

LESSON 290

LIFE AND LOVE

Related Scripture: I John 3:11-18

KEY VERSE: "And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."—I John 4:21.

Lesson Scripture: John 13:1-15, 34, 35

Introduction:

That Jesus Christ is the supreme expression of divine love is a universally recognized tenet of Christian faith, but few of the people who talk about this love have any spiritual understanding of it or make any serious attempt to imitate it.

We are accustomed to the fact that His love is exhibited in His dying for us, and that the ultimate test of our love for Him is a willingness to die under persecution as His martyrs (witnesses). But in this part of the world in this period of history we do not face this test. It is easy to talk bravely about dangers not present. What we forget is that before Jesus demonstrated His love in death He demonstrated it in life, and so must we.

Outlining the lesson, we note:

1. Love Enduring, John 13:1
2. Love Employed, John 13:2-5
 - a. Hellish betrayal, 2
 - b. Heavenly bearings, 3
 - c. Humble blessing, 4, 5
3. Love Excluding, John 13:6-11
 - a. Limits of time, 6, 7
 - b. Limits of tenure, 8-10
 - c. Limits of teleology, 11
4. Love Exemplifying, John 13:12-15
 - a. Teaching by enquiry, 12
 - b. Teaching by encouragement, 13
 - c. Teaching by exhortation, 14
 - d. Teaching by example, 15
5. Love Extending, John 13:34, 35
 - a. Conduct commanded, 34
 - b. Conduct convincing, 35

Notes on the Printed Text:

Love Enduring, John 13:1.

Realization of approaching death generally brings to mind the more important values of life. Just what do we consider to be most important to us? Would we feel the same way if we knew that tomorrow we must die? How many days can we afford to waste in the pursuit of objectives that will be worth nothing when this life is past?

Jesus knew that He was born to die, and His whole life on earth was lived with this end in view. The passover feast was a visible reminder of His predestined role as the sacrificial Lamb of God. But He had foreseen and planned for this event; He had gathered a chosen few about Him as the special objects of His love who would testify of Him to a lost world after His departure; and with this departure imminent "He loved them unto the end."

Genuine love "endureth all things" (I Cor. 13:7)—in life and in death. A so-called love in which people "fall" and which they later "lose" is not true love at all. True love endures.

Love Employed, John 13:2-5.

As surely as love is real, it must find expression; that is, it must act, not selfishly, but for the good of those whom we love. So the love of Christ found employment in the practical instruction of His disciples.

Hellish Betrayal, 2.

Perhaps Judas Iscariot never imagined himself capable of such wickedness until the devil put it into his heart. Motivations of the human heart are beyond human understanding. (Jer. 17:9.) The Bible tells us of good spirits and of evil spirits which work in and through men. (I Jn. 4:1-3.) Yet this fact in no wise diminishes individual human responsibility for our individual behavior. We may not be responsible for some hidden impulses, but we are responsible for whether we obey such impulses, good or bad.

In the case of Judas, we might suspect even if the Bible did not tell us that the devil was personally involved. Author of all sin and rebellion against God, Satan has always given his attention to strategic points of attack. Evidently he did not understand or believe that in arranging for the crucifixion of the Son of God he was merely instrumental in carrying forward the divine program which includes his own destruction. (He. 2:14.)

Yet the scripture makes it clear that while Judas Iscariot and even the devil himself did not fully understand the meaning of unfolding events, Jesus not only knew the wicked motives of men and demons but also understood how the hellish betrayal by an official apostle fit into the divine plan of the ages.

Heavenly Bearings, 3.

So the Son of God never lost His heavenly bearings, even in His darkest hour on earth. Though the fact was not apparent, all things were in His hands by the Father's appointment. It was from God that He had come forth to earth, and He was soon to leave the earth to go back to God. Under divine inspiration, John reminds us that these facts were in the mind of Jesus at this very time.

Humble Blessing, 4, 5.

Therefore it was in full awareness of His divine character that Jesus assumed the attire and undertook the task of a common slave in washing the feet of His disciples. To appreciate the worth of this literal washing, we must imagine men going without shoes or socks, wearing nothing on the feet except open sandals. Washing the feet after coming in from a journey was then almost as customary as washing the hands. But on this occasion it seems that the disciples had neglected to wash their feet; certainly none of them had thought of washing the feet of the others.

Love Excluding, John 13:6-11.

Naturally we would rather think of the inclusiveness of divine love than of its exclusiveness. But there are definite limits to the love of God. Indiscriminate love, so-called, is mere promiscuity, not love.

Limits of Time, 6, 7.

Human knowledge is limited at best, not only because the human mind is finite, but also because divine love often withholds knowledge that we are not prepared to use wisely until a later time. When Jesus came to wash Simon Peter's feet, Peter's only thought had to do with this outward act: how unfitting it seemed that the Lord should wash a disciple's feet! But the time would come, said Jesus, when Peter would know more about the spiritual meaning of this act.

Limits of Tenure, 8-10.

Spiritually speaking, Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet represents our frequent cleansing from the defilements of life's journey, necessary to maintain fellowship with our Lord. (I Jn. 1:6-9.) The new birth, compared to a bath (Titus 3:5), is a once-for-all experience; but there are limits to our tenure as God's children. Our relationship, once established, is eternal; but our fellowship with God is broken by sin, and can be renewed only by a spiritual washing of our feet: that is, by confessing to Him our sins.

Verse 10 may be translated as follows:

"Jesus says to him, He that has taken a bath has not need to wash (other) than his feet, but is altogether clean; and ye are clean, but not all (of you)."

Limits of Teleology, 11.

Dimensions of divine love (Eph. 3:17-19) are to be found in the word of God, rather than in human imagination. Certainly His love is not as limited as some would try to make it. But neither is His love in conflict with His other attributes. The Bible does not teach, as some would have it, that God has tried and failed to save from hell every member of Adam's fallen race. For instance, it never was any part of God's eternal purpose to save Judas Iscariot. "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him." (Jn. 6:64.)

Love Exemplifying, John 13:12-15.

Because of His eternal love, God has provided in His Son the perfect Example of human life to which He intends to make us conform. (Ro. 8:29.) Jesus therefore is not only the perfect and only acceptable Sacrifice for our sins; He is also the perfect and only infallible Teacher of all who receive His life through faith in His death.

Teaching by Enquiry, 12.

Questioning the pupils is one effective means of teaching, when the questions are such as to stimulate thought and further enquiry. Now of course the disciples knew what Jesus had done to them, so far as the outward action was concerned. His enquiry was evidently calculated to stimulate interest in the spiritual meaning.

Teaching by Encouragement, 13.

Encouragement and praise for lessons already learned, as any good teacher knows, will help the pupils to learn the next lesson. The word "Master" in this verse and the next one means "Teacher." The disciples had learned to call Jesus their Teacher and Lord, and they were right in so doing.

Teaching by Exhortation, 14.

Clearly the disciples did not understand Jesus to be instituting a church ordinance. It is possible that, while such action was appropriate, these disciples and others may have literally washed the feet of their brethren as a private service at home (I Tim. 5:10); but nowhere in the New Testament is there any mention of the washing of feet in a church service. The spiritual meaning of this exhortation of Jesus seems to be expressed in such scriptures as Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:16, 20; I Jn. 5:16, etc.

Teaching by Example, 15.

"Example," said Samuel Johnson, "is more efficacious than precept." Most teachers and preachers could learn from Jesus how to practice what they preach. Again perhaps we should note that the best examples are not always to be followed literally in every detail. There could be circumstances where it would be appropriate for any of us to wash someone else's feet—literally. But it is more important and practical to learn the spiritual lessons of humble and helpful service and of our common need for frequent spiritual cleansing.

Love Extending, John 13:34, 35.

Fuller expression of love is possible among those with whom that love is mutual. Intervening scripture omitted from the printed lesson tells how Jesus ridded the company of the hypocrite Judas to clear the air for the more intimate love talk of the next three chapters and finally the most intimate prayer of chapter 17. If the love of God is to be effectively extended, it must not be spread too thin; only a spiritual overflowing from the abundance of divine grace in the experience of God's people can satisfy the needs of lost souls.

Conduct Commanded, 34.

"As I have loved you" will not permit us to stop with sweet sentiment, sweet singing, and sweet sermonizing. If we love as Jesus loved, that love will govern our conduct—unto death if need be, but meanwhile in daily life. The commandment is "new" in the sense of being newly emphasized and exemplified in the life and death of Jesus.

Conduct Convincing, 35.

Men are prone to give credit to great preaching or to such things as "effective soul-winning methods" for spectacular numbers of converts to a Christianity that is too often more counterfeit than real. But somehow the greatest sermons and the most efficient methods lose their spiritual power when there is little manifestation of love among professed Christians.

God is glorified when we love one another, whether we get converts or not; because in this manifestation of divine love men are made to know that we are disciples of His Son, and so God is glorified. One genuine disciple is worth more to God than any number of fakes.

Let no one imagine that this is an attack on scriptural evangelism. On the contrary, in the long run, where love is not found the gospel is sure to be lost or turned into a counterfeit message; while nothing is more conducive to scripturally zealous evangelism than the real love of God in the hearts and lives of His people.