



Learning to Love the Unlovely

Will Rogers is reputed to have said, "I've never met a man I didn't like." Most of us cannot say that. And yet, as a Christian, many of us can honestly say, "I never met a man I didn't want to like." On the other hand, one of the most common sins I find among us is "grudge holding".

I have seen this moral disease devour Christians. Hatred spreads throughout their very being. It causes one to lose the joy of his salvation. His peace with God slowly ebbs away. Soon the disease has spread into his "witnessing" and "stewardship". He begins to dry up and be but a semblance of what he used to be Spiritually. We cannot help but pity those who have been smitten by this spiritual malady.

An old High School friend wrote me sometime ago. She had asked me how to love the cruel. "How can I adjust my thinking to Christ-like thinking toward those who have sinned against me? How do you distinguish between the sin and the sinner?" These are pertinent questions. I do not know of anyone who has not grappled with them. The Christian must seek solutions for such questions.

FIRST – Visualize Christ dying on the cross because He loved this person in spite of his sin. He did do that, you know! Christ loved that person enough to die for him. He suffered the agony of the soul at Gethsemane for him. He accepted the mocking of Pilate's hall for him.

He suffered the torture of Calvary for him. Can you not love him for whom Christ, your Savior gave His all? You love a pesky dog because your little boy loves him. Should you not love a man for whom God's Son died? How can you not love him whom Christ loves?

SECOND – Consider the potential as well as the present.

The following illustrated concept may help. A man walked briskly into a sculptor's studio and saw an unfinished statue of Abraham Lincoln. It still looked a little unlike Lincoln, so he smashed it to smithereens.

Another man walked aimlessly into the studio of a famous painter. An uncompleted picture of a beautiful woman was on the easel. He looked closely at the picture and saw it did not yet do justice to the one who had posed. He took the picture off the easel and lit a match to the canvas and watched it burn.

In the first instance, a majestic statue may have been destroyed. In the second, a masterpiece of art may have been denied to the world. Why? Because they were not valued in their unfinished state. The people never gave enough time for the creators to complete their work.

The kids today are wearing buttons that say, "Please be patient with me, God's not through with me yet." I like that concept. See the man you do not like as an unfinished creation of God.

THIRD – Look for the good points in the person you dislike and imagine how wonderful he could be if he surrendered his life to Christ.

Imagine his abilities turned to Christ's work. Think what a powerhouse he could be if converted to the cause of Christ.

FOURTH – Pray for him earnestly. It is hard to hate one whom you are bringing before God's throne in prayer. Pray for his reformation. Pray that the "burr that is under his saddle" may somehow be removed. Let that prayer activate you into helping him locate that burr. Pray that you may see the reflection of God's image in him so that you may more easily love him. God's image in him is blurred by sin. Pray that the image might be restored.

FIFTH – Try to find why the person is as he is by inquiring into his background. Ugly experiences make ugly people. Was he mocked as a child? Did his parents reject him? Was he living in the shadow of an older sibling? What warped the personality? Then you may find yourself his sympathetic friend rather than his bitter enemy.

SIXTH – See yourself in this person. Have there not been times that you too were unfair and cruel? Are you not someone else's villain at times? Physical cruelty is sometimes not as cruel as mental cruelty. Pouting, revenge, coldness, unforgiveness, are sins more common and cruel than physical abuse. Are you always a loving person? Are you always the one who is ready to forgive? Are you perfect?

SEVENTH – Look at the person through the eyes of eternity. Do you wish him to be lost? Move toward him as you would toward one who unknowingly is about to plunge into Hell. When you have that interest, your compassion may be just what will transform him.

EIGHTH – Remember that he is not sin. He may be a murderer but he is not "murder". He may be an adulterer, but he is not "adultery". Love the sinner but hate the sin. Anger at sin is not wrong. Jesus became angry at the hardness of men's hearts when they complained that He healed on the Sabbath. He zealously drove men from the temple when they

perverted it with graft. But He died for those men.

I do not believe I ever met a person in whom there was not some good, enough at least to respond to genuine concern. People often fight back at a cruel world they don't understand or that doesn't understand them. If they can ever comprehend the love of Christ for them personally, and if they can experience Christ's love through His Body, the Church, they can lose their frustrations and be transformed men.

Love produces love. God's kind of love is not loving the lovable but loving those who oppose themselves. This kind of love is really not produced merely by such arguments as I have given. It must be prayed for from the source of all love.

God is love.