

The Teachings of Jesus

Living Like Jesus

Lesson #7 for August 16, 2014

Scriptures: Matthew 9:36; 25:31-46; Mark 10:21; Luke 6:32-35; 10:30-37; John 15:4-12.

1. In this lesson we will discuss Jesus setting an incredibly high standard by which Christians are to live. Jesus not only lived according to that standard Himself from childhood to the end of His ministry but also gave examples from the experiences of others. The principle of true Christian love—known as *agape* love—was set forth by Christ Himself in the times of the Old Testament as recorded in Leviticus 19:18,33-34.
2. It is interesting to notice that other ancient societies spelled out rules that might have sounded like those rules as well. Since the days of Eve, probably every mother has said to her children: “If you don’t want your sibling to do something bad to you, don’t do it to her/him.” This basic idea has been repeated in places like the *Code of Hammurabi*.
3. To the Hebrew people who had just escaped from Egyptian slavery, God set forth the principle that they should love their neighbor as they loved themselves and that love should extend even to the stranger. (Leviticus 19:18,33-34) Surely, every Jewish child must have known of those commands from Leviticus.
4. However, Jesus set a new, even higher, standard for loving. What was that standard? We are to love as He loved! (John 13:34-35) How is that possible for naturally-selfish human beings? What are the worst sins? See *Steps to Christ* 30.1.

Love was the element in which Christ moved and walked and worked. He came to embrace the world in the arms of his love.

We are to follow the example set by Christ, and make him our pattern, until we shall have the same love for others as he has manifested for us. He seeks to impress us with this profound lesson of love. *Youth’s Instructor*, October 20, 1892 par. 2-3; *OFC* 27; *SDG* 147.2.

5. So, what standard did Jesus set for us?

From His earliest years He was possessed of one purpose; He lived to bless others. For this He found resources in nature; new ideas of ways and means flashed into His mind as He studied plant life and animal life. (*The Desire of Ages* 70.2)

Jesus was the fountain of healing mercy for the world; and through all those secluded years at Nazareth, His life flowed out in currents of sympathy and tenderness. The aged, the sorrowing, and the sin-burdened, the children at play in their innocent joy, the little creatures of the groves, the patient beasts of burden,—all were happier for His presence. He whose word of power upheld the worlds would stoop to relieve a wounded bird. There was nothing beneath His notice, nothing to which He disdained to minister. (*The Desire of Ages* 74.1)

Jesus worked to relieve every case of suffering that He saw. He had little money to give, but He often denied Himself of food in order to relieve those who appeared more needy than He. His brothers felt that His influence went far to counteract theirs. He possessed a tact which none of them had, or desired to have. When they spoke harshly to poor, degraded beings, Jesus sought out these very ones, and spoke to them words of encouragement. To those who were in need He would give a cup of cold water, and would quietly place His own meal in their hands. As He relieved their sufferings, the truths He taught were associated with His acts of mercy, and were thus riveted in the memory. (*The*

Desire of Ages 87.1)

Jesus did not contend for His rights. Often His work was made unnecessarily severe because He was willing and uncomplaining. Yet He did not fail nor become discouraged. He lived above these difficulties, as if in the light of God's countenance. He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently. (*The Desire of Ages 89.4*)

6. What do we know about how Jesus felt about the people with whom He dealt on a daily basis during His ministry? Read Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32. Having learned this lesson during His childhood, as noted above, Jesus continued to look with pity and compassion on all those who swarmed about Him during His ministry. He had pity on the blind, (Matthew 20:34) on the lepers, (Mark 1:40-41) and especially for a widow who had lost her only son. (Luke 7:12-13)
7. And what did this compassion and pity lead Him to do? See Mark 10:21 and John 11:5. Would it be correct to say that everything Jesus did was motivated by love? What about His discussion with the Pharisees and the Sadducees as recorded in John 8? Was it loving for Him to have said, "You are of your father the devil"? (John 8:44, *KJV*. See also John 2:13-17.)
8. Jesus was questioned about His lifestyle and His actions on several occasions. Read Luke 10:30-37. One of the most noteworthy occasions was the question that came from a lawyer who apparently was also a very good Bible student. Jesus was preaching and healing somewhere on the east side of the Jordan in the final few months of His ministry. As usual, there was a very mixed group of people listening to Him including Pharisees and, no doubt, some Sadducees. The priests and the rabbis had encouraged the lawyer to ask this question to try to entangle Jesus in an argument which they hoped to win. (See *The Desire of Ages 497.2.*) Instead of entering into one of their long arguments, Jesus simply told the story of the good Samaritan.

This was no imaginary scene, but an actual occurrence, which was known to be exactly as represented. The priest and the Levite who had passed by on the other side were in the company that listened to Christ's words. (*The Desire of Ages 499.1*)

How do you suppose the priest and the Levite felt as they heard their story being told by Jesus? Did they wonder how Jesus found out about the story? Jesus asked the lawyer:

Luke 10:36-37: ³⁶ "In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbor towards the man attacked by the robbers?" ³⁷ The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who was kind to him." (*GNB*)

The attitude that the Jews had toward the Samaritans was illustrated by the fact that the lawyer would not even mention the Samaritan by nationality.

9. This parable adapted from a true story should teach us that anyone in need is our neighbor. We should not be asking, "What can my neighbor do for me?" but rather "What can I do for my neighbor?" When someone mistreats us, how do we respond?
10. Think of those who might have mistreated you or, at least, treated you unfairly in the past. How have you responded to that treatment?
11. What did Jesus go on to say almost at the very end of His ministry, three days before His crucifixion, about our relationship to the poor and needy? (Read Matthew 25:31-46.) This very familiar parable can be confusing to some. It seems as if the criteria for salvation is good works. That was not Jesus's point. Jesus was trying to tell us that faith *works*! It is the faith—our relationship with God—that saves us. But, having love for God and growing to love Him more every day because of the example He has given us in the life and death of Jesus, we come to love our neighbors as He does. The resulting actions are the *result* of our faith and our salvation and not the *cause* of that salvation.

12. There will be some in the judgment who claim to have done many good things—even casting out devils and performing many miracles—in the name of Jesus. (Matthew 7:21-23) But, Jesus will sadly turn to them and say: “I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!” (GNB)
13. So, who are those people that Jesus will call “the least of these, my brethren”? (Matthew 25:40) Ellen White discussed this parable.

Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God. (*The Desire of Ages* 638.2)

14. Maybe the toughest command that God ever gave to practicing Christians is found in Luke 6:27-28 and Matthew 5:44. Is it really possible to love your enemies? Jesus identified three characteristics of enemies: 1) They manifest hostile attitudes toward us; 2) They may speak bad words about us; and 3) They may actually abuse us, even persecute us. (Matthew 5:44)
15. He tells us to respond in three appropriate ways: 1) Treat them well, 2) Speak well about them, and 3) Pray for them. What does it do to us as humans to treat our enemies in these ways? (Romans 12:21) The only possible way to accomplish that apart from a hypocritical, offensive, lying behavior is to consistently look to Jesus and practice being like Him. As Abraham Lincoln suggested, if we turn our enemy into our friend, have we destroyed our enemy?
16. So, why did Jesus say we need to love our enemies? (Luke 6:32-35) That is the way we come to be like God. Once again, Jesus gave three arguments in favor of this: 1) Doing these things separates us from the low standard of the world; 2) We will be rewarded by God for that kind of behavior because it actually changes us to become more like Him; and 3) That kind of behavior is powerful evidence of our Christianity. (Luke 6:35; John 13:34-35) We must never forget that God loved us even when we were still His enemies. (Romans 5:10)
17. It would be naturally human to say these standards are impossible for human beings. But, God has made them possible by providing the means to accomplish it.

This standard is not one to which we cannot attain. In every command or injunction that God gives there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command. God has made provision that we may become like unto Him, and He will accomplish this for all who do not interpose a perverse will and thus frustrate His grace.—Ellen G. White, *Mount of Blessing*, p. 76.2.

18. In His final hours with His disciples, Jesus used a vine to illustrate how these things are to be accomplished. We must have such a close connection with Him that it is like the attachment of a branch to the vine. That kind of relationship will transform us from selfish, evil, sin-loving, human beings into gracious, kind, loving Christians.
19. So, who are the people that we should be reaching out to every day?

All around us are poor, tried souls that need sympathizing words and helpful deeds. There are widows who need sympathy and assistance. There are orphans whom Christ has bidden His followers receive as a trust from God. Too often these are passed by with neglect. They may be ragged, uncouth, and

seemingly in every way unattractive; yet they are God's property. They have been bought with a [387] price, and they are as precious in His sight as we are. They are members of God's great household, and Christians as His stewards are responsible for them. "Their souls," He says, "will I require at thine hand."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 386.5-387.0.

It is not the greatness of the work which we do, but the love and fidelity with which we do it, that wins the approval of the Saviour. It is the use which we make of our talents which determines our woe or weal. We may have faith to remove mountains, and understand all mysteries, and give our bodies to be burned, yet without charity—that love which finds utterance in good works, that feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and visits the afflicted—we are "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." [1 Corinthians 13:1-3]—*Pamphlet 69* 13.3 (1878); Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 325. [Content in brackets is added.]

20. Many Christians living in so-called Christian nations today might say that they do not really have any enemies. But, the time is coming soon when people will be seeking to end our lives! How can we be prepared for that day?

21. How can we come to truly love and desire becoming more like Jesus? Is it really possible to learn to love our enemies? If we come to be more and more like Jesus by studying His life, what happens to our natural selfishness?

It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 83.4.

22. If we are kind and loving toward transgressors, are we encouraging them in their sin? Many Christians today are more wealthy in terms of this earth's goods than their neighbors. How should we relate to those poorer neighbors? (1 John 3:16-19)

23. When Jesus was on this earth, He reached right through cultural Jewish barriers and extended His hand of love to Romans, Greeks, Syro-phoenicians, Samaritans, demoniacs, lepers, and anyone else He thought was in need. What groups of people would be on your list today?

24. The *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* recounts a story from many years ago. When Adventism swept through the Solomon Islands, two rival chiefs from cannibalistic tribes both became Christians and ended up worshiping in the same church. One of those chiefs had actually murdered the father of the other chief and cannibalized him. When the time for communion came, the son of the chief who had been cannibalized became enraged to think that he was taking part in the communion service with the man who had killed and eaten his father. He stormed out of the church; but after a short time, he decided to return; and eventually, the two of them were reconciled to become victorious Christians. They emerged from the church that day, one liberated from his shameful actions, and the other from his thirst for revenge.

25. Could we actually get to the place where we could forgive someone who had killed a relative? Revelation 14:4 says that the remnant will follow Jesus wherever He goes. Jesus went to the cross. Are we prepared to follow Him that far?

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