God cares
    - (1) **1 Peter 5:7**
    - (2) God knows you've been hurt & He's concerned. He feels and cares.

### B. God heals

1. He can make the bitter sweet (**Ex. 15:25-26**) – even relationships.
2. **V. 26** "Yahweh Rapha" – The Lord who heals.
3. **Psa. 147:3**
4. Commenting on this passage Moses Lard said: "By this course, you will certainly conquer the evil which is in yourself, and you may conquer that which is in him."

## X. **Bomb people with love (Romans 12:20)**

### A. Find a need in the life of the other person

1. In the text we find an enemy who is hungry or thirsty. Your enemy may not lack these things, they will lack something. May not be literal food for which they are hungering.
2. This will help you take the focus off yourself and force you to try to understand the other person.

### B. Look at your resources.

1. What do you have to give? Take an inventory of what is at your resources.
2. Look at your funds, possessions, time, life, etc. See what you have that can be used to help your "enemy." Then go back and plan ahead to do something fine for them.
3. Isn't that what God did? Saw our need of salvation. Took inventory of heaven and found His Son – then sent Him.

### C. Heap good!

1. Heap the coals – heap means "a lot." One kind deed, a few sweet words probably will not do the trick. Heap it on – overwhelm!
2. For instance: Guys when do you bring flowers for your wife? Only when your in trouble? Special occasion? Why not try those times when your wife has been having a bad time & has been a bit difficult!
3. Perhaps a reference to ancient Bedouin sign of homage where hot coals are given to anyone who has no fire.
  - a. Commenting on this understanding Dan Allender in "Bold Love" states: "Evil cannot tolerate the intrusion of goodness. Evil has its own snarl, dress code, favorite beer, and sports team, and when

someone comes into its lair sporting a smile, out of fashion wide lapels, and a root beer, it can hardly bear to coexist with this alien and stranger. It depends on its ability to mock and shame the intruder into retreat ... in other words goodness has the power to expose and shame the one who did harm. Shame is the experience of having the curtain lifted and being recognized as the wizard of a sham kingdom... for that reason, I understand the metaphor of heaping burning coals on the head to mean offering goodness that surprises, supplants and shames the sin of the one who does harm, lest it remain and destroy his heart.. Shame can be a severe mercy, a gift of sight that either hardens or softens the heart.”

XI. **Conclusion:**

- A. This is tough stuff. It is not for the faint of heart.