

LESSON 224

LOVE VS. LUST

Related Scripture: Matthew 7:12-20

KEY VERSE: *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."*—John 14:21.

Lesson Scripture: I Corinthians 7:1-7;
I Thessalonians 4:1-9

Introduction:

"Love" is one of the most misused words in our language. Certainly mere selfish desire, sexual lust, or infatuation do not deserve to be called love. In this lesson we shall consider love as describing the ideal relationship between husband and wife; and, on a higher plane, the unselfish benevolence or good will in the spiritual family of God.

Outlining the lesson, we note:

1. Sanctified Marriage, I Cor. 7:1-7
 - a. Honorable sex, 1, 2
 - b. Honest sex, 3-5
 - c. Optional sex, 6, 7
2. Sanctified Morals, I Thes. 4:1-9
 - a. Told by the Savior, 1, 2
 - b. Tried by the Sovereign, 3-6
 - c. Taught by the Spirit, 7-9

Notes on the Printed Text:

Sanctified Marriage, I Cor. 7:1-7.

Marriage as a lifelong union of one man and one woman into one flesh is an institution of God. Sanctified by submission to His holy will, marriage ideally provides for both husband and wife a fulfillment of life and love that can be found by no other means.

Polygamy is a gross perversion of the sacred institution of marriage; and the practice of divorce and remarriage to different mates at different times according to passing fancy is, if anything, worse than polygamy, even though it may have the sanction of human governments.

Still worse than abuse of the marriage relationship is so-called "free love," or practice of sex relations outside of marriage. This is not love at all, but mere unbridled lust.

True love toward another does not seek primarily to please self, but seeks rather the good and happiness of the person loved.

True love between a man and a woman can have no legitimate sexual expression except in a marriage relationship sanctified by divine approval.

Honorable Sex, 1, 2.

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." (He. 13:4.)

Celibacy is not natural for normal men or women. If a person can and will live without sexual relations, "good." But there is such a thing as fornication, meaning sex relations outside of marriage, to which most unmarried adults can be tempted; and to avoid this, "let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." In this marriage relationship, sex is normal and honorable.

Honest Sex, 3-5.

We have some plain talk here. Marriage involves mutual sexual obligations. The man or the woman who pretends to love wife or husband and then willfully refuses sex in marriage is not being honest. In marriage, their bodies no longer belong to themselves, but to each other.

Husbands and wives are sometimes said to "cheat" on their marriage when they commit adultery. But according to verse 5, there can be fraud in a marriage without any third party being involved.

If "with consent for a time" husband and wife abstain from sex in order to give themselves "to fasting and prayer," they are admonished here not to prolong the arrangement, but rather to "come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency" or lack of self-control.

Optional Sex, 6, 7.

Marriage is not compulsory for all, but optional. Paul himself was probably a widower, and chose not to marry again, that he might be free to devote all his energies to the service of Christ. If a person can live a pure life, free from sexual temptation, he has no particular need for marriage. "But every man hath his proper gift of God." We are not all alike.

This thought is further developed in context (vv. 8, 9). If the unmarried or widows can live as Paul lived, good. But if they cannot control their natural desires, "let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" with unsatisfied lust.

Sanctified Morals, I Thes. 4:1-9.

Morals without religion are weak and fickle. Human traditions, customs, and opinions are as shifting sands which cannot support a stable morality. So the "new morality" of fake religionists is immorality by divine standards. True moral principles must be founded upon the unchanging word of God. Only our Creator has the inherent authority to lay down rules for our conduct and the ultimate power to bring us to judgment.

Morals sanctified by divine commandment are not subject to the changing tides of popular fashions. We do need to distinguish between moral principles, which do not change, and application of those principles, which must be adapted to changing circumstances. This distinction is not always easy; but generally speaking the overruling principle of love will show the way.

Told by the Savior, 1, 2.

Apostolic exhortation is "in the Lord Jesus" and "as ye received from us." Human governments, human rules and regulations, are in constant need of amendment, because they are always imperfect; but not so with the commandments of God given to us by the apostles "through the Lord Jesus." God is always right the first time.

Christ is the final and supreme revelation of God. Contrary to the fantasies of hyper-dispensationalists, He came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill. (Mat. 5:17.) We must distinguish between ceremonial and moral law. The ceremonial law served only to foreshadow Christ, and with its fulfillment in Him, Old Testament ceremonies are of no further use. But the moral law of God can never change; not only was it fulfilled in Christ, but also it is still to be fulfilled "in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Ro. 8:4.)

Our Savior, therefore, is our great Teacher, Who tells us how we "ought to walk and to please God." As the teachings of Christ are in perfect harmony with the teachings of Moses, so the apostle tells us nothing different, but rather exhorts us to "abound more and more" in the kind of conduct that Jesus has taught us by precept and example.

Tried by the Sovereign, 3-6.

Let those who boast of their knowledge of God's will try this on for size. God's will is the sanctification of His people, and this sanctification means "that ye should abstain from fornication" and "that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor." The word "vessel" is used here in the same sense as in II Cor. 4:7, referring to the human body as the container of the soul and spirit.

Negatively, sanctification rules out "the lust of concupiscence." The terms are broad enough to include all unholy desires. Specifically, we are warned here against going beyond the bounds of fair dealing in business and so taking undue advantage of a brother because of our covetous nature.

Ultimate enforcement of morality rests upon the fact that "the Lord is the avenger of all such" deeds of immorality. Human judgment is comparatively unimportant; in the end we must give an account to the sovereign God.

Taught by the Spirit, 7-9.

Lost sinners may be unimpressed by this argument, but God's people have been called in (rather than "unto") holiness. To "despise" or set aside His commands is not merely to despise man, but rather (tremble at the thought) to despise God, the very God Who gave to us His Holy Spirit.

Mention of the Holy Spirit reminds us that we have a present Comforter, Teacher, and Guide, Who teaches us all things (Jn. 14:26) so that we need not that any man teach us (I Jn. 2:27). Human teachers may tell us that it is our duty to love, but only God can teach us to love one another. It is His Spirit that has poured out His love in our hearts. (Ro. 5:5.)

Key Verse:

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."—John 14:21.

So it is not necessarily the one who talks most about love that really loves. The acid test of our love for Christ is our willingness to obey His commands. Love begets love, and forms a growing "bond of perfectness." (Col. 3:14.) "We love him, because he first loved us" (I Jn. 4:19); and as we show our love to Him, He shows His love to us. Father and Son agree in loving the obedient soul, and Jesus is pleased to manifest Himself in special ways to the soul that so loves Him.