

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

How good are you at dealing with **difficult people**? You know the type of person I'm referring to: quarrelsome, unkind, spiteful, tactless – the list could continue. Whether it's a family member, co-worker or neighbor, do you find dealing with them challenging? Or, are you able to let their annoying behavior and talk slide by you, like water off a duck's back?

Life in this world means that **we will have to deal with the difficult**. But are we supposed to ignore their insults and public displays of sin (like bad mouthing us or others)? What does God expect of us as His children?

First, God calls us to forgive them. How many times must we do this before we can haul off and slug them? Seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22). In other words, **you can never stop forgiving them**. Is this difficult for you to do? Yes - it's difficult for all of us! We should take our thoughts of hatred and revenge to our Lord in prayer, asking for His forgiveness. We should publicly confess this sin of hatred. We are called to pray for them – pray that they may see their sin clearly and turn to God for forgiveness and life. We should also pray for the strength we'll need to deal with them. Only by the power of the Gospel, God's complete forgiveness for all of our sins, can we draw the very strength we need to continue forgiving others!

Second, it's important to discern if the difficult person claims Christianity as his or her religion. If **they do not proclaim Christ**, the approach must be one of **love for the loveless**. The Bible tells us that if they slap you on the right cheek (this includes verbal insults), offer them the other cheek as well (Matt. 5:38-41, 43-45, Rom. 12:14, 16). Notice that there is absolutely **no room here for retaliation**. By your loving response, you are showing them the very love of Christ. They need to see this love, in the face of their disobedience. God's plan for your loving response is to help them to be ashamed of their behavior, to feel guilt over what they have done (see Romans 12:18-21). This "being brought low" is necessary for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to penetrate their hearts and minds, so that they may be restored to God. If they ever do approach you with remorse over their behavior, **they need to hear the wonderful news that there is forgiveness for them in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection**. They need to hear that you too are sinful and apt to do and say the wrong things. But that you have received forgiveness through Christ's shed blood, and that this gift is also available to them.

Now, if **the difficult person already claims Jesus as their Savior**, the approach to their public or private sin is different. First, go and tell them their faults between you and them (Matt. 18:15). Do not hold in your feelings of anger. It's important that they know the truth of how their behavior is damaging to their spiritual life in Christ, and in their relationships with others. Public sin, left unchecked is dangerous, because it may be a temptation to others to do the same. **Talk to them about their offending conduct— but do so in love**. Be sure to pray about the efforts you are making, and ask others to pray with you. Be empathetic, but never side with them over their sinful behavior.

If their sin is **directed against others** (like gossip or bad mouthing of another who is not present; living a lifestyle that is blatantly sinful like public drunkenness, sexual depravity, etc.), you must take them aside, and privately tell them of their sin (see Ephesians 4:29, 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Remember, they claim Jesus as Lord, and yet they are walking this earth as if God doesn't matter. Before confronting them, consider this: **how often have you offended God?** Yet daily He forgives. As He forgives, so should we. Coming from the throne of God, where we have been forgiven, we must feel kindlier toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. So we approach them with humility, and proceed out of love for them. Our desire is that they be **restored to God** through repentance and forgiveness of sin.

Finally, if the Christian brother or sister **refuses to listen to you**, when confronted with the truth, take another Christian with you and confront them again (Matt. 18:16). Ultimately, if they refuse to recognize their sin after this second confrontation, you must take it to the church (contact an elder or your pastor). **Unrepentance is death – eternal death in hell!** This is more serious than a heart-attack. We are called to love our brothers and sisters, sharing their burdens. Confronting them out of love is the most loving thing a Christian can do.

Can you imagine what this nation would be like if **all of our Christian brothers and sisters dealt with each other as Christ has called us to do in His word?** Over the years, Satan has tricked believers into thinking that we are not to judge other people, lest they be judged (Matt. 7:1-5; this simply means we don't elevate ourselves above our neighbor as judge; as penitent sinners, we seek to remove the speck from their eye by confronting them out of love). God has a plan for you, and that includes **being your neighbor's keeper**. May God strengthen each of us, so that we many accomplish His will.

Pastor Travis