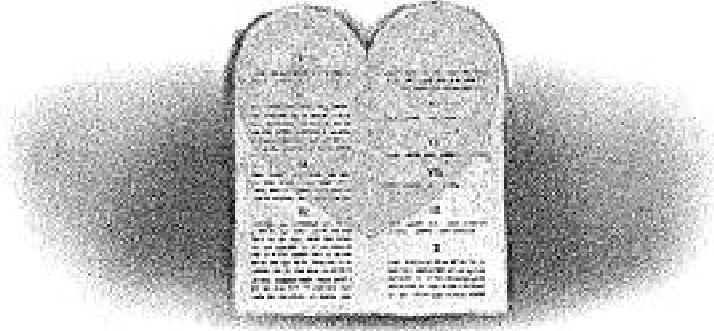


For the Love of God



MEMORY VERSE: “Since you [the Christians at Colossae] have accepted Christ Jesus¹ as Lord, live in union with him” (Colossians 2:6, TEV).

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BRITISH WRITER WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM once said that “the greatest tragedy² of life is not that people die, but that they stop loving” (adapted).

Other people think the greatest tragedy is that people have never *learned* to love.

When we look around the world, we see that the fruits of love can be bitter. Many things people do for love make us wonder whether love is nothing but a curse. Is love a foolish show of emotion that causes people to do terrible things? Think of the marriages that have ended in divorce. Homes have been destroyed. Hearts have been broken and abused by love. Such examples are repeated throughout history, and they could give love a bad reputation.³

But love is a very important part of creation. From the inside of atoms⁴ to the coldest corners of outer space, love is what holds God’s universe together. If God is love, then we can be sure love is something good.

We need to know what love is. As a result of the forgiveness we have received from the Cross, we are told to love both God and humanity.⁵

This week, we will study what it means to love God and humanity.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why should we love God and humanity? What has God done that should cause us to love? Did our love for God lead Jesus to the Cross? How does God’s law encourage us to serve Him? If love fulfills⁶ the law, what need is there for the law?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 17.

¹Christ Jesus—another name for Jesus.

²tragedy—a terrible happening.

³reputation—what people think about something.

⁴atoms—the smallest part of something.

⁵humanity—all the people of the world.

⁶fulfills—meets the requirements of something. We are required to obey the law. So obeying the law fulfills the law.

SUN FIRST LOVE.

“We love him [God] because he [God] first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Sometimes the deepest thoughts come from the simplest sentences, such as 1 John 4:19. Science and philosophy could never explain the full meaning of 1 John 4:19.

Why do science and philosophy fail in discovering the full meaning of 1 John 4:19?

Some Bible scholars think that the ancient⁷ Bible manuscripts show that the word *him* might not belong in 1 John 4:19. So then the verse would read, “We love, because he first loved us.” But the basic point of the verse remains: We love only because God has loved us.

If evolution⁸ explains that we are just the products of matter and energy, then where did love come from? Charles Darwin, the man who started the theory of evolution, taught that the matter which joined with love should have been buried with prehistoric⁹ animals 20 feet under the ground. Evolution teaches that only the healthiest animals will survive. Darwin called this “the survival of the fittest.” Darwin believed love had no place in “the survival of the fittest.”

⁷ancient—very old.

⁸evolution—slowly changing from a lower form of life to a higher form of life.

⁹prehistoric—before history was written.

¹⁰selflessly—not thinking of yourself.

¹¹unselfish—not selfish.

But in Christianity, love comes from God. And we love because God loved us first. Notice the word *first* in 1 John 4:19. Humans love because love flows out from God to us. Without receiving God’s love, we could never show love. First John 4:19 speaks about Christians, but also about people who do not know or love God. They, too, reflect God’s love when they show love. Christians react to God’s love by loving not just God but all people too. Of all the people in the world, we [Christians] should be the most loving of all people, because we know God loved us first.

Why does the knowledge that God loved us first mean that we should love? 1 John 4:11.

MON GOD SENT HIS (GOD’S) SON.

To say that you love someone is easy. How many people say they love someone, but do things that do not show that love?

One writer says there is no such thing as human love, if love means “to care selflessly¹⁰ and deeply for someone else.” For example, John loves Mary. By that we mean John wants Mary to be happy. But Mary loves Charles, not John. Now if John truly loves Mary, then should he not be glad that Mary has found love with Charles and that Charles makes her happy? If love is unselfish¹¹ care for someone else, then John should

be glad that Mary has found happiness with Charles. But human love says that John is not going to be happy that Mary has found happiness with Charles.

When God says He loves us, what does that mean? How has He shown that love for us? 1 John 4:8-10.



God showed His love for us by sending His only Son into the world so we could be saved.

Compare¹² 1 John 4:8-10 with 1 John 4:19. Both verses show that God loved us *before* we loved Him. It was not our love for God that led Him to send Jesus. His love for us led Him to send Jesus. Even if we did not love God, He would have sent Jesus for us. God's love for us did not depend on anything we could give back to Him. His love went beyond ours. His love was not dependent upon our love.

If Jesus' coming to die for us depended on how much we loved God, where would we be today?

¹²compare—show how things are the same.

¹³motives—why we do what we do.

TUE TO LOVE GOD.

“For our love for God means that we obey his commands” (1 John 5:3, TEV).

Anyone, even God, can say they love someone. But what does it mean to love someone? God showed His love for us by sending Jesus to die for our sins. When we understand what it means that Jesus came to die for our sins, then we can understand the wonderful love God showed for our sake.

Read Isaiah 53:4-6; Matthew 26:39; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; and Colossians 1:16. Then write in your own words what happened at the Cross and why this helps us to love God.

No wonder we love God! God has forgiven our sins because of Jesus. According to 1 John 5:3, we show our love for God by obeying His commandments. Walking with Jesus in obedience is not a matter of following rules. A robot could be programmed to follow rules. Our feelings, thoughts, purposes, and motives¹³ cause us to do what we do. We obey God because we *love* Him. We love Him because God has shown us that He loves us and that He wants us to have what is best for us. The Cross shows us that we can trust God. We obey Him not because we want to be saved, but because He already has saved us. Jesus has forgiven our sins.

So we have the promise of eternal¹⁴ life even now. We love God because God has saved us, because Jesus has forgiven our sins, and because we have eternal life. Because we love God, we obey His commandments.

“God’s love renews¹⁵ the heart. Love is the basis of action. Love changes the character, controls the desires and emotions, removes hate, and improves the affections.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* [Jesus], p. 59.



Why does God want us to obey His commandments? Why is obedience to God’s commandments an example of love?

WED WALKING IN LOVE.

“ ‘Now, if you will obey me [God] and keep my [God’s] covenant,¹⁶ you [the Israelites] will be my own people.

The whole earth is mine [God’s], but you will be my chosen people, a people dedicated [faithful] to me alone, and you will serve me as priests’ ” (Exodus 19:5, 6, TEV).

There is no great mystery to God’s law and why He wants us to keep His law. If someone’s child was standing on a ten-foot cliff, would that parent want her child to step over the cliff? Of course not! Why? If the child falls to the ground, the child will be hurt.

We live in a universe with both physical and moral¹⁷ laws. Breaking the physical laws can harm us. Breaking the moral laws can harm us too. God does not want us to get hurt, because He loves us.

“The law given at Sinai was the principle¹⁸ of love. . . . God . . . showed the purpose of the law when He told Israel, ‘Ye [you] shall be holy men unto me [God]’ Exodus 22:31.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 46.

God’s love is behind every commandment of His law. The commandments are designed for our happiness. People who break the commandments destroy themselves.

How does God promise to carry out His purpose of helping us obey His principles of love in His law? Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Hebrews 10:16.

¹⁴eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

¹⁵renews—makes new again.

¹⁶covenant—an agreement between God and His people.

¹⁷moral—having to do with right and wrong.

¹⁸principle—a truth that is the basis for all rules, standards, and other truth.



God will write His law on our hearts.

Obeying God's law is not just a matter of doing something. Obeying His law means His law is a part of us. The Ten Commandments are principles more than rules. God wants us to show these principles in our characters. Showing these principles in our characters is what it means to have His law in our hearts. He will make His law a very important part of our lives. When His law is a part of our lives, we are walking with Jesus. Peace and unity with His law become a way of life.

What is the relationship between God's Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and Jesus' Beatitudes¹⁹ (Matthew 5:3-12) on the Mount of Blessing? Compare Exodus 20:3-17 with Matthew 5 to see if you can find the same principles in Matthew 5 that are in Exodus 20.

THU FULFILLING²⁰ THE LAW.

"Be under obligation [debt] to no one—the only obligation you have is to love one another. Whoever does this has obeyed the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit [do] adultery; do not commit murder; do not steal; do not desire what belongs to someone else'—all these, and any others besides, are summed up in one command, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' If you love someone, you will never do him wrong; to love, then, is to obey the whole law" (Romans 13:8-10, TEV).



Notice the relationship between love and law that Paul shows in Romans 13:8-10. There is no disagreement between love and law. Many Christians say, (often in a debate over the Sabbath): "We do not need to keep the law. What we need to do is love."

¹⁹beatitudes—the ten principles for happy Christian living given by Jesus in Matthew 5:3-12.

²⁰fulfilling—meeting the requirements of the law.

But that is not what Paul says in Romans 13:8-10. Keeping the law is not something we do instead of loving other people. Keeping the law is the way we show love. This is a point many people, even Adventists, forget.

Love is a verb.²¹ A verb requires action. So love also requires action. The law is a guide on how we are to show love to people and to God.

What do you think Paul means when he says “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10, TEV)? What commandments does he mention in Romans 13:9? What point is Paul trying to make by mentioning just these commandments?

Faith in Jesus does not excuse a person from obeying the law. We love God because of what Jesus has done for us. Because of the Cross, we love God (1 John 3:16), and we love other people. The Ten Commandments outline how we show our love to both God and other people. Salvation by faith makes the law a very important part of following Jesus.

How would you answer a person who says we do not need someone to tell us how to love, that because love is natural we will automatically do the right thing?

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount*

of *Blessing*, “The Spirituality of the Law” (Matthew 5:19, 20), pp. 51–55.

“We do not earn salvation by our obedience. Salvation is the free gift of God which we receive by faith. But obedience is the fruit of faith. . . . We remain in Jesus, and the love of God is in us. Then our feelings, thoughts, purposes, and actions, will follow the will of God as it is in His holy law.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* [Jesus], p. 61.

“Jesus must be shown to the sinner as the Savior who has died for the sins of the world. As we watch the Lamb of God (Jesus) upon the cross, our minds begin to understand the mystery of salvation. Then the goodness of God leads us to repentance.²² In dying for sinners, Jesus showed a love we cannot understand. And as sinners watch this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires the soul to repent.²³ . . .

“Sinners may reject this love. They may refuse to be attracted to Jesus. But if they do not reject this love they will be attracted to Jesus. Knowing the plan of salvation will lead sinners to repent at the foot of the cross for their sins. These same sins have caused the sufferings of God’s dear Son.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 26, 27.

“God does not require us to give up anything that is for our best interest. In all He does, He cares for His children. . . . We are doing the greatest injury and injustice to our own souls when we rebel against the will of God. Sin-

²¹verb—a word that shows action. *Jump, run, wash, and drive* are verbs.

²²repentance—being sorry for your sins and wanting to stop sinning.

²³repent—to say you are sorry for your sins and that you want to stop sinning.

ners find no real joy in doing things God does not permit. God is the One who knows what is best and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of sin is the path of suffering and destruction.”—Adapted from *Steps to Christ* [Jesus], p. 46.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read Monday’s lesson again. How would you answer the argument about Mary, John, and Charles?
2. Read each of the Ten Commandments with love in mind. What principles are in each commandment that show love to both God and humanity?
3. What dangers come from trying to keep the law without love?

What is true love? Can a human show true, unselfish²⁴ love? If so, how?

²⁴unselfish—not selfish.