

# Love: The Essence of Righteousness

“God is love” (1 John 4:16).

“Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18.

**Suggested Reading:** *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23–36.

# 1. The Great Commandment

- a. In the Christian life, what vital significance does love have in relation to the law of God? Matthew 22:36–40.
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“Obedience is not a mere outward compliance, but the service of love. The law of God is an expression of His very nature; it is an embodiment of the great principle of love, and hence is the foundation of His government in heaven and earth. If our hearts are renewed in the likeness of God, if the divine love is implanted in the soul, will not the law of God be carried out in the life?”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 60.

- a. **Matthew 22:36-40** (36) Master, which is the great commandment in the law? (37) Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (38) This is the first and great commandment. (39) And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (40) On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

# 1. The Great Commandment

- b. How does the apostle John summarize God's character—and how does His character relate to righteousness? 1 John 4:16; Psalm 11:7.
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“Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16). It is conformity to the law of God, for ‘all Thy commandments are righteousness,’ and ‘love is the fulfilling of the law’ (Psalm 119:172; Romans 13:10). Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18.

b. **1 John 4:16** (16) And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

**Psalms 11:7** (7) For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

## 2. Outward Compliance or Heartfelt Obedience

- a. What kind of service does the Lord desire? Deuteronomy 6:5; Joshua 24:15.
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“The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world’s dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, ‘with healing in His wings’ (Malachi 4:2).”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

“It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour’s matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary’s cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him.”—*Ibid.*, p. 480.

a. **Deuteronomy 6:5** (5) And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

**Joshua 24:15** (15) And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

## 2. Outward Compliance or Heartfelt Obedience

- b. In contrast to a willing, joyful obedience from the heart, what kind of obedience are some professed Christians rendering to God? Deuteronomy 28:45–47; 1 John 5:3.
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“Christ died on the cross to draw all to Him, and He would have us joyful in that joy which He alone can give, the joy of obedience.”—*Sermons and Talks*, vol 1, p. 217.

“The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 97, 98.

- b. Deuteronomy 28:45-47** (45) Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee: (46) And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. (47) Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things;  
**1 John 5:3** (3) For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

### 3. Identifying True Love

- a. What will be seen in the life of those who genuinely love God?  
1 John 3:10; 4:20, 21.
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“Love is the basis of godliness. Whatever the profession, no man has pure love to God unless he has unselfish love for his brother. But we can never come into possession of this spirit by *trying* to love others. What is needed is the love of Christ in the heart. When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously. The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within—when the sunshine of heaven fills the heart and is revealed in the countenance.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384.

a. **1 John 3:10** (10) In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

**1 John 4:20-21** (20) 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?

(21) And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

### 3. Identifying True Love

- b. Describe some of the characteristics manifested by true love.  
1 Corinthians 13:4-7.
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“True love is not a strong, fiery, impetuous passion. On the contrary, it is calm and deep in its nature. It looks beyond mere externals and is attracted by qualities alone. It is wise and discriminating, and its devotion is real and abiding. God tests and proves us by the common occurrences of life. It is the little things which reveal the chapters of the heart. It is the little attentions, the numerous small incidents and simple courtesies of life, that make up the sum of life’s happiness; and it is the neglect of kindly, encouraging, affectionate words, and the little courtesies of life, which helps compose the sum of life’s wretchedness. It will be found at last that the denial of self for the good and happiness of those around us constitutes a large share of the life record in heaven. And the fact will also be revealed that the care of self, irrespective of the good and happiness of others, is not beneath the notice of our heavenly Father. . . .

“Love cannot live without action, and every act increases, strengthens, and extends it. Love will gain the victory when argument and authority are powerless. Love works not for profit nor reward; yet God has ordained that great gain shall be the certain result of every labor of love. It is diffusive in its nature and quiet in its operation, yet strong and mighty in its purpose to overcome great evils. It is melting and transforming in its influence, and will take hold of the lives of the sinful and affect their hearts when every other means has proved unsuccessful.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 133–135.

- b. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7** (4) Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, (5) Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; (6) Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; (7) Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

## 4. Living The Law of Love

- a. In light of the self-sacrifice of Christ for us, what law or principle will be at the heart of the Christian life? 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 13:5.
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“When the Spirit of God, with its marvelous awakening power, touches the soul, it abases human pride. Worldly pleasure and position and power are seen to be worthless. ‘Imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God’ are cast down; every thought is brought into captivity ‘to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Then humility and self-sacrificing love, so little valued among men, are exalted as alone of worth.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 135.

“In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which ‘seeketh not her own’ has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto.”—*Ibid.*, p. 20.

a. **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** (14) For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: (15) And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

**1 Corinthians 13:5** (5) Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

## 4. Living The Law of Love

- b. In order to live a life of self-sacrificing love, what is required of us on a daily basis? Luke 9:23.
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“Every soul that accepts Jesus as his personal Saviour will pant for the privilege of serving God and will eagerly seize the opportunity to signalize his gratitude by devoting his abilities to God’s service. He will long to show his love for Jesus and for His purchased possession. He will covet toil, hardship, sacrifice. He will think it a privilege to deny self, lift the cross, and follow in Christ’s footsteps, thus showing his loyalty and love.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 394.

“Self-denial and the cross are our portion. Will we accept it? None of us need expect that when the last great trials come upon us a self-sacrificing, patriotic spirit will be developed in a moment because needed. No, indeed, this spirit must be blended with our daily experience, and infused into the minds and hearts of our children, both by precept and example. Mothers in Israel may not be warriors themselves, but they may raise up warriors who shall gird on the whole armor and fight manfully the battles of the Lord.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 135.

- b. **Luke 9:23** (23) And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

## 5. The Sign of True Discipleship

a. What is the sign of true discipleship? John 8:31; 14:15.

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“Obedience—the service and allegiance of love—is the true sign of discipleship. . . . Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 60, 61.

a. **John 8:31** (31) Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;  
**John 14:15** (15) If ye love me, keep my commandments.

## 5. The Sign of True Discipleship

- b. What does true obedience mean, and from where does it spring?  
Romans 5:5; 13:10.
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“In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, subdues enmity, and ennobles the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around.”—*Ibid.*, p. 59.

“All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

- b. Romans 5:5** (5) And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.  
**Romans 13:10**(10) Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

## PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What key element in God's law does Jesus present to us in Matthew 22?
2. Explain the difference between outward compliance and true obedience.
3. When will the development of our Christian character be complete?
4. Describe the attitude towards service in those who have accepted Christ.
5. How closely will Christ be identified in the obedience of His followers?