



+ **YOU**

Sermon Series: How to Avoid Life's Pitfalls
To be used with: The Pitfall of Guilt and Grudges
Sermon Title Possibilities: Responding to Others
Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study “*The Pitfall of Guilt and Grudges*,” this sermon will seek insight from Paul’s letter to the Romans in his commands on how to interact with others during difficult times.

Introduction: We are going to experience difficult times as a direct result of difficult people. We live in a sinful and sin filled world. A direct consequence of this truth is conflict between people. This conflict, however, need not lead to guilty feelings and grudges between one another. The beauty of this text is that it can be applied to conflict between church members or conflict between a follower of Jesus and one who is outside of the faith. Paul provides us with clear directives on how we should live in a world filled with conflict.

1. I will consistently and deeply (v. 9-10)

A key word to understanding this entire passage is the word love. The word Paul used here is *agape*. This is not a shallow love, but rather a deep and heartfelt love of sacrifice. John used the same word in describing the love that God has for the entire world (John 3:16). This is the love that God has for us, and this is the love that we are to have for one another.

Once we understand the magnitude of the word, we are to love others without hypocrisy. The word hypocrisy means to adapt yourself to your surroundings. For example, if someone behaves one way in the boardroom and another way at home and another way at church, then that person is considered hypocritical. Paul’s command is not to be hypocritical in our love, but rather to be consistent.

As we are consistent, we are to love each other deeply. To love someone deeply means to love them no matter what. This is most evident in a love that a parent has for a child. The child can be prone to misbehave, yet the love of the parent is steady and stable. God’s church is called to be consistent and steady in our love for one another as well as those outside the faith.

2. I will bless those who hurt me (v. 14)

To bless someone means to offer them help, hope and encouragement. This easy to do for those who offer us blessings, but that is not the command. Instead, the command is to bless those persecute you.

Please note the verb tense here. We are to bless those who persecute us. The way Paul phrased this shows us that the persecution is taking place. If we were all being honest, we would confess to wanting to curse those who are persecuting us. Paul understood that too as he told them to not curse those who were persecuting. This phrase was written to show

the need to stop something that was currently taking place. The Bible is amazing in that some commands tell us what to do and others tell us what to stop doing. We learn both what to do and not do for those who are hurting us.

3. I will bite back (v. 17)

We have another example of what not to do and what to do. Paul told the church to not repay evil with evil. Have you ever listened to a child provide an excuse for bad behavior? It might sound something like this: “Well Johnny did this to me, so I did that to him.” We roll our eyes and then come back with, “If Johnny jumped off a bridge, would you do the same?” The answer is, maybe. We all tend to respond to someone’s bad behavior with our own bad behavior. Paul warns us not to do this.

Instead, we are to give careful thought to what is honorable. If we would all stop and think before we act, we stand a chance of avoiding a great deal of heartache and hurt feelings. Instead of firing back at someone for a nasty email, we slow down long enough to think things through and then respond in an honorable manner.

A great example of this is once again Joseph in the Old Testament. Jacob, the patriarch of the family had passed away, and the brothers that sold Joseph into slavery were anxious about what Joseph might do to them. Instead of seeking revenge he said to them that what they intended for evil God was using for good (Gen. 50:20). Joseph was looking at things through God’s eyes and was not seeking revenge.

4. I will trust God (v. 19)

God is in control. This is easy to say when things are going well. It gets difficult to say or believe when things are not going well, and others are attacking you for no apparent reason. Verse nineteen, however, does not provide a stipulation. Paul told the church to not seek vengeance.

This command does get a little easier in that Paul assures us that we are to leave room for God’s wrath. This is where trusting God comes in to play. We must trust that He is in control, aware of what is taking place and will respond accordingly. No, this is not easy, but it is still a command, and He will give us the strength needed to live in obedience to His will and ways.

5. I will serve others (v. 20)

Being around those who have hurt us is difficult. We may find ourselves praying a quick prayer before we go grocery shopping asking the Father to not let us even see someone we want to avoid. We have all probably heard of church conflicts being so bad that people end of moving their membership or stop going to church completely.

Knowing all of this, however, does not change the command in this passage. Paul called the church to serve those who have hurt them. Is this easy? No. Is it still a command? Yes, and the only way to fulfill it is to walk with Him moment by moment and ask Him to give you the strength needed to live in obedience to His commands.

Conclusion: When Jesus was here on earth He asked people to follow Him. To follow Him means to learn His ways and to be like Him. His invitation and willingness to model a life of obedience has not changed. When He was on the cross He loved deeply, blessed those who hurt Him, did not bite back and trusted the Father to right the wrong. He is our model, but we must have a relationship with Him to faithfully fulfill His commands. We cannot do this alone.

Tod Tanner has degrees from Texas A&M University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has pastored churches in Texas and Tennessee. He and his family reside in Wartrace, TN and he is serving as the Vice President of the Tennessee Baptist Foundation.