

Love



SABBATH—MARCH 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 53; Matthew 22:37–39; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3; 1 John 4.

MEMORY VERSE: “The three most important things to have are faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of them is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV).

ANY STUDY GUIDE COVERING IMPORTANT CONCEPTS (IDEAS) of the Christian faith should start with love. The apostle¹ Paul points out that faith and hope and other parts of Christianity are important. But it all starts with love. Without love, we are “nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2, NIV).

Some 500 years before Christ was born, the Greek thinker named Sophocles said, “One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life. That word is love.” These words may be true. But this Greek thinker never would know how true they could be. It would take the life and death of Jesus to show us what these words truly meant.

God is love. Whatever else God is and does is an example of His love. This love is as comforting as it is difficult to understand. God's love goes far beyond what we understand about love. Human love is sometimes shallow. It often is connected with selfishness and greed. God does not just *have* love or *show* love. He *is* love.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: God's love for us has been revealed (made known) in many ways. The greatest example is the Cross. As followers of Jesus, we act on His love by loving others as Christ loved us.

1. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus returned to heaven.

SUNDAY—MARCH 29**LOVE—THE PATTERN OF LIFE
(Matthew 22:37–39)**

We need to eat and drink in order to stay alive. Without liquid to drink or food to eat, we will soon die. But in order to live, we also need love. Life without love is no life at all. There is a built-in need in us to receive love. We need the love of parents. We need the love of family and friends. We need to be part of a loving community. We need to receive love. But we also need to give love. We are not truly human if we cannot love. But let us be clear: true love does not begin with us. Love is created in us by our Creator Jesus. (Read Genesis 1:26 and John 3:16.)



There is a built-in need in us to receive love.

According to Matthew 22:37–39; 1 Corinthians 13:1–3; and 1 John 3:14, how important is love in the

life of the follower of Christ?

True “love is God’s principle [rule], a permanent [forever] power. The unholy heart cannot start or make it. It is found only in the heart where Jesus rules. ‘We love him, because he first loved us’ [1 John 4:19]. In the heart renewed by God’s grace, love is the ruling principle of action.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 551.

The famous British author C. S. Lewis uses the words “Gift-love” and “Need-love” to show the difference between God’s love and human² love. God wants our love more than anything else. But He does not need our love in the same way we need love from Him and from fellow human beings. “We [must] begin at the real beginning, with love as energy [power] coming from God. God’s love is Gift-love. In God there is no hunger that needs to be filled. There is plenty of love that God desires to give.” —Adapted from C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), page 121. Our human love needs to be changed by God’s love. In this way, we can give love in a truly Christlike way while receiving love from others.

From your own experience, what is the difference between human love and God’s love? What kind of human love best teaches us about God’s love? How can we better reveal (make known) God’s love in our own lives?

2. human—having to do with men, women, or children.



God's love is a gift.

MONDAY—MARCH 30

THE OLD TESTAMENT GOD—A GOD OF LOVE (Jeremiah 31:3)

People often say that God's love is made known only in the New Testament. They also say the "Old Testament God" is a God of justice and anger. Careful study of the entire Bible shows that God does not have such a split (divided) personality. God's love was shown in the fullest measure in Christ (as pictured in the New Testament). But the God of Old Testament times is just as much a God of great love. God does not change (James 1:17). He does not slowly change from a God of anger or a God of justice into a God of love. God's love is eternal (forever). The words to His Old Testament people point to all times: " 'I have loved you with a love that lasts forever' " (Jeremiah 31:3, NIV).

Read the following examples of God's love in Old Testament times.

Then add a few other clear examples of His love found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

1. **God's love in creation** (Genesis 1:26–31; Genesis 2:21–25)
2. **Giving an answer to the sin problem** (Genesis 3:15; Genesis 22:8; Isaiah 53)
3. **The gift of the Sabbath** (Exodus 31:12–17)
4. **The continuous gift of prophecy³** (Amos 3:7)

There are stories and statements in the Old Testament that seem hard to understand. It is true that we read about bloodshed and war. But we should never forget that God is always revealed (made known) as the One who pulls people toward Himself and does not leave them. He does so even when His people turn their backs on Him time and again.

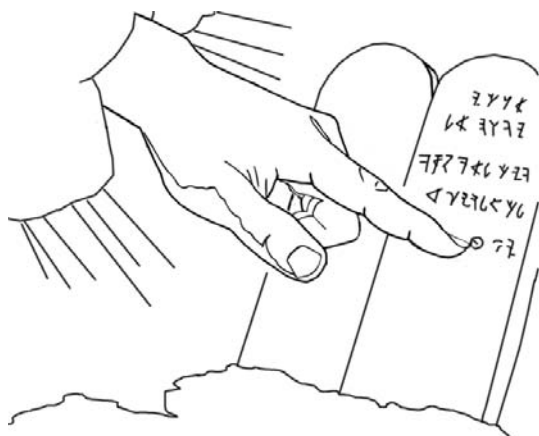
How do you answer questions about war and bloodshed in the Old Testament? How do you connect God's commands to remove entire nations with the concept (idea) of a God of love? (By way of an example, God permitted Israel to take over the land of Canaan.)

TUESDAY—MARCH 31

THE NEW TESTAMENT GOD—A GOD OF LOVE (John 3:16)

3. gift of prophecy—the ability to receive special messages from God and/or foretell future events.

Why did Jesus Christ come to the world? Why did He have to suffer? Why will He come again and restore this world to its original pure condition? Was it necessary for Him to die on a cross? Was there no other way? If not, why does it take such a long time to deal with the sin problem? We are in no position to answer these questions. In His unlimited wisdom, God “developed” a plan to deal with the problem of sin in the best possible way. Being a holy God, He could not ignore the rebellion (sin) against His perfect law. God was, and is, love. He could not stand back and let His people die without doing His best to save them.



God could not ignore the sin against His law.

“God’s holiness is His perfect purity that cannot accept moral evil. God’s love is His open-hearted acceptance of the sinner. God’s holiness means that He keeps Himself separated from what is unclean and sinful. God’s love means that He is willing to be one

with those who are unclean in order to help them. . . . God’s wrath [anger and punishment] is limited to how long sin lasts. But His love is eternal [forever].”—Adapted from Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pages 140–143.

What do the following verses tell us about the New Testament message of God’s love?

1. **God’s gift of His Son** (John 3:16)
2. **The Son’s giving of Himself** (Philippians 2:5–8)
3. **The gift of the Holy Spirit** (John 14:15–18; Acts 2:1–4)
4. **The giving of spiritual gifts**⁴ (Ephesians 4:11–13)
5. **The certainty (sureness; being sure) of salvation**⁵ (1 John 3:1–3)
6. **An eternal future in an environment (area) of love** (2 Peter 3:13)

How would you summarize the New Testament message about the love of God?

How do the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 fit in this New Testament theme (topic; subject) of God’s love? Ellen G.

4. spiritual gifts—the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us when we become born again. Read 1 Corinthians 12:1–11 for a list of these gifts.

5. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

White speaks about the message of the third angel as the good news of justification (forgiveness and cleansing from sin) by faith “in verity [truth].” How does that fit in with the theme of God’s love for us?

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 1

AN ANSWER TO LOVE (Deuteronomy 6:5, 6)

Our world today is full of self-love, blind ambition, hate, selfishness, dirty politics, and war. As long as the people of this world let themselves be guided by such behavior, love will have no chance to grow. Mother Teresa once said, “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”

If we truly have accepted the Lord and become His disciples (followers), the principle (rule) of love will control our lives. No matter what our weaknesses are, we will continue to grow in our love for God and for our fellow humans. Conversion means a change from the love of self to the love of God and others.

What do Deuteronomy 6:5, 6 and Matthew 22:37–40 tell us about the principle we should find as we study the commandments God has given us? Has this principle been working differently since Christ came to this world?

If we truly have been changed by Jesus Christ, His love will make itself

known in how we deal with other people. We may not like some people. But we are called to love everyone, even our greatest enemy. This will both help the people we work with and be a great blessing to ourselves. Give love and complete acceptance to those you meet and notice what happens.

How do Matthew 5:44; Matthew 25:31–46; and 1 Peter 1:22 make clear that love should influence⁶ us in what we say and do?

“Church members should put away all self-worship and receive in their hearts the love for God and for one another that filled Christ’s heart. If they do, our heavenly Father will make known His power through them. Let His people join together with God’s love. Then the people of the world will recognize God’s power to work wonders. Then they will accept that He is the Strength and the Helper of His commandment-keeping people.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 7, page 940.

Are you loving or selfish and self-centered? What useful steps can you take to move away from self and reveal (make known) love to others?

THURSDAY—APRIL 2

LOVE PERSONIFIED (IN PERSON) (Luke 17:12–19)

6. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

Jesus Christ is our perfect Role Model. If we wonder what our love should be like, we need search no further than our Savior. In Him we find the perfect example. As a human, Christ could have had good reasons for not liking a lot of people. The Jewish spiritual leaders were very jealous of Jesus' success. They bothered Him and decided to kill Him. Why should Jesus have loved these people? His own family sometimes did not give Him support. Jesus' disciples often fought among themselves and were absent when Jesus needed them the most. How could Jesus love them at those times when they totally left Him?

Jesus also revealed (made known) His love toward those who would not get much positive attention from the spiritual leaders of His day. They were women (including prostitutes), lepers, people from Samaria, Roman soldiers, and tax collectors.



Jesus made His love known to people whom others left out or ignored.

Take a careful look at some strong examples of how Jesus made known His unselfish love. In these examples most people would not have been able to love as He did: Luke 17:12–19; John 13:1–17; John 19:25–27.

How do 2 Corinthians 5:14 and Philippians 2:2 reveal the example of God's love in the ministry (work) of Jesus that should influence our discipleship?

The apostle Paul says that the love of Christ compels (motivates; drives) us (2 Corinthians 5:14). The English translation is not very clear. But the original Greek meaning may be translated as the love that comes from Christ and the love that we have for Christ too. Both meanings are correct in biblical language and meaning. When we begin to understand the greatness of Christ's love, we will learn to appreciate His love. And this will give us the great desire to share that love with others.

Jesus also loved those who were hated by most people. But Jesus went out of His way to treat them with love. How do I reveal my love to the homeless, to people who are outcasts, or to those who do not share the same lifestyle that I have?

FRIDAY—APRIL 3

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "God's Love for Man," pages 9–16, in *Steps to Christ*. Also read

7. discipleship—the practice of obeying and following Jesus.

“Calvary,” pages 741–757, and “‘It Is Finished,’” pages 758–768, in *The Desire of Ages*, which deal with the final moments of Christ’s earthly life. The book *The Four Loves*, by C. S. Lewis, is an inspiring essay on the different kinds of human and divine (God’s) love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ One cannot avoid asking the “why” question: if God is love, why is there so much suffering? It is not only how much suffering people have to go through that makes us wonder about God’s love. But it is also how many and how much innocent people suffer that makes us wonder. How do we, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, deal with this kind of real life? How does our understanding of the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan) help us understand this difficult topic?
- ❷ How can one love an abusive (cruel) parent, a serial killer,⁸ or a totally selfish person? How did Jesus love those who were not lovable?
- ❸ How can one continue loving if there is no answer to that love? Again, how

did Jesus continue to love those who never would love Him back?

- ❹ Who are the outcasts, the hated, and the cursed in your own society? What kind of outreach and ministry does your church have for those people? How can you get yourself and your church involved in such a work?
- ❺ In a real sense, true love demands a death to self and a willingness to put self aside for the good of others. What choices do we need to make in order to die to self?
- ❻ Besides the Cross, what other ways does God make His love known to us?

SUMMARY: God is love. This is the basis for everything God is and does. This loving God is already made known in the Old Testament. But His love is found in its most perfect form in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. This kind of love encourages Christians to share this love with others. If we claim to be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, our lives will be known by the full love that we have for God and by our unselfish love for others.

8. serial killer—someone who kills more than 3 people.