

# ***Loved and Loving: John's Epistles***

## ***Walking in the Light: Renouncing Worldliness***

Lesson #5 for August 1, 2009

Scriptures: Daniel 5:13; John 15:19; Colossians 1:14; 2:8,13; 2 Peter 3:10-12; 1 John 2:12-17.

1. The lesson for this week focuses on the opposing motivations and goals of Christians versus "the world." How can we serve God and not the world? What does "the world" mean in this context? Read the passage for this week: 1 John 2:12-17. Note that John was addressing different groups—fathers, young people, and children.
2. Read 1 John 2:12,13. In this passage John wrote about fathers, young men, and children. These are code words for church members of various ages. What does it mean when we say our sins are forgiven "for His name's sake"?
3. In both the Old and New Testaments, ultimately, God did things not because we deserved them or we have somehow earned them, but rather, God did them for His own name's sake. What is implied by this expression? What does it have to do with the "great controversy" between Satan and the government of God? In the great controversy, there are several very important issues which must be answered and dealt with convincingly in order for God to win. First of all, He must prove that He was not lying, and that it was Satan—the father of lies—who was lying about sin causing death. (Genesis 2:17; 3:4) Immediately, we should recognize the main issue in the great controversy: Who is telling us the truth? This was proved by Christ's near-death in Gethsemane (*DA* 693.1) and His death from sin on Calvary. This is the death which the Bible describes as the second death. Jesus Himself also had to prove that He was a divine being and not merely a creature as Lucifer/Satan is. He proved that by rising from the dead in His own power. (John 10:18)
4. But, God also does many things for us "for His name's sake." In those days "gods" were judged on the basis of how their followers or worshipers were doing. God had to do something to prove that He was the real God. When Yahweh sent the plagues on Egypt, respect for him went way up! But out in the wilderness when their faith failed, God could no longer lead them against their enemies. Later, Daniel pleaded—in his prayer recorded in Daniel 9:15-19—for God to do something for His holy city, Jerusalem, for His own name's sake. Ezekiel wrote repeatedly about doing things for God's name's sake. (See especially Ezekiel 20, 36, 39) Does God need to act "for His name's sake" today? God needs to demonstrate not only that sin leads to death but that sinful human beings can be restored to a right relationship with Him. How can God demonstrate to the onlooking universe that it will be safe to bring some of us back to heaven to live among them forever? (Ephesians 1:9,10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20) That involves much more than just God declaring that our sins are forgiven. Jesus forgave the men who were crucifying Him even though they did not ask for and did not deserve it! (Luke 23:32) What does that tell us about God's forgiveness?
5. To many Christians, forgiveness is the key to justification. Justification is considered to be the only requirement for salvation. This would imply that if we can just be forgiven, we will be saved. Will the people who were crucifying Jesus be saved because He forgave them? If God Himself, verbally and audibly, asks for the Father to forgive someone, wouldn't we feel confident that that person or persons would be forgiven? God is forgiveness personified. Consider the story of the prodigal son (the lost son). (Luke 15:11-32)
6. What does forgiveness mean? To some it means that the record of their sins is "wiped out" of the books of heaven. It has been suggested that justification means that God will treat me "just as if I'd" never sinned. But Ellen White makes it very clear that the record of sin—the history of our salvation—will be preserved for our study throughout eternity.

Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. **All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.** Our only hope is perfect trust in the blood of Him who can save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. **The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary is our only hope in this world, and it will be our theme in the world to come.** (ST Dec. 30, 1889). {5BC 1132.9; OHC 45.4}

7. That would be impossible without preserving a record of sin. Furthermore, if all trace of sin was to be eliminated, all Bibles would have to be destroyed. (Aren't lots of sins recorded in the Bible?) If all record of sin, rebellion, and transgression is going to be wiped out at the second or even third coming, then why bother to have this great controversy at all? God should have destroyed Lucifer when he first rebelled in heaven and avoided this whole mess. The fact that we are still here amidst all of this mess is proof that the record of the plan of salvation including all of our sins and how God has dealt with them will be preserved. But no one in heaven will waste his/her time focusing on any individual's sins.
8. Look at the "new covenant." What does God want us to understand when He forgives us? Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. Compare Hebrews 10:16-18. Compare what the people promised in the "old covenant." (Exodus 19:8; 34:3,7) If sins had been wiped out completely, why would God need to say, "I will no longer remember their sins"? God was telling us that He will treat us as if we had never sinned. God has not lost His omniscience; He is just choosing not to think about our past transgressions. Look at how God talked about David after his death. (1 Kings 11:6,38; 1 Kings 15:3; etc.) By the life and death of Jesus, God proved that human beings can live sinless lives, and He demonstrated that sin leads to death. It is His plan that human beings who look at His life and death and begin to comprehend all that is implied will reject sin forever. And God will be delighted to treat them as if they had never sinned. Forgiveness is the easiest thing for God. Salvation—which means complete healing—requires much more than just forgiveness.
9. Read 1 John 2:13,14. John reminds us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have existed forever. But He goes on to say that by knowing them, we can overcome. How does that work? If we come to understand the truth about sin and its consequences—and, by contrast, the truth about God and eternal life and what He is offering us—we should not have any difficulty committing ourselves to being His disciples. But in the process, we must overcome the evil one, and that is not easy.
10. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* says (Monday, July 27, 2009):  

Thus, in these verses we're given the essence of the Christian life: forgiveness of sins, knowing the Godhead, victory over sin, and the Word of God living in us.

Is that how you would describe the essence of the Christian life? What does it mean to know God? Is that the list you would have compiled to describe "the essence of the Christian life"?
11. As we have discussed before, that is not a casual knowing *about* God. An intimate personal relationship with Him is implied. It means choosing God's form of government based on love—in opposition to Satan's form of government based on selfishness. The problem, of course, is that we are born selfish. We may recognize the need of something above, beyond, and outside of ourselves; but we want that something to be under our control. That is why the ancients made idols. Think how many of us would love to have God and God's power under our control! Which is the ultimate in selfishness. Do we have any idols today? Some might

“worship” money, houses, cars, or position. Ellen White said:

**Multitudes have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal.** Many even of those who claim to be Christians have allied themselves with influences that are unalterably opposed to God and [178] His truth. Thus they are led to turn away from the divine and to exalt the human. {*Prophets and Kings* 177.1}

Every one of us is worshipping a “picture of God” that we have developed in our own minds. We do not know God as He really is, but we have developed a picture of God that is “real” to us; that is what we worship. Do any of us have a full, complete, and accurate picture of God? Think of all the media that the Devil is perfecting to distort and confuse our picture of God. If our picture of God has not changed in the last year, it is static and has become an idol!

12. Read 1 John 2:15. John does everything possible to make it starkly clear that we cannot be Christians and love God at the same time that we love the world. This is clearly not a reference to the kind of love God has for the world as mentioned in John 3:16. The Greek word, *kosmos*, translated *world* can refer to the entire universe, to this earth, to the beings who live here, to our way of life, to our existence, and sometimes, even to our sinful ways in opposition to God. This presents something of a conundrum for us because while God loved the world, we are told not to love the world. How can that be? Clearly, the term *kosmos* was being used to represent different things in these different settings. When John told us not to love the world, he was talking about the selfish interests, motives, and goals of worldlings. To what extent are our lives motivated by selfish interests in contrast to loving godly interests? What do we love most of all in our lives? How would our lives be different if we were motivated only by *agape* love?
13. Would it be safe for God to admit to heaven people who are still motivated by selfishness? It was the selfishness of Lucifer/Satan that started the great controversy in the beginning. God cannot risk the possibility of having another great controversy begin in the courts of heaven.
14. God recognizes that the only safe way for human beings to be admitted to heaven is for us to learn to be motivated only by love—which is what motivates Him and all the rest of the beings in the universe outside of planet Earth. If we are motivated by that kind of love, we will have overcome the world.
15. What are the very specific problems that John mentioned as being part of the world? (1 John 2:16) John mentioned three things in this verse:
  - 1) “The lust of the flesh” which obviously refers to passions which often control human behavior. If we are controlled by our urges, we are not controlled by love.
  - 2) “The lust of the eyes” goes beyond “the lust of the flesh.” As Jesus suggested in Matthew 5:27-30, if we even want to do something wrong, we have already committed sin. (See Exodus 20:17)
  - 3) “The pride of life” (Job 12:10; Acts 17:28) is also a problem. It is very easy for human beings to believe that they can do it themselves—that they do not need God! However, true Christians recognize that they are totally dependent upon God for even the beating of their hearts. There is no room for human pride.
16. So, we are to understand that when John referred negatively to the world, he was writing about the world of sin and all that is connected to it. Jesus called us to leave all that behind, to look to His life (by beholding and becoming changed), and to learn to live lives motivated by love.
17. Read 1 John 2:17. John finally made the point that when it is all said and done at the end of

this world's history, there will be nothing left of the world of sin. All traces of disease, death, sin, and rebellion will be wiped out. So, why would we want to commit ourselves to something that is destined to total destruction. This world is nothing more than a transient place to live. But God will make a new heaven and new earth wherein dwells righteousness. (Revelation 21:1-4; 2 Peter 3:13) What is it that makes heaven, "heaven"? Is it the gold on the streets, the tree of life, or the river of life. No! It is being able to live forever with God and among a group of people who are totally loving.

18. There is a parable told about a man who showed up at the pearly gates, and Peter asked him if he had any last request before he entered heaven. "Yes" the man replied, "I would like to see what hell is really like." So an angel escorted him to hell where he saw people who were just skin and bones and looked simply awful. Then a bell rang and the man asked what that was for. The angel surprised him by saying it was the dinner bell. But the people looked like they had not eaten in months! So the angel said, "Come and see what happens when they get to the dining area." As they approach a long thin building with several doors, there was an "angel" standing outside each door, and as each person came up to the door to enter the angel would place tubes over their arms and elbows so they could not bend them. Inside, the table which was quite narrow was filled with wonderful food from end to end. During the "lunch period," each of them struggled as hard as he/she could to get something into his/her mouth, but each of them failed.

When they returned to heaven, the man discovered that there was a dining room in heaven just like the one in hell, but all of the people looked well-fed. When these people arrived for a meal, as they sat opposite each other on either side of the long narrow table, they picked up the wonderful items of food and reached across to feed their friends on the other side! Those who enter heaven will always be thinking of others.

19. In heaven there will be perfect freedom. (John 8:31,32) Moreover, everyone will always do God's will. Why? Because they have come to understand that God's will is always the right thing to do. No one will ever want to do anything evil or wrong.
20. That is why those who love this world are not true lovers of God. Again and again throughout Scripture, we are told that this "world" is a transitory place—that it will not exist forever.
21. We may understand all of these things theoretically. But in order to be true Christians, that theoretical knowledge must be converted into ethical action. Our lives will demonstrate the truth of what our real motives are.
22. In this lesson we have seen that there is no compromise between the "world" of sin and the lives of true Christians. The great controversy comes down to the "battle" in our hearts and in our minds. We are fighting against formidable foes. (Ephesians 6:12) But God does not ask us to do that alone. Jesus has shown the way. In fact, He has lived the life for us. We just need to follow His example. This requires that we look past all the local but very transient allurements of this present world to the permanent "pleasures" of our future home "out of this world." Are you living a "loving life" or a "selfish life"? Which life do you think is the really happy life?

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