

GETTING BETTER AT LOVING PEOPLE

1 Thessalonians 3:12

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. One time Jesus was challenged to choose the greatest commandment of all. The Jews had identified 613 commands in the Old Testament. They challenged Jesus to select the one that was the greatest, the most important of all. He said, "First, love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Second, love your neighbor as yourself." Today we are going to talk about that second commandment – loving others.

II. TEXT:

1. **1 Thessalonians 3:12** "And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you."

III. FOUR FACTS ABOUT LOVING BETTER

1. We are called to be characterized by love.

- i. Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His prayers reveal what God wants for us. According to this prayer, God wants us to be characterized by love. Christians are to be people of love.
 1. **1 Corinthians 14:1 (NLT)** "Let love be your highest goal."
 2. **1 Corinthians 16:14** "Do everything in love."
 3. **Colossians 3:14** "Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."
- ii. What is love? The Greek word used here for love is *agape*. Agape love is doing what is best for people and meeting their needs.
- iii. Seven Truths About Biblical Love
 1. Love is a command. A Christian should never say, "I can't love that person." Or "I refuse to love that person." We have to love that person.
 2. Love is an action. Love includes feelings and words and emotions, but it goes beyond that. When God says to love your neighbor, He's not commanding you to feel good about them, or to merely tell them that you love them. He wants you to act lovingly toward them – to do what is best for them and to meet their needs.
 3. Love is a choice. It is a deliberate choice of the will. In other words, love is not dependent upon feelings. We don't show love only when we feel love. We choose to love regardless of how we feel.
 4. Love is unmerited. We don't love people because of their performance, or because they deserve it. We love them unconditionally.

5. Love is free. We don't love and expect something in return. We don't expect to be paid back. We love for free.
6. Love is obedient to God. Love does not say, "If you love me you will commit this sin for me." Love does not say, "I broke God's commands because I love you." Love conforms to the character and will of God. If you contract God's character or break His commands, your behavior is not loving.
7. Love is sacrificial. The person who loves is willing to endure hardship and pain for the benefit of the other. Love is willing to hurt; it is willing to be uncomfortable; it is willing to be inconvenienced for the loved one.

2. God wants us to grow in love.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 3:12** "And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you."
- ii. The fact that Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is praying for us to love better, means that God wants us to grow in love. To get better at love.
- iii. This means that it is possible for all Christians to get better at loving. No matter where you are in your spiritual life, you can get better at love. You may be very selfish; very impatient; very mean; but you can grow and become mature at loving others. You may watch other Christians who are full of love and think, "I wish I could be so loving." You can be. You can grow. You can become Christlike too.
- iv. Is it possible for Christians to be unloving?
 1. If God wants us to grow, then that means that not all Christians are good at loving others. Some are mature. Some are immature. Some are experts. Some are novices. Some are masters. Some are beginners. Some are excellent. Some are sloppy and inconsistent.
 2. This explains why Christians sometimes do mean things. The church has Christians at all different maturities in it. Some are very loving, others have a lot of room for growth.
 3. You shouldn't be shocked or leave the church when someone in the church hurts us. We're all at different levels of love. Don't expect everyone in the church to be an expert lover. Don't expect everyone who calls themselves a Christian to be an expert lover.
 4. Instead, the Bible commands us to forgive one another and be patient with one another (Col 3:12-13). Because forgiveness is an expression of love, too. They may have failed to love by hurting you, but you will also fail to love if you are bitter and leave the church.
 5. Remember that in the church we are learning to love better, and we are practicing on each other.

- v. There are two ways that God wants us to grow in love:
 - 1. “And may the Lord cause your love to increase”. God wants you to grow in your ability to love. He wants you to grow in your capacity to love.
 - a. Your love ability or love capacity is like a gas tank. Your gas tank determines how far your car can travel. If you want to go further, you will need a bigger, larger gas tank. Your love ability determines how loving you are. If you want to get better at loving, your love ability, or your love capacity has to grow.
 - b. How do you grow your love ability?
 - i. Your affection must increase.
 - 1. To grow in love, your feelings for others must become more loving.
 - 2. While love is not dependent upon feelings and emotions, the right feelings and emotions help love to grow. Affection is like wind beneath the wings of love; it is like throwing gasoline on the fire of love.
 - 3. The reason many struggle to love is because they lack affection for others. They don’t feel love for others. When you don’t feel love, it is harder to show love.
 - 4. How do you increase your affection toward others? You must learn to see people the way that God does.
 - 5. Actions are driven by emotions, and emotions are driven by thoughts. As you learn to think the correctly about people, you will feel correctly, and in turn you will behave correctly.
 - 6. How does God want us to see people?
 - a. Every person is loved equally by God.
 - b. Jesus died on the cross for every person.
 - c. Every person is made in the image of God and is equally valuable in the eyes of God, regardless of race, sex, age, income, religion, attractiveness, or education.
 - d. Every person has the same ancestors.
 - e. Every person has the same race. There is only one race – the human race. We

- just have different facial features and skin tones.
- f. God wants every person to be saved.
 - g. Every Christian is your brother or sister in Christ.
 - h. Every non-Christian is your potential brother or sister in Christ.
7. As you begin to think biblically about people, your feelings about them will change. You will start to feel affection for people, and your actions will follow.
- ii. Your understanding must increase.
- 1. For your love ability to grow, your understanding of love must grow. That's what makes sermons like this one so important.
 - 2. It is possible to want to love others, but not know how, and therefore do more harm than good. For example, if you want to love God but don't know how, you might go out do something terrible in the name of love, such as kill an abortion doctor. But God would hate such an action.
 - 3. There are many misconceptions about love.
 - a. Agape love is not the same as liking someone. You're supposed to love people even if you don't like them. You don't have to like someone to love them. Think about a parent. Does a father always like his children? Not when they are being disobedient. But he still loves them.
 - b. Agape love is not the same as approving of someone's behavior. You can love somebody and hate their sin at the same time. Is it unloving for a husband to disapprove of his wife's behavior? What if she was using drugs? What if she was abusing the children? What if she was unfaithful? A husband can love his wife even if he disapproves of some of her behaviors.

- c. Agape love is not the same as agreeing with somebody. You can disagree with somebody and still love them. I don't agree with my wife on everything; I think she's wrong on some things; but that doesn't mean I don't love her.
 - d. Agape love is not being a doormat. Love doesn't mean that you always have to let the other person have their way. Love knows how and when to say, "No." Love has boundaries. Love has consequences. Love is tough.
- 4. Let's go back to the definition of love and add to it. Earlier I said that love is doing what is best for others and meeting their needs. Let's add a couple of things to increase our understanding of love.
 - a. Love is doing what's best for others, not what makes them feel good.
 - b. Love is meeting people's needs, not their wants.
- 5. If you apply these two statements to parenting you will see how they make sense. Loving your kids means that sometimes you're going to do things that make them feel bad initially, like go to school, do their homework, clean their room, and get a spanking. Those things aren't unloving because you are doing what's best for them. And loving your kids means that you're not going to give them everything they want. They don't know what's best for them; sometimes they will want things that are bad for them. At times you will have to deny them, and even give them things they don't want. But you are being a loving parent because you are meeting their needs.
- 2. "and overflow". God wants you to grow in your application of love. He wants your love to grow so much that it overflows from you and touches others. He wants you to grow more loving in your actual attitudes and actions toward others. This means more meeting of needs; more sharing burdens; more helping people. How do we grow

in our overflow, or application of love? You need to get in close contact with people. You need to rub shoulders with people

- a. You can have a huge capacity for love, and a deep understanding of love, but if you are not in close contact with people then you won't have anybody to love.
- b. One of the best ways to grow in love is to get involved in church. There you will meet people, build deep relationships with people, and you will find many opportunities to express the love that God has put in your heart.
- c. When I say get involved in church, I mean arrive early and stay late; be there every time the doors are open; volunteer in a regular ministry (like the Greeting Team, or Hospitality Team, or Offering Team, or Take-down Team); and get in a Home Group.

3. God wants us to love everyone.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 3:12** "And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you."
- ii. Paul mentions two groups of people that we need to love: One another and everyone. "One another" refers to other Christians. Everyone refers to non-Christians. In other words, God wants us to love everyone.
- iii. Our love is to be supernatural. There is a natural love, and a supernatural love.
- iv. Four Marks of Natural Love:
 1. It loves people who are like you.
 2. It loves people who are nice to you.
 3. It loves people who are related to you.
 4. It loves people who have something you want.
- v. This is a natural love – a love that comes naturally. You don't need God's help. It's easy to love these people. It takes no effort. Even an unbeliever can show natural love.
- vi. God wants us to surpass natural love and live in a supernatural way. He wants us to love the way He loves, empowered by His strength. He wants you to love people who are different from you; people who are mean to you; people who are not related to you; people who can't help or benefit you in any way.
- vii. God wants you to love people of other skin colors; other political views; other religious beliefs; people with disabilities; poor people; uneducated people; unattractive people; old people; young people; people with other styles; people from other nations; even wicked people.

- viii. Because before Christ, that was us, and Jesus loved us. We were His enemies; so different from Him; with nothing to offer Him; totally ignorant and evil; unattractive; ignorant; and yet He loved us by dying for us.
- ix. When we love like this, we love like God. We show the world what God is like, and we can point the cross as our inspiration.
- x. Let us pray as Paul did, that God would help us to get better at loving others.