

BaptistWay Press® Adult Online Bible Commentary

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Studies in 14 Habits of Highly Effective Disciples

Lesson Six

Love

Focal Text

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

Background

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

Main Idea

Disciples love others because of God's example and his command.

Question to Explore

What keeps me from following God's command to love others?

Quick Read

God's kind of love is not a reaction to receiving affection from someone else; his kind of love is a decision to put another person's needs above my own.

Introduction

How do we measure our progress in discipleship? One clear measurement is our love for others. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

I recently helped with my friend, Waldo Hill's funeral. It was one of the most interesting examples of God taking over a service that I have ever experienced.

Waldo's family didn't want a large service because of Waldo's advanced age and his wife Lee's physical condition. They suggested a simple graveside service with family

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only. Waldo had a larger network of “family” than any of us knew. Thirty minutes before the service, people poured into the funeral home, packing several rooms. Lively conversation and beautiful laughter echoed in the halls. A long stream of cars formed to drive back to the gravesite.

When we arrived, Marcela (a former neighbor), asked if she could say a few words at the service. Another man came forward to say that he had flown all the way from California to speak a word about his former colleague. Marcela told about how kind Waldo had been to her, complete with woodworking items he had made for her and her family. She called him *Waldito* or “Little Waldo.” She described him as the perfect neighbor.

For years Marcela tried to figure out why Waldo was the way he was. Then came the moment when he told her about Jesus, his best friend. It was an amazing example of how easy sharing our faith becomes when we realize God loves us and we begin to share his love with others. One of the habits of disciples is what John calls “fearless love.”

Commentary

Faithful Love: Friends Love at All Times (Proverbs 17:17)

We sometimes draw a false distinction between the teaching of the Old Testament and the New Testament. True, they were written by different people at different seasons in the history of the world. Still, there exists a great continuity between the two. Augustine said: “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.”¹

God has always been a God of love, who chose to love his people and invited them to love others as well. In the book of Proverbs we see examples of love described. So the writer tells us, “...there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24). Even before that though, he reminds us that a friend loves at all times (Proverbs 17:17).

Proverbs says a great deal about friendship. The word is also translated “associate.” But contextually it is defined by an unending love. The Hebrew word for love *ahav* is distinct from our western concept of love. Love for us is an abstract thought or emotion. We use the term to describe our feelings. It is not especially discriminating – so we *love our families*, and we *love God* and we *love chocolate and our sports teams*, all with the same word.

In Hebrew “love” spoke more of one’s responsibility to provide for and protect a privileged gift. As a verb, this word means “to provide and protect what is given as a privilege” as well as “to have an intimacy of action and emotion.” We are told to love God and our neighbors, not in an emotional sense, but in the sense of our actions. So love is something we *do*.

The true friend loves at all times. So love for one another is not conditioned on the other person's actions or worth. We love when things are going well, but we also love when things are not going well.

In college, God brought a friend from another state. I was fresh from Germany and Montana, but my friend grew up in a small town in Northeast Louisiana. He knew my older brother and initially confused the two of us, as I recall. Soon we discovered that we served as pastors of churches just four miles apart. We used to drive to "Falls on the Brazos" park in Falls County early on Sunday mornings to pray before we went to our churches to preach.

Over time, we learned to preach funerals and perform weddings. We labored in love in neighboring communities. He became the best man at my wedding and I at his. Over the years we have celebrated amazing victories in our lives, families, and churches. We have also wept over painful experiences which disappointed and dismayed us. Truthfully, he has been a better friend to me than I to him. He has punctuated the years with an occasional question, "What can I do for you today?" Now Wayne Gray works for Hardin Simmons University in Abilene. He has loved at all times for over thirty years.

Fearless Love: Love Casts Out Our Fear

The New Testament has much to say about love as well. In the Gospel of John, we discover that the apostle defines God's purpose for the world in his report of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. At some point in that conversation or after, Jesus enunciated, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

John, the beloved disciple, has a lot to say about love. He, who had once been called a Son of Thunder (Mark 3:17), had been so transformed by Christ's love that he became most loving. He began by reminding his readers of the love that God had for them. Then he pointed out the way that God's perfect love casts out our fear of being punished and our need to punish others. The more we remain in God's love and God's love remains in us, the more loving we become. God's faithful love for us creates in us a fearless love for others! On the other hand, we may hate others because we can't really believe that God loves us.

Much, if not most, of our hatred comes from fear of others. We fear that they will harm us. Or we just do not understand them. But when we realize fully that the One who knew us best, loved us the most even when we were at our worst, then we are free to love others in the same way, in spite of differences and perceived deficiencies. The perfect love that casts out all fear starts with our fearless God!

Disciples Love Because We Have Been Loved by God Perfectly! (1 John 4:7-10)

We sometimes say to those we love: "Don't tell me, but show me you love me." God has done that. Talk is cheap, but commitment is costly. John wrote. "...love comes from

God...” (1 John 4:7) and then, “This is how God showed his love among us” (1 John 4:9). How did God show us his love? Josiah Conder wrote in a song, "This knowing, if I love Thee, Thou must have loved me first."²

To show his perfect love, God sends. God the Father sent his one and only Son into the world to give us life so that we might live through him (1 John 4:9). Further, in his perfect love, God sacrificed for us. God the Father sacrificed his only Son for us (1 John 4:10) and the Son of God sacrificed his life for us. Jesus willingly became the propitiation, or atoning sacrifice, for our sins!

Fred Craddock tells about a family stopping to pick up a stray kitten on the side of a road over the protests of the father.

“Daddy, if you don’t it will die.” When the father stopped the car and picked up the cat, the kitten not only hissed at him but scratched his hand. Some days later the father felt something rub against his leg. When he reached down the cat did not hiss or scratch but arched its back for a caress. Craddock commented: Not long ago God reached out his hand to bless me and my family. When He did I looked at his hand: "it was covered with scratches. Such is the hand of love, extended to those who are bitter.” God’s hand reached out to us has nail-prints in it.³

In his perfect love, God sanctifies us. John wrote, “...he has given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13). Our Pastor Emeritus, Les Collins chooses as one of his favorite songs, Melody and Keith Green’s words: “Thank you Oh my Father for giving us your Son and leaving your Spirit until the work on earth is done.”⁴

Finally, God in his perfect love saves us. God had every right to punish us (Ephesians 2:1-7). As one of our students (Michael Glasgow) preached at a student service out in a pasture in Waller, Texas earlier this year: this means our sin deserved death. Jesus was able to be our sacrifice because he lived the life we could not live, so that he could die the death we should have died.

Isaiah told us that God says, “Come now, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Instead of punishing, God chose to love and forgive and transform us.

Norman Vincent Peale envisioned God’s sending, saving love this way:

The father might have said to his only begotten Son, “Son I hate to see you go. I sure am going to miss you. I love you with all my heart. But I do want you to go down to earth and tell those poor souls down there how to live and point them to

the cross that will lead them back home.” The last thing the Father said to the Son, “Give them all my love.”⁵

Well he did! Jesus, the Son, gave all of us all of God’s love. But now that he has built the house of love, shouldn’t we live there? People who know and receive God’s love then choose to love others.

Disciples Love Others Fearlessly (1 John 4:11-12; 16-21)

Of course Christians ought to love each other (1 John 4:7, 11). John explained that when we love, God is living in us and completing his love in us (1 John 4:12, 16). John wanted his hearers to know that God is love and if we abide in love - we abide in God and God in us. In other words, God’s love in us is never mature or complete or perfect until we become a conduit through which it flows.

In Israel, the Jordan River flows both into the Sea of Galilee which teems with life, and the Dead Sea which stagnates in death. The difference is what the body of water does. The Jordan flows *through* the Sea of Galilee but it *stops* in the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea does nothing with the water because it is a container, not a conduit. What are we doing with God’s love? We can be like the Dead Sea with no outlet, or we can be like the Sea of Galilee with God’s love flowing through us giving life to others.

People from other countries sometimes complain about the inability of Americans to be friends. We may say, “Time is money.” But it takes time to be friends. We may have to sacrifice and share as well to have friends.

One man had 700 friends on Facebook and he invited them to RSVP for coffee with him: “Yes, Maybe, or No.” Fifteen said they would come, while sixty thought they might come. One solitary woman showed up who was a friend of a friend. The man lamented, “I have 700 friends and I am drinking coffee alone.”

When we love, the hatred which grows from fear has to leave. Why do people hate? Isn’t it because we fear? John makes this connection. We fear judgment until we believe God loves us (4:17). The reality is that God loves us as he loves his Firstborn, Jesus. As he is, so are we in the world. Once we let go of the fear that God hates us, then we are free from fear to love others and not to hate. In fact, a person who continues to hate others can never grow as a disciple. Someone will say, “Well I was born with these prejudices.” The gospel says, “*You were born again to let them go.*”

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, "Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear; only love can do that. Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love lights it."⁶ Along the same lines, Anne Lamott wrote, “You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”⁷

My favorite scene in the book *Les Miserables* comes early when Jean Valjean tries to steal from the priest who has given him food and rest. The gendarmes capture Valjean before he gets very far and bring him back to the priest. They smile as they say, “He said you gave him the silverware . . .” The priest inexplicably refuses to seek justice saying instead, “Did you forget the candlesticks? I told you to take them as well.”

The gendarmes are surprised as the priest sends them on their way. Only the thief and the priest and God remain on the stage. And the priest says, “Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man.... Jean Valjean, my brother: you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God!”⁸

And Valjean, simultaneously destroyed and redeemed by the priest’s love, becomes an honest man.

Valjean loves the forsaken prostitute Fontine and cares for her daughter Cosette, making her his own daughter through kindness at great cost to himself. He is kind to his enemy Jalvert and ultimately kills him with kindness. This is what disciples do. We love.

Conclusion

Todd Boling tells about his grandfather and grandmother one Christmas when he was a boy. They had lived simple lives but one Christmas, Todd’s grandfather splurged and bought his wife the very finest coat. When she lifted it out of the enormous box, Todd’s grandmother began to cry. She gently took her husband’s face in her hands and kissed his forehead and softly said, “It’s exquisite . . . I love it . . . thank you, my love.” Her grandson Todd was watching.

A few days later he was even more affected by his grandmother and others going to the mall for the after-Christmas sale. She looked like royalty in her new coat. As they left the mall, they passed a woman quite dirty and cold sitting on the curb. Grandmother left the children together at the car and walked over to the woman. She draped her new coat around her shoulders gently held her face in her hands and kissed her softly on the forehead just as she had kissed her husband. To this day they have never talked about it, but the self-giving love influenced her grandson.⁹

What would make a person love like that? She had been loved and she shared that love. This is God’s story with us.

Is it our story with others?

Meet the Writer: Dr. Duane Brooks

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Duane was called to preach while in middle school in Germany and ordained in Great Falls, Montana. He has served as pastor in four Texas Baptist churches - New Hope Baptist Church in Cedar Park, Williams Creek Baptist Church in Mart, and Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Rosebud. Duane and his wife, Melanie, have two sons, Graham and Chase, and a daughter, Casey.

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¹Catherine Martin. *Trusting in the Names of God* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008), 34.

²Josiah Conder, "Untitled." in *Songs of Grace and Glory, for Private, Family, and Public Worship* (London: W. Hunt & Co., 1872), 719.

³Fred B. Craddock. *The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 244-45.

⁴Melody Green. "There Is a Redeemer" in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 279.

⁵ Quoted by Thomas Shepherd in "A House Divided," *Rev. Thomas Shepherd's Theology Blog*, 25 October 2006, <http://revtom-theo-blog.blogspot.com/2006/10/house-divided.html> as cited in Peter Rhea Jones. *1, 2 & 3 John* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2009), 196-97.

⁶ Martin Luther King Jr. and Clayborne Carson. *The Papers* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 2007), 541.

⁷ Ann Lamott. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Anchor, 1995), 22.

⁸ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*. Trans. Lee Fahnestock, Norman MacAfee, and Charles E. Wilbour (New York, NY: Signet Classic, 1987), 104-6.

⁹ Peter Rhea Jones. *1, 2 & 3 John* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2009), 198.