

***Loved and Loving: John's Epistles***  
***John's Letter to the Chosen Lady***

Lesson #12 for September 19, 2009

Scriptures: Exodus 20:1-17; Romans 6:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; Hebrews 13:2; 2 John; Revelation 2:14,15; 14:12.

1. This lesson focuses on the deeper meanings of love, truth, and keeping the Ten Commandments. It goes on to raise questions about what it really means to exercise Christian hospitality and love.
2. This lesson and the next are based on the two shortest books in the Bible. It is very likely that each one of these letters was written on a single sheet of papyrus, and that somewhat dictated or determined the length of each. While 2 John was addressed to "the chosen lady," it is almost certain that this was a code name for a church. Therefore, her children would be church members. Remember that these letters were written at a time when it was an automatic death sentence to be proven to be a Christian.
3. Read 2 John. Why do you think John took the issue of false teachings so seriously in this short book. Could anyone's teachings be so bad that even if he/she was a Christian, you would refuse to offer him/her hospitality? Is it referring to the hospitality offered by individual members in their homes? Or, could it be referring to the hospitality of the church as a whole offering those false teachers an opportunity to spread heresy in their midst? Who should decide who will be allowed to stand up in church and give a sermon or promote an idea?
4. Read 2 John 1-4. Clearly, John began his letter by focusing on love and truth. What is the relationship between love and truth? How long does a love relationship last if one partner discovers that the other is not being truthful? Does God still love us even when we are completely unfaithful to Him? Should He? Does a parent stop loving a child that is misbehaving or even rebelling? Most Christians would agree that Jesus Christ was the most loving Person who ever lived. He described Himself as "the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6) Would it be fair to describe Jesus as the perfect example of both love and truth? Did Jesus ever speak out against false teachers? (Matthew 23; John 8:12-59) Near the end of His ministry, He spoke out with devastating frankness about the Jewish leadership!
5. In 2 John 1-4, there is a great deal written about love and truth. If one continues on to 2 John 5,6, he/she will discover there is a focus on keeping the Ten Commandments. Is there a relationship between love, truth, and keeping the Ten Commandments? If you were given the assignment of establishing a new community or government, where would you turn for the best set of guidelines for the new laws? Are there any of the Ten Commandments that you would want to leave out? The first four commandments are clearly designed to help us show a correct love for God; the last six are ways in which we can avoid destroying our relationship with others. Love to God and love to our fellow man are the principles behind the Ten Commandments.
6. But, do you feel like you are truly loving when you try to keep the Ten Commandments? Or does it seem like when you are trying to keep the commandments, you are just following a set of rules?
7. The 19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously declared, "There are no facts, only interpretations." He went on to write in his famous philosophical work (*Thus*

*Spoke Zarathustra*), “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.”—  
<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/22827>.

8. Nietzsche declared that Christianity—and Judaism before it—had turned the truth upside down or on its head. According to Nietzsche, “Might always makes right” and trying to fight for the underdog or protect those who in his view should rightfully be destroyed is dangerous to society. That became Hitler’s rationale for killing Jews. A number of those ideas were promulgated right in the United States shortly after World War I.
9. Unfortunately, his relativistic views are being adopted by many Americans—64% of adults and 83% of teenagers say that truth is always relative to the person and the circumstances. Why do you think only 6% of teenagers say that truth is absolute?— (These statistics are quoted on page 141 of the Teachers Edition of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. Similar statistics are shown at <http://www.barna.org>) Look at the many other somewhat surprising results of different surveys that this group has conducted. For example, most American Christians do not believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit exist! What has caused this change? What are the results?
10. Is love dangerous apart from the truth? Is the truth dangerous apart from love? Do truth and love need each other in order to be true Christian virtues?
11. Do love and truth provide an important motivating force for keeping the commandments?
12. Can you think of any heresies or erroneous teachings within the Christian world or perhaps even within the Seventh-day Adventist Church that you would not feel comfortable welcoming into your church, your Sabbath school class, or even into your home?
13. How can we distinguish between a simple difference of opinion, an error, and a heresy? After Constantine declared that Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire, it was not long before there were groups going around and trying to root out heresy!
14. How should we respond if someone else regards some of our beliefs as errors or even heresies?
15. Should a Seventh-day Adventist who rejects the Genesis account of creation and the flood and instead accepts the major premises of evolution be regarded as a Seventh-day Adventist “in good and regular standing”?

Earlier this year, some students from La Sierra University requested that Dr. Sean Pitman, known for his expertise at defending the biblical account of creation and the flood, come to campus and give a lecture trying to counteract the open teaching of evolution being promoted by some of the science teachers on campus. From that day until this, there has been a very active internet discussion going on about what the church should do in such a case. People have expressed strong emotions and thoughts on both sides of the issue. Is teaching evolution on one of our campuses a form of heresy?

How should we react when we discover that there are several prominent teachers on the Loma Linda University campus who, while not so openly promoting their views, absolutely agree with the teachers at La Sierra University?

Should we go to church and escort such “evolutionists” out the door? What about the very vocal group of former Adventists who publish a glossy magazine encouraging people to leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Why did John say that we should not even say, “Peace be with you” to such people? How should La Sierra University alumni act when they hear such news?

We need to recognize that the SDA Church is not only a “faith community” but an employing organization. We need to keep a very clear mark of distinction between those two functions. If you wonder exactly what is being taught and what arguments are being promoted, go to Sean Pitman’s website: at <http://www.detectingdesign.com>

Would it be good for students and others to hear the very best evidence and arguments on both sides from experts and proponents on both sides? How should we respond to those who openly say that the church is wrong?

Think of how the church has dealt with the Shepherd’s Rod, Robert Brinsmead and his followers, and even Des (Desmond) Ford and his followers in the past.

Do parents have a right to expect their children to be taught the best possible arguments in favor of the church’s stated position? Many, many of the major ivy-league universities on the East Coast began as Christian institutions. But over time, faculty began to believe that their scientific education was leading them away from the teachings of the church and virtually every one of those schools has separated from its church roots. That is exactly what is being promoted at this time at La Sierra University.

Does this mean that we should forbid “academic freedom”? Are these teachers employed by “Nike” while they are selling “Reebok”? What should we do with teachers who believe that in their opinion based on their understanding of “scientific evidence,” the church is wrong? If we forfeit the “privilege” of hiring and firing whom we choose, then we have lost our institution.

What we do in Sabbath School class every Sabbath morning is an example of how such problems should be handled. If you choose to fire such teachers, how do you put your arms around them and try to keep them in our “faith fellowship”? We know that a time is coming when the Devil will deceive, if possible, the very elect. (See Matthew 24:23,24)

Our young people are being bombarded constantly with evolutionary ideas. Who is preparing them to deal with these ideas by presenting the other side of the evidence?

16. Many of us hold as very dear the general principles of the “great controversy, trust, healing model” of salvation. How should we respond to others who believe that such a view is the direct work of the Devil? Should we fight back? There are a number of people in very powerful positions who oppose what we teach in this class. Remember that Jesus was crucified as a heretic.
17. A recent book says, for example:

In the final analysis, it wasn’t nails, thorns, or physical crucifixion that caused Jesus Christ’s death. The Jews didn’t kill Him, nor did the Romans. Neither was His demise simply the result of “natural consequences.” Instead, Jesus’ death was the result of a premeditated, well thought-out, divine act preplanned in eternity by the Father and the Son. Jesus died because of “our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3), because a heavenly “sword” struck the sin that He bore. This is what ended His life—as it is written:

Yet it pleased *the Lord* to bruise Him;

He has put Him to grief (Isaiah 53:10; emphasis added).

This verse says that *God did it*, which is why He alone is responsible for our salvation.—Steven Wohlberg and Chris Lewis, *The Character of God Conflict*, p. 96

Beyond this, we recognize that there are many times when God does withdraw His protecting care and allows either sin, natural elements, or evil angels to inflict suffering and pain. Yes, we agree with all of this. But here's a key divide: we adamantly *disagree* that divine wrath can be fully and adequately defined as "God gave them up," and we also firmly resist the conclusion that it is inherently improper, inappropriate, or even devilish for the Supreme Governor of the universe to actively, directly, and personally punish *real evil*. Here's why.

While Romans 1:24-31 does teach that God gives up sinners to wicked practices, nowhere in this chapter does Paul specifically define this giving up as the wrath of God. (*ibid*, p. 55)

Are these just differences of opinion, or are they something more serious?

18. If truth is really important to you, why? Read 2 John 7-9. What kind of deception was John talking about in these verses? Of course, in John's day there were groups who disputed every doctrine of the Christian church. But John did everything possible not to lose a single member of his flock. John seemed to believe that correct doctrine is absolutely essential to the Christian life.
19. Have you had any experience with false teachings and false doctrines? Is it easy to understand the views of those who do not agree with you? Ellen White wrote: "Those who cannot impartially examine the evidences of a position that differs from theirs, are not fit to teach in any department of God's cause." {*RH*, February 18, 1890 par. 13; *1SM* 411.2}
20. Paul spoke to this point in Ephesians 4:14-16 and wrote that those who are tossed about by every wind of doctrine need to grow up!
21. Is a common set of beliefs important for keeping a church together? How does a common set of beliefs cement friendships? Remember once again that John lived and wrote in a time when it was an automatic death sentence to be known as a Christian. Tacitus, the Roman governor and historian, said Christians were a "class hated for their abominations." [http://books.google.com/books?id=Jiy2ba0pc5QC&pg=PA144&lpg=PA144&dq=a+class+hated+for+their+abominations&source=bl&ots=a3oCc6kWOg&sig=1S2aPx6lxSB4dBd kJvDizHp4BrE&hl=en&ei=tEV0Ss-yFoqqswO-z-moDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=2#v=onepage&q=&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Jiy2ba0pc5QC&pg=PA144&lpg=PA144&dq=a+class+hated+for+their+abominations&source=bl&ots=a3oCc6kWOg&sig=1S2aPx6lxSB4dBd kJvDizHp4BrE&hl=en&ei=tEV0Ss-yFoqqswO-z-moDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2#v=onepage&q=&f=false) (If you would like to see this, you must copy the preceding address to your browser.)
22. But shouldn't we be somewhat tolerant of those who do not believe as we do? Should we insist that everyone who enters the church believe exactly as we do before they are admitted? What difference does a common set of beliefs make?
23. For Christians is there a way to know absolute truth? Where would you go to find absolute truth? (Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19) Should Christians feel snobbish because we have the "best" religion?
24. Does having the truth make one a snob? Should Christians—specifically Seventh-day Adventists—open their homes to those of other Christian communities—even Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists—if they have the opportunity? Jesus mixed with some of the most bigoted people in the world. It was not until near the end of His life that He apparently came out clearly condemning the Jews for their bigotry. (Matthew 23; John 8:12-59)
25. If we provide hospitality to someone even when we know they are teaching false doctrine, do we, in effect, give our silent support to their teachings? What should a church do to

make sure that it does not welcome to its pulpit those who are teaching false doctrines?

26. Who has the authority to declare a certain kind of belief as being heresy? Are you teaching others your attitudes? Are they correct attitudes? Are there any teachings within the Seventh-day Adventist Church today that threaten to undermine the gospel as we know it? If we believe so, how should we react? (Galatians 1:8,9)
27. Why is it that Christians need to understand that the truth is not just a set of propositions, but rather, truth is embodied in Jesus Christ and all that He lived and did and died for? How would you respond to these words from some prominent Christians:

I want you to just let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you. . . .We are called by God to conquer this country. We don't want equal time. We don't want pluralism.—Randall Terry, former Evangelical leader. See <http://www.mediamatters.org>

The need to exercise true tolerance towards others' beliefs does not mean that one has to champion the irrational idea that all views are equally true.—Joseph Farinaccio, *Faith With Reason: Why Christianity Is True* (Pennsville, N.J.: Bookspeccs Publishing, 2002), p. 12

28. Near the end of each of his letters in 2 John and 3 John, the apostle wrote,

I have so much to tell you, but I would rather not do it with paper and ink; instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you personally, so that we shall be completely happy.” (2 John 12, *GNB*)

In light of the dangers of being identified as a Christian in John's day, was that a way to protect himself?

29. This message from John is straightforward and pointed. Was he agreeing with what Paul wrote in Galatians 1:6-9?
30. When we come down to the end of this discussion, does it really matter what you think about God? Are your life and your beliefs correctly representing Jesus Christ? Are there sins in the church that we need to point out? What about among our friends who claim to be church members?
31. There have been a number of people down through the years who have assigned themselves the responsibility of calling sin by its right name! Usually, those people are so intolerant and so unattractive that they turn people away. We certainly would not want to be like that. Others believe that Jesus loved everyone, and so should we. So how does a true Christian draw a careful line between those two extremes?
32. To many, our beliefs about the great controversy focusing on God's character and government seem to be strange doctrine. They do not understand it or us. How should we relate to those people who think we believe strange things?

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[Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

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