

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

Lesson #8 for August 22, 2009

Scriptures: Mark 12:28-31; John 14:15; James 2:15,16; 1 John 3:11-24; 4:7-5:4.

1. This lesson focuses on love, how God loves us, and how we—if we are true children of God and true Christians—will love others within the church.
2. In his gospel John wrote that God loved the world; (John 3:16) but in our passages for today, he challenges Christians to love other Christians. Why that difference?
3. In today's lesson we are told twice (1 John 4:8,16) that God is love. What do you think that means? Does it just mean that God is the most loving person we know? Why doesn't the Bible say that God is "faith" or "kindness" or "longsuffering"? Our passages also suggest that we have passed from death to life because we love others in the church. Shouldn't it be easy to love others in the church?
4. What is the relationship between having faith—which is the key to salvation (Acts 16:31)—and loving another person or God? John wrote that if we love, we will obey the commandments. Is that relationship obvious? What matters about faith is what we have faith in: the God of love. Then we will have love also. Is God the only perfect example of love?
5. What aspects of the great controversy and the plan of salvation do you think best represent God's love?
6. In our final verse for last week (1 John 3:10), we were told that children of God are recognizable because they do what is right and love other church members. In our two passages for this week (1 John 3:11-24; 4:7-5:4), John described the various things that love will accomplish in the Christian. Why did John apparently almost duplicate the words in these two passages? (Compare James 2:1-7)
7. With writing materials at such a premium, why do you think John repeated many of the ideas from 1 John 3:11-24 just a few lines later in 1 John 4:7-5:4? Note particularly that we are told repeatedly that we must love one another, we must love other believers, and we must not hate other believers. Why that emphasis? Is there ever a problem with getting along with other church members? We are reminded that in His very essence, God is love. Love is mentioned 38 times in those two short passages.
8. As we move to discussing love, we must not forget a few verses earlier what John wrote about antichrists. It is the divine/human Son of God who is able to teach us what real love is. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* (August 16) explains it in the following words:

Only through Him and what He did for us can the love of God be understood in a deeper sense. That is, only as we understand what happened at the cross and how Christ bore in Himself the punishment for our sins can we come to love God as we should.

Do you have any questions about those words? How do you think that actually works? Can you explain clearly to a new believer why Jesus had to die? What does it mean to say that Christ "bore" in Himself the punishment for our sins? Can our sins—or perhaps the guilt for our sins—be transferred to someone else? Is God deceived by that exchange? Doesn't God know who the real sinners are? Should we change the word "punishment" to "consequence"? Doesn't the use of the word "punishment" imply that someone is doing the punishing? Who is that? Is God the One who does the punishing? Does God then have to do something about the "punishment" that He is administering? Could the consequences of sin be moved to someone else? Doesn't God, who is doing the judging in any case, know who the original sinner was? Were the sins of the Israelites really transferred to the heads of those lambs before they were slaughtered? Or was that just a symbolic gesture? Did Jesus die to say something about "sin" as rebellion or our "sins" that we commit day by day? Or both? God is not preoccupied with "sin." He is preoccupied with saving us out of our sins.

9. Paul suggested that the love of God compels us—even leaves us no choice (2 Corinthians 5:14)—but to love other believers. Every day of every week, do we practice actually putting that idea into down-to-earth daily living? Is there any “compulsion” in love? Or is it that we are so moved by Christ’s life and death that we cannot help but love Him in return?

. . . Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. {DA 22.1}

10. Considering the fact that Christ gave His life for us, does that compel us to love others?
11. As you look at the news headlines and listen to the television news, how much loving do you hear about? Why is it that so much killing and hate seem to capture the headlines?
12. Read John 13:34,35. Is the world really so full of hate, mistrust, and alienation that when Christians love each other as “the world” sees the difference in Christians and looks on, they know immediately that Christians have something better to offer? Where are the loving acts on the front pages of the newspapers?
13. John gave some examples: 1) He used Cain’s hatred for his brother Abel as an example of the opposite of love. 2) By contrast, God is the ultimate example of true love. What does it mean to say that those who learn to truly love have passed from death unto life? What does that mean? As we become real Christians, do we move from the selfish world of Satan to the loving world of Christ? Why did John say that those who have learned to truly love are children of God? Do you agree with the basic premise that “not loving” means we do not know God and that “loving” means we know God? If we can learn to love instead of following Satan and always acting in a selfish way, we have literally passed from death to life! Can we tell whether any given act that we perform is motivated by love or selfishness?
14. The Greek word translated *love* throughout this epistle is *agape*. This word describes a selfless love which reaches out not because the recipient is worthy or attractive but simply because that person is in need. How can we possibly exhibit that kind of love toward God? How would you define Christian love? Is it adequate simply to say, “God is love”? Does that include His character, His work, and the way He runs His government? John made it very clear that love is not just an emotional response. True Christian love leads through action to faith and obedience.
15. What do you think was happening in Christian churches that led John to write so boldly about love? Is every “Christian” you know loving? Why, or why not?
16. In his book *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1995) offered the following quiz as an introduction:

When I am feeling alone, I most appreciate:

- 1) Hugs,
- 2) Something special in the mail,
- 3) Eating out with someone,
- 4) A call expressing appreciation, or
- 5) Assistance with something that needs to be done.

When I am feeling alone, I long most for:

- 1) Recognition for something I’ve done,
- 2) Help with the chores,
- 3) Someone taking time to listen,
- 4) A surprise gift every once in a while, or
- 5) A pat or touch of care and concern.

My favorite way of expressing care and love for someone else usually involves:

- 1) Offering words of appreciation,
  - 2) Reaching out with a touch,
  - 3) Doing things that help him or her,
  - 4) Taking quality time to be with this person, or
  - 5) Giving small presents.
17. Mr. Chapman suggested that the five love languages are giving quality time, receiving gifts, physical touch, acts of service, and words of affirmation. Which of those languages of love is most important to you?
  18. How often have we felt condemned by our conscience? Where does that condemnation come from? Where does the conscience come from? Do feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence come from God? Do they come from our knowledge of our past sins? What do you think John was implying when he said God is greater than our conscience? (1 John 3:20,21)
  19. Read 1 John 4:17,18. How is it that love casts out fear? Do we fear only because we are frightened of punishment? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* says, "Only by leaning on Him, on His merits and not on our own, can we have confidence and assurance." What do you think John was talking about when he discussed "merits" and "confidence"? Can't we be certain how God will respond? What is the courage, boldness, and confidence we need to approach God? Are you afraid of your human "friends"? Can we really be friends of God? Even if He is the Judge of the entire universe? When we think of God, are we attracted or repulsed? Are we more comfortable around Jesus than around the Father? (See John 14:9)
  20. Is it possible for us to approach God confidently only because we know we have an Advocate, Mediator, and Intercessor standing "between" us and the Father? See John 16:26. What would it take for us to be able to approach confidently to the Father directly? We need to remember that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit decided together to carry out the plan of salvation in that way.
  21. Is it possible for us to "love" even people we do not like? How does that work? Or was John suggesting that if we lived together as Christians, we could actually come to love anyone?
  22. When the former rain fell at Pentecost, the Christian community in Jerusalem "came together," gave sacrificially of their means, and began to live a sort of communal existence. Is it possible that when the latter rain is poured out, it will be necessary for us to do some of that again? Would you be comfortable living in a communal setting with other Christians that you know? Are you prepared to practice thinking of others before you think of yourself? How often do you do that today? What would it be like to live among a group of people who are truly loving?
  23. The *Message Bible* paraphrase of 1 Peter 1:22 says, "Love one another as if your life depended upon it!" Do our lives really depend upon learning to love? Is it possible to love God without loving other human beings?
  24. Repeatedly, we have heard sermons explaining that the great commandment is love. That commandment was divided into two by Moses (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5) and by Jesus (Matthew 22:37) to say that we must love God first and love others next. Is it obvious when you read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17; Deuteronomy 5:7-21) that those words are a call for love?
  25. Read 1 John 3:22-24; 4:21; 5:2-3. What do those verses teach us about love and its relationship to keeping the commandments?
  26. In the past we have suggested that if we keep the tenth commandment, and if we do not even want to do anything wrong, the other commandments will be easy. Is that a valid statement? Paul realized that the tenth commandment was the commandment which guarantees safety in heaven for eternity. No one will be permitted into the kingdom of heaven who even wants to do anything wrong. (Romans 7:7-25)

27. When you think of the Ten Commandments, do you think of a set of rules? Do you think of a description of how things work in God's kingdom?

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. **This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.** The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. **Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven.** Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, they have a place at the King's feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng. *Christ's Object Lessons* 315; *God's Amazing Grace* 148 (1900)

If God were to admit some selfish people into heaven, they would just start the whole great controversy all over again!

28. Read 1 Corinthians 13. Where does that kind of love come from? Notice that this chapter is in the middle of a discussion by Paul about the gifts of the Spirit. How does God give us that kind of love?
29. Look at the parable of the good Samaritan. (Luke 15) Look back at the recent events in your own life. Do you tend to act more like the priest, the Levite, or the good Samaritan?
30. All of those appeals to love are very personal. Unless God is a Person, they really do not have much meaning. For people who believe in the theory of evolution, what is the basis for loving? How does survival of the fittest go along with loving our brothers and sisters?
31. It is only as we recognize God as our loving, heavenly Father and all other humanity as our brothers and sisters that we begin to understand true Christian love. There is no room for the teachings of evolution!
32. Ellen White and certain Seventh-day Adventists have focused on the great controversy as a war of ideas between Satan and God over God's character and how He runs His government—His universe. Satan's government is based on exalting oneself and is totally selfish. God's government is based on love for others. It is totally unselfish. Are we fully convinced that we want to be part of God's loving government rather than Satan's selfishness? Do our daily lives prove that our choices are genuine?

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