

## Lord, Love My Enemies through Me

01/29/12

Romans 12:14-21

**Intro.** Intolerance, threats, harassment and violence against followers of Jesus Christ continue to grow worldwide. Listen to these excerpts from reports posted recently on the Voice of the Martyrs website:

*Stonegate Institute, a nonprofit organization that researches human rights issues, cited recent Nigerian church bombings — in which the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram killed more than 40 people attending a Christmas service — as an obvious example of intensifying violence. And in Iran, the State Security centers of the Islamic Republic ordered local churches to cancel Christmas and New Year’s celebrations. Churches in Egypt, Malaysia and Pakistan also closed during the holidays to avoid attacks.*

*In countries like Egypt, Iraq, Malaysia, the Philippines and Saudi Arabia, Christians are often viewed as second-class citizens. Persecution in these countries is commonly manifested through the sexual abuse of Christian women; forced conversions to Islam; unjust enforcement of apostasy and blasphemy laws; the theft of Christians’ property and the plunder and burning of their homes; and physical attacks and murder.*

*Six church leaders in Laos remain in prison after the local security force raided their Christmas celebration on Friday, Dec. 16. Under the Boukham village chief’s orders, eight church leaders were arrested and immediately escorted to the village government house. Four of the eight leaders were handcuffed and their feet placed in stocks, which are planks of wood fastened to the wall. Family members delivered blankets to the prisoners that night. In the past few years, many Christians in Laos have faced imprisonment, experienced family or village rejection and received threats because of their faith. Many Laotians consider Christianity a “Western” religion and a threat to Laotian identity.*

The scriptures command us to ‘remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.’ (Heb. 13:3)

When we read our text for today, ‘Bless those who persecute you,’ we are reminded of the teaching that persecution is a fact of life for the growing follower of Christ. We all have experienced God assigned opposition, conflict, evil or intolerance against us in some form or fashion. Perhaps our experience does not compare to that of those in the above excerpts, but we know the powerful force of opposition whether severe or minor.

Think of the impact on your obedient faith and commitment to love others that is felt when you intersect with an angry spouse, a rebellious child, a difficult neighbor, an uncaring family member or an obnoxious co-worker. You may not be beaten, bloodied or bound, but your independent preoccupation with your life and your self infatuation lead you to incredible frustration as you fight and defend yourself from these various assaults on your perceived freedom. It is significant that in most cases when faced with angry or unkind opposition, the best we can do is not react and distance ourselves from the threat. The gospel of God releases us and transforms us to not waste our lives as victims of those who oppose or hurt us.

We come today to the last of four metrics found in Romans 12 that define essential characteristics of the growing follower of Christ.

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|-----------------------------|----------|
| 1. Personal transformation. | 12:1-2   |
| 2. Community participation. | 12:3-8   |
| 3. Love for people.         | 12:9-13  |
| 4. Conflict management.     | 12:14-21 |

**Personal transformation** . . . the mercies of God transform a person specifically in a growing devotion to God and a new and changing way of thinking. Conformity to the surrounding values and way of life of the world is a shrinking thing of the past.

**Community Participation** . . . this second metric taught in Romans 12:3-8 simply establishes that your effective and humble participation in a community of believers is evidence of gospel empowered growth in your life. Effectively serving and being relationally connected to a community of believers is huge.

**Love for people** . . . 12:9-13 is a description of the genuine, discriminating love that grows out of the work of God's mercies in a person's life. Love comes from God, is developed in community and is to be expressed genuinely. Our lives are pictured as being rooted in God's love and built upon God's love.

**Conflict management . . . 12:14-21**

Let's look at the believer's response to conflict and opposition under three headings from this passage:

Necessary assumptions	V.14
Essential mindset	V.15-16
Universal guidelines	v.17-21

**1. Necessary assumptions 14**

Any successful journey into this arena of 'advanced love' requires us to strongly believe and connect with three truths about life under God:

a. Conflict happens as assigned by God.

The scriptures are clear . . . you will be challenged by the response of others to you to the point where the last thing you could imagine doing is blessing them, what you really want to do is curse them and you can't imagine empathetically entering their world. 1Pet. 3:8-17; 4:19; 5:9-11

b. Your identity in Christ is primary. Romans 6, 12:1-4

The theological key that releases you to love those who hurt you is your new life of contentment and security in Christ Jesus. Your life and body are no longer yours or are they your greatest treasure. You belong to Christ, have been placed in him and he in you. You turn to Christ, treasure Christ and embrace Christ as your main satisfaction, security and hope. To quote Bible teacher John Piper . . . 'we are free from the raging impulse to retaliate that once rose up in this old self.' Faith in Christ is the turning from ourselves to Christ for life itself. Threatening this new self who is united with Christ with violence or hurtful speech is no longer the ultimate threat.

c. God is good. Romans 12:1-2

Not everyone is 'carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease' although it does seem that way for some. The 'advanced love' club membership begins and ends with the goodness and trustworthiness of God. His assignments are perfect. His will, as you experience it is good and perfect and pleasing.

## **2. Essential mindset                    V.15-16**

The renewed way of thinking commanded in 12:2 and empowered by the living Christ is essential to loving those who hurt or threaten to hurt us. Consider how the times when we are attacked serve as not only a profound test of our faith but an open window to see what is in our hearts. Rarely does the preoccupation with self become more evident than when we are treated unjustly or unfairly. These verses describe the mindset or attitude of Christ that should become ours if we are to love our enemies.

a. Empathy.                    15

Identifying intimately and entering wholeheartedly into another person's life.

b. Humility.                    16

Verse 16 has three terms built from the root 'to think.' This is calling us to a common mindset where we recognize that we will not all think the same on every issue but we mutually reject our individuality for the common identity we have in and under Christ. The opposite of pride or selfishness is not that you are nothing in Christ. 12:3 teaches us that we replace thinking haughty things about ourselves by accepting our assignments and identity from God in Christ.

c. Submission.                16

Pride is the biggest barrier to loving your enemies well. Controlling your view of your self and your own wisdom along with submitting to the 'lowly' are the training regimens for advanced loving. It is almost absurd to think of an abused person manifesting pride as they angrily curse the one who hurt them so deeply . . . but that is the counterintuitive nature of the gospel.

Cmp. Phil. 2:14

## **3. Universal guidelines                17-21**

These verses teach us 5 guidelines for our response to those who oppose us in various ways . . .

a. No retribution.                17, 19

b. Pursue peace.                17, 18

c. Trust God.                    19

d. Act kindly.                    20

e. Live to win.                    21

cmp. Matt. 5:38-48

## Summary/Take Aways

1. Identify and thank God for his 'advanced love' assignments in your life.
2. Renew yourself to the 'root and ground' of radical 'advanced love.'

Rom. 5:6,10 God loves his enemies. Luke 23:34 Jesus loved his enemies.

3. Set your affections on the rewards of heaven given to those who love radically.

Matt. 5:11-12; Psa. 63:1-3

4. Seek help from others in the body with your 'advanced love' assignment.

Includes humility, kindness and trusting God

## Study Questions

1. Read Romans 12:14-21 together. What observations, questions or challenges stand out to you the most?
2. What observations, questions or concerns were raised in your thinking from today's sermon?
3. Share a story from your spiritual journey about facing opposition such as that described in the sermon. What are your tendencies or patterns of response to people who mistreat you?
4. Review the three assumptions in the sermon notes. Role play . . . have group members explain the assumptions as if trying to convince or encourage an embittered person who has been hurt by others.
5. According to 12:3, what is the opposite of pride, thinking too highly of yourself? The sermon presents 'measure of faith' as the assignment of gifts and placement in the body. What do you think? See 1Cor. 12:7, 11. How does this relate to loving difficult people?
6. What has helped you the most to develop and grow the mindset described in verses 15-16/the second point?
7. v.16 'Associate with the lowly' could be translated as 'get carried away with or by lowly things or people.' What does that mean or look like?
8. Review the guidelines from 17-21. What is the most challenging? Why? What does 'live to win' mean?
9. Pray together and for each other. Survey your group to identify those who have extra special assignments of loving those who have or are hurting them. Talk about ways to help keep them rooted and grounded in God's amazing love.