

"Thoughtful Love For Bad People"

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- [0 : 0 0] It's always a pleasure to be together with you this morning and many mornings. What's that? I want to try it.
- What? The Bible. All right.
- I have a title for this morning's sermon. It is Thoughtful Love for Bad People. And that title will be a good way for you to try to remember the things that I'm going to be drawing out of the text for us in this sermon.
- But it is important whenever you are preaching a sermon to keep in mind your audience. And so I need to make sure that the sermon I'm about to preach applies to you all.
- So before I preach, I'm going to do a little survey. I'm going to ask you a series of questions. And if the answer is yes, you can raise your hand. You can nod your head.
- [1 : 1 8] You can give me a yes. And if the answer is no, do the opposite. Here we go. Question one. Do you love people?
- Yes. I hope so. Do you love bad people or people who do bad things? Yes. The answer should be yes.
- Yes. It should be yes. Do you find it? What's that? It's a drawing anyway. Yeah. Yeah. That's my third question. Is it hard to love bad people?
- Sometimes. Yes. Yes. Yeah. Well, if you answered yes to those three questions, then this sermon is for you. Because it's a sermon on thoughtful love for bad people.
- Second Corinthians chapter two, verses one through four. So we're going to continue our study in the book of second Corinthians.
- [2 : 1 8] And in this passage today, we have a great example from Paul in how to thoughtfully love people, even when they're bad. But before we read the passage, I want to teach you a little call and response.
- This is an engagement sermon this morning. So after I finish reading this passage, I'm going to say, this is the word of the Lord.
- And what I want from you is to call back, thanks be to God. Okay. So practice that with me. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.
- Amen. All right. So we do things like this as a church to collectively receive God's word and praise him for it.
- So follow along with me as I read second Corinthians chapter two, verses one through four. But I determined this within myself that I would not come again to you in sorrow.
- [3 : 2 1] For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad, but the one who is made sorrowful by me. And I wrote this very thing to you, lest when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy.
- Having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Very good. You get an A plus today. So Paul is writing here about something that happened in the past with his relationship with the Corinthians.

So it's helpful if we go through a little bit of history and background to understand the context of what Paul is saying. If we were to turn to Acts 18, we would read about when Paul first visited the city of Corinth.

There he preached the gospel and many repented from pagan worship, believed the gospel and became Christians. Those Christians began the Corinthian church.

[4 : 53] And while Paul travels to other places after being in Corinth, he writes the letter of first Corinthians to them to talk to them and instruct them.

This is the book that we have in the Bible, the letter of first Corinthians. In that letter, he says many different things to them. But one of the things he does is calls them out for letting sin continue in the church without doing anything about it.

Someone in the church was living a sexually immoral lifestyle and the church did nothing about it. So Paul rebukes them in the letter of first Corinthians.

After he sends that letter to them, he plans to visit them and he does visit them. But it is a sad visit because sin is still going on in their midst.

After that sad visit, we get to what Paul is talking about here, that he planned to visit them again. But when he heard that they were still having issues, he canceled his visit and writes another letter to them.

[6 : 08] Because he cancels that visit, they are tempted to believe that he does not care about them. But Paul is continuing in this passage to explain that his decision was not selfish, but for their good.

So Paul begins to write this letter that we have here, the letter of second Corinthians. And this is actually his third letter to them.

We don't have that middle letter, the tearful one. And in this passage, he explains that he wrote to them out of love. That when he does visit them, it would be joyful.

And that he made the decisions to cancel his plans so that he would not bring them too much sorrow or more sorrow than would be good for them.

So as we study this, we will see that Paul is thoughtful and loving, even to a church that keeps making mistakes with sin.

[7 : 14] And that should be an example for us of how to be thoughtful and loving to people who keep on sinning. Before we go further, I want to once again drive home why we need the sermon.

We need a sermon about love because we love people and we are supposed to love people all the time to very great degrees.

Jesus tells us, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first commandment.

And the second like it is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. This is a commandment from God that we as his people are to love others.

And so we need a sermon about love because we are commanded to love others. We need a sermon about love for bad people because everyone who we would ever love, save for Christ, is a bad person.

[8 : 30] And we are called not just to love those people who are nice to us, but to love people who hurt us. Jesus says in the sermon on the mount, You have heard it said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spite you and persecute you.

That you may be sons of your father in heaven. For he makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, sends rain on the just and the unjust.

We are instructed clearly to love people, even people who do bad things to us and hurt us. If you are called to love sinners like Christ loves sinners.

And other people hurting you is never an excuse for you to stop loving them. You are called to love bad people.

[9 : 48] And so you need to learn about thoughtful love for bad people. Because loving bad people is hard. And it takes a lot of work.

And so we need wisdom from scripture to learn how to live out the calling that we are given. So I have three steps from this passage for us to take away as to how to thoughtfully love bad people.

Step one. Love them. It's a simple but odd step. I want to remind you that love is not simply a feeling.

If love is only a feeling, it's going to be very hard for you to love bad people. Because it's hard to want to love people who hurt us.

Don't believe the lie that the world tells you that you can't help who you love. That it's not a choice. That you have no say in the matter.

[11 : 00] Love is a choice. It is a feeling and a decision. And so when I tell you to love people, I'm telling you to decide to care about people even when you don't feel like it.

Even when it doesn't come easily to you. When people say I can't help who I love. Usually what they mean is that I love myself so much that I cannot act out love towards anyone that I don't feel like it.

That I am so consumed with feeling good that I will never love people in my actions if I don't feel like it.

Look at how Paul loves the Corinthians. Even when it's hard on him. Let's look at verse 4. Look at how much he loves people.

Even in grief and affliction. Do you love others so much that you are moved to tears for their good?

[12 : 38] Do you love others so much that you shed tears when they aren't doing well? That you could be moved to write to someone out of much grief and affliction for their sake.

Paul is moved like that. And he's our example in this passage. We should be so abundantly passionate about loving each other.

That sometimes it hurts. That we feel pain when we see others suffering. That we share in their difficulties.

And we should love others. Even those who hurt us deeply. And we should love them selflessly like Paul does.

Willing to be in great sorrow for the sake of others. So get out there and set your mind on loving people.

[13 : 40] Think about it all the time. Be busy about the work of caring about those who are around you. This is the command of the Lord.

In verse 1 Paul says he determined this within himself. That's Paul taking counsel in his own thoughts about how to best care about other people.

But I get it. It's hard to love people. And it's even harder to love people when our hearts don't feel like it.

So we need to pray. We need to pray for the people that we're trying to love. And we need to pray for our own hearts.

That God would through the Holy Spirit move our hearts to care about people more and more. So that we would feel love even for people who don't look lovely to us.

[14 : 43] Ask God to change your heart so that you love more like Paul loves. Step 2. Talk to them.

Paul talks to the people he loves. He talks to them seriously and he talks to them thoughtfully. He puts a lot of care and effort into building them up with his words.

Words are powerful things. Too often we speak them carelessly with very little concern about how to love people in the things we say.

Paul isn't like that. Twice here he talks. He says that he wrote to them various things. And he wrote these things to them because he loves them.

He speaks to them to teach them and to help them. And he talks to them so that they can know clearly and plainly that he loves them.

[15 : 55] Let's look at verse 3. Paul is saying here that the last letter he sent.

The one that's between 1st and 2nd Corinthians was sent so that there wouldn't be sorrow for him when he visits.

But Paul knows that he and the church at Corinth are so closely bound to each other. That if Paul is sad when he visits, it will make the Corinthian church sad as well.

And so rather than visiting and creating more sorrow, he writes a letter to them so that they might know the love he has for them and that his next visit with them might be joyful.

Then he says that he wrote to them not to make them sad, but to show them how deep his love is.

[17 : 13] He wrote to them so that they might know that he loves them and that they are loved. When you care about people, when you love them, you need to tell them that.

You need to speak to them in such a way that they know they are loved. I had a stepdad for many years who would never say, I love you.

But my mom, trying to comfort me, would tell me that when we're sleeping, he comes into our rooms and says, I love you to us. But it meant little to nothing to me because he never cared to actually make his love known to me in his words.

And so I never felt loved by him. So we need to tell others our love for them.

So Christ Baptist Church, I want you to know that I love you. That the reason I am here these weeks preaching to you is because I love you.

[18 : 28] Thank you for having me here and for letting me get to know you. So we need to follow Paul's example.

He talks to those he loves. When he is sad because of what they have done. He doesn't tell them to make them feel bad. How many of us, whenever someone says that does something that hurts us, are quick to say something to hurt them back?

Or quick to talk about our own feelings and our own pain so that they might hurt because of what they did to us.

But Paul's not vindictive. He doesn't tell them about his feelings just to make them regret what they did.

He says, out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears, not that you should be grieved. Do you have to make people feel bad when you feel bad?

[19 : 43] When someone hurts you, do you make sure they know just how much it hurt? Do you have to bring up all the time other people's failures and shortcomings?

Are you quick to mention the things that other people do wrong? Or just how much you do for them? So that they might feel bad for the ways they disappointed you.

When we do that, we are not loving others. We are dishonoring God and being self-centered. We are falling short of Christ and short of Paul's example.

I ask you this. Are your tears for others or for yourself? When you are moved to sorrow, is it because your life is so bad?

Or because you are saddened at the difficulties that those you love are going through? Never use your sorrow to get back at people.

[20 : 53] In Romans 12, 19, God says, vengeance is mine. I will repay. So never take it into your own hands.

And don't forget that if you love them, you will also tell people things that they don't want to hear.

A good friend tells his friends bad news. A good friend will tell his friend hard truths for their benefit.

If you go out into the world, most people won't want to hear about the gospel. They won't want to hear you tell them that they are sinners.

But you are not loving them if you do not tell them. What sort of friend are you if a car is barreling towards your friend and you can't be bothered to warn them about it?

[22 : 02] What sort of friend are you if your friends have not trusted in Christ, are on their way to hell?

And you can never be bothered to tell them about it because it might hurt their feelings. Because it might be hard for them to hear. A good friend tells their friends things that are hard to hear.

And good friends also confront sin in each other's lives. If you love others, you will want them to walk closely with Paul.

Just like Paul wants the Corinthians. Sorry, you'll want them to walk closely with God. Just like Paul wants the Corinthians to walk closely with God. That means that you must sometimes lovingly confront the sin in others' lives.

If I never tell you about your sin, you can be sure that I don't love you. Proverbs 27.6 says, Faithful, faithful are the wounds of a friend.

[23 : 19] But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. That means a true friend will sometimes say things to you that hurt deeply. And if someone only ever says the things you want to hear, they are as good as an enemy to you.

So be like Paul. And out of a deep love for people, talk to them gently about their sin. Help them to walk closely with Christ and to live more righteously.

Step three, play the long game. If you want to love people well, you're going to have to expand your perspective out to run a long race.

No one puts a plant in the ground, comes over and once a year pours 10 gallons on it and think that they've done a good job.

You can't get all the years of watering done at one time and hope that the plant is going to be all set. You don't love people by saying all the stuff you think in one conversation and then leaving them to go their merry way.

[24 : 45] Paul had plans to go to the church. He canceled them because he knew it would be better for them if they had good memories of their times together.

He knew that he could show up as he had planned before, find their house in disarray, whip them into shape. But he knew that it wasn't a good long term strategy.

That in the long run, they would be happier if he gently guided them. If he didn't try to make everything happen in just a brief period of time.

But that he writes a letter at one point, delays his visit, then comes to them and experiences a joyful time together. He was in it for the long game.

Be patient when loving people. It takes time and nothing important is done quickly. Tend to people gently like you would tend to a plant.

[25 : 57] You might push on a plant, you might bend it slightly, but you have to always be careful not to break it. You want to train its shoots to grow up a certain way, but you never do so forcefully.

A hammer is not the gardener's tool. You might even cut off a bad branch. But you have to be careful not to cut off the good with the bad.

So sometimes when you talk to people, let the hard conversations wait. Wait till they know that you love them.

And wait till they're ready to receive those truths. Instead of battering them harshly. You would not feel loved if I walked in here and started telling you all the things you were doing wrong and should do better.

But if I spend time talking to you, listening to you, praying for you and preaching to you.

[27 : 09] Then when I come to you and I say, I think this is a problem and we should change it. You'll be more ready to receive that truth.

In the same way, when you love others, be patient with them. Make sure they know your love for them. And work for the long game.

Don't try to win the battle. Win the war. I was thinking about a guy that I was talking to recently who is a recovering drug addict.

And I know there's a good chance he may relapse. I know when I was talking to them that there's no perfect thing I can say that will make him have no more issues with drugs.

So I'm in it for the long game. I try to plant seeds to make differences consistently over time. That even if he relapses, hopefully he will sober up more quickly and be that much closer to a lifetime of soberness.

[28 : 29] So you should think about how to make a difference in someone's life over a long time. Broaden your horizons. Don't just think about the one conversation or the one day.

But think about how in little ways you can shape someone's life for good over the next five years. You might not have the wisdom to fix all of my problems today.

But I tell you, if every week for the next five years, you are happy to see me. You say kind things to me.

You listen to me when I need help. It will make a huge difference. And so do that for each other. Think about how to love each other well in the long term.

Even little things done consistently over time make a huge difference. Be in it for the long game when thoughtfully loving bad people.

[29 : 38] So, so far we've thought about how we should thoughtfully love bad people. But there's an even better truth to come out of thoughtful love for bad people.

And that is God's thoughtful love for you. I want you to know that God's love for you is amazing.

Because you and I and everyone else in this room and everyone else in this world are bad people. Who do not deserve God's thoughtful love.

We are all sinners. We all make a practice of sin. It comes naturally to us. No one even has to teach us to be selfish.

We're born doing it. We do not deserve love. And we don't deserve love. Especially from the God whom we rebel against.

[30 : 46] But there is hope. Because we have a God who thoughtfully loves bad people like you and like me.

There is hope. Because God who knows the depth of our sin. Knew that there was only one way things could be made right.

And he did it. That one way was Christ. Before time began, he planned to send his son to die on that cross.

So that anyone who believes in him, no matter how bad you are, could be forgiven. You. You. You.

You are a bad person. But if you receive God's thoughtful love on that cross, you can be saved.

[31 : 50] There is nothing else that can save you. But he can. His love is more than enough.

Romans 5.8 captures this so beautifully. But God demonstrates his own love toward us.

In that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Earlier than that, he says that people won't die even for a good person.

Sometimes someone will give their life to save a good person. Raising the obvious question, who dies for a bad person?

You know? Who catches the bullet to protect the bank robber from getting shot? That's you and me. We don't deserve love because we are bad people.

[32 : 50] But the amazing thing is that God has loved us. Even while we were in the midst of our sin. And so as we think about how to thoughtfully love bad people, We must first sit and meditate in the amazing truth that God has thoughtfully loved us who are bad people.

Let's close in prayer. Lord, we thank you for your love for us. We know that we cannot love as we ought.

So we ask that you would teach us more and more how to love like you have loved us. In your son's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.