

“HOW TO HARNESS HATE”

Dr. John Allan Lavender
1Cor.10:1-6,10-12; 1 Jn .4:10-11

Four factors kept the Israelites from claiming the promised land. Feelings of inferiority, fear, hatred or resentment, and guilt. These are the same four factors which psychologists recognize as the principle troublemakers affecting people. Whenever you find yourself in a troubled state, look to see if one of these pesky demons is camping on your corner. And, while you're at it, be alert for the other three as well, because if you find one, you may discover a touch of them all.

In the case of the Israelites it is difficult to describe which of these demons played the leading role. But there can be no mistaking the fact that as hatred, disguised as bitterness, hostility, a critical spirit and resentment (for these are some of the masks hatred wears) was a major factor.

They were critical and rebellious from the very first start. They had hardly been released from captivity when their complaining began, and, as the book of Numbers records, it kept getting worse. The Biblical term for it is “murmuring.” They murmured at the Red Sea. At Marah. In the wilderness of Sin. At Rephidim. At Taberah. At Hazeroth. At Meribah. At Kadesh. Their resentment reached such a fever pitch they not only refused to go in and claim the promised land, they would have stoned Moses and their leaders except for the miraculous intervention of God.

Hatred is a devastating thing! It wears many masks, as I have said. And wearing the mask of resentment and a critical spirit, hatred played so large a part in the downfall of the Israelites, that over seventy-five percent of all Biblical references to “murmuring” are related to the children of Israel. I Corinthians 10:10 specifically states it was hatred disguised as resentment and expressed as murmuring which led to the undoing of one whole generation of the Jews and made it impossible for them to enjoy the milk and honey of the promised land. What a terrible warning to us as Christians to guard against giving vent to our lower emotions lest we deprive ourselves of

the peace and joy of abundant living.

The Terrors of Hate

Dr. Smiley Blanton, the noted psychiatrist, makes this cogent comment on the consequences of hate --

“Hate causes us to perish. Sometimes in a series of little deaths, sometimes all at once.”

“Hate causes us to perish.” We cannot escape the consequences of our emotional or spiritual immaturity. If we start on a low, cheap road today, we cannot hope by some bit of hocus-pocus to find ourselves on a high, fine road tomorrow. We reap the inevitable consequences of our choices, and when we choose to hate, we perish.

Physiological

This is true physiologically. Our bodies pay a terrific price when we join “the clan of the clenched fist.” Hatred upsets the digestive system. It throws normal functions out of balance. It raises blood pressure and decreases efficiency.

One journalist describes the physiological effect of hate in a story about a boss with whom he simply could not get along. Everyday he would drag himself home, absolutely exhausted, barely able to muster up enough strength to tell his wife about the horrible new atrocities he believed this man had committed against him.

“I really hated this guy,” he said. “He was a guy who was just made to be hated!”

One day after a particularly stormy session when his stomach was churning, his heart was pounding and he was hardly able to function, he stumbled upon a little sentence which had been written by Booker T. Washington,

“I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him.”

And this writer says,

“I was never so strongly affected by one sentence, for, in a flash, it showed me

how small and mean I had become, and the physical penalty I was paying for this.

The fact that the offer of that sentence was a Negro who must have suffered unspeakable indignities on his way up from slavery, seemed a special reproach to me. What were my troubles in the office compared to the struggles which he had gone and which had given birth to this defiant magnanimity?”

So he began to work on his hatred. He tried to replace it with genuine understanding of the man who was his special nemesis. Out of understanding came acceptance. Out of acceptance came affection. In the end he made this amazing discovery, “When I stopped wasting energy on hatred, I found I had energy to burn and to expend on better things.”

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Economically

Another way in which hatred is self-defeating is in the area of economics. Elmo Roper, the research specialist, completed a searching study of employee relationships in the United States. Among other things he discovered that hatred disguised as prejudice and resentment among workers and between labor and capitol, has had some devastating results economically.

It has resulted in higher operating costs. Increased turnover. Work stoppages. Wildcat strikes. He estimates the cost of prejudice, resentment, hostility and just plain hatred to American Industry at thirty billion -- that's right -- thirty b-i-l-l-i-o-n dollars a year in wasted man power, production and morale.

This means that ten dollars out of every seventy-five dollar paycheck has been wasted on the phoney luxury of indulging our hate. And few can estimate the incalculable and far more terrible cost in human suffering.

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Emotionally and Spiritually

Hatred also extracts a dreadful toll on our emotions. The human spirit is remarkably resilient. It is made of though fiber. It has withstood wars, epidemics, hardships, discouragements, and defeats. But one thing it cannot survive is hatred expressed in the withholding of love.

The mere fact that we have never *seen* someone die for want of love, is no proof that it does not happen. It may not seem like death when we crawl to our days, burdened with fears and frustrations, our personalities twisted into ugly caricatures of what they were meant to be. But death is was. Slow, painful, and every bit as final.

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Handicapped People

We hear a lot about handicapped people, and we usually equate that with someone who is blind or physically limited. I wonder if you have ever stopped to realize that the really handicapped people are those who are preoccupied with their own resentments. Who are blinded by prejudice, maimed by hostility, weakened by bitterness, and driven by a nightmare of hatred into a wasteful misuse of physical, emotional and spiritual faculties.

These are the real handicapped. The discontented, distraught, and defeated ones among us.

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It is like a rattlesnake which when cornered becomes so angry it bites itself. Hatred and bitterness harbored within the heart is a biting of oneself. We may *think* we are harming others, but in reality we are destroying ourselves.

Caiaphas

The tragic folly of hatred is graphically told in the story of Caiaphas the high priest, who

masterminded the crucifixion of Jesus.

I’m sure Caiaphas didn’t start out to hate Jesus. But, he was an aggressive man who had been frustrated in achieving his own ambitions. For one thing, he was under the iron thumb of Rome, and there was little this squirming priest could do about it except hate. He hated the “pull” of his crooked father-in-law. He hated the power of Pontius Pilot. He hated Herod, the pompous figurehead king. Hatred filled his entire frame. Every thought and action and word were motivated by hate.

Caiaphas hated with such intensity and consistency that one day he could actually hate God, and without the slightest qualm, crucify his son. Although he had twenty-thousand priests under his command, and absolute control over an annual “take” which amounted to roughly ten-million dollars, he wanted more power, more money, more recognition and honor. Like all over-ambitious people who never attain their goals, Caiaphas turned his aggression outward. He had to find a scapegoat, and for Caiaphas, the object of hatred became Jesus. As someone has said, “When the kind voice of Christ called Israel to its highest service, the vicious voice of Caiaphas drowned it out.

When the soft eyes of Jesus looked upon this man with warm love, the hard eyes of Caiaphas stared back at him with cold hatred.

The tender hands of the Savior were lifted to bless, the cruel hands of Caiaphas conspired to nail him to a cross.”

Hatred, you see, is equipped with incredible fertility. It grows with tremendous rapidity until everything beautiful, pure and good has been destroyed and with it comes the destruction of the hater. Such was the case with Caiaphas, and such may inevitably be the case with us. My friend, are you holding something in your heart against someone this morning? If so, it is destroying you just as surely as if you were injecting a deadly poison into your veins.

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Root out your hatred.

Correct your attitude toward the one who is the object of your hostility.

Tear off the facade of rationalization with which you have surrounded your hatred.

Admit that your criticism of others is just a juvenile attempt to build up *your* ego by tearing other people down.

Then, having done that, harness your hate through an exercise of genuine self-discipline and love.

Choose to love. For love is not a feeling, it is a decision.

Self-Discipline

One woman who had suffered from deep hostility, overcame it by putting a new accent on the old command:

“Watch and pray.”

She put the emphasis on the word “watch.” Through a slow, painstaking, and sometimes painful self-analysis, she learned to recognize what she called --

“A whole fifth column of unwelcome guests.”

Then, having recognized them, she *watched* for them. Whenever she saw one of those unwelcome emotions rearing its ugly head, she refused to give it admittance into her heart and mind. By sheer self-discipline, she learned to conquer her fears and harness her hate.

She prayed about it. But, unlike many of us, she didn’t expect God to do it all. She *watched* while she prayed. It was in a combination of *watching* and praying that she gained the victory. And, oh, how many of our problems would be solved if we would raise the threshold of our mind so that baser emotions cannot get in!

The Exercise of Love

However, the real answer to hatred lies in a wholehearted exercise of love. Dr. Karl Menninger, the world famed psychiatrist, says, “If we can love enough . . . *this* is the touchstone. *this* is the key to the entire therapeutic program of the modern psychiatric hospital. Love is *the* medicine for the sickness of the world.”

And why is that? Because, “God is love” and he has made this old world to operate on love. Everything Jesus said about the relationship of people to God, and people to other people, was based on love. He said --

“Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind . . . and thou shalt *love* thy neighbor as thyself.”

Love was the hardcore of his teaching.

On the eve of his crucifixion he sat around the table with his disciples and said,

“A new commandment I give to you, that you *love* one another. As I have loved you, love one another.”

And then he made this last appeal --

“If you love *me* . . . *keep* my commandments. *Love* one another!”

“Love is *the* healing power!” There is nothing new about that. We’ve heard it many times. The difficulty is that we don’t really believe it. We don’t really believe God loves us *as we are*. We feel God’s love is like the flabby affection of some parents for their children. It is only good when the children are good.

That kind of love is not taught in the New Testament. The Bible plainly declares that God’s love is not conditional. It has nothing whatsoever to do with our goodness, for --

“God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Jesus did not die to make God love us. Jesus died *because* God loved us, *before* Christ died! What we desperately need is to accept the fact that God’s love embraces us with all of our foibles, faults, frailties and failings. He knows it all *and understands!* All he asks is that we learn to love ourselves as he loves us, so we can be free to love others as he loves them.

There are many illustrations of the healing power of love in action. Let me share just three.

The King and I

Do you remember the story of The King and I? Actually, it is the true story of a missionary in Siam. There were many situations in which hostility and resentment could have developed between Anna and the King, but instead, love grew. How did it happen? Because around the strangeness of the people and their customs, Anna flung the mantle of understanding. Do you remember that lovely scene when she gathered the palace children around her and sang to them, and they to her?

“Getting to know you.

Getting to know all about you.

Getting to like you.

Getting to hope you like me to.

Haven’t you noticed?

Suddenly I’m bright and breezy,

Because of all the beautiful and new,

Things I am learning about you,

Day by day.”

She overcame hostility and hate, with love.

Panmunjom

The whole world was given a stirring demonstration of the power of love in an event that occurred at Panmunjom in the fall of 1953 at the end of the Korean War. Since the government of India had taken a neutral position during the conflict, the warring nations asked India to provide guards to take care of the stockades in which some twenty-thousand prisoners of war were being held.

General S. P. Thorat was in command of the neutral forces. One day the frustrations and indignities of imprisonment reached a boiling point and a riot broke out. Instead of arming his men with machine guns and threatening to shoot down the rioters, General Thorat took twelve men armed with nothing but walking sticks, and went inside the compound where twenty-

thousand prisoners were on the verge of hysteria.

When the enraged men saw the general and his small company, they grabbed tent poles and rocks and started to attack them. It was clear that General Thorat had to choose between two alternatives: *love or hate*. *Love* recognized that these men were harassed by frustration and indignity and needed understanding. *Hate* looked upon them as a bunch of animals bent on destroying their prey. *Love* might avert a catastrophe. *Hate* might precipitate one.

As the mob began to inch its way toward him, General Thorat turned to the nearest prisoner and said quietly,

“What sort of Chinese are you? Where is your hospitality? You have not offered me or my men a cup of tea?”

There was a moment of hesitation, and then, one after another, the Chinese slowly dropped their make-shift weapons, and making an aisle between them, the leader of the rioters motioned for the General and his men to follow. In a moment, they were seated inside a tent engaged in a long and polite discussion of the problem. A solution was decided upon, and General Thorat and his men were escorted by a guard of honor to the gate.

Smiley Blanton who tells the story, points out that the issue between life and death is rarely drawn to so fine a point of balance as it was on that historic morning in Korea. Even so, we must often make a decision between love and hate. When we love, we pour health and healing into life.

When we hate, we perish.

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The Orphan Girl

Actually the world is dying for a little bit of love. A young orphan girl who suffered some physical disfigurement, was ignored by the matrons and made fun of by the kids. No one paid much attention to her. One day one of the children reported that she had seen the little girl

putting a piece of paper in an old tree stump nearby. Three of the matrons hurried over to see what new form of mischief this unlovely little girl was up to. One reached into the stump and fished out the piece of paper. As she read it, an ashen expression swept across her face, and she silently handed it to the other two. They read it, and without a word, went back into the building. It said, “To whoever finds this, I love you.”

Oh, dear friend,

“The world is dying for a little bit of love,
Everywhere men are crying for a little bit of love,
For the love that rights the wrong,
For the love that brings a song,
They have waited, oh so long,
For a little bit of love.”

So lets try love. Love is the healing word. Love is the medication which can cure all ills. And I John 4:10 declares,

“Here is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son. (God sacrificed the best in him to redeem the worst in us.) Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”

Spiritual Prescription For Today

“Hate causes us to perish. Sometimes in a series of small deaths. Sometimes all at once.” Hate wears many masks. Resentment, bitterness, “constructive” criticism, the withholding of love. The trick is to be painfully honest so the mask can be lifted off and the hate exposed. Once recognized, there is no justification for continuing to hate, nor any peace if you persist in clinging to it. It must be flushed out with L-O-V-E.

“And here is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son,

beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 Jn 4:10-11).