

The Christian Life

Love

Lesson #1 for April 4, 2009

Scriptures: Isaiah 53; Matthew 27:37-39; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3; 1 John 4.

1. The focus of this series of lessons is on the teachings or doctrines of the Christian church as presented in Scripture. In our world today, we see a huge gap developing between: 1) Those who want nothing to do with God and who promote evolution and atheism as their “religion”—some London buses now carry signs that read: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life”—and 2) Those who believe the Christian life consists completely of “experience” without much connection to the Word of God. This latter group seems to believe that faith and “feelings” are almost the same. Is there a valid middle ground between those two?
2. What is the correct role of Christian doctrine or teaching? Do the “words of life”—Scripture—really matter if we live a “good” life? Are there truths clearly set forth in Scripture which are the inalienable rights and duties of Christians? In what way do these teachings or doctrines affect the lives of Christians?
3. During this quarter it will be our aim to explore not only the doctrinal truths set forth in Scripture, but also how those “truths” impact our everyday experience. For the Christian all doctrine and experience should focus on the life and death of Jesus Christ.
4. The Greek-speaking people in the times of the New Testament had four words for “love”: *epithumia* (desire), *eros* (passionate or sexual love), *philia* (friendship love or “brotherly” love), and *agape* (selfless love). In contemporary English “love” has come to have so many different meanings and connotations that it has almost become a wastebasket word.
5. While discussing spiritual gifts, why do you think Paul placed “love” as the most important gift? (1 Corinthians 12-14) What did he mean when he said, “These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love”? (1 Corinthians 13:13, *NIV*)
6. How would you define “love”? What characteristics of true love stick out in your mind? Do you think of human love or divine love? What are the contrasts between these two?
7. What is implied when we say, “God is love”? How is that different from saying that God loves us? Does God just have love? Does He show love? Or, “is” He love? The Infinite One at the center of our universe is certainly more than just an emotional response. What does He want us to think about Him when He says, “God is love”? (1 John 4:8,16)
8. Remember that true love implies the capacity for not loving, even hating. In order to love, we must have free choice. Choice is not the same as chance. In order to have choice we must understand the long-term implications of our choices. That necessitates an orderly universe. That makes science and God reliable predictors of the future. If science were not orderly, there would be no reason to bother with it! If the same exact experiment yielded different results yesterday than it does today, there is no reason to bother with it! That also means that bad choices will have bad consequences just as good choices have good consequences. It must

be so in an orderly universe. (See the handout “Love” posted on the website theox.org under the General Topics section of the Teacher’s Guides: https://www.theox.org/images/images_A2115/love2.pdf)

9. In scientific studies it has been demonstrated again and again that in order to survive, humans need love. Not only do we need to receive love—that is where we start—but also we need to give love. Those human beings who do best in life, live in a “community of love.”
10. Read Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-39; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 John 3:14. Do you just naturally love everyone? What about those who just naturally repulse you? Can you “love” them? One of my patients is dirty, smelly, and does all sorts of things that destroy health. I have worked with him for years now and several times have probably prevented his death. He has large ulcers on his feet. Recently, he wrote me a very touching note in his shaky handwriting telling me how much he appreciated what I had done for him. Everyone needs love. What do those verses tell us about the love which God asks us to exhibit in our lives? Ellen White states:

Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another—this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow. This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found. “We love Him, because He first loved us.” [1 John 4:19] In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the ruling principle of action.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 551.

11. Is there an essential difference between God’s love and human love? Is it possible for humans to exhibit true love after the order of God’s love?
12. When God first made humankind, Adam and Eve must have come to love Him immensely. They had every reason to love and trust Him. Imagine having the supreme God of the universe come and take a walk with you in the cool of the evening! How could they have distrusted Him and placed their trust in a “talking snake”? What are some of the ways in which God has manifested His love to us down through history?
13. Why did God choose to make man? What is implied by His making man in “His own image”? What specifically makes us “in the image of God”? Are there other beings in the universe made in the image of God? “You made him [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings” (the Hebrew says, “God.” Psalms 8:5, *NIV*) Ellen White suggests that one thing that makes us like God is our power to procreate. (*RH* February 11, 1902; *1BC* 1081.3) We have some of the power that Satan wanted! What are all those other beings like? Are they something like us? What do they think of us and our story of rebellion? Did the great controversy have to happen here on planet earth? Couldn’t other beings have been the ones that sinned instead of us? (*EW* 39-40) Remember that Satan rebelled in heaven before this earth was created. If fact, there is good evidence that this earth was made especially to respond to Satan’s accusations against God. We were supposed to be part of the answer to “the sin problem.” Instead, we have become a part of the problem. Adam and Eve could have been a part of the answer right in the Garden of Eden. We did not have to sin to provide God an opportunity to show His

answers. But it is true that our sin has led to God's grace abounding! (Romans 5:20) Why did God have to put the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden? Couldn't Adam and Eve have chosen to sin if they really wanted to, just like Lucifer did in heaven without someone to tempt them? True! But remember that sin was already in the universe. As soon as God made Adam and Eve, Satan demanded access to them. God limited Satan's access by restricting him to that one tree. The purpose of that tree was to protect Adam and Eve. They would have been safe if they had stayed away from that tree. What are the clearest evidences of God's love in Scripture? Creation? The Sabbath? The gift of His Son? His Son's dying for us? The plan of salvation? The great controversy? (What Christ faced in terms of the great controversy goes way beyond even His dying on the cross!) The gift of eternal life?

14. Is it possible to love God without loving our fellow humankind? Why does the Bible seem to suggest that if we love God supremely, we will also love others? (1 John 4:20)
15. Do you see a different God in the Old Testament than the God in the New Testament? What did Jesus and Paul say about the God of the Old Testament? (Luke 24:44; John 5:39; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4) How was God's love manifested in the creation of human beings? What do we learn about God's love from the plan of salvation? From the life and death of Jesus? (Genesis 3:15; 22:8; Isaiah 53) What should we learn about God from the Sabbath? (Exodus 31:12-17) What do we learn about God's love by the gift of the Scriptures? What do we learn about God's love from all His killing in the Old Testament?
16. There are many incidents in Scripture which do not seem to be a manifestation of God's love: the flood (Genesis 6-8); the death of the newborn in Egypt (Exodus 12); the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 11); the deaths of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16); the deaths of the 185,000 Assyrians (Isaiah 37:21-38; 2 Kings 19:20-37); and the instruction to "leave alive nothing that breathes" in Canaan (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).
17. **Could a loving God ever lead His people into war? Why? Or, why not? In light of the great controversy and the issues involved throughout eternity, was what Israel did to the Canaanites worse than what the Canaanites and their religion did to the Israelites?** (Is physical death more serious than spiritual death?) Remember that the Canaanites were the recipients of the very first group of "foreign missionaries"—Abraham and his descendants. Some of the Canaanites joined Abraham and his family. The ones who were not "converted" by Abraham became more and more wicked until their time of probation was exhausted.
18. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expounded on teachings from the Old Testament. But He went far beyond the interpretations placed on those teachings by the Scribes and Pharisees. How could Jesus say, "Love your enemies"? Isn't that an oxymoron? Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying, "The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend!" Is that what Jesus had in mind? (Matthew 5:44-48; 25:31-46; 1 Peter 1:22)

Ellen White states:

If church members will put away all self-worship, and will receive in their hearts the love for God and for one another that filled Christ's heart, our heavenly

Father will constantly manifest His power through them. Let His people be drawn together with the cords of divine love. Then the world will recognize the miracle-working power of God, and will acknowledge that He is the Strength and the Helper of His commandment-keeping people (MS 125, 1907).—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 940.

19. In light of all this, does it seem that God's ideal of love is an impossible dream for human beings? Is that really feasible? Didn't Jesus provide the example and attitude (Philippians 2:5-7), the motivation (2 Corinthians 5:14,15), and the means (John 16:12-15; compare Romans 8)? All three members of the Godhead are on our side! Have you seen the work of the Holy Spirit in your life creating a more loving attitude toward others? Are we really ready to let the light of God's presence shine forth from our lives? (Matthew 5:16; compare Galatians 5:22,23) The fruit of the Spirit includes "self-control." When we are ready to choose to do what is right because it is right, then we can do whatever we want to do. So, why do Christians have such a bad reputation among many in our world? We need to speak up about Christ and watch what "doors" God will open for us to witness.
20. Celsus who lived long ago said, "These Christians love each other even *before* they are acquainted."—W. Carl Ketcherside: *In the Beginning*, chapter 11, "Fear of Love," [italics supplied], <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wcketcherside/itb/chap11.html>. What do you think Celsus saw in the lives of Christians that made him say such words?
21. Read John 13:34,35. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (NIV) Is it really true that honest, true love would set us apart from all other people in the world? In what way? Is it impossible for non-Christians to truly love?
22. Christians would say that the greatest demonstration of love was the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Why was that necessary? If God truly loves us, did He need to die for us as well? Was His death "just" to demonstrate that He loves us? What do the following passages tell us about God's love? John 3:16—God's gift of His Son; Philippians 2:5-8—the Son's gift of Himself; John 14:16-18; Acts 2:1-4—the gift of the Holy Spirit; Ephesians 4:11-13—God's spiritual gifts; 1 John 3:1-3—the certainty of salvation; 2 Peter 3:13—an eternity in God's presence. Do you honestly look forward to spending eternity with God? Or is it terrifying to think of that?
23. Although Christians would recognize that Jesus Christ is the ultimate role model of love, didn't Jesus have plenty of reason to hate His enemies. They ultimately killed Him. Jesus demonstrated love for all kinds of people: prostitutes (John 8:1-11), tax collectors (Matthew 9:10), lepers (Matthew 11:4-6), the unclean (Mark 5:1-20), Samaritans (John 4:1-42), even the pagans and heathens from Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 15:21-28). What can we learn about Christ's love from the following examples: the story of the 10 lepers (John 17:12-19); the example of Jesus washing the dirty feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17); the way Christ dealt with the woman taken in adultery and her accusers (John 8:1-11); (Why didn't Jesus write the sins of those scoundrels who brought that woman on the marble walls of the temple rather than writing in the dust on the ground? He could have done that!) His dealing with His mother Mary at the cross (John 19:25-27).

24. After studying the life of Jesus, do you really want to be more like Him? Do you ever feel as Paul did when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "Christ's love compels us." (GNB) Or what about, "the love of Christ leaves us no choice"? (NEB) Compare Philippians 2:2.
25. Does the example of Jesus compel us to be loving, considerate, and kind to those who are the most unlovable in our world today?
26. What is your natural tendency in response to those who misuse you? Take advantage of you? Talk about you behind your back? Try to take advantage of your kindness?
27. If God is so clearly a loving God—which seems to be spelled out in great detail in the New Testament—why does the Bible end with the three angels messages in Revelation 14:6-12? Could a loving God really give us the third angel's message? Why would He use such words? Are those words any less "fearsome" than the language of the Old Testament?
28. Read 1 Corinthians 13. Do you think you could ever live a life represented by those verses? If someone was so dedicated to the truth that he was even willing to give his body to be burned, could he possibly not have love? Why would a person do such a thing? Why do young men blow themselves and others up at the command of *Al Qaida* and other terrorist groups?
29. How much of what you do on a daily basis is motivated by selfishness? Are there certain things that you do from time to time that have no selfish motive whatsoever but rather, are motivated purely by love? Christians go through a process that we refer to as "conversion." After conversion are all our motives loving?
30. Many questions have been raised about God's character of love. Why would a loving God allow all the suffering we see in our world today? Does our understanding of the great controversy help us to answer that question? Before the great controversy can come to an end, isn't it necessary for God to allow Satan to fully demonstrate the "awfulness" of sin and its consequences, even on innocent people? If we honestly recognize what sin does and has done to people, could we ever go back to it?
31. One billion years into the future when new creatures are created by God, if one of them should choose to rebel against God, might God point them back to the history of our world to teach them that rebellion is always a wrong choice? What do you think God would do if such a person persisted in his rebellion? Would God allow another great controversy to develop? Why? Or, why not? What other options might God have? If God allowed such a new but persistent rebel to perish while we all watched, would we be inclined to fear Him thereafter? Why? Or, why not? The Bible and Ellen White say that sin will not arise a second time. (DA 26.2) The record of the great controversy is the reason why!

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