

Heather Loewen  
Discipleship and Ethics  
Professor Mark Baker  
February 8, 2017

Ethical Exhortation: Overwhelmed by Love

*“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us”*

*~ 1 John 4:8-10a (ESV)*

God is love. Though perhaps repeated too frequently for us to truly hear, this statement is nonetheless brimming with meaning. Who God is, how he relates to us, and by extension, who we are is encapsulated in these three words. But what does God-love look like? What does John mean when he states that a person who does not love does not know God? To better understand let us first examine the love of God.

God’s love for us is neither determined by whether or not we love Him in return, nor is it constrained by our unworthiness. He brings the sun and rain to nurture the land of the wicked as well as the good. The span of His care encompasses all of humanity. He looks at the world, broken, weary, angry, rebellious, sinful humanity, and the sight moves His loving heart to save us from our sin, to heal us, to show us who we were made to be, and to draw us into a relationship with Himself. He did not come to condemn. God’s love is merciful. We are secure in His love. God loved us while we were enemies, while we lived in sin. We do not need to prove ourselves or try to be worthy. We are already pursued. We are already cared for. We are already loved.

God’s love for us is the same love he showed to Saul as he persecuted the church. As Saul ravaged the body of Christ, Christ reached down to Saul and chose him for a special position of ministry. In Saul’s state of utter sinfulness, God chose to forgive rather than hold his failings against him. With mercy and love, Christ invited Paul into a conversation and a relationship and Paul became one of the leading apostles. Throughout his letters, Paul continued to marvel at the depths of forgiveness and love shown towards him. After his conversion, Paul still failed at times and the sin within him would sometimes cause him to do evil. Nonetheless, God remained faithful to save Paul and remain in relationship with him. This is the kind of love that God has toward us.

Because God’s love is so profound we do not need to fear losing it. Nothing on heaven or earth can take it from us. After we come to Christ, God’s love for us does not suddenly change or become dependent upon our performance. He remains faithful regardless of our struggle with faithlessness. By saving us from our sin once and for all, God also frees us from our fruitless attempts to save ourselves through good works. We are not asked to climb up a staircase of personal righteousness to draw close to God. On the contrary, God has already come to us. Our Christian walk is simply a relationship.

The incredible love that God has for us defines who we are. We are loved. We are free. We are cared for. Even in our sin, God provides for, treasures, and rescues us. Now that we have turned to Him, we simply have stepped into a life within that reality. A life where we draw ever closer to Him as His love continues to fulfill and overwhelm us. We have been powerfully brought from death into this glorious life. Live! Live as the people you are: unchained from slavery to sin, fear, rejection, religion, or hardship. We now live through Christ and His love. His

mercy and faithfulness give us the strength to also love like He has loved. The Spirit of God now indwells us, guiding us into relationship and into love.

How then shall we respond when we face enemies? We have been accepted and loved by Christ even when we ourselves were enemies of the gospel and opposed to all that is good. We have been made whole and saved by love. Will we refuse to love others as we have been loved? We who know God have been given the power to love even those who hate and harm us. All we must do is allow what has been given to us to overflow for the benefit of others. To the person in your life who belittled and discredited you; show love. To the parent that mistreated, abused, or abandoned you; show love. To the people who have hurt you or your loved ones; show love. You are loved and forgiven. Be who the Spirit has empowered you to be. Be who you are. Love.

Charity Calahan  
Discipleship & Ethics  
Ethical Exhortation: final draft  
February 15, 2017

Possible chapel message to a class of 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> graders at a small Christian school

Good morning, friends! It's so great to be here with you this morning. When I was thinking about what to share with you today, I was having trouble coming up with the right topic. Then I thought about you guys and the things you would often come to me about, and I suddenly knew what I wanted to share. This morning, we are going to talk about our words.

Words matter. For starters, we have the Bible, which we frequently call the Word of God. It tells us who God is, who we are to God, and who He created us to be. It's full of encouragement, guidance for life, warnings of destructive living, and endless grace and love that God the Father delights to lavish on us. Words mean something—the Word of God means something. Words leave lasting impressions on us and have the power to lift us up or tear us down, to heal our wounds or create them, to build trust or birth doubt.

You all know this to be true. Everyday you're out there on the playground with your friends. Everyone is having a good time, you're playing a fun game you made up together, running around, being creative and silly—it's all good. Then someone says something that somebody else doesn't like. Maybe someone is accused of cheating, not playing by the rules, or someone is being bossy and you don't want to play with them anymore, so you let them know. Or maybe you're in the classroom and you didn't do as well on that spelling test as you had hoped and a classmate makes a mean comment, making you feel stupid. In each case words are spoken, feelings are hurt, and friendships are often called into question. I want you all take a moment and think of a time when something like that happened to you.

There's an old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." In the example you just thought of, did words hurt you? Of course they did. When people say mean things, they hurt us. I think we often try to protect ourselves from other's words, pretending that their hurtful words can't get to us. But the reality is that whatever was spoken probably did hurt and make us feel bad. We all know what it's like to be on the receiving end of hurtful words. It's not fun and it doesn't feel good. It can make us believe lies about who we are, about who our friends are, and about who God is. It's yucky and can make us feel sick to our stomach. And you know what? I'm glad. I'm glad it doesn't feel good because that tells us that

something is wrong, that it isn't what God created us for and, more importantly, that it can be changed with God's help.

Okay, so we all get that words can hurt. Now, on the other side of that coin we find that words spoken in love can also give life and be an encouragement. How many of you, when you were hurt by someone else's words, went to share your hurt with another friend (or maybe a teacher, parent or sibling, etc.) who then comforted you with words of love and kindness? Maybe they reminded you of how awesome you are and how much you are loved. Maybe they reminded you that people don't always mean what they say and whatever was spoken is false. Maybe they even gently helped you to see how you may have been wrong in your own words, encouraging you to apologize and repair the hurt you may have caused. So now I want you to take a minute and think of a time when someone used their words to make you feel good inside. I can tell by the looks on your faces that this was a much better experience!

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he writes, "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:29-32, NLT).

This is what God's best looks like for us, who He created us to be. Loving each other, building each other up to be the best that we can be. Through the words of Paul, God is calling you and me to love with our words because of who we are in Christ. We belong to God, he has identified us as his own! Our identity in Christ frees us to love others because we know how loved we are ourselves. We can be so full of Jesus' love and kindness toward us that we overflow and share it with those around us. This not only brings joy and life to those around us, but it also fills us with even more joy because we are becoming who He created us to be.

A school teacher friend of mine recently shared with me how he encourages students to use their words wisely. He encourages them to THINK before they speak. If you take the letters T-H-I-N-K, they can help you remember what we've been talking about. T, are your words true? H, are they helpful? I, are they inspiring? N, are your words necessary? And K, are they kind? (repeat acronym to help them remember)

My friends, what do your words sound like? Are you THINKing before you speak so that your words are good and honoring to God? Let us pay more attention to our words this week and practice being kind and encouraging. Let us be friends who are known for how well we support and encourage each other, being a community of grace and kindness. Let us also remember that we belong to Jesus and there is grace and forgiveness for us when we don't use words wisely. I encourage you to write down Ephesians 4:29-32, and put it somewhere where you will see it often and be reminded to THINK before you speak. Let's close in a word of prayer.