

## Chewing on Gristle

In the 1990s a preacher friend was having lunch with some of his preacher friends. The discussion turned to some of the challenging things in the Christian walk. One brother described one challenge saying, "That's the meat." Another brother upped the ante saying, "No, that's the gristle!"

Gristle - that hard, almost un-chewable part of the roast you should have trimmed off before cooking. Parts of life are like that. Parts of God's word can seem the same - so hard you want to ignore it. But those "hard parts" are almost always the very things that help us grow and mature. Those very things are usually the ones that yield the peace and joy for which we search.

Two that come to mind are the discipline of the Lord and loving our enemies. Discipline "...for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." (Hebrews 12:11, NASB)

The other, loving our enemies, is a focus of Jesus in Matthew 5:43-45:

**"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven...."**

Yep, that's gristle! Love your enemies? Pray for your persecutors? That's what He said. It's a bit like golf - very simple (put the golf ball in the cup) but very challenging to perform correctly. The passage needs no explanation - it's very easy to understand and explain. But in genuine application, *it's gristle*. It's so easy to put in your mouth but so very hard to chew completely.

Remember, Jesus never gave us a command that He does not empower us to accomplish, and accomplish well. You can do it - it just takes time, effort and goal oriented thinking. AND... one other item: love. "Love one another as I have loved you," John 13:34, 35. When we love as Jesus loves, it's almost as if someone put meat tenderizer and steak sauce on the gristle! It's easier to chew and it tastes a lot better. Hmmm - love as a heart tenderizer... maybe it's really not so much about the gristle but about the heart!

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