

Unconditional Love

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Seven Uncharacteristics That Can Change the World in 2017 – Lesson One

“Greek to me.” As this lesson developed over the last few days and many hours at this keyboard, I began to get concerned the seven things below I refer to as **uncharacteristics** might too easily fall into the “Christian-speak” category. You know what I mean – biblical words or phrases so frequently used in the church they have become almost pedestrian, lacking the impact and effect the Author intended. To make matters worse, unchurched people do not know what they mean anyway. “Greek to me.”

We know there is nothing pedestrian or mundane in the words of God no matter how frequently we read or hear them. That is, of course, unless wax buildup dulls our hearing and calcification has begun in and around our hearts.

So, my challenging goal for this lesson is to present seven well-known and oft-discussed characteristics of biblical Christians that have become so uncharacteristic in our lives the world is either unimpressed or confused. Unimpressed because our lives appear just as miserable as theirs. Confused by our words and deeds.

Let’s get hammered! Forget about New Year’s resolutions you may have already broken two weeks in. Choose a loftier goal. Purpose and pray that the Lord will use you to help change the world in 2017. That begins by allowing Him to change us. And that change is wrought only by the power of the Holy Spirit. I learned as a former materials science and metallurgy student, the word wrought means metal worked into shape by hammering or forging, often with great heat and pressure. Here it would be appropriate to say, “Beating the hell of me.” In that case,

let's get hammered! God's way. That may sound a bit crude to some, but if that is what it takes to forge change, so be it.

Following is the first of seven characteristics, the application of which in our lives, would change our world.

After several days spent developing and writing this one, it became obvious this is a series not one overly lengthy lesson.

I hope that makes some breathe easier and helps you focus and absorb more of this one –“the first and foremost”.

Unconditional Love. No matter who...

This characteristic or attribute is almost always associated solely with God. Only He can and does love without condition...no matter who or what. Then why list it as something uncharacteristic in our lives that should be present if we have no chance to be successful, i.e., love that way? Since most will not like the answer, let's begin with Jesus' words that have direct application to us regarding this most difficult kind of love.

Consider two people, very familiar to Christians, Jesus used to confront unloving, hateful religious people that point directly to our lives more than two thousand years later: The Good Samaritan and the woman at the well.

Coming out of the most bitter and divisive political year in our history, you may find it interesting that both examples I used have political and racial overtones. Jesus was not into politics as seen on several occasions in Scripture. His only alignment was with His Father, not left nor right. But to make His point about the way God defines love in what He called the greatest commandments, Jesus used people completely repugnant to Jews.

The Greatest Commandment: “And He said to him, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR

NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22: 37-40 NASB

The Good Samaritan. This parable came out of another text in which someone quoted these verses to Jesus. (Luke 10) When the man asked, "Who is my neighbor?", Jesus told this famous story. It was a highly inflammatory story to Jews, especially religious leaders. You may recall the bad guys were the two religious Jews who passed by on the other side of the road because they wanted nothing to do with the man. The good guy in the story was a Samaritan. Jesus could not have picked a worse choice for the hero. You know how the story ends. Jesus asked the man who questioned Him which man acted like a neighbor. His response was the one (Samaritan) who showed love (mercy) to the wounded man. Notice he did not say the word Samaritan.

Jesus' response was profoundly simple, *"Go and love/live that way."* (paraphrase)

The Woman at the well. (John 4: 1-42) The Apostle John recorded a very long account of this story, particularly given the fact that it involved a hated, despised people – the Samaritans. (That was very intentional to get people of Jesus' day to understand love as it relates to racial prejudice and political bias.) Jesus had to walk through the region of Samaria to get back home. Many religious Jews actually walked around it to go north.

As He passed through, Jesus sat down by Jacob's well and a Samaritan woman came to get water. Crossing all cultural boundaries – speaking to a Samaritan and a woman – He asked her to give Him a drink. She was shocked as were His disciples when they returned. Jews do not talk to or even acknowledge Samaritans, especially rabbis, as many referred to Jesus.

Now pay close attention to the amazing, far-reaching impact and results of that simple one on one encounter.

"So the (Samaritan) woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to Him...Many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony...So when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." (excerpted from John 4)

Wow and wow again. Christ gave His disciples (that includes us) these two simple examples of what unconditional love looks like no matter who is on the receiving end. Remember we were all as "Samaritans", lost sinful people before God, until the blood of Christ redeemed and made us acceptable in His sight.

Loving the "Deplorables." Remember that word used to describe many of us during the election season? I thought it would be appropriate to close this part of the lesson with one more verse that expresses the heart of Jesus toward "deplorables" of His day who are more like us that we will admit.

'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25:40 NASB)

Mission Impossible: Unconditional love was not a suggestion from Jesus. It was a command. And He knew it was an impossible one to follow. Unconditional love is not in the heart of man. It resides in and flows only from the heart of God. Therein we find the answer.

"We love because He first loved us." (I John 4: 9 NASB)

Knowing this, God, in His unconditional love, pours out His love into the hearts of those of us who are in Christ and willing to follow His example humbling ourselves before God

and man. We know we were among “the deplorables” before Christ. If we have received Christ, we have received the Holy Spirit from Whom comes power to produce His first-fruit...**love**. (Galatians 5:23)

Jesus said this is coupled with the first and foremost commandment. That makes it the most important characteristic of those who love Christ first and best, and the first step in changing our world.

Written with love from your brother, once deplorable now adorable, and unconditionally loved by our Father,

Walter

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