

OBSESSIVE LOVE DEUT 12:12-22

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the person who wrote the best book on discipleship: *The Cost of Discipleship* has been so influential to Christianity and is so foundational for *The Just Life* that I thought it might be helpful to look at some of his key ideas.

Published in 1937, *The Cost of Discipleship* grew out of Bonhoeffer's seminars, sermons, and study groups he was a part of as the world around him seemed to be self-destructing.

Bonhoeffer knew that following Jesus meant a response of obedience, not merely a confession of faith in Jesus. Following Jesus meant participating in Jesus' life and ministry, as well as in his death and resurrection. "When Christ calls a man," says Dietrich, "he bids him come and die." He modeled that in the way he lived and died. His ideas were just as powerful as his witness:

As a good Lutheran, Bonhoeffer grew up hearing the famous Reformation rallying cry. We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ! And he wouldn't have argued with it. But he DID have a problem with Christians who taught and/or thought that, since we don't have to do anything to be "saved," therefore we don't have to do anything at all. That, he said, is cheap grace.

"Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord's Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ."

Bonhoeffer contrasts cheap grace with what he calls "costly grace," grace that is always connected to discipleship.

"It is costly because it calls to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live. It is costly, because it condemns sin; it is grace, because it justifies the sinner. Above all, grace is costly, because it was costly to God, because it costs God the life of God's Son—you were bought with a price'- and because nothing can be cheap to us which is costly to God."

The gift of salvation can never be separated from the call to follow Jesus. We don't have to do anything to be saved; that is a gift! But this gift sets us free to answer Christ's call to love God and serve our neighbor. We are called and set free to give ourselves away for the sake of others. We are called and set free to follow Christ.

"It is not enough for man simply to recover right ideas about God, or to obey his will in the isolated actions of his life. No, man must be refashioned as a living whole in the image of God. His whole for, body, soul, and spirit, must once more bear that image on earth."

Nor is discipleship something reserved only for an elite or monastic class of Christians "called" to such commitment. Those who answer the call are not monks but are Christians.

No, the call of discipleship is inseparable from grace. Bonhoeffer instructs that the only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ.

When we answer Christ's call to follow, Bonhoeffer reminded us, it is like finding a treasure hidden in a field or a pearl of great price. It is worth leaving your nets behind. It is an easy burden to bear.

The Great Commission: "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20, emphasis added).

The guiding force in Bonhoeffer's life, underlying all that he did, worked and suffered for, was his faith and love of God in whom he found peace and happiness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested in March 1943 for his part in attempts to assassinate Adolf Hitler, he was imprisoned and eventually hanged just before the end of WWII. He had an obsessive love for God.

I am sure most everyone has heard of OCD or obsessive compulsive disorder. If you have ever watched the USA TV series "Monk," you have observed a person who really has OCD. I tell people I have CDO. They ask what is that? I tell them that is OCD but in alphabetical order. I do have a mild case of OCD. I have applied it to different areas of my life such as my car. The inside of my car was the only place I had some control so I kept it really clean and no one could eat, drink or smoke inside my car. I finally gave that up. Right now my OCD is manifesting itself in the light switches in our house. I do not know who it was that decided we needed two light switches to control one light but it bothers me to no end that the kitchen has two light switches and the light to the stairs leading down to the rest of the house has two light switches so I am forever making sure that the switches are in the correct position which is flipping the light switch UP to turn it on and DOWN to turn it off. It does not bother Sherri but it bothers me.

Obsessive behavior Can be bad and can be good. I have been accused of being obsessive in my love for God. I have been at certain times, more or less, obsessed with loving God. I always will be because I am always amazed at what God has done for me through the person and work of Jesus Christ. No one has ever died for me or shown their love for me to the degree Jesus did on the cross. The text today reveals that even in the days of Moses God was calling His people to the high standard of loving God with everything we have and are. When people ask about the law of love and they want me to give them a list I remind them that there is no list. When you are in love you know what to do. There was a 15 year old boy, named Carl. Every night Carl would come to the supper table ready to chow down, and as usual his hands were dirty and his hair was all messed up. He was all sweaty and nasty. And as usual, his mom says, "Carl, you can't eat until you've washed your hands, fixed your hair and cleaned up a bit?" And that's the routine, every night, it never fails.

But then one night, Carl's mom is setting the table and putting out the fried chicken and she notices a drastic change. Carl comes in with clean hands, a styling hairdo, wearing an Old Navy

sweater and khakis instead of his dingy T-shirt and basketball shorts, and he's even wearing cologne. Before the next meal, the same thing happens. Carl comes in all spiffed up, smelling good, and this time he even shaved the peach fuzz off of his face. Carl's mom knows something's going down. What's the deal? Carl is in love. He's found a girl.

Love is a very peculiar thing. It's been estimated that there are nearly five million words in the English language. However, there is only one word in our language for love. This word is supposed to span the entire spectrum. This one word is supposed to give description to our feelings about our baby sister and the way we feel about our favorite food. The same word that's used to say what you think about McDonald's french fries is the same word that we use to say what God thinks about us. Something is very wrong with this picture. I can say, "I love football," and I can say, "I love Sherri." But do I love football the same way that I love Sherri? In other languages, they may have as many as seven words for our one word love. Bible writers used four different Greek words for love, and I want to focus on them differently than before.

The four Greek words for love are:

- A. Eros- physical love; married love; mutual desire between a man and a woman;
- B. Storge- family love;
- C. Phileo- the love of friendship, the affection we feel for people in friendly relationships;
- D. Agape- divine love.

Divine Love is unselfish love. Before Jesus was crucified, Peter denied Jesus three times, so after Jesus had risen from the dead, Jesus asked Peter to confess his love for Him three times. The first time Jesus asked, "Peter, do you love me?" He used a new word for love: agape. He was talking about a particular non-emotional type of love that was by choice, by an act of the will- Peter didn't understand what he meant. So he answered, "Yes, Lord, I have a phileo for you." But that's not what Jesus was asking. The word agape was a word that didn't even exist. It's not in secular writings, in philosophy, Aristotle didn't write about it, Hippocrates didn't know what it was, it wasn't in any Greek literature.

The word agape was created to describe the concept of divine love. Everybody during Jesus' time knew that eros meant married love, that storge meant family love, and phileo meant friendly love. But they had no idea about the agape kind of love. Peter said he had phileo for Jesus because that was all he had. He only had the feeling, and he couldn't understand agape. There needed to be a word in Jesus' day to describe the totally unselfish love of God toward His people. Agape was that word. God's agape love gives and gives, then gives some more, never asking for anything in return. There was no word, until agape, that described exactly what we see in the character of God, someone that gives without ulterior motives, without seeking something in return. Agape is love that is not based on emotions or feelings. It is actually a love by choice. Agape gives us the ability to love the unlovely.

Agape love doesn't change. It's always the same. There's nothing you can do to make God love you more. There's nothing you can do to make God love you less. He loves you just the way you are. Agape is not based on performance. Agape love is unconditional. Think about how that would affect the way our world operates. Everybody wins and nobody ever loses. Now lets try

an experiment here. What if we got in our scientific laboratories and mixed up a few potions? Remember the song Love Potion Number 9? We are going to mix our own love potions. Our 3 base liquids are eros, storge, and phileo. We've got them in our test tubes. We know the essence of each. Our other ingredient is agape. Add a drop of agape to each of our base liquids. What would we come up with? Liquid number one. Eros + agape = erosagape. What does that look like? Married unconditional love. Agape combined with eros will make a marriage relationship that is heaven on earth. The husband will never cause his wife to endure physical or verbal abuse. He will never be critical of her. Because he loves her with agape love, he will never cause her harm. The husband and wife are looking out for each other's best interests. Next mixture number—Storgeagape? What does it look like? When agape gets into the family, it says, "This family is not to be maneuvered, manipulated, hurt or torn apart." Your parents won't need to ground you because you will be obedient. They'll protect you and not make you spend every night cooking for yourself. Brothers and sisters wouldn't argue and beat the stuffing out of each other. Add a little agape to the mixture and the dysfunctional family will become the ideal family.

What about the next potion - phileoagape? You won't have fair-weather friends. Agape and phileo form a tie that will hold a friendship together no matter what happens. You'll have true friends that stick with you through thick and thin. Add agape to these different types of love and you get love that gives and gives and gives. But wait, you said agape was divine love, that means it's God's love, not people love. Agape is divine love, but the truth is, you CAN love like that.

Romans 5:5 "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." The Holy Spirit has poured out the love of God in our hearts. That means we all have the ability to love like God. Why don't we?

Max Lucado's focus on love crystallized into something he calls "The 7:47 Principle." Lucado says, "I take the name for this principle from the story of the woman who washed the feet of Jesus." This remarkable example of love, found in Luke 7:36-47, takes place at a dinner where Jesus has been snubbed by his host. A woman comes in uninvited, holding a jar of perfume. She washes and wipes Jesus' feet with her tears and hair, then pours perfume on them. The host becomes angry, and Jesus teaches an important lesson.

He says, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair... You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Her love overflowed from gratitude for His forgiveness. The Pharisee, on the other hand, who did not believe he required forgiveness, probably didn't think the woman deserved it. And there you have the 7:47 Principle: "He who has been forgiven little loves little."

Lucado points out, "Yet as shocking as this may sound, we try **not** to be forgiven. We say it is more blessed to give than to receive—it's also easier and less humble. First, let God be kind to you and forgive you. Then you will have a love worth giving away."

William Gladstone, in announcing the death of Princess Alice to the House of Commons, told a touching story. The little daughter of the Princess was seriously ill with diphtheria. The doctors told the princess not to kiss her little daughter and endanger her life by breathing the child's breath. Once when the child was struggling to breathe, the mother, forgetting herself entirely, took the little one into her arms to keep her from choking to death. Rasping and struggling for her life, the child said, "Momma, kiss me!" Without thinking of herself the mother tenderly kissed her daughter. She got diphtheria and some days thereafter she went to be forever with the Lord. Obsessive love forgets self. Obsessive love knows no danger. Obsessive love doesn't count the cost. The Bible says, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." When you love like that then you will have an obsessive love.