

A Love Response



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 John 4:18, 19; Rom. 3:19, 20; John 15:13; Rom. 5:6–8; John 6:28, 29.*

Memory Text: “If you love Me, keep My commandments’ ” (*John 14:15*).

Key Thought: We should work to win souls to Christ; the question we need to ask ourselves is, **What motivates us to do just that?**

Although our memory text is most often considered to refer to the Ten Commandments, there are other commandments, as well, not the least being “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ ” (*Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV*).

Our motivation for witnessing and evangelism should be primarily God’s grace to us and not a sense of guilt, mere obligation, or debt. One doesn’t need to be a behavioral psychologist to know that pretty much everything we do as humans is in response to something. This is true also of our involvement in witnessing and evangelism. We can discover our motivation simply by asking why we do what we do. Why do we become involved in the church’s witnessing and evangelistic strategies? Or indeed, why *don’t* we?

This week we will explore the right motivation for getting involved in the Lord’s work and also expose the dangers of working with the wrong motivations, such as obligation, guilt, or shame. We will explore why evangelism and witnessing should be our love response to God’s gift of salvation to us.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 9.*

Motivated by Love

Have you ever wondered why often it seems difficult to motivate people to make long-term commitments in church projects? Perhaps the answer can be found as we think of some other situations in which a very high degree of motivation and commitment are evident. What is it that motivates a parent to donate a kidney to save the life of his or her child? Why do moms and dads spend a small fortune to provide the best possible education for their children? Are these things done because the parents would feel guilty if they didn't? Do they think that they owe their children these things? Of course not.

While parents do have a sense of responsibility for the welfare of their children, love is surely the major motivating force. They do what they do because they love. We cannot spell this out enough times: *we do things for God because we love Him and because we know He loves us.*

Read 1 John 4:18, 19. What do these verses mean? Write out their meaning in your own words.

Our love for God must be rooted in His love for us. God existed before we did, and He has loved us supremely from the creation of humankind. Love can come only as a result of, and in response to, love. Obedience to the great gospel commission for any other reason than the fact that we love is all but fruitless. This is why spiritual preparation is vital as we seek to become involved in witnessing and evangelism.

Our love for God and our willingness to work with Him in the saving of souls is dependent upon our knowing Him. It is not usual that we love people whom we don't know. Therefore, it is vital that to obey God out of love, we must know Him personally.

What do the following texts reveal about love for God and the motivation to obey Him and work for Him? Josh. 22:5, Luke 7:41–43, John 14:23, 2 Cor. 5:12–18.

Love and obedience are inseparable as long as they occur in that order. True love for God will always result in obedience to His revealed will, but obedience will not necessarily lead to love (although it can). If we want people to work for Jesus, we must help them to create a loving connection with Him.

How much does your love for God motivate what you do? Does it motivate you at all? What does your answer say about your relationship with Him and what needs to change?

Not by Guilt

Over the centuries guilt has been used to motivate people to action. Evangelism leaders have often reminded us that God has given us responsibility and that we must use our God-given talents and gifts. We are told that God or the church is depending on us. If God has done so much to save us, how can we remain evangelistically inactive? All these attempts call us to action, delivered, no doubt, with the best intentions, subtly appeal to our sense of guilt and indebtedness to God. Motivation always seems to become counterproductive when we remove the emphasis from what God has done and place it onto what we must do.

Read Romans 3:19, 20. What did the apostle Paul mean when he said the whole world is guilty before God? What’s his point?

The way that Paul uses the word *guilty* in this passage communicates the sense of accountability. He has already stated in Romans 3:10 that “‘there is none righteous, no, not one’ ” (NKJV), and in verse 19 he confirms that the law makes “all the world” guilty before God.

The law’s function has often been likened to a mirror that reveals our sinful condition but which cannot provide the cleansing soap and water. Looking into God’s law, we become aware of our sinfulness and are driven to the Savior to receive His free pardon and cleansing.

After we come to Christ, we are no longer motivated by guilt, because the guilt has been washed away, covered by the righteousness of Jesus. We stand in Him, perfect and guiltless and forgiven. Yes, we are sinners, but we have been forgiven, our guilt has been atoned for; now—based on the salvation that is ours through Christ—we are motivated to witness to others about that which Christ has done for us.

Read James 2:10. What is the main point that James is trying to make? How would you explain this verse to a new believer?

The fact that an offense on one point makes one guilty of defying the God who commanded the whole law underscores the futility of the attempt to gain favor in God’s sight through law keeping. Law breaking, even to a small degree, reveals an underlying desire to do our own will rather than God’s.

While acknowledging your wrongs, you have to surrender them to Jesus, claiming His righteousness, His forgiveness, and His grace, regardless of how unworthy you are. And lest you be mistaken, you are *unworthy*, more than you could imagine. If not, the salvation offered to you wouldn’t be from grace but from a debt God owes you (see Rom. 4:1–4). Do you really think that God owes you anything?

Motivated to Serve

What would you think of someone who constantly and loudly declared that he or she was motivated and yet attempted nothing? What about someone who claimed to be dedicated yet never revealed to what, or to whom, he or she was dedicated? As we have seen, love is a most powerful motivator; but to only declare our love, even our love for God, means nothing unless we act on that love. In other words, we expect love to be revealed through actions. In this sense love is an active word as it reveals itself through loving actions.

Read John 15:13 and Romans 5:6–8. What do these verses reveal to us about Jesus’ love as manifested in His actions? How are we to take the principles revealed here and manifest them in our own lives?

What a wonderful Savior is He who deliberately and willingly gave His life because of His great love for us. Here is the ultimate example of where the one who loves is compelled to act for those who are loved. What if Jesus had pledged His love for us and remained in heaven? What if He had declared His love but made no promises to us or provisions for us?

Read John 14:21. What does this verse tell us about love in action, on the part of both Jesus and us?

We are not just talking about love here; we are talking about a loving relationship. In any loving relationship our motivation is to please the one who is the object of our love. Jesus’ decisive saving act on our behalf was motivated only by His love for a race that had broken its connectedness to God. Anything that we do for God that does not come from a similar motive suggests that we do not really understand what it is to have a love relationship with God. God doesn’t want us to be involved in witnessing and evangelism because we think we owe Him. Rather, He desires our connectedness to Him be such that it compels us to do the things that please Him and to be in tune with things that matter to Him. God wants us to love Him so much that we will reach out to the people whom He loves.

How can we be sure that we do things for God with the right motivation? Can we be a blessing to others even if we are wrongly motivated in our action? If so, in what way? Are right actions for the wrong reason good actions anyway? Whatever your answer, bring it to class on Sabbath and discuss.

The Legalism Trap

There's an English expression that says, "There is no such thing as a free lunch"—the idea that if you receive something free, it really isn't free because somewhere, somehow, sometime, you will have to pay or repay. The theory that nothing is ever really free has subtly infiltrated Christian thinking to the extent that many try to be deserving of God's salvation through obedience to His will.

Legalism in the Christian vocabulary describes the attitude of those who believe that their obedience to God will somehow cause Him to justify them in His sight. Of course, although God's grace does not negate His expectation of obedience, salvation is based solely on this grace and nothing else, certainly nothing else that we could do.

What do the following texts reveal about the misunderstanding of salvation so prevalent in the minds of many? In what ways can we, ourselves, get caught up in that same kind of thinking? Why is it so easy, in fact, to do so?

Rom. 10:1–4 _____

Rom. 11:5, 6 _____

Gal. 2:16 _____

A legalistic religion causes the individual to focus upon personal performance (and often on the performance of others) rather than on the gospel commission. Legalistic attitudes can lead to pride and arrogance on the part of those who are so blind that they actually deem themselves holy enough to be saved. Or, just as bad, legalistic attitudes can lead to discouragement and despair for those who realize just how far they are from the divine standard. Either way, it's a trap that needs to be avoided, especially by a church such as ours where obedience to law is so central to our understanding of what the gospel is all about.

Read John 6:28, 29. How does Jesus reveal the truth of salvation by faith in these verses? What, though, does it mean to believe in "him whom he hath sent"? How should that belief be manifested in our lives? How well do you manifest that belief, especially when no one is looking?

Free to Be a Slave

The Bible makes it clear that we were once slaves to sin, but through Christ we have been released (*Rom. 6:6*), set free (*Gal. 5:1*), delivered (*1 Thess. 1:10*), adopted (*Rom. 8:15*), and born again (*1 Pet. 1:23*).

The effective worker for God is the one who has given the past to Him and has accepted His power to work in the present and the future. In other words, those who have been delivered by Christ are able to be His slaves. If we don't understand this truth, it may seem strange that deliverance leads to slavery, but it is as true as the sayings, "To be spiritually filled we must continually empty ourselves" and "The way to victory is constant surrender."

Read *Philippians 1:1, James 1:1, and 2 Peter 1:1. What did Paul, Timothy, James, and Simon Peter mean when they announced themselves the bondservants of God and Jesus Christ? How are we to understand these ideas for ourselves?*

Usually bondservants, or slaves, would be owned by and compelled to work under a master. To work for the Master in the Christian sense is a totally voluntary choice. God loves us too much to force our will. When Timothy, James, and Simon Peter used these words, they were indicating their entire identification with Christ and His cause. They were declaring their unreserved service to Him as their Lord. They were renouncing their self-importance so that others would focus only upon Jesus. In this picture of slavery we see dedicated followers pledging their loyalty and devotion through selfless service.

Read *John 8:34–36. What do these verses tell us about slavery to sin and the way to freedom?*

Jesus' hearers knew full well that slaves had no security. They could be sold at the whim of the master, while the son of the master was always secure in the household. Here Jesus uses the contemporary slave situation to impart a vital, spiritual truth. If the Son of God makes you spiritually free from slavery to sin, you will be free indeed. It would be unusual for literally freed slaves to voluntarily place themselves back in bondage, but, spiritually, this is what happens when we are freed from the slavery to sin and become slaves of Christ (*Rom. 6:17, 18*). If we are free from the things that make us focus upon ourselves, we are free to consider others and what we have that can benefit them. Herein lies the key to a life of service.

Further Study: Keeping on Track

Just as any good motor vehicle will ultimately break down as a result of a lack of regular maintenance, so many good and worthwhile church ministries have fallen by the wayside because of a lack of regular intentional maintenance.

To keep your ministry healthy and on track, consider the following maintenance checklist:

1. Maintain your personal connection. Remind yourself often that you are in a partnership ministry with the Lord.

2. Maintain your personal vision. Do you still sense the importance of your ministry? Are your goals as clear and as strong as they were when you became involved in this ministry?

3. Maintain your communication. Regular reporting is important to continued support. People are busy, and they need to be reminded of how this ministry is going and also of how they can become involved.

4. Maintain your enthusiasm. It is a true saying that “Nothing breeds enthusiasm like enthusiasm.” Show your continued excitement about your ministry, and others will become excited too.

5. Maintain your focus. Don’t get sidetracked with other duties or programs that will prevent you from spending the time and energy that your current ministry needs to survive and grow.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, go over your answer to Tuesday’s final question.
- ❷ What insights does the following quotation give into the relationship between love for God and service for Him? “The watchful Christian is a working Christian, seeking zealously to do all in his power for the advancement of the gospel. As love for his Redeemer increases, so also does love for his fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 261.
- ❸ “Those who have never experienced the tender, winning love of Christ cannot lead others to the fountain of life. His love in the heart is a constraining power, which leads men to reveal Him in the conversation, in the tender, pitiful spirit, in the uplifting of the lives of those with whom they associate. Christian workers who succeed in their efforts must know Christ; and in order to know Him, they must know His love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 550, 551. In class, share your own personal experiences of God’s love and how you have come to know it for yourself.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 14:15*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe what kind of personal experience is necessary in order to share a compelling witness of God’s love.

Feel: Open his or her heart to the love of God—a love that awakens, softens, and sweetens his or her love for others, leading to a sharing of experiences of God with them.

Do: Serve Christ in loving obedience, as Christ offered up His life for him or her in loving service.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Compelling Love

A Why are guilt and duty not good motivators for witness?

B How do the experiences of being delivered from guilt and slavery to sin and becoming truly happy and secure children of God overflow into a heartfelt witness of God’s goodness?

II. Feel: Awakening Love

A Why is it important to dwell on Christ’s sacrifice for us, believe that He loves us, accept His love, and give our hearts to Him?

B How does His love for us awaken our love for Him?

C Why is love a critical prerequisite for true witness?

III. Do: Obedient Love

A When we love and are loved, how do our relationships to others change?

B Why does true love result in obedience, and how does our loving obedience demonstrate a loving relationship to God?

► **Summary:** Christ’s loving service to us awakens a loving relationship to God and is the basis of our true witness of God’s love for us, as reflected in our loving ministry to others.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The unconditional, all encompassing love of God for His created beings is the touchstone of our faith and witness. To reflect, even dimly, this divine love is the essence of what it means for us to be Christ’s ambassadors.

Just for Teachers: The complex, often hidden, realm of human motivation impacts every aspect of our lives—both physically and spiritually. This week, help your class to discover practical ways to untangle the threads of healthy and unhealthy motives for witnessing.

Opening Activity: It’s been called one of the most barbaric, “scientific” experiments ever conducted. In the thirteenth century, Frederick II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, attempted to discover what language God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He theorized that if newborn babies were isolated from all spoken language, they would grow up to speak the “natural language” of humankind. And so the emperor prepared his experiment. He took a number of newborns from their parents and gave them to caregivers who were forbidden to speak to, cuddle, or play with the infants. The babies were even handled with special instruments to ensure they never experienced human touch.

But Frederick didn’t get a chance either to prove or to disprove his theory about “natural language.” Despite being regularly fed, bathed, and clothed, each one of the babies died before reaching the age of speech. Why? Modern scholars have attributed the babies’ failure to thrive primarily to the absence of love, as expressed through human touch and voice.—Daniel G. Amen, *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life* (New York: Three Rivers Press®, 1998), p. 73.

Consider This: Why do you think that one of the most fundamental human needs is to both give and receive love? Could it have something to do with the character of the One who created us? Read Zephaniah 3:17, Luke 13:34, and Revelation 3:20, noting especially the imagery. What are we to make of a Being of unfathomable power who longs to sing over us, to gather us up like a mother hen gathers her chicks, who stands at the door of our hearts and knocks? Take a few moments to consider the extraordinary nature of this divine love, which we’ve been called to share with the world.

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: Lead your class on an exploration of key biblical

passages that reveal how deeply our Lord wants love to define our response to Him.

Bible Commentary

I. A “Love Revolution” (*Review Romans 5:6–8 and 1 John 4:7–21 with the class.*)

Agape is the Greek word used repeatedly by New Testament writers to describe the transcendent, self-sacrificing love that God displays for humanity. But this was an alien concept within the pagan world that surrounded the early Christian church. In pagan philosophy, mercy and pity were considered “defects of character”; it was a widely accepted practice to “discard” infant girls at birth; and pagan deities, it was believed, were as likely to torment humans as to assist them.

Within this context, the Christian concept of *agape* love was nothing less than a cultural bombshell. In place of the self-interested, capricious pagan gods, Christianity assumed that there was a Divine Being who actively sought a love relationship with humanity. And even more radical was the idea that this God expected humans to treat each other with the same kind of love!

Second-century Christian writer Tertullian recorded how Christian love attracted pagan attention: “But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they love one another.’ ” —*Apology*, chap. 39. Even the emperor Julian, no friend to the Christian church, acknowledged in A.D. 362 that the “ ‘impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well.’ ” —Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press®, 1996), p. 84.

Activity: Ask the class members to imagine, as you reread 1 John 4: 7–11, that they’re hearing these words through the ears of someone steeped in the cultural and religious norms of paganism. What may have been their reactions, and why?

Consider This: How does knowing more of this cultural context deepen your understanding of the reasons why early Christians emphasized *agape* love as central to their identity and witness?

II. “More Than a Feeling” (*Review 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 with the class.*)

Love can mean different things within different contexts. So, what is the nature of the love that fuels Christian witness? Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 and note the various facets of Christian love.

A. *It's irresistible* (“For Christ’s love compels us” [vs. 14, NIV]). The word *compel* is closely related to *coerce*, *force*, or *require*. It implies that our choice is somehow limited. Do you think that Paul is suggesting that Christ’s love coerces us in some way? If not, why do you think that Paul uses this particular word to describe the impact of Christ’s love on our lives?

B. *It transforms* (“The old has gone, the new is here!” [vss. 16, 17, NIV]).

C. *It doesn't come alone*; it's packaged with a specific mission (“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors” [vs. 20, NIV]).

Consider the words of Ellen G. White: “Love can no more exist without revealing itself in outward acts than fire can be kept alive without fuel.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 695.

III. “Spoilers” (Review Romans 3:19–20 and 1 John 4:18 with the class.)

Do motives really matter? Many influential thinkers throughout history—from Niccolò Machiavelli to John Stuart Mill—have said no. They’ve taken a “utilitarian” stance, arguing that it’s the outcome of actions that are important, not the motivation nor the morality of the actions themselves. What do you think?

Read Christ’s pointed words about hypocrisy in Matthew 23:25–27. Here Christ explicitly rejects the idea that if we do the right things, our motives are irrelevant. He calls us to integrated living, in which there’s no disconnect between our actions and our convictions. Why do you think this is so important to Him?

Consider This: Read Philippians 1:15–18. Why do you think that Paul says he still rejoices, even though the motivation is wrong? Is he saying that motivation really doesn’t matter? Why, or why not? How can Paul’s words be reconciled with those of Christ in Matthew 23?

■ *What “spoilers” does Scripture identify that can taint our motives and subvert our love responses to God? For example, **fear** that we’ll never “measure up” (Rom. 3:19, 20); an acute awareness of our **guilt** before God (read the “laundry list” of indictments against human nature contained in Romans 3:10–19); and **pride** and all its variants, including envy, vanity, and ambition (Phil. 1:15–17, John 12:43).*

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: How can we guard our own motives when it comes to the sharing of our faith? Lead your class in a discussion of the practical ways to integrate the biblical principles we’ve discussed into our everyday thought processes.

Thought Questions:

Rather than being motivated by our love for God, in what ways do we sometimes approach witnessing with a distinctly “Protestant work ethic”? How do we show by our actions that we believe that working hard enough and long enough can “get the job done”? What are some of the dangers of a works-focused approach to witnessing and evangelism? In what ways might we become preoccupied with “winning souls” rather than developing disciples? What are the dangers of elevating our importance and denigrating the role of the Holy Spirit? How could this lead to discouragement, especially if we don’t meet our goals?

Ellen G. White writes, “God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. . . . But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself.” —*Steps to Christ*, p. 79.

How do you respond to this assertion? For those caught up in a works-orientated approach to witnessing, how could this revelation operate like a metaphorical bucket of cold water over their heads?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Use the final few moments of the lesson study to guide your class back to the Person of Christ, the anchor of our faith and witness.

In an ideal world, our commitment to witnessing would flow purely from our response to Christ’s sacrifice and love for us. Yet, in the words of Scripture, and in our own experience, we see that there are other powerful forces at work—forces that can subvert our good intentions. Can we ever unravel the hopelessly complicated knot of our motives and desires—both conscious and unconscious? Do we need to? Or is it sufficient simply to acknowledge our inability and submit the whole tangled mess into the loving hands of our Creator?

Activity: Close the class by reading Psalm 51:1–13, which David wrote after repenting of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. David frankly acknowledges that God knows him through and through—the good, the bad, and the ugly. And then David surrenders himself humbly, yet confidently, to God’s mercy. Read the psalm meditatively, as a prayer. Focus especially on verses 10–13. In what ways do these few words encapsulate the main themes of our lesson today?