

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

How to Get Along with Irritable People

Romans 12:9-21

¹ It's been said, "I could get to love the world real easy. It's the people I have trouble with".

During my freshman year at college I worked part time as a box boy at a market a few blocks from the college campus. One of the grocery checkers I worked for was a grouch. I seemed to be the only one who could get along with her and that was a real struggle. Have you ever had to work with people like that?

Here's another quote, "The more I get to know the human race, the more I love my dog!" ¹ Stop and think about it. My dog is loyal, dependable (most of the time), eager to please and quick to forgive. Don't you wish people were like that! ²

This scripture from Romans, Chapter 12, might help you get along better with irritable people.

¹ Our Daily Bread, January 2001.

I. What to Do to Get Along with Irritable

People – v9-17 ³

Verses 9 through 17 tell us what to do to get along with irritable people. ⁴ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ⁵

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ⁶

Let's find out, first, how to get along with those irritable people within the church. The church is

certainly not immune to having grouchy people in it. It's a shame; but that's the way it often is. ⁷

First, you must love without hypocrisy. Verse 9 starts with **love must be sincere**. Love ², here, means to satisfy real needs regardless of whom the person is or their ability to repay. ⁸ “Sincere” ³ means not to be hypocritical about it. A hypocrite ⁴, in the Bible, was a “mask wearer”, a Greek actor. A hypocrite was a person who played a role, read a script, without revealing their real self or their real feelings. Your love for others has got to be genuine, with no hidden agenda. ⁹

Verse 9 continues recommending that you **hate what is evil**. ¹⁰ The word “hate” ⁵ in this verse appears only here in the New Testament. It means to hate emphatically. Combat evil wherever it exists. ¹¹

² ἀγάπη.

³ ἀνυπόκριτος.

⁴ ὑποκριτής.

⁵ Ἀποστύγέω.

You must hate evil itself, not just the consequences of it. Our society doesn't hate fornication. It hates venereal disease and AIDS. I expect you don't really hate breaking the speed limit on the freeway. You just hate being pulled over by the Highway Patrol and paying a fine. ¹²

The best way to combat evil is to repay evil with good! Let's let God's word continue to speak here. Verse 14, **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse**. Verse 17, **Do not repay anyone evil for evil.** ¹³ Verse 19 through 21, **Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."** ¹⁴

Verse 9, again, tells you to **cling to what is good.** ¹⁵ Cling ⁶, here, means to glue yourself to. ¹⁶ The

⁶ Κολλάω.

prodigal glued himself to the hog pen ⁷. ¹⁷ Some of the Athenians glued themselves to the Apostle Paul at Mars Hill ⁸. ¹⁸ First Corinthians, Chapter 6, verse 16 says, **Do you not know that he who unites himself (glues himself) with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”**

¹⁹

You glue yourself to good by hating evil emphatically and having a genuine love for others. So identify yourself with good to the degree that it seems glued to you! ²⁰

Verse 10 encourages you to **be devoted to one another in brotherly love.** ²¹ “Brotherly love” ⁹ is family affection. The church is to be a family. ²² You are to love your brothers in the church as if they were blood kin! ²³

⁷ Luke 15:15 - So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

⁸ Acts 17:34 - A few men became followers of Paul and believed.

⁹ Φιλadelphia.

Verse 11 reminds us to **keep your spiritual fervor**.¹⁰

This literally means to keep your spirit at the boiling point! What happens to water when you boil it? It bubbles! If there's anything to get boiling about, it's the Lord Jesus and His salvation!²⁴ In fact, He warns us that He would spit lukewarm Christians right out of His mouth!¹¹²⁵

How do you maintain spiritual fervor? Verse 12 says, **be joyful in hope, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer!**²⁶

The final recommendation on how to get along with irritable people in the church is in verse 13; to **practice hospitality**. As Christians, we must share generously with those in the household of faith.²⁷

The best expression of hospitality in our current culture is to give to our brothers and sisters in the Lord who are homeless. The Lord said, **Give to the**

¹⁰ τῷ πνεύματι ζέοντες.

¹¹ Revelation 3:15-16 - I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, **because you are lukewarm** —neither hot nor cold — **I am about to spit you out of my mouth.**

one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. ¹² ₂₈ John the Baptist put it this way, “The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.” ¹³ ₂₉ The Apostle Paul said to Timothy, Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.
¹⁴ ₃₀

We are always encouraged to give of our resources generously to everyone in need. But the primary Bible focus is this: reach out to the secular community in witness and the household of faith in benevolence! ₃₁

So now how do we get along with those irritable people outside the church? ₃₂ Verse 14 tells us to bless the irritable! ¹⁵ ₃₃ “Bless” ¹⁶ means to speak well of or kindly to. ₃₄ Verse 15 ¹⁷ tells us this can be done

¹² Matthew 5:42.

¹³ John 3:11.

¹⁴ I Timothy 6:18.

¹⁵ v14 - Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

¹⁶ Ευλογέω.

¹⁷ v15 - Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

by showing empathy; really feeling with others. ³⁵ Lord Jesus demonstrated this empathy when He wept with Mary and Martha over the death of Lazarus ¹⁸. ³⁶

The final way to relate to irritable people outside the church family is punctuated in verse 16, **Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position**. In other words, don't try to be a big shot! Our Lord Jesus was criticized by the religious people of His day by hanging out and identifying with the "not so religious" folks. ¹⁹

II. What to Do When Irritable People

Don't Want to Get Along with You – v18-21 ³⁷

The rest of our scripture passage helps us with what to do when irritable people don't want to get along with you. ³⁸ Verses 18 through 21 continues, **If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace**

¹⁸ John 11:35-36.

¹⁹ Matthew 11:19 - The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."' '

with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.²⁰ ³⁹

Don't ever seek revenge no matter how much satisfaction you may think it will bring. Following the American civil war in 1865, two extended families, along the Big Sandy River separating Kentucky from West Virginia, got into a feud. For the next thirty years the Hatfield and the McCoy families fought one another and murdered a dozen from their families before the authorities were able to stop it. The vicious cycle took place whenever a member of one family was killed his family would take revenge to even the score. Nothing good ever comes from seeking revenge! ⁴⁰

²⁰ Quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22.

Besides that, it's unnecessary. Verse 19 says that the Lord Himself promised to get even with anyone who messes with His children! ⁴¹

So, what should be our godly response? Turn the other cheek! Matthew, Chapter 5, verses 38 and 39, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴²

What's the result? You heap burning coals emotionally upon the head of the non-believer. Again, verses 20 and 21, On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. ⁴³

Keep a good reputation. Verse 17 admonishes us to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ⁴⁴ We've got

to really be careful to **avoid every kind of evil** ²¹. The King James Version of this verse says to **abstain from all appearances of evil**.

Everyone, believer and non-believer alike, admires Billy Graham. I've seen interviews with Larry King more than once and Billy Graham has always been treated with the utmost of respect. There's a respect for people who are genuine, even if you disagree with them! ⁴⁵

Finally, have a peacemaking spirit. Verse 18 tells us **if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone**. Our Lord commented, **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God**. ⁴⁶ One of the qualifications for being an elder in the church is that he is to be a peacemaker ²². ⁴⁷

Peacemaking is the result of the wisdom that comes from above. James, Chapter 3, verse 17 says, **But the**

²¹ I Thessalonians 5:22.

²² Titus 1:6 - An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. ⁴⁸

Do you want to get along with irritable people? Put these character traits into your life and see how the irritable people respond!