

Love Lesson Six

Focal Texts: Proverbs 17:17; 1 John 4:7-21

Background: Proverbs 17:17; 1 John 4:7-21

Teaching Aim: To lead members to gain a better understanding of what it means to love their neighbor and to apply this understanding to relationships with others.

Connect with Life: Begin by sharing the following story: Following the surrender of France to Nazi Germany during World War II, the Vichy regime was set in place by Germany for the governing of France. This government (dictatorship) set about to enforce all of the practices in Germany of Hitler and his regime, including the enslavement and persecution of the Jews. Most French people abided by these new laws out of fear for their lives. One glaring exception was the people in the small French village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon under the leadership of a pastor by the name of Andre Trocme.

These people refused to abide by the new laws, especially the ones related to the persecution of the Jews. In fact, in spite of great persecution, this village became a haven for those Jews that could get to the village. During the war this small village was responsible for saving the lives of nearly 5,000 Jews.

After the war, Trocme's wife tells the story of how their ministry to the Jews began. She said that it began one morning with the arrival of an elderly Jewish woman on her doorstep asking for help. The Trocmes immediately asked her in and took care of her. When asked what went through their minds regarding whether or not to admit this woman into their lives in light of certain persecution, Mrs. Trocme said, "The only questions I asked myself were, 'Is this my neighbor' and 'did Christ die for this person?'"

Ask members to share why this is a perfect example of the kind of love that we will be discussing in our study for today? Then ask members, what sorts of neighbors have been showing up on their doorsteps lately? Have they found it easy to love these people? Let's discover some ways that the study for today will help us with this challenge.

Guide Bible Study: Begin with a reading of Proverbs 17:17 and make the following summary statement: "Sometimes it is easy to love one another and sometimes it is more of a challenge but...we are to love one another (1 John 4:7a)."

Then ask members to discover responses to the following question in the remaining focal verses: "Why is it essential that we love one another?" Suggested responses and related commentary include the following:

1. Because love is from God (7b). God gave us the ability to love another. It would be a great sin and travesty to ignore such a wonderful gift. "We must make a conscious decision to demonstrate unselfish love and be willing to receive love from others

within the Christian community. Such love does not come naturally to us. Rather, the source of this love is God.”

2. Because our love for one another gives evidence that we know God (7c). “Because love is inseparable from what it means to be a follower of God, its presence or absence provides a positive or negative indicator about our relationship with God. Those who love one another with this godly type of love show that they are children of God and truly know God.”
3. Because we have found salvation in God’s great act of love (9-10). “Here the focus is on love as both the motivation for sending and the desired response from those who are the recipients of this sacrifice which atones for sin.” “The primary way that God has demonstrated his love for us is by making a way for us to be reconciled to him through the sacrifice of his Son. Any human act of love pales in comparison. In response, we can do no less than to love our brothers and sisters in Christ with a sacrificial love.”
4. Because when we love one another we know that God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (11-16). “One of the great privileges we have as children of God is to be the visible manifestation of his love. Because he lives in us, others can see God’s love in action through our lives.” “His love has become complete or reached its goal when we take the initiative to love others.” “In this context, God’s Spirit is closely associated with the love that flows from our lives to those around us. Undoubtedly, the presence of God’s Spirit in our lives creates the capacity for us to both obey God and demonstrate our love for one another.” “Our testimony that Jesus is the Son of God also proves that we abide in relationship with God.” “After we come to know what God has done for us and realize that God is love, we desire to live or remain in this love. As heart, mind, and actions unite, we abide in this love of God, and he abides in us.”
5. Because we will have no fear of the judgment (17-18). “Because of this, we do not need to dread Judgment Day. We can be confident that we will be judged in the light of our identity in Christ.” “In fact, love actively drives out fear.” “We can live life confidently, having the assurance that God abides in us and we in God. In this way, love reaches its completion, accomplishing its intended purpose in our lives.”
6. Because we cannot hate our brother and love God (19-20). “Note that the response is not just a matter of reciprocating love to the One who loved us. God expects us to love those who may not love us back. This becomes a test of whether our love is genuine.” “When Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another, he told them their love for one another would identify them as his disciples. In short, love exercised by, among, and between disciples proves our love for God, and that love originates with God.”
7. Because loving one another is a command from God (21). “If we are truly followers of Jesus, love for others is not optional; Jesus commanded us to do so.”

Encourage Application: Then remind members of the question asked at the beginning of this study, “What sort of neighbors are showing up on your doorstep lately?” Lead members to make a list of the types of neighbors that are difficult to love. As you look at the list, ask members to indicate those that could be exempted from the command to love our neighbor. (Of course, the answer is none.) Conclude the lesson by asking members to share ways that this study will provide the motivation and help they need to love their neighbor. Suggested responses include the following:

1. We need to stop trying to love people in our own strength and rely on the strength of God. After all, He is love and gives us the gift of love and the power to use it.
2. By sharing the gospel with others we can demonstrate the ultimate expression of love.
3. We need to learn to allow the Holy Spirit to love them through us, which is God’s ultimate purpose for our lives.
4. As we learn to love God, this love can be transferred to our neighbor.

Close with prayer for members to be able to demonstrate a Godly love to others in the days ahead.