

Love and Justice: The Two Greatest Commandments

Sabbath Afternoon, March 15

John's love for his Master was not a mere human friendship, but it was the love of a repentant sinner, who felt that he had been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. He esteemed it the highest honor to work and suffer in the service of his Lord. His love for Jesus led him to love all for whom Christ died. His religion was of a practical character. He reasoned that love to God would be manifested in love to His children. He was heard again and again to say, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11). "We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (verses 19, 20).

The apostle's life was in harmony with his teachings. The love which glowed in his heart for Christ, led him to put forth the most earnest, untiring labor for his fellow men, especially for his brethren in the Christian church. He was a powerful preacher, fervent, and deeply in earnest, and his words carried with them a weight of conviction. —*The Sanctified Life*, p. 53.

If we love God with all the heart, we must love His children also. This love is the spirit of God. It is the heavenly adorning that gives true nobility and dignity to the soul and assimilates our lives to that of the Master. No matter how many good qualities we may have, however honorable and refined we may consider ourselves, if the soul is not baptized with the heavenly grace of love to God and one another, we are deficient in true goodness and unfit for heaven, where all is love and unity. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 223.

The servants of Christ are not to act out the dictates of the natural heart. They need to have close communion with God, lest, under provocation, self rise up, and they pour forth a torrent of words that are unbecoming, that are not as dew or the still showers that refresh the withering plants. This is what Satan wants them to do; for these are his methods. It is the dragon that is wroth; it is the spirit of Satan that is revealed in anger and accusing. But God's servants are to be representatives of Him. He desires them to deal only in the currency of heaven, the truth that bears His own image and superscription. The power by which they are to overcome evil is the power of Christ. The glory of Christ is their strength. They are to fix their eyes upon His loveliness. Then they can present the gospel with divine tact and gentleness. And the spirit that is kept gentle under provocation will speak more effectively in favor of the truth than will any argument. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

Sunday, March 16

The Two Greatest Commandments

The lawyer was not satisfied with the position and works of the Pharisees. He had been studying the Scriptures with a desire to learn their real meaning. He had a vital interest in the matter, and had asked in sincerity, "What shall I do?" In his answer as to the requirements of the law, he passed by all the mass of ceremonial and ritualistic precepts. For these he claimed no value, but presented the two great principles on which hang all the law and the prophets. This answer, being commended by Christ, placed the Saviour on vantage ground with the rabbis. They could not condemn Him for sanctioning that which had been advanced by an expositor of the law.

"This do, and thou shalt live," Jesus said. He presented the law as a divine unity, and in this lesson taught that it is not possible to keep one precept, and break another; for the same principle runs through them all. Man's destiny will be determined by his obedience to the whole law. Supreme love to God and impartial love to man are the principles to be wrought out in the life. —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 497, 498.

When this young ruler came to Jesus, his sincerity and earnestness won the Saviour's heart. He "beholding him loved him." In this young man He saw one who might do service as a preacher of righteousness. He would have received this talented and noble youth as readily as He received the poor fishermen who followed Him. Had the young man devoted his ability to the work of saving souls, he might have become a diligent and successful laborer for Christ.

But first he must accept the conditions of discipleship. He must give himself unreservedly to God. At the Saviour's call, John, Peter, Matthew, and their companions "left all, rose up, and followed Him." Luke 5:28. The same consecration was required of the young ruler. And in this Christ did not ask a greater sacrifice than He Himself had made. "He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9. The young man had only to follow where Christ led the way. —*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 392, 393.

Those who love God cannot harbor hatred or envy. When the heavenly principle of eternal love fills the heart, it will flow out to others, not merely because favors are received of them, but because love is the principle of action and modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, subdues enmity, and elevates and ennobles the affections. This love is not contracted so as merely to include "me and mine," but is as broad as the world and as high as heaven, and is in harmony with that of the angel workers. This love cherished in the soul sweetens the entire life and sheds a refining influence on all around. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 223.

Monday, March 17

The Two Greatest Sins

Many who bear the name of Christians are serving other gods besides the Lord. Our Creator demands our supreme devotion, our first allegiance. Anything which tends to abate our love for God, or to interfere with the service due Him, becomes thereby an idol. With some their lands, their houses, their merchandise, are the idols. Business enterprises are prosecuted with zeal and energy, while the service of God is made a secondary consideration. Family worship is neglected, secret prayer is forgotten. Many claim to deal justly with their fellow men, and seem to feel that in so doing they discharge their whole duty. But it is not enough to keep the last six commandments of the decalogue. We are to love the Lord our God with all the heart. Nothing short of obedience to every precept—nothing less than supreme love to God as well as equal love to our fellow man—can satisfy the claims of the divine law. —Ellen G. White Comments, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, 1011.

The enemy well knows that if we do not have love one for another, he can gain his object, and wound and weaken the church, by causing differences among brethren. He can lead them to surmise evil, to speak evil, to accuse, condemn, and hate one another. In this way the cause of God is brought into dishonor, the name of Christ is reproached, and untold harm is done to the souls of men. . . .

It is not the opposition of the world that will most endanger us; it is the evil cherished right in our midst that works our most grievous disaster. It is the unconsecrated lives of half-hearted professors that retard the work of the truth, and bring darkness upon the church of God. —*This Day With God*, p. 165.

Let it be printed on the mind that mercy and the love of God are to be expressed to the children of God. Search heaven and earth, and there is no truth revealed more powerful than that which is manifested in mercy to the very ones who need your sympathy and aid in breaking the yoke, and setting free the oppressed. Here the truth is lived, the truth is obeyed, the truth is taught as it is in Jesus.

There is a great amount of truth professed, but truth practiced in relieving our fellow men is of great influence, reaching unto heaven, and compassing eternity. Every soul in our world is on trial; every man's experience, the common life history, tells in unmistakable language whether he is a doer of Christ's words and His works. There is constantly recurring a large array of little things that God alone sees; to act out in these things the principles of truth will bring a precious reward. The great and important things are recognized by nearly all, but the knitting of these things with the supposed smaller things of life and closely connecting them as one, is too rarely done by professed Christians. Religion is too much profession, and too little reality. —*This Day With God*, p. 224.

Tuesday, March 18

God Loves Justice

Christ came to give to the world an example of what perfect humanity might be when united with divinity. He presented to the world a new phase of greatness in His exhibition of mercy, compassion, and love. He gave to men a new interpretation of God. As head of humanity, He taught men lessons in the science of divine government, whereby He revealed the righteousness of the reconciliation of mercy and justice. The reconciliation of mercy and justice did not involve any compromise with sin, or ignore any claim of justice; but by giving to each divine attribute its ordained place, mercy could be exercised in the punishment of sinful, impenitent man without destroying its clemency or forfeiting its compassionate character, and justice could be exercised in forgiving the repenting transgressor without violating its integrity. —*Selected Messages, book 1, p. 260.*

Let those who occupy positions of trust rid themselves of the unmerciful spirit which so greatly offends God. Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne. Let no one suppose that God has given to men the power of ruling their fellow-men. He will accept the service of no man who hurts and discourages Christ's heritage. Now is the time for every man to examine himself, to prove himself, that he may see whether he is in the faith. Investigate closely the motives which prompt you to action. We are engaged in the work of the Most High. Let us not weave into the web of our work one thread of selfishness. —*Manuscript 42, 1901.*

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples," said Jesus, "if ye have love one to another." When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart.

This love, manifested in the church, will surely stir the wrath of Satan. Christ did not mark out for His disciples an easy path. "If the world hate you," He said, "ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." . . . The gospel is to be carried forward by aggressive warfare, in the midst of opposition, peril, loss, and suffering. But those who do this work are only following in their Master's steps. —*Lift Him Up, p. 298.*

Wednesday, March 19

Called to Establish Justice

The true worshipers of God will work the works of Christ. They will be liberal to the needy; they will not turn the poor from his right, nor frame an excuse to avoid helping those who need help; they will love their neighbors as themselves, not hiding themselves from their own flesh, but considering the condition of the poor, the fatherless, and the widow; they will not appropriate to themselves any portion of the just earnings of those who may be under their control. "Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: at his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee." . . .

"And the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart." —"The Blessed of the Father," *The Home Missionary*, July 1, 1891.

Read the words of Christ in Matthew 23:23: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." These denunciations are given as a warning to all who "outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within" "are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." . . . What lessons are here; how fearful and decisive! Jesus said, "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city." This prophecy was literally fulfilled by the Jews in their treatment of Christ and of the messengers whom God sent to them. Will men in these last days follow the example of those whom Christ condemned? — *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 79.

Jesus was misunderstood by His brothers because He was not like them. His standard was not their standard. In looking to men they had turned away from God, and they had not His power in their lives. The forms of religion which they observed could not transform the character. They paid "tithe of mint and anise and cummin," but omitted "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." Matthew 23:23. The example of Jesus was to them a continual irritation. He hated but one thing in the world, and that was sin. He could not witness a wrong act without pain which it was impossible to disguise. Between the formalists, whose sanctity of appearance concealed the love of sin, and a character in which zeal for God's glory was always paramount, the contrast was unmistakable. Because the life of Jesus condemned evil, He was opposed, both at home and abroad. His unselfishness and integrity were commented on with a sneer. His forbearance and kindness were termed cowardice. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 88.

Thursday, March 20

Who Is My Neighbor?

Many, many, have fainted and become discouraged in the great struggle of life, when one word of kindly cheer would have strengthened them to overcome. 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. They are bearing testimony to the fact that “the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Psalm 19:7. And whoever fails to manifest this love is breaking the law which he professes to revere. For the spirit we manifest toward our brethren declares what is our spirit toward God. The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” Beloved, “if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.” 1 John 4:20, 12. —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 504, 505.

The characteristics most needful to be cherished by God’s commandment-keeping people are patience and long-suffering, peace and love. When love is lacking, irretrievable loss is sustained; for souls are driven away from the truth, even after they have been connected with the cause of God. Our brethren in responsible positions, who have strength of influence, should remember the words of the apostle Paul, spoken by the Holy Spirit: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me.” Romans 15:1-3. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 398.

No matter how high the profession, he whose heart is not filled with love for God and his fellow men is not a true disciple of Christ. Though he should possess great faith and have power even to work miracles, yet without love his faith would be worthless. He might display great liberality; but should he, from some other motive than genuine love, bestow all his goods to feed the poor, the act would not commend him to the favor of God. In his zeal he might even meet a martyr’s death, yet if not actuated by love, he would be regarded by God as a deluded enthusiast or an ambitious hypocrite.

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.” The purest joy springs from the deepest humiliation. The strongest and noblest characters are built on the foundation of patience, love, and submission to God’s will. —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 318, 319.

Friday, March 21

For Further Reading

Manuscript 62, "Home Missionary Work," August 18, 1894;
Reflecting Christ, "Perfect Oneness Will Give Success," p. 200.