

Love for Enemies

Sometimes trying to love people we care about can be difficult, right? Love is flat out hard work at times. The focus in today's passage, however, is not primarily on loving people we naturally care about; it is on loving our enemies. This is part of our calling in Christ. Jesus was the ultimate model for us of this way of life and we are to strive to be like him even in this most difficult area.

Opening Question: Have you ever had anyone in your life that you'd put in the category of "enemy"? If so, explain briefly.

Read Romans 12:14-21

1. If you were someone who did not grow up in the church and knew nothing of a Christian ethic, how would these verses sound to you? Why?
2. What counsel do these verses offer for how we should treat an enemy?
3. What is it going to take for us to actually relate to an enemy in the ways that Paul instructs in this passage?
4. How does Jesus serve as an example for us in living out the commands we find here?
5. What would you say to someone who says, "There is no way that I could ever love my enemy or treat them like this passage says"?

6. How might the instructions in Romans 12:1-2 relate to what Paul commands in these verses?

Steve said:

Can you envision what your life might be like if you routinely blessed those who persecute (or wrong) you, if you never took your own revenge, and if you sought to overcome evil with good? In today's passage Paul wasn't describing someone who was outwardly kind to everybody but inwardly seething in rage and resentment. He was describing someone who really wants the best for everybody, even his/her enemies, even those who cause them great pain. Can you imagine being a person who honestly wants the best for every single person you encounter?

7. What do you envision life might be like if from the heart you treated enemies like Paul instructs in this passage?

Steve said:

You can use your imagination to find ways to cultivate love for enemies. Of course internalizing Scripture is one of the core "means" of becoming like Jesus. Easter is four weeks from today. Perhaps between now and then you could spend significant time reading in the gospels and pondering the last week of Jesus' life. Fix your eyes on Jesus and notice how He responded to the evil He experienced. Notice how He responded to insults and persecution during His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. If we care to notice, we can become convinced on a heart level that loving our enemies is a beautiful and Christlike way to live our lives. Another means you can employ is simply practicing in everyday life the habit of treating others better than they treat you. This week people *will* irritate and/or insult you - in conversation, in traffic, on FB, in the media, etc. When this happens, you have the opportunity to practice not returning "evil for evil or insult for insult but giving a blessing instead" (1 Peter 3:9). When somebody cuts you off in traffic, you don't have to be enraged that they are going to get to the stoplight 3 seconds before you do. You can breathe a prayer, "Lord, that lady in the blue car must be dealing with some difficult issues to drive that way; please give her grace this day."

8. What are some practical things that you can begin to practice that would help you grow in learning to love your enemies?