

Loving Our Brothers and Sisters



SABBATH—AUGUST 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 12:28–31; John 14:15; 1 John 3:11–24; 1 John 4:7–5:4; James 2:15, 16.

MEMORY VERSE: “Here is the command God has given us. Anyone who loves God must also love his brothers and sisters” (1 John 4:21, NIRV).

A PASTOR VISITED WITH A WOMAN WHO HATED HER HUSBAND. She wanted to divorce him. And she wanted to cause him as much pain as possible. The pastor suggested she go home and act as if she really loved him. She was to be as kind to him as she could. After the woman told her husband of her undying love, she would then inform him about wanting a divorce. She agreed, really believing this would cause him as much suffering as possible.

With revenge in her eyes, the woman did just that. She poured love on her husband for a few months as she never did before. Then the pastor called her and asked about her divorce.

“No way!” she answered. “I discovered I really do love him.”

Love is able to change our world, our churches, our families, and our marriages. This week we will see a little of what John says about this important topic. We will study how love is to be shown by those who claim to be followers of Jesus.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What does John teach about the importance of love? How is Christian love shown? How does the plan of salvation¹ show the true meaning of love? How can we, as sinners, have the assurance² of salvation? How are Christians to show love?

1. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

2. assurance—promise that gives hope.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 16**THE TWO PASSAGES³ ON LOVE
(1 John 3:11–24; 1 John 4:7–5:4)**

The passage we studied last week showed children of God doing what is right and loving their brothers and sisters in the Lord (1 John 3:10). That verse builds a bridge to the discussion of love that shows up in the rest of John's letter.



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What are some of the things that 1 John 3:11–24 has in common with 1 John 4:7–5:4?

The two passages are almost the same. Both use the wording *love one another* repeatedly (often) (1 John 3:11, 23; 1 John 4:7, 11, 12). Both say we need to love other believers. Both warn us against hating our brothers and sisters. Both passages also point to God's love for us.

First John 3:11–24 focuses on love to one another and uses different

forms of the wording *to love* 8 times. The second passage uses it more than 30 times and broadens the topic. We are asked to love not only the children of God but also God Himself. On the other hand, God loved us first and still loves us.

We need to understand 1 John 4:7–1 John 5:4 with the antichrists in mind. They were wrong in their ideas about Jesus. The passage says Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 4:15) and the Christ (1 John 5:1) and became the Savior of the world. Only through Jesus and what He did for us can we understand the love of God more deeply. As we understand what happened at the cross and how Christ accepted the punishment for our sins, we are able to love God as we should.

Read again the passages for today's study. What important point, or points, impresses you the most? How well do you show others the love God has toward you? What changes do you need to make so you can show that love better?

MONDAY—AUGUST 17**THE "DEFINITION" OF LOVE
(1 John 3:11–16; 1 John 4:7–16)**

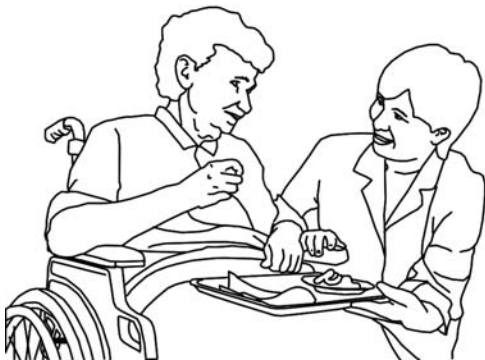
John talks a lot about love in these verses. But how does he describe and explain love in 1 John 3:12–16 and 1 John 4:7–10, 16?

³ passages—groups of verses.

John does not set out to give the meaning of love from a dictionary. Rather, he starts out using the example of Cain as showing what love is not.

How does that example help make John's point?

The negative example is followed by a positive one. Jesus put down His life for us. The Father sent His Son as a Sacrifice (offering) for our sins. The Father sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. This is the deepest meaning of love. Love means to do whatever is necessary to help others. This includes self-sacrifice. This is the opposite of what Cain did to his brother. Love also means to forgive and to forget the past. In Jesus' case, it meant complete self-denial for the good of others.



Love means doing whatever is necessary to help others.

But love is not just an example to be followed. It must have an influence⁴ on others' lives. If someone

would jump in the water and drown just to prove his or her love, it would mean nothing. But if the person who jumped in lost his life so that he could save someone else, that is love.

The best way to understand love is to study the Godhead and Their work as shown in the plan of salvation. This includes Jesus' making Himself a sacrifice for us.

Christian love has its beginning in the love of God. To abide in love means to enjoy a close relationship with God. There is no love that does not come from God (1 John 4:7). But the sentence "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (NKJV) in the same verse could be misunderstood. It has to be interpreted from the theme (topic; idea) of 1 John. According to 1 John 3:23, faith (true belief) and love belong together. According to 1 John 5:2, love and keeping the commandments do too. Anyone can say they love God. But John tells us that love needs to be shown to prove it is love.

What are some examples of this kind of love you have seen shown among others? Who were they who showed this love? What did they do? And what did you learn from them about the true meaning of love?

TUESDAY—AUGUST 18

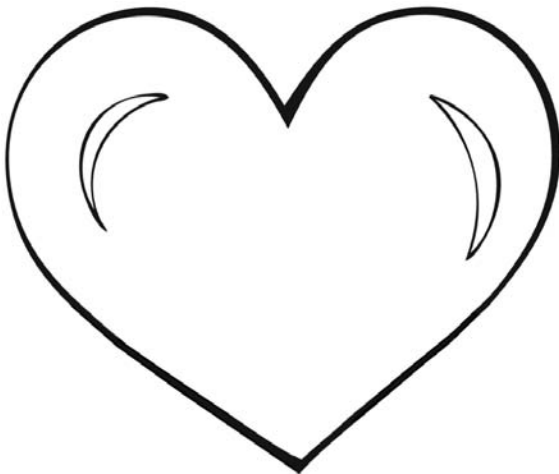
**A CRISIS OF ASSURANCE
(1 John 3:19–21)**

4. influence—the power to affect or change a person or things.

What point is John making in 1 John 3:19–21? What is he saying to us? Who has not at some point experienced the feelings that John is talking about?

What problem is John talking about in 1 John 4:17, 18? Again, who has not had this problem?

Most Christians look at themselves, at their weaknesses, and at their lack of love. Then they feel guilty and even lost. But how important it is to remember that God is greater than we are, greater than our guilt, greater than our hearts! How important that we understand, day by day, that our hope of salvation must depend on Jesus and His work for our sake. Only by depending on Him, and not on our own works, can we have confidence⁵ and assurance.



**God's forgiveness is greater than our guilt,
greater than our hearts.**

Confidence is brought up several times in 1 John. John wants believers to be positive when they pray to God (1 John 3:21, 22), positive about Christ's coming (1 John 2:28), and positive about God's judgment (1 John 4:17). God means good things for us, His children. Being settled in His love drives away all fear.

"Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace⁶ will get it. So he exposes their sins to them to discourage them. He is always looking for opportunities to cause those who are trying to obey God to feel weak. He tries to make them feel that even their best and most acceptable service is unacceptable to God. By many cruel tricks, he tries to cause them to be lost forever.

"In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges made by Satan. In sin-stained clothes he stands in front of God and confesses his guilt. But Jesus, our Advocate [Lawyer], pleads for all who have turned away from sin and entrusted themselves to His care. Jesus pleads their cause. And by the powerful arguments of the Cross, Jesus defeats their accuser. Jesus' perfect obedience to God's law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth. And He claims from His Father mercy and restoration for guilty man."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, page 316.

What hope can you get for yourself from these hope-filled words?

5. confidence—having positive feelings about self.

6. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 19**LOVE IN PRACTICE (ACTION)
(1 John 3:17, 18; 1 John 4:19–21)**

John is not satisfied with just talking about love. He lets us know God wants us to put love into practice. John says hate does not go with a loving attitude (thoughts and feelings). Hate is even a part of murder (1 John 3:15). He says, too, we should not love with words alone but with actions (verse 18).

John also informs us we are to speak kind and encouraging words to one another. Words are an important part of sharing love. How would our spouses, children, relatives, and friends feel if they never received support from our kind words? Even John himself used words to share God's love with others.

But John does not like the kind of love that is given without standards. In 1 John 3:17, John describes a situation that is almost the same as one found in James 2:15, 16. A church member is in need. Others have the money to help him or her but do not do anything except to say some nice things to that person. That is not enough. God informed us that He loves us. But He also sent His Son to die in our place. People who love much do much because real love is active.

Which command in 1 John 3: 16, 17 is the harder one to follow, and why?

We may not be called by God to die for another believer. But many of us likely will be asked by Him to show love for someone who is poor. We may be able to give jobs, food, clothes, a Christian education, or a place of safety. But we choose to live our own comfortable lives instead. Early Christians shared their money. To love others is a challenge because it requires us to sacrifice.⁷

Home is the place love must be shown most of all. There are many, many ways we can show our love to family members. Sometimes even little things can send a powerful message of love and acceptance. For example, “little” things can include extra help around the house, a nice dinner, or a special family outing together. There are many ways we can show love. Love thinks first about others. And more so, it will act on those thoughts.

Imagine what it would be like living in a home in which true love was shown. What changes should you make that can help make that ideal become more real in your home?

THURSDAY—AUGUST 20**LOVE AND THE COMMANDMENTS
(1 John 3:22–24; 1 John 4:21–5:4)**

Both passages we have studied this week end with the commandments. The word *commandment* is

7. sacrifice—to give up things, such as life or time or money, to save or help someone or something.

used four times each in both passages. First John 5:2 (NIV) talks about carrying out the commandments. First John 3:22, 24 and 1 John 5:3 (NIV) focus on obeying, or keeping (KJV), the commandments.

What do 1 John 3:22–24; 1 John 4:21; and 1 John 5:2, 3 teach about the commandments along with obeying them?

John says keeping God's commandments and doing what pleases Him (1 John 3:22) give Christians faith and hope that God hears their prayers. God's command is to believe in Jesus and to love one another. Keeping the commandments gives opportunity for us to abide (remain) in God and God in us. To love God includes keeping the commandments. Really, the commandments can be kept because they are for our happiness.

When John talks of the commandment (instead of commandments), he means the command for us to believe in Jesus as the Messiah (Chosen One) and to love one another. In chapter 4 the *commandment* is that we who love God should also love our brothers and sisters.



We who love God should also love our brothers and sisters.

Someone asked Jesus which of the commandments was the most important or the foremost of all. Jesus answered by pointing to the commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:28–31). But Jesus also pointed out that those who love Him keep His commandments (John 14:15). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about many different commandments.

By changing from *the commandment* (one) to *the commandments* (many), John may have shown that the one commandment of love shows itself in many commandments.

How can we, in our walk with the Lord, experience the truth that God's commandments are more than just a set of rules? Is that all they are? Or are they something more? If so, what?

FRIDAY—AUGUST 21

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read 1 Corinthians 13; Ellen G. White, "A Faithful Witness," page 548, in *The Acts of the Apostles [Preachers]*.

"We should never pass a suffering person without trying to give him the comfort that we receive from God.

"All this is but a fulfillment of the principle [rule] of the law. This principle is shown in the story of the good Samaritan. The principle also is made clear in the life of Jesus. Who Jesus is shows the true meaning of the law.

It shows what is meant by loving our neighbor as ourselves. And when the children of God show mercy, kindness, and love toward all men, they also are witnessing to the nature of the laws in heaven. . . . The love of God in the heart is the only kind of love shown toward our neighbor.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 505.

“You should get rid of your cold, formal feelings as soon as possible. You need to develop feelings of love, mercy, and friendliness in your everyday life. You should show true courtesy and Christian politeness. The heart that really loves Jesus loves those for whom He died. Just as truly as the needle points to the pole, the true follower of Christ will work hard to save souls for whom Christ has given His life. Working for the salvation of sinners will keep the love of Christ warm in the heart. And it will give that love a proper growth and development.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*⁸ for the Church, volume 3, page 466.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What can your local church do, as a church group, to show love in ways that you as a person cannot? How well is your local church showing the love of God to the community?⁹ What can you do to help?
- ② In class, talk about different persons who have shown the kind of love we have discussed this week. What did they do? What was given up by them to help others? What did their actions have in common that can help us better understand what true love is?
- ③ The Bible says love is from God. Why must that be so? Where else could love come from? It is hard to imagine how pure matter and energy alone could ever create something like love. How does real love help us better understand God is real? How does our example of love show others God is real? In what ways might the example of love be the best proof God is real?

8. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

9. community—groups of people living, working, or worshipping together.