

Loving Brothers *and* Sisters



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 12:28–31; John 14:15; James 2:15, 16; 1 John 3:11–24; 4:7–5:4.*

Memory Text: “And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (*1 John 4:21, NKJV*).

A pastor was visited by a woman full of hatred toward her husband. Not only did she want to divorce him, she wanted to cause him as much pain as possible. The pastor suggested that she go home and act as if she really loved him. She was to tell him how much he meant to her and to be as kind as she could. After having convinced him of her undying love, she would then inform him about wanting a divorce. That would all but guarantee hurting him as much as possible.

With revenge in her eyes, she did just that, lavishing love on him for a few months as she never had done before. Then the pastor called her and asked about her divorce.

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

Love is able to change our world, our churches, our families, and our marriages. This week we'll see a little of what John says about this crucial topic and how love is to be manifested by those who claim to be followers of Jesus.

The Week at a Glance: What does John teach about the importance of love? How is Christian love manifested? How does the plan of salvation reveal the true meaning of love? How can we, as sinners, have the assurance of salvation? How are Christians to manifest love?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.*

The Two Passages on Love (*1 John 3:11–24, 4:7–5:4*)

The passage we investigated last week ended with saying that children of God are recognizable by doing what is right and by loving their brothers and sisters in the Lord (*1 John 3:10*). That verse builds a bridge to the discussion of love that appears in the rest of the epistle.

What are some of the similarities between **1 John 3:11–24** and **1 John 4:7–5:4**?

The two passages are remarkably similar. Both contain the phrase “love one another” repeatedly (*1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12*). Both stress that the objects of love are primarily other believers, and both warn us against hating our brothers and sisters. Both passages also emphasize God’s love for us.

First John 3:11–24 focuses on love to one another and uses the variants of the phrase “to love” eight times; the second passage employs it more than thirty times and enlarges the topic: We are called to love not only the children of God but also God Himself. On the other hand, God loved us first and still loves us.

First John 4:7–5:4 must also be understood in the context of the antichrists, who were wrong in their ideas about Jesus. The passage says that Jesus is the Son of God (*1 John 4:15*) and the Christ (*1 John 5:1*) and became the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the Savior of the world. 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.

Read again the passages for today’s lesson. What specific point, or points, jump out at you, talk to you, convict you the most? How well are you doing in regard to what John says here? How well do you reflect toward others the love that God has toward you? What changes do you need to make in order to better show that love?

The Definition of Love (*1 John 3:11–16, 4:7–16*)

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

Interestingly enough, John does not set out to give a lexical definition of love. 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 laid down His life for us. The Father sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice. He sent Him to be the Savior of the world. This is the deepest meaning of love. Love means to do whatever is necessary to help others, even if it includes self-sacrifice. Hence, what a contrast to 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.

But love is not a mere spectacle to be observed. It must have an impact 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 in order to save someone else, that is love.

The best definition of *love* is the character and work of the Godhead as revealed in the plan of salvation, with Jesus giving Himself for us.

Christian love has its source in the love of God. To abide in love means to enjoy an intimate relationship with God. There is no love in the biblical sense that ultimately does not come from God (*1 John 4:7*). However, the statement that “everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (*NKJV*) in the same verse could be misunderstood. It has to be interpreted in the context 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 that he or she loves God; John shows us how that love is to be revealed.

What are some examples of this kind of love that you have seen manifested among others? Who manifested this love, what did they do, and what did you learn from them about the true meaning of love?

A Crisis of Assurance

Read 1 John 3:19–21. What point is John making? What is he saying to us? Who hasn't at some point experienced the feelings that John is talking about here?

Read also 1 John 4:17, 18. What problem is he addressing here, as well? Again, who hasn't experienced this concern?

What Christians at some point, looking at themselves, at their weaknesses, at their lack of love, at their shortcomings, have not felt condemned, guilty, even lost? How important to remember that God is greater than we are, greater than our guilt, greater than our hearts. How crucial that we realize, day by day, that our hope of salvation must rest on Jesus and His work in our behalf. Only by leaning on Him, on His merits and not our own, can we have confidence and assurance.

Confidence is emphasized several times in 1 John. John wants believers to be confident when they approach God in prayer (*1 John 3:21, 22*), confident before the reality of Christ's coming (*1 John 2:28*), and confident about the divine judgment (*1 John 4:17*). God means well for us, His children. Being grounded in His love drives away all fear.

"Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation.

"In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God's law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man."—Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 316.

What hope can you take for yourself from these inspired words?

Love in Practice *(1 John 3:17, 18; 4:19–21)*

John is not content to theorize about love. He lets us know that God wants us to put love into practice. Therefore he states that hate is incompatible with a loving attitude, and it is even a form of murder (*1 John 3:15*). He says, too, that we should not love with words alone but with actions (*vs. 18*).

John, of course, isn't against us speaking kind and encouraging words to each other. Words are an important part of sharing love. How would spouses, children, relatives, and friends feel if they never received verbal affirmations from us? Even John himself used words to share God's love with others.

However, John is opposed to a superficial declaration of love with no strings attached. In *1 John 3:17* he describes a situation similar to the one found in *James 2:15, 16*. A church member is in need. Others have the means to help him or her but do not do anything other than say some nice things to that person. That's not enough. God not only informed us that He loves us, He sent His Son to die in our place. People who love much do much, because real love is active.

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

It's not likely that any of us will be called to die for another believer. But we most likely will be called to demonstrate love for someone in need. We may have the means to provide jobs, food, clothes, a Christian education, a place of refuge, whatever. Instead, though, we prefer to live our own comfortable lives. Early Christians shared their financial means. To love others is a challenge, especially because it demands sacrifice on our part.

Of all the places that love must be manifested, no place is more important than in the home. There are endless ways we can show our love to family members. Sometimes even the littlest things can send a powerful message of love and acceptance: extra help around the house, a nice dinner, a special family outing together, whatever. There are many ways we can manifest love. Love thinks first about others; more so, it will act on those thoughts.

Imagine what it would be like living in a home in which true love was manifested. What changes should you make that can help bring that ideal closer to reality in your home?

Love and the Commandments *(1 John 3:22–24, 4:21–5:4)*

Both passages that we have studied this week end with a reference to the commandments. The term is used four times each in both sections. First John 5:2 (*NIV*) talks about carrying out the commandments. First John 3:22, 24, and 5:3 (*NIV*) emphasize obeying, or keeping (*KJV*), the commandments.

What do the passages teach about the commandments apart from that they should be kept?

1 John 3:22 _____

1 John 3:23 _____

1 John 3:24 _____

1 John 4:21 _____

1 John 5:2 _____

1 John 5:3 _____

John says that keeping God’s commandments and doing what pleases Him (*1 John 3:22*) give Christians confidence that God hears their prayers. God’s command is to believe in Jesus and to love one another. Keeping the commandments allows for mutual abiding—we in God and God in us. To love God includes keeping the commandments, and indeed, *they can be kept* because they are not burdensome.

When John talks about *commandment* in the singular, he mentions the commandment to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and to love one another. In chapter 4 the *commandment* is that we who love God should also love our brothers and sisters.

When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was the most important, He responded 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*). Yet, He stressed that those who love Him keep His commandments (*John 14:15*), and in the Sermon on the Mount He referred to a number of different commandments.

By switching from *the commandment* (singular) to *the commandments* (plural), John may have indicated that the one commandment of love expresses itself in a multiplicity of commandments.

How can we experience God’s commandments as something more than a set of rules? Is that all they are? Or are they something more?

Further Study: Read 1 Corinthians 13; Ellen G. White, “A Faithful Witness,” p. 548, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Never should we pass by one suffering soul without seeking to impart to him of the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God. All this is but a fulfillment of the principle of the law,—the principle that is illustrated in the story of the good Samaritan, and made manifest in the life of Jesus. His character reveals the true significance of the law, and shows what is meant by loving our neighbor as ourselves. And when the children of God manifest mercy, kindness, and love toward all men, they also are witnessing to the character of the statutes of heaven. . . . The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 505.

“You should get rid of your cold, frozen formality as soon as possible. You need to cultivate feelings of tenderness and friendliness in your everyday life. You should exhibit 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, so will the true follower of Christ, with a spirit of earnest labor, seek 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 will give that love a proper growth and development.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 466.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ We tend to think of all the admonitions to love as a personal issue, one between God and ourselves. And though that is true, it certainly isn’t limited to just us as individuals, is it? That is, what can your local church do, as a church body, to show love in ways that you as an individual can’t? How well is your local church revealing the love of God to the community? What can you do to help it along in this important area?
- ❷ In class, talk about various individuals who have displayed the kind of love talked about this week. What did they do? What kind of self-sacrifice was involved? What did their actions have in common that can help us better understand what true love is?
- ❸ The Bible says that love is from God. Why must that be so? Think about it—where else could love come from? It’s hard to imagine how pure matter and energy alone, the stuff of physics and atoms, could ever of itself create something like love. How does the reality of love help us better understand the reality of God? How does our expression of love reveal to others the existence of God? In what ways might the manifestation of love be the best evidence yet for God’s existence?

The Persistent Porter

by INNOCE CHAPAMBA

A few years ago my family was returning home from Malawi to Zambia. At the border we had to wait several hours for the bus that would take us home. When the bus arrived, we stowed our luggage and found a seat. But just as we were about to leave, a porter told our family to get off the bus and wait for the next one. Mother argued, for the next bus wouldn't leave until the next day. But the porter politely but firmly insisted. Reluctantly we obeyed.

As he retrieved our luggage from the roof rack, my mother started crying. "Why us?" she said. "We have no place to sleep except out in the open." Other passengers tried to convince the porter to allow us back on the bus, but he politely refused. Finally we accepted the situation and sat down to wait until the next bus the following morning.

During the night the loudspeaker at the bus terminal crackled, awaking us. "The bus that left for the capital city yesterday afternoon was involved in a fiery crash. Everyone aboard that bus is dead."

Mother sat up and started crying. "My dears," she said through her tears as she gathered us close to her. "We should have been on that bus. The porter who forced us off the bus saved our lives. God saved us."

We sat stunned, trying to comprehend that God had saved us from death. We were Christians but not Adventists at the time. We recalled that although the porter had insisted that we get off the bus, he was never rude. "Is it possible that he was an angel?" we whispered among ourselves. When we arrived home, Mother told Father what had happened, and we all rejoiced in God's salvation.

Later I met some Adventist students who impressed me with their diligence and commitment to God. When told to help clean the campus on Sabbath, these students refused but politely offered to do their share of work on Sunday. One day I asked one of them about his faith, and he explained that Saturday is God's true Sabbath, the day God set aside for us to spend with Him. When I learned this, I wondered, Could they be right about the Sabbath?

I visited the Adventist church and eventually was baptized. I shared my faith with my family, and they, too, became Adventists.

I don't know why God sometimes intervenes and other times He doesn't. I'm sure many of us have been protected from harm without realizing it. I was blessed to have seen God's hand in a marvelous way.

Your mission offerings help spread God's love from person to person. Soon the whole world will know, and Jesus can come. Thank you for hastening that day.

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