What is Love...?: Dr. Harmon

I John 4:7-21
7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 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. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Excerpt from Marguerite de Navarre, Heptaméron, Nouvelle VIII (published posthumously in 1558)

“Hircon,” said Dagoucin, “I mean to say that if our love is based on the beauty, good grace, love, and favor of a woman and if our goal is pleasure, honor, or profit, that love cannot last long. For when that upon which we base it fails, our love vanishes. But I am firmly of the opinion that he who loves and has no other goal or desire than to love well, will sooner let his soul depart in death than let this strong love go out of his heart.”

“Well,” said Simontault, “I don’t believe you have ever been in love, for if you had felt the flame like other men, you would not be painting for us the republic of Plato, who wrote but did not experiment at all.”

“Yes, I have loved,” replied Dagoucin; “I love still and will love as long as I live. But I am so afraid that showing it would harm the perfection of my love, that I dread it becoming known to her of whom I should desire a similar sentiment. I dare not even think my thought, lest my eyes reveal something of it; for the more I keep this flame hidden and covered, the more pleasure I feel in knowing that I love perfectly.”

“Yet I suppose you would be very glad to be loved in return?” said Geburon.

“I do not deny it,” said Dagoucin, “but as nothing could diminish my love, though I love much and am not loved, so it could not be augmented, even were I loved as much I love.”
The Way of Love: Dr. Harvey

“If God loves the world, might that not be proved in my own love for it? I prayed to know in my heart His love for the world, and this was my most pridelful, foolish, and dangerous prayer. It was my step into the abyss. As soon as I prayed it, I knew that I would die. I knew the old wrong and the death that lay in the world. Just as a good man would not coerce the love of his wife, God does not coerce the love of His human creatures, not for himself or for the world of for one another. To allow that love is suffering. It is our freedom and His sorrow. To love the world as much as even I could love it would be suffering also, for I would fail. And yet all the good I know is in this, that a man might so love the world that it would break his heart.”

~Wendell Berry, Jayber Crow.

“In Scripture the virtues are called ‘ways’. The greatest of all the virtues is love. That is why St. Paul said, ‘Now I will show you the best way of all’ (I Cor. 12: 31), one that persuades us to scorn material things and value nothing transitory more than what is eternal.”

“The principal vices – stupidity, cowardice, licentiousness, injustice – are the ‘image’ of the ‘earthy’ man. The principal virtues – intelligence, courage, self-restraint, justice – are the ‘image’ of the ‘heavenly’ man. As we have borne the image of the earthy, let us also bear the image of the heavenly (cf. I Cor. 15: 49).”

~St Maximos the Confessor, Four Centuries of Love.

How Love reorients our hearts and our lives: Mr. Northen

“Our desires are not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

~C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory

Barriers to Loving well:

1. Fear
2. Bitterness, Resentment, or not placing a high value on Forgiveness
3. Defining people by their Sin
4. Loving Love more than People
5. Shame or Insecurity
6. Self-righteousness

Disordered Love and its consequences (see chart on next page): There is a little or a lot of Smeagol in us all...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vice</th>
<th>Disordered Love</th>
<th>Disordered Fruit</th>
<th>Virtues of the Beatitudes (Reordered Love)</th>
<th>Reordered Fruit</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Immoderate love of self (self-centeredness), feeling one is better than others because of their superior abilities, achievements, positions, etc.</td>
<td>Unteachable, unrepentance, disobedience to authority figures, demeaning others and their successes, expecting honor, refusing it to others, trusting unreasonably in one’s judgments, and hiding one’s true self and showing a false face.</td>
<td>Humility or Selflessness (Matthew 5:3-poverty of spirit)</td>
<td>The Gospel frees us to consider others more important than ourselves, seek their good, beware of selfish ambition and vain conceit, and, in humility, be honest about our shortcomings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Envy</td>
<td>Inordinate amount of discontentment rooted in pride (self-centeredness).</td>
<td>Feeling bad when others succeed; feeling better when others fail; feeling best when we succeed and others fail. Despising the giver, the gifts or the gifted. “Envy cannot bear to admire or respect; it cannot...be grateful” (Dorothy Sayers)</td>
<td>Compassion; mourning with others in their unhappiness/pain, not secretly celebrating it. (Matthew 5:4)</td>
<td>The Gospel frees us to be defined not by what we have or don’t have, but by who’s we are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>A desire for punishment revenge, or retribution rooted in pride and envy.</td>
<td>Willing harm, destruction or vengeance on people who have threatened or hurt us by making us feel ignored, forgotten, bullied, humiliated, teased, disrespected, belittled, or wronged.</td>
<td>Forgiveness, Meekness, and Peacemaking (refusing to harm others and breaking the cycle of violence or pain) (Matthew 5:9)</td>
<td>The Gospel free us to love and pray for those who have hurt us and instructs us to be reconcilers as we were reconciled to God in our sin.</td>
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<td>Sloth</td>
<td>A lack of love for God and the things of God. God bores us or seems insignificant, whereas other loves capture our interest and attention, excite and energize us (spiritual lethargy). We are disappointed that God is our chief good (spiritual dejection).</td>
<td>Indifference, apathy. Refusing to exert the soul toward the good or ideal. Failure to pursue God enthusiastically. Forgetting church, avoiding Scripture, rarely pray, avoid fellowship, don’t witness, shunning service, busyness, superficiality and evading meditation.</td>
<td>An appetite for God. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness. (Matthew 5:6)</td>
<td>The Gospel restores the attractiveness of God to our hearts and allows us to be dissatisfied in our false satisfactions, driving us to him. A realization that joy in one’s life is cultivated not just by avoiding sin, but by running toward something better—a Good God worthy of our praise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
<td>An inordinate love of money, wealth, and possessions.</td>
<td>Measuring one’s or another’s worth by their net worth. Pursuing self-esteem, security, status and power through consumerist or materialistic means.</td>
<td>Mercy toward others. The alternative to greed (getting/self-seeking) is mercy (giving). (Matthew 5:7)</td>
<td>The Gospel frees us to delight in giving more than receiving, with a heart of self-forgetfulness. Trusting in God’s provision and looking to Him for our satisfaction, we can be content in plenty and in want.</td>
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<td>Gluttony (self-indulgence)</td>
<td>An unreasonable love for food, drink, and intoxicants.</td>
<td>Overindulgence (gorging or fussiness) of food and drink. An inability to enjoy food and drink moderately.</td>
<td>Courage/perseverance to withstand unjust persecution. Giving vs. taking. (Matthew 5: 10)</td>
<td>The Gospel frees us to be self-sacrificial, not self-indulgent. Having a knowledge and trust that only God satisfies the fulfillment we seek in food/drink.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lust</td>
<td>An inordinate craving for sexual experiences. A desire that makes one believe that true happiness or fulfillment is always waiting in the next sexual encounter.</td>
<td>Using sex to get love or using love to get sex; both make lust lord hoping that it will give us the peace and purpose we long for. Symptoms are adultery, prostitution, pornography, pedophilia, bestiality; sexual relations (in marriage) approached in self-centeredness or loveless physical gratification.</td>
<td>A God-given disposition given through Christ to have purity in heart will allow one to see and delight in God’s way. Trusting in Jesus will give us the purity of heart needed to give our hearts weight in order to see in them the disordered desires that exist. With purity of heart, we see God, others, and ourselves as we ought to. (Matthew 5:8)</td>
<td>Not looking to sexual gratification when one is numb, bored, lonely, or discontent to excite or satisfy. Trusting that God is the Lover of all lovers, and only His love will fulfill us. Having sexual relations in light of God, whereby seeing its limitations to wholly satisfy.</td>
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**Discussion Questions:**

1. Identify two of the seven deadly sins that you sense you are currently noticing in your heart and explain how each is an expression of disordered love? Comment which aspect of the disordered fruit you resonate with and then discuss how you see how the Virtue/Beatitude can appropriately redirect your love toward God?

2. What does love that does not seek anything in return look like? Toward your family? Toward your friends? Toward your classmates? Toward your professors? Toward people in other faith traditions? Toward people of other political persuasions? etc.

3. How might love (agape) and desire (eros) be similar—examples?

4. What does love have to say to its own repeated failure to transform the world that it might yet redeem? What does it say to our failures to love one another and our enemies? What does it say to hate? What does it say to time? Why doesn’t love succeed?

*See Reordered Love, Reordered Lives (Naugle, 2008) for further reading*
From the Book of Common Prayer

Confession: (everyone)
Most merciful God,
We confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your way,
to the glory of your Name. Amen

Hear the good news:
Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
That proves God’s love toward us.
In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!
In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. (everyone)
Glory to God. Amen.