

"I Don't Even Like Him!"

The busy weekend (in the late 60s) was over and I was in my office at the church on Monday morning. There was something I had to settle then and there.

My problem? I wasn't practicing what I was preaching. That bothered me. The dilemma had to be resolved that morning. I was not going to leave my study until I had a breakthrough.

The irony of it was that I really didn't know why I disliked Ralph. I disliked him from the day I first met him. There seemed to be no logical explanation for my negative attitude toward him. But, everything about him rubbed me the wrong way. I didn't like to be around him.

When I first came to be the pastor the church, Ralph's parents were members but he was not. Furthermore, he was in the army. When he got out, he came home and, before long, started dating one of our single church members – Lois. They married and seemed to be doing well. He wasn't saved but she thought she could bring him around.

Yesterday, I had preached about love, about loving everyone. My one exception haunted me. It was one too many.

"Lord, I am staying on my knees until you help me settle this situation with Ralph."

"Pray for him."

"Pray for him! I don't even like him!"

"Pray for him, anyway."

"How can I pray for him and mean it?"

"Try."

Well, it didn't make any sense, but it was obvious the Lord wasn't offering me any alternatives. When I started praying for Ralph, it seemed so labored, so contrived, so insincere. But I kept at it. After all, the Lord had spoken. So, I prayed for Ralph, for Lois, for the baby that was on the way. I asked the Lord to give them good health, to bless their business, to bless them spiritually.

As I continued to pray, it became easier and I noticed I was beginning to mean it. As I did my best to pray honestly, the Holy Spirit joined in and helped me pray. At one point, he even did the praying through me. I had gone from praying by myself to praying with the Holy Spirit to praying in the Spirit. It was divine! And all because I agreed to try to pray for someone I disliked.

When I finally got up off my knees, there was no trace of antipathy or resentment.

I loved Ralph with the love of God. We became good friends. As it turned out, he became a committed Christian and still is. And... I like him! ◇◇