

Proposition: God calls us to love the difficult, not the lovely.

In his book, *Love in Hard Places*, D. A. Carson says, "Not all Christians face persecuting enemies, but all Christians face little enemies."¹

What does he mean by little enemies?

Well, he gives a long list of possibilities in his book. Let's think of some of them ourselves.

There are those who are in your church of family who are just different. They may have trouble getting along with others for various reasons; they certainly at times have trouble getting along with you.

Some people you know are at least perpetually grumpy, if not out and out angry.

There are others who are annoyingly right almost all the time; or those who just have the perfect personality, winsome gifts, social graces, good looks... and they know it.

There are some people who want to have position, power, and influence, even in a small group – they are pushy, domineering, difficult. If they don't get their own way, they are upset.

We could go on.

The Christian church tends to collect a more than average assortment of misfits. Why is that?

Carson says, "because despite all its faults it is still the most caring and patient large institution around."²

It is inevitable that you will run into difficult people – they aren't persecutors, but they are "little enemies."

So now, how should we treat them? (It isn't a mystery for a Christian.)

Let's read some texts:

Col 3.12-14; Phil 4.2-3; Jn 13.34-35

We can sum up these admonitions with the word of our series: love.

¹ D. A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 52.

² Carson, 53.

However, let's be clear about Christian love. We tend to make love sentimental; it isn't sentimental, at least, not primarily. Carson says: "This action goes way beyond niceness."³

Second, "None of this is to deny that some offenses are so serious that they should not be overlooked."⁴

Having said those things, let's now consider our proposition:

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I. The particularly Christian basis of this love (Col 3.12-14)

A. In the Sermon on the Mount, loving enemies is an imitation of God, "God makes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust"

1. Here, love is an imitation of Christ: "just as the Lord forgave you"

2. We see the same emphasis in Phil 2.1-5

B. The love of others in this sense is especially a love for difficult brethren who *are brethren* ... and we must not forget it

1. The Lord Jesus loves them, just as he loves you

2. The Lord Jesus died to save them, just as he died to save you

3. The Lord Jesus will bring them, one day, to heaven, just as he will, one day, bring you

Someone asked a Bible teacher if we would again see our loved ones in heaven. The answer, "Not just the loved ones."

There is a need for a commitment to one another as blood-washed and blood-bought sinners.

II. The supremely difficult aspect of this love (Phil 4.2-3)

A. It is sometimes easier to love big enemies

1. Because there is something heroic about enduring persecution

2. And this isn't persecution, it's just nasty (Phil 4.2-3)

³ Carson, 54.

⁴ Carson, 53.

- a. Confrontation is easier than forbearance
- b. Endurance [of persecution] is easier than forbearance

B. The difficulties between brethren often seem extremely petty

Carson tells the story of a brother who came to him and asked to meet about an offence the brother had with D. A. Carson. It turned out that the offence occurred years previously, and quite unwittingly on Carson's part.

The man had been quoting something from a theological author in French. Carson, who grew up in Quebec, unconsciously corrected his pronunciation a couple of times. The other man had taken offense at this, but said nothing at the time. But, he said, "I want you to know, Don, that I have not spoken another word of French from that day to this."⁵

Now... what could the man have done?

1. He could have simply brushed it off and made nothing of it
2. He could have been grateful for the corrections as help from a friend
3. He could have realized no ill will was intent, especially since he knew Carson's background
4. He should have realized that holding on to such resentment was in itself an evil thing to do
5. And, if in fact Carson was simply being rude, he should have loved Carson anyway and forgiven him

So, what did Carson do? Did he bring these alternatives up?

- "I immediately apologized for having offended him, however unwittingly."⁶

Now we have to realize that it is difficult to love a brother who takes an offense like this. But love him we must, odious and stinky though he be.

⁵ Carson, 56.

⁶ Carson, 56.

III. The glory of this kind of love (Jn 13.34-35)

A. The love is distinctively Christian, not merely an imitation of God's providential love

“even as I have loved you”

B. The love demonstrates Christianity to a dying world, who knows nothing of this

1. See also Jn 17.21

2. There is an evangelistic function to our love

Conclusion:

Now I am primarily thinking in this message about loving Christians who are hard to love.

We also have neighbours and co-workers who are hard to love.

We don't love them the same as we do Christians, but our love to them, rooted in the love of Christ, likewise has the evangelistic function.

That doesn't mean everyone you are kind to, helpful to, gracious to, and so on, will come to Christ. But you will bring Christ to them by the attitude of your heart.

Please don't think that I think I have this figured out. I think I am one of those difficult people, really. But I try to keep myself under control and love others as Christ loved me.

May Jesus Christ get the glory for this!