

Topic: *The call of Christians to love even the “unlovely,” the balance of Biblical confrontation versus pushing people away and the Biblical view on gossiping*

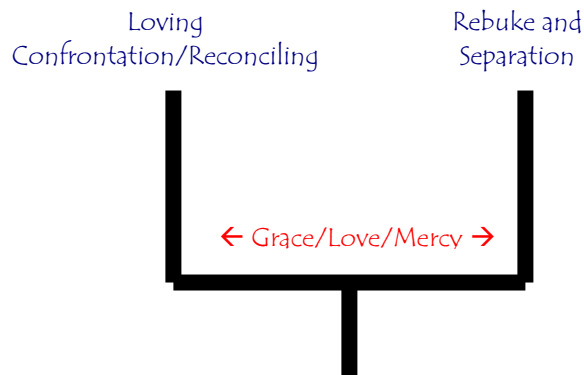
Loving All People

- The Bible calls us to and Christ demonstrated a model of loving people. If there are trademarks of a Christian group/community it would be love for God followed closely by a sincere love for all people, particularly those who do not have the hope of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Some particular points from the Bible...
 - Matthew 9:10-13 → *“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house (he was a tax collector before becoming a disciple), many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?’ On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”* (this was a reference to Hosea in the Old Testament)
 - When reading this story we should put ourselves in the shoes of the Pharisees and ask ourselves, “Are we judgmental of people in the way they were? Do we see ‘sinners’ and avoid any contact with them? Do we see them as needing God’s healing and love?”
 - Jesus quotes the book of Hosea from the Old Testament, which has a theme about a Godly man with an unfaithful wife whom God keeps instructing the man to accept back and forgive. Why do you think Jesus would reference this story of adultery and repeated forgiveness (even when painfully) when addressing how people view sinners?
 - I Corinthians 13 → deemed the “love chapter” of the Bible it describes a Godly definition of what true love is. This is not a chapter on romantic love or even just about understanding God’s love for us – if you read the intro, it describes how Christians in our striving for holiness fail or our efforts are pointless if we do not first approach ministry with true love for people.
 - 1 Cor. 13:1-3 *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”*
 - Pretty powerful words! This is not to say pursuit of these other spiritual disciplines and gifts is pointless or bad by any means – but if we do not reflect the very love God shows us, then our efforts are in vain.
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 → *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*
 - One of our chief responsibilities/callings as Christians living on earth is to seek to help “reconcile” lost “sinners” to their loving Heavenly Father. This means to reach out non-condemningly with a compassion for their spiritual needs and offer a loving openness. That doesn’t mean endorsing “sinful lifestyles,” but it means seeing the person as a lost soul needing God rather than focusing on the side-effects of their lost state spiritually.
 - Other passages....

- Matthew 15:17-20 (Jesus explains that what makes a person “unclean” or a “sinner” is not their appearance but their heart and what comes from their heart)
 - Luke 7:36-50 (Jesus presented with a gift from a very “bad girl” causes a scandal among the “holier men” of the day, until Jesus explains that her humble recognition of who He is and her need for Him erases all of her past – do we hold people under judgment for who they ‘were’ instead of who God views them as?)
 - Luke 19:1-10 (story of Zacchaeus, a tax-collector known for dishonesty and cheating people – after coming to Jesus, he is viewed as someone redeemed even though those around him remember his past)
 - John 4:7-24 (story of a woman who had been divorced 4 times and then was living with a man, Jesus focused on who she was going to serve from that point on rather than holding her hostage to her past. When we see people living in sin, do we condemn them for that, or invite them to a new life in Christ free from that shame/guilt?)
- Key points to take away:
 - (1) We are called to be reflections of Christ’s love to those around us
 - (2) Christ came to “reconcile” or recover people who needed him most – he left us with the charge or commission to continue that work
 - (3) To be exclusivistic or “click-ish” where we do not let people who have “issues” near we are disappointing God and contradicting the very love He shows to us

Confrontation & Dealing with a Struggling Christian

- Loving people - particularly non-Christians - is on thing, but what do you do about that person who starts drifting into things he/she shouldn’t? What if you not only see someone doing things that dishonor God but they also offend you in some way?
- When evaluating how to handle a situation like this (and they will come up quite a bit!), we must prayerfully and lovingly work to understand the balance we are called to strive for. Loving and confronting is just one of many areas where it’s not all one way or another, but about balancing between 2 very Biblical points - like kicking for a field-goal, Biblical confrontation is about aiming and approaching people right “up the middle of the goal” under a mindset of love, grace and mercy.



- The Bible actually has quite a bit to say about handling those people who frustrate us because they either seem to live contradicting lifestyles, slip-up and send mixed messages or even do something harmful to us...

- Matthew 13:24-29 → “Jesus told them another parable: ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together, until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters to first collect the weeds and time them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”
 - Even in the earliest times of the church there was concern about “fakes” who hang out like Christians but are obviously not true in their faith and who cause problems. The temptation is to get rid of any “poser” so that the group is pure – but the risk is that in focusing on just “weeding” out the bad apples, you also ruin the good group. Instead, this passage encourages us to focus on really growing the good people and let God deal with the “weeds.” This translates into us focusing on really loving God fully and encouraging one another in our walk with Him, rather than always focusing on cleaning up the people around us.
- Luke 17:3, 4 → “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you 7 times a day, and 7 times comes back to you and says ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”
- 2 Timothy 4:2 → “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction”
 - We are called, as Christians, to grow in our wisdom and knowledge of God’s will (reading Scripture). This will equip us so that when the time is appropriate, we may confront, “rebuke” and encourage our brothers/sisters – but note that we are instructed to do such with “patience.”
- 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15 → “If anyone does not obey [Biblical teaching], take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet, do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”
 - The temptation when confronting is to treat it as an “ultimatum” where we say “do this or else!” and then we cut-off that person. While in some cases where a person is doing something sinful (a Christian) and they continue after you lovingly confront them, this instruction is to put some distance between them and you – but not to alienate them altogether. We are to love them as a family member and seek to see them rejoined in fellowship. We are not “against” someone for sinning – we are for their return to a loving walk with God. We must never let the frustration or disappointment of someone’s behavior lead us into the sin of wrath, judgment or ill-will.
- Matthew 18:15-17 → “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault – just between the 2 of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take 1 or 2 others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church [group of Christians]; and if he refuses to listen even to them, treat him as an outsider.”
 - The Biblical model of confrontation always begins with YOU – taking up your issue with someone directly before making headlines about it. If you have an issue with someone, you should take it up with them before broadcasting it and risking that person’s reputation or other friendships. This verse talks about an escalation plan for when confrontation doesn’t work initially. Note – this is not for anything that you don’t like. For instance, if Billy took your seat in class, it is not a case of “confrontation,” that’s just a preference for you and Billy to work out. This is about more serious matters that really divide you.

- Galatians 6:1-2 → “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”
- The Bible does discuss times when actual separation is necessary, particularly when someone persists in a sinful lifestyle while claiming to be a Christian and refusing to respond to confrontation...
 - 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 → “What business is it of mine [yours] to judge those outside of the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.”
 - This passage hits on 2 good points – (1) that we are not to worry about judging those who are not Christians, (2) sometimes when someone persists in “wickedness” while being within a group and claiming to be a Christian that it is sometimes necessary to have that person leave so as to not mislead other new believers.
 - Matthew 7:6 → “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”
 - This passage may sound odd, but it is advising against persistently arguing with someone who is hardened to God. Someone who is angry at God or really disrespectful to anything of God will not be overcome with consistent arguing – and, in fact, you may just end up getting hurt yourself. Sometimes we have to walk away and pray for the Holy Spirit to work on a person’s heart while continuing to show love them.
- Key points to take away...
 - (1) When confronting, make sure you are doing so out of love with a desire to restore not injure the person
 - (2) Be sure to go to the person directly first – don’t spread the word without having the guts to clear the air with the person yourself!
 - (3) Consider carefully if an issue is one where you just need to discuss and work it out or if it is really severe enough where you need to distance/separate yourself from that person for a while. Even if you do – remember not to “treat him/her as an enemy” or use it as an excuse to speak badly of the person to others (that’s something called “gossip.” Gossip = bad)

The Trap of Gossip (the Gab-Trap)

- One of the easiest traps to fall into that dishonors God, hurts relationships and sends mixed messages to onlookers is to gossip. Gossip can destroy a person’s reputation, leads to negative “putting-down” of people instead of building them up and distracts us from our pursuit of God.
- If you’ll note in the passages about confrontation and issue-resolution, that God always instructs us to take our complaints/issues to the person directly before involving anyone else. Now, if there are safety concerns it doesn’t mean being stupid, but for the most part this means not blabbing to the world until you’ve given the person a fair chance to reconcile with you.
- As most things, the Bible has some pretty clear teachings on the trap of Gossiping...
 - Proverbs 11:13 → “A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy [person] keeps a secret.”
 - Proverbs 16:28 → “A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.” (how true!)

- Proverbs 26:20 → *“Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.”*
- 2 Corinthians 12:20 → *“For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.”*
 - These passages all drive home some hard points – (1) gossiping divides people, even friends and can ruin good relationships; (2) we should be on guard when we find ourselves “stirring up” people against each other as that is a sinful behavior, not a God-honoring one; (3) when we indulge in gossiping we contribute to the issue and quarrel actually going on longer than it would have otherwise; (4) gossip ranks up there with slander, rage, and arrogance in the list of ungodly character traits – we should seek the fruits of the Spirit through a sincere love of God by which we would be known for our patients, long-suffering, humility and love.

Bringing it Home – Some Things to Chew On...

- What is your group about? Is it intended as an outreach tool to reach friends and those interested? Is it a group about really studying the Bible and growing in your personal faith? EITHER way, the trademark of your group and you as individuals should be love towards each other and visitors. To judge a person by their lifestyle when they are not in a relationship with Christ is harmful and not following the model Christ set for us.
- Do you have guys/gals who really bother you? Someone who has really rubbed you the wrong way or ticked you off? Deal with it - by dealing with them. Don't vent to all of you friends without having prayed about your own heart and confronting that person. Like the story of ripping a feather pillow on a hill with the wind blowing - once you have spread rumors or bad things about a person, it's impossible to clean up your mess.
- Do you know things about a person that are scandalous? Keep your lips sealed! Unless you are working to help that person, restore them, reconcile them or protect them fight the urge to tell the world the “latest breaking news about So-and-so.”