

## Proverbs 10:12

### Basic instinct

If ever we need some church publicity material, I'd strongly advise that we think carefully about who we employ. A good way back, they asked the kids in the youth group at our previous church to think how they might encourage their friends to come along. Only one of the slogans really sticks in my mind to this day:

***Come along to Oakwood Chapel ...  
... or I'll kill ya!***

Of course we all recognise that that is just so absurd, and contradictory. But it taps into some very basic instincts in all of us, doesn't it? We *understand* the possibility, at least, that rejection could lead to hatred, and hatred could lead to violence, even to murder. And it's not just that we have seen it on the TV. We can see it in ourselves, if we dare to look within.

Jenny and I recently watched a Channel 4 programme about the ... not sure quite how you'd describe him ... perhaps "illusionist"?

### Derren Brown

20 years of TV shows now, and what has he learned? In his more recent shows, he has moved on from doing things like

### Card tricks

To arranging scenarios where apparently normal people can be coaxed or manipulated into doing some pretty outrageous things. For most people, adulthood includes inhibitions ... but which the right - or do I mean *wrong*? - circumstances can overcome.

Think how dire the world would be if people behaved on the instincts we had as kids. When I was I guess something like 8 or so, I had a mental

### Hit list

I doubt I thought this very seriously, but I do remember that at the top of this list of *people I would kill* was one of the teachers at my junior school. I don't know exactly what it was about that particular teacher, looking back. I don't think they had seriously told me off, or anything like that. They *did* have a rather unpleasant barky kind of voice, I can certainly remember that ... but a barky voice is not actually sufficient grounds for capital punishment!

I'm telling you this to illustrate that we will all of us have some very thorough understanding *from the inside* of some of these potent emotions. We might not have experienced either of them to the full and extreme, love or hate. We have most likely read stories or seen films in which the emotions feature. But we have felt the emotions running through our own veins, too. So when we read today's verse

***Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences.***

(Proverbs 10:12)

It seems at first almost too simple and obvious to spend a whole sermon on. But like with so many of these proverbs in this book, it is worth sitting and chewing it over for a while. Unlike

### **Chewing gum**

That loses its taste over time, I think these proverbs *gain* in flavour, the more you consider them. I hope you'll agree as we do spend a while longer here pondering.

Let's pick up on the first half for starters.

***Hatred stirs up strife, ...***

(Proverbs 10:12)

Hatred is something that the Bible is quite familiar with, too. We have plenty of examples we could consider. There's the fairly obvious stuff, things like David:

***Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.***

(Psalms 25:19)

And you will pick up right away that some hatred just goes so far beyond reason. Some hatred is at least part deserved, and some is just unaccountable. David again:

***So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love.***

(Psalms 109:5)

And yet there are some surprises, too. Hatred is all bad, right? David once more:

***Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.***

(Psalms 139:21-22)

AV there has "*perfect* hatred", which I think is a helpful nuance that we would need to hold on to. But the basic meaning is something that is full-on. David will have no half measures here. So we might need to revise our thinking a little, already. Hatred is not always bad. There are things that it is *right* to hate! In fact, we could even say it more strongly: there are things that it is *wrong not* to hate!

***The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.***

(Proverbs 8:13)

And what will that mean about what we choose to watch or read, and how we

choose to vote? Just the other night on BBC there was a dramatised account of the life of

### **Barbara Windsor**

I didn't see a whole lot of it, or really pay much attention to it, but there was one scene where she was wanting *not* to marry, but to stay simply living with the man who, I think I got this right, did actually end up as her husband. So many of the modern dramas portray just living together, or even sleeping around, as just normal and to be expected. Have we just given up on this? Do we still register that this is *wrong*? Do we simply mentally react against "the way of evil", or does it touch *our* emotions, too - the way that David the psalmist's were?

We may have to fight against self-righteousness superiority, and condemnation of the *people* involved, yes. But do we so much back off from that that we then refuse to view the actions or the lifestyles that are being referred to as harmful and evil? Remember poor

### **Tim Farron**

The former leader of the Liberal Democrats, caught in the glare of the media over whether he would dare label homosexual practice using the Bible's S-word?

So the question arises: what the Bible states that God finds *hateful*, are we prepared to "hate", too? - though I'll put that word in quote marks for us, as it is still very easy for such a potent emotion as hate to run away with us, and it is all too easy for us to end up as heartless bigots. Just remember that the word "detestable" *does* crop up in Scripture. The Israelites entering the Promised Land were warned about some such:

***And you have seen their detestable things, their idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, which were among them.***

(Deuteronomy 29:17)

Nowadays that would be labelled "culture", to be preserved and cherished. For the Israelites, they were snares to be avoided:

***Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations.***

(Deuteronomy 29:18)

But look, back to the more normal understanding of this verse ...

***Hatred stirs up strife, ...***

(Proverbs 10:12)

Most of the time, hatred itself is something detestable.

***There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination***

**to him: ...**

(Proverbs 6:16)

That's a pattern of Hebrew speech there that sounds a bit odd in English. It is taken by some to mean that the seventh one of the following list is the worst of all. And guess what the seventh one is!

***... a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.***

(Proverbs 6:19)

Strife, contention, arguments ... all very human ... we understand that. It's the staple diet of

### **Soaps**

But just because it produces millions for the TV stations doesn't make it good.

***Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.***

(Galatians 5:19-21)

And those are serious things:

***I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.***

(Galatians 5:21)

Strife, arguments, contention, comes from a multitude of roots:

***By insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom.***

(Proverbs 13:10)

***A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.***

(Proverbs 15:18)

***A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.***

(Proverbs 16:28)

***As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.***

(Proverbs 26:21)

***A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the LORD will be enriched.***

(Proverbs 28:25)

***A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.***

(Proverbs 29:22)

***For pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood,***

***and pressing anger produces strife.***

(Proverbs 30:33)

So what's the advice that we're given?

***Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.***

(Proverbs 17:1)

***The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.***

(Proverbs 17:14)

***It is an honour for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.***

(Proverbs 20:3)

I'm not saying that we must never disagree about things. But we must certainly learn to handle disagreements in a safe way. Think about it. What is the equivalent of

## **PPE**

That we need to invest in if there is a disagreement brewing - or one that has already broken over us? I wonder if it would help to go back to one of the root causes - the one in that verse we're majoring on - and see what can be done about cutting that off at source.

***Hatred stirs up strife, ...***

(Proverbs 10:12)

See, I think that one of the key things that hatred does is to remove respect. You feel it is OK to behave in this way - yes, you justify it - because you claim that *that other person* has forfeited your respect. So it becomes OK to despise them. It is OK to label them with mean little names. It is OK to say little snide things about them behind their back. It is OK to belittle their intelligence. It is OK to claim to think that you know what must be their thoughts and motives. You have got them sussed. And they are *worthy* and *deserving* of your contempt.

What's the answer to this? It's not so easy to just stop hating - or acting hatefully - just by itself. The answer, I'm sure, is in the other half of the verse.

***Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences.***

(Proverbs 10:12)

Just think how you would read this, if you're one of those people we speak with their hands.

## **Stirs**

Could just be the literal circular motions, but I'll bet that "stirs *up*" would have your

## **Hands rising**

Showing the buildup and growth of tension - the explosion just *has* to come!  
Whereas

## **Covers**

Is an exactly opposite gesture. Palms *down*. Protecting. Reducing the temperature. Covering. Hiding, even. That's the basic meaning of the word in Peter's first letter:

***Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.***

(1 Peter 4:8)

Love hides these things. Love doesn't deny their existence, but keeps them out of sight and out of mind. Love treats them as if forgotten. Love does not open the box and toss the contents on the table again if there is some future disagreement or pain or sin. Love does not leverage the memory of having forgiven in the past for some self-advantage in the future. Love covers over those sins. Love seals up these things in a

## **Hazardous materials**

Container and leaves it for the experts to deal with. And that to me speaks immediately of grace. Because what is being concealed can be pretty unpleasant stuff. It maybe doesn't even deserve to be covered over. But "doesn't even deserve" is precisely what makes it about grace.

We don't often or routinely say "The Lord's Prayer" together when we meet, but we did today. There is that challenging line in it, isn't there? I'm sure you know the one I mean.

***"... and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."***

(Matthew 6:12)

And I fear that we come up with all sorts of theological wriggles when it comes to this, to try to evade its force. We plead that it's so difficult to forgive ... so God can't realistically expect it ... so this can't mean what it obviously does mean. And yet Jesus reinforces precisely this, having concluded that model prayer.

***"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."***

(Matthew 6:14-15)

Folks, it's no good going for the cop-out that "this sounds like salvation by works" ... so we can in practice ignore it. Yes, Jesus does often include things in that Sermon on the Mount, that this is part of, that are deliberately exaggerated for effect. But that doesn't give us the right to interpret it down to *nothing*.

What it means is that when I ask, *Is there someone that you hate?* And your mind flits immediately to someone who has wronged you, perhaps recently, perhaps decades ago ... perhaps you or someone close to you ... and you feel that ill-feeling rise within you, like bile within your throat ... then your

### **alarm bells**

should ring like crazy because of this verse. Your attitudes are a signal to God, saying "Don't *you* forgive *me* either". You are implying that you so treasure that hatred that you would rather go to Hell with it than Heaven without it. Despite knowing that there is that

### **heat-seeking missile**

of the wrath of God against sin, you have just lit a bonfire!

Of course this is something so difficult to do. Actually, doesn't the way Jesus say this show that this is something *impossible* for us to do? That's exactly it, with the Sermon on the Mount. It's not a handbook to heaven. It's not a new set of rules to keep, to earn your passage through the Pearly Gates. It's meant to show us just how *impossible* it is to *qualify* for salvation.

***"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."***

(Matthew 5:20)

It's meant to make us realise that we need mercy for ourselves. It's meant to show us that we are spiritual murderers, and spiritual adulterers, and by nature vengeful, self-centred, proud and unforgiving. And to *cry out* to God for his mercy.

Yes, we do get teaching on how to forgive. That Parable of the Unforgiving Servant that we read earlier is potent stuff, and it's still a real challenge. Remember how much the first guy was let off?

***"... one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents."***

(Matthew 18:24)

Totally ludicrous amount. Nobody could seriously run up a debt that big. But how much was this same person owed?

***"... one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, ..."***

(Matthew 18:28)

And the whole point of the story, I reckon, is not that that was *nothing*. It's a third of a year's wages. Round figures, for some of us, £10,000. *Not* trivial. It would seriously sting to be deprived of that. It's only trivial *in comparison with* the amount the servant had been let off.

So some things that Jesus calls you and me to forgive are *not* trivial. It *really*

hurt. It *did* wound. It was sinful and unconscionable. People may be bearing the scars of this for the rest of their lives. It will be difficult - perhaps even humanly *impossible* - to just let go of this.

Folks, that parable doesn't just teach us that we need to forgive, but that we need to be forgiven a huge and massive debt ourselves. How we go about exacting the debts of others is part of our own debt to God. We need forgiveness for our *unforgiveness*, too. And that is where I want to take us, back in

***Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences.***

(Proverbs 10:12)

This is about how we are to live, *in two different senses*. There's the obvious: don't hate, be forgiving. But that's not all. There are the words of grace there, too. The second half of the verse doesn't just encourage *us* to forgive, but points us away from ourselves and our lives, to the life of Jesus Christ, to the Love, capital L, of the God who forgives and covers *all* offences.

***"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."***

(Isaiah 43:25)

***For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.***

(Psalms 103:11-12)

Slightly different pictures, I admit: blotting out - dissolving ink and expunging the record - or removing to an infinite distance. But still the same effect. That's what the Gospel explicitly includes nowadays, too. Again, slightly different picture language at times, but building up as part of the same overall picture:

***And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.***

(Colossians 2:13-14)

The record is not simply removed, but formally cancelled. And we're told how it works, how this forgiveness has its effect. It is not just a vague "love of God" thing, but a very specific "cross of Christ" thing.

***... the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.***

(Colossians 2:14)

A fortnight back we were speaking an earlier Proverb:

***Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.***

(Proverbs 10:2)



We concluded that that wasn't just saying that we must live righteously in order to please God, but that we needed God's gift of righteousness *to us* and *into us* in order to live - which is exactly what Paul argues in his letter to the Romans:

***For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ... just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:***

(Romans 4:3,6)

But what does Paul quote to further prove this? A verse that brings in the notion of *covering*. Different Proverb, but the same story:

***"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."***

(Romans 4:7-8)

And folks, this is for *us*. That is how Paul concludes that section of his letter to Rome.

***But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.***

(Romans 4:23-25)

Folks, we're here today ... we're going to break bread together in a moment ... to remember and celebrate and proclaim to one another what "Jesus our Lord" has done. To give thanks for how his death and his resurrection have spoken life *for us* ... "to us who believe in him".

***By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, ...***

(1 John 3:16)

That is truly the Love, capital L, that we see back in Proverbs.

***Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences.***

(Proverbs 10:12)

Folks, glory in that word *all*.

***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

(1 John 1:9)

Or as we sang earlier:

*My Saviour's obedience and blood  
Hide all my transgressions from view*