

community; rather, it places these relationships within the broader context of God's kingdom, where the ultimate allegiance lies.

On Balancing Love of God and Community

Andrii Zvorygin yN-PH2196 mtH2a1 & GPT4
attender of Glad Tidings Fellowship, Tara, ON

November 12, 2023

1 Disclaimer

This is a brief on balancing the Love of God and community. We encourage you to "test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and to peacefully set aside what does not resonate with you.

2 Introduction

In the Anabaptist perspective, the teachings of Jesus in Luke 14 are a clarion call against in-group favoritism, serving as a stark reminder that such preferences can be a significant stumbling block to inheriting the kingdom of God. For Anabaptists, who prioritize following Jesus's commandments, the emphasis is on a love that transcends familial and community boundaries, reaching out to the broader world with compassion and humility.

Jesus's directive in Luke 14:12-14 to invite the marginalized to feasts, rather than just friends, relatives, or rich neighbors, underscores the importance of overcoming in-group favoritism. This teaching is a clear admonition that placing familial or community ties above the commandments of Jesus could lead to being unprepared for the kingdom, as depicted in the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24). In this parable, those who make excuses, often tied to personal or familial obligations, miss out on the banquet, symbolizing the kingdom of God.

This message is further reinforced in Luke 14:26, where Jesus states that anyone who comes to him and does not put aside their father, mother, spouse, children, siblings, and even their own life cannot be his disciple. This challenging teaching calls for a prioritization of the kingdom of God over even the closest family ties, urging a readiness to follow Christ's commandments above all else.

For Anabaptists, this is a call to a radical discipleship that places Jesus's teachings at the forefront of one's life. It involves cultivating a love that is inclusive and unconditional, mirroring the boundless nature of God's love. This approach does not diminish the value of family and

3 Family and Community

The importance of loving and serving within the family unit is highlighted in scriptures like Ephesians 5:21, which urges believers to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." This mutual submission is not about power or control, but about loving service to each other, reflecting the selfless love of Christ. In the context of family, this principle encourages members to support, care for, and uplift each other, recognizing the unique value and divine nature of each individual.

Furthermore, 1 Timothy 5:8 emphasizes the importance of providing for one's family, stating, "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." This verse underlines the responsibility of caring for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of family members, viewing it as a fundamental aspect of living out one's faith.

In addition to familial love, the broader Anabaptist community is seen as an extension of the family. Galatians 6:10 encourages believers to "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." This verse reinforces the idea that the community of faith should be a place where love and kindness are abundantly shared, and where each person is valued as a bearer of the divine image.

The concept of humility and service within the community is further emphasized in Philipians 2:3-4, which instructs, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." This passage calls for a selfless attitude and a focus on the well-being of others, fostering a community where members are dedicated to supporting and serving one another.

4 Pitfalls of in-group favoritism

In the Anabaptist tradition, the pitfalls of in-group favoritism are viewed with great caution, as such biases can lead to behaviors that are contrary to the teachings of Christ. This concern is rooted in numerous scriptural examples where favoritism, greed, and avarice led to significant moral failings and divine judgment.

One of the most striking Old Testament examples is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, often cited for their immorality. In Ezekiel 16:49, the sin of Sodom is explicitly described as

pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but failing to aid the poor and needy. This passage highlights how their cruelty and lack of hospitality towards strangers were key factors in their downfall. This story serves as a warning against becoming insular and neglecting the broader responsibilities to extend kindness and support to those outside one's immediate community.

Another poignant example can be found in the actions of the Israelites throughout the Old Testament, where their repeated turn towards greed and idolatry led to various forms of divine judgment. The narrative of Naboth's Vineyard in 1 Kings 21, where King Ahab, driven by greed and envy, unjustly seizes Naboth's vineyard, exemplifies how avarice and disregard for justice can lead to grave sin. This story, and others like it, demonstrate the danger of allowing in-group interests and material desires to override the principles of justice and righteousness.

The Anabaptists also draw lessons from the New Testament, where Jesus frequently warns against the dangers of wealth and greed. In Luke 12:15, Jesus cautions, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." This teaching urges a focus on spiritual riches rather than material accumulation, emphasizing the importance of generosity and sharing with others.

Furthermore, the early Christian community, as described in Acts 2:44-45, practiced a form of communal living where they shared possessions and resources. This model is seen as an antidote to in-group favoritism and greed, promoting a way of life where the needs of all are met through mutual care and sharing.

In summary, the Anabaptist perspective on the pitfalls of in-group favoritism and greed is informed by numerous biblical examples. These stories serve as cautionary tales about the consequences of prioritizing one's group or personal gain over the principles of hospitality, justice, and care for the needy. By reflecting on these examples, Anabaptists seek to cultivate communities that are inclusive, just, and generous, embodying the values of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus.

Breaking Through In-Group Favoritism

Problem: Judging Others for Leading Different Lives

Scriptural Solution: Matthew 7:1-2 - "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same

way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." This passage reminds us to approach others with understanding and compassion.

Problem: Showing Hospitality Only to Familiar Faces

Scriptural Solution: Hebrews 13:2 - "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." This verse encourages us to extend our hospitality beyond our usual circles.

Problem: Favoring One's Own Group at the Expense of Others

Scriptural Solution: Galatians 3:28 - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This passage discourages any form of favoritism based on group identity.

Problem: Neglecting the Needs of Those Outside Our Immediate Community

Scriptural Solution: 1 John 3:17-18 - "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." This scripture calls for tangible acts of love towards all.

Problem: Feeling Superior to Others

Scriptural Solution: Philippians 2:3 - "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." This teaching urges us to adopt a humble attitude.

Problem: Failing to Recognize the Divine in Everyone

Scriptural Solution: Genesis 1:27 - "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This verse encourages us to see the divine in everyone.

Problem: Resistance to Learning from Those Who Are Different

Scriptural Solution: Proverbs 27:17 - "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." This proverb suggests that interactions with diverse individuals can lead to mutual growth.

By addressing these problems with scriptural solutions, individuals and communities can work towards breaking down barriers of in-group favoritism, fostering a more inclusive, loving, and Christ-like approach to all of God's creation.