

The Fruit of the Spirit Lesson 2 1Q 2009

The Fruit of the Spirit is Love

SABBATH

Read second paragraph – “John says it so...” thoughts? Maybe I am just playing word games with the quarterly, but what do you think about the phrase that “love is so central to His character”?

Is there more to God’s character than love? Recently I have been having an email exchange with an intelligent young man who struggles with this issue. He wrote:

To use the true statement, God is love, in an attempt to prove God’s character of love and His being of love are one in the same is unbiblical and illogical. The texts that use the statement God is love are clearly describing God, not identifying Him. It is understood Who is being talked about, what is being explained in these verses is what God is “about,” if you will. God is the Who (identity), love is the what (descriptor). .. You have provided no Biblical or logical evidence that supports the notion that God and His character are one in the same. There are no defining characteristics of God’s identity. ..The only “defining characteristics” of God’s identity are ones such as... Jehovah, Lord of Lords, etc. This is Who God is. His character is what He is like.

Thoughts? What do you hear from such a position regarding how this young man sees God? It seems He sees God as the one in authority, or God merely as the one in charge, sovereign. Now let us be clear, nothing we have ever said or suggested in this class, my writings or presentations would ever suggest God is not sovereign. He absolutely is – but power and sovereignty alone are not what God wants to be recognized for nor is it what generates in us what God desires – love for Him!

George MacDonald an 19th Century theologian said it beautifully:

What is the deepest in God? His Power? No, for power could not make him what we mean when we say God. A being whose essence was only power would be such a negation of the divine that no righteous worship could be offered him; his service would be only fear. *Discovering the Character of God*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989, p. 29.

Why is this important?

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2Cor 10:3-5

Romans 1 – Paul tells us that when we reject the truth about God the mind becomes futile, darkened and depraved – we cannot become what God wants us to be if we fail to realize the true nature of God – that He is love!

Thoughts?

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. Matt 16:13-20

Thoughts?

What kind of weapon is a gate? A defensive weapon – Satan took humanity captive by deception – about what? God, Satan holds humanity captive by continued lies about God. But Jesus is the exact representation of the Father (Heb 1:3). In Jesus all the lies of Satan are refuted.

Peter spoke the truth that Jesus is God and Jesus will build His church on this truth, and the gates of hell will not stand against it for the lies about God will be demolished by the divine weapons of truth revealed in Jesus!

And what are the keys of the kingdom? The truth about God which frees from lies and opens the heart to receive the Holy Spirit who fills the mind/heart with love! When we are bound to God on earth by the truth about Him as revealed in Jesus we are bound to eternal life. When we reject the truth about God we are set free to cling to the lies told by Satan and are lost from our heavenly home.

Is the truth about God's character important? Let's examine a passage from the book *The Great Controversy* and think through what she is saying. I will read it and then let's go back and analyze it:

The law of God, from its very nature, is unchangeable.
 [why is it unchangeable?] It is a revelation of the will and the character of its Author. **God is love, and His law is love.**
 [Where did God's law originate? Is it something external to God and compulsory upon Him or is it a manifestation of His nature? If a manifestation of His nature is it something He created or imposed?] Its two great principles are love to God and love to man. **"Love is the fulfilling of the law."** Romans 13:10. [Can love be imposed?] **The character of God is righteousness and truth; such is the nature of His law.**
 [What does love look like? It always does what is right and is always true, truthful] Says the psalmist: "Thy law is the truth:" "all Thy commandments are righteousness." Psalm 119:142, 172. And the apostle Paul declares: "The law is holy, and the

commandment holy, and just, and good." Romans 7:12. Such a law, being an expression of the mind and will of God, must be as enduring as its Author. [Why is such a law enduring as its author? Because it emanates where? From the mind and will of God, who Himself is enduring forever] {GC 467.1}

It is the work of conversion and sanctification to reconcile men to God by bringing them into accord with the principles of His law. [What is God seeking to do? Reconcile God to man or man to God? Who needed to be changed after Adam's sin? And what is the change that mankind needs? To have minds/hearts that operate in harmony with what? The law of love] In the beginning, man was created in the image of God. He was in perfect harmony with the nature and the law of God; the principles of righteousness were written upon his heart. [In God's original design were there a bunch of rules imposed upon Adam and Eve to which they had to adhere or was the law the law of love which was written into their minds/hearts by God?] But sin alienated him from his Maker. He no longer reflected the divine image. His heart was at war with the principles of God's law. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Romans 8:7. [How did sin alienate man from God? What happened? See EGW quote below RH 1/5/86] But "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son," that man might be reconciled to God. [Again, why was Christ given, so that God might be forgiving? So that God would be reconciled to man and His anger might be assuaged, or to change and heal man? See EGW quote below 1SM346] Through the merits of Christ he can be restored to harmony with his Maker. His heart must be renewed by divine grace; he must have a new life from above. This change is the new birth, without which, says Jesus, "he cannot see the kingdom of God..." [What is the emphasis here and through all scripture? On changing, renewing and recreating humanity to be in harmony with God's character of love] {GC 467.2}

The law reveals to man his sins, but it provides no remedy. [Do you think her words were poorly chosen? Should she have said the law provides no legal payment? Is that our problem or do we actually need a remedy a cure?] While it promises life to

the obedient, it declares that death is the portion of the transgressor. [Why does the law declare death is the portion of the transgressor? Because the law says God must execute or kill? Or because the law is the basis of life and anything that deviates from it is not compatible with life?] The gospel of Christ alone can free him from the condemnation or the defilement of sin. He must exercise repentance toward God, whose law has been transgressed; and faith in Christ, his atoning sacrifice. [What does the good news of Christ accomplish? It destroys Satan's lies and wins us back to trust. Then in trust we open the heart and experience the Holy Spirit who takes the accomplishments (merits) of Christ and reproduces them in us. Thus through Jesus Christ we are restored to unity or oneness at-one-ment with God again. Christ sacrificed all in order to provide us reconciliation with God.] Thus he [the sinner] obtains "remission of sins that are past" and becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is a child of God, having received the spirit of adoption, whereby he cries: "Abba, Father!" [We are changed to be Christlike in character, back into the image God created us to be in the first place]. {GC 467.4}

- “Eve believed the words of Satan, and **the belief of that falsehood in regard to God's character, changed the condition and character of both herself and husband.** They were changed from good and obedient children into transgressors...” RH, January 5, 1886 par. 8
- **Through belief in Satan's misrepresentation of God, man's character and destiny were changed, but if men will believe in the Word of God, they will be transformed in mind and character, and fitted for eternal life.** To believe that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16), will change the heart, and reproduce in man the image of God. {1SM 346.1}

We have power over what we believe, but our beliefs have power over us – we are changed, neurologically, biologically, physically, even genetically by a change in what we believe!

What does the law require? What do you think about this quote?:

The law requires righteousness,--a righteous life, a perfect character; and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God's holy law. But Christ, coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God can "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. 3:26. {DA 762.2}

Do you agree or disagree? Why? Why does God's holy law require a perfect character? Because perfect love is the basis of life, life cannot operate outside this principle!

Why do we experience remission of sins that are past, because of legal payment or God's forbearance?

When we experience this kind of regeneration in the heart, when the law of love is written again in the heart, what does it look like here and now on planet earth?

I received an email this week from a patient of mine, a young lady 20 years of age. She gave me permission to share it with you. This young lady was abandoned by her mother shortly after birth, never knew either parent. She was in an orphanage for several years and mistreated, neglected and abused and then adopted at age 5. She has struggled with marked fear and insecurity and inability to love and trust. I have been working with her for about 18 months. This is her email to me:

As you are aware I am a very selfish person and being selfless is not natural for me.

As I am in this holiday season I am trying not to forget that Christmas is not about GETTING but about giving. So I brighten my holiday season by brightening someone else's.

I had opportunities to give this year, and I strived to participate in all of them ;}

Our school is taking donations for a single mother with a son who has severe autism... and no income

The donation failed because people wouldn't give

These people have clothes, food, a warm bed, a house, and money. And all they could donate to this family were pennies....PENNIES!!! This poor woman has a child and doesn't know if she'll have a roof over her head... what is she going to do with a bunch of pennies? All she got was a bunch of pennies and a few dimes and two small boxes of food. I gave a box FULL of food for her.

And I feel bad for that family...In fact my heart breaks for that mother because she's going to have to suffer the consequences of people's selflessness... see? look! EMPATHY! ;}

Two years ago, I wouldn't have even thought twice about people in need. I didn't care about people in need, or homeless children who have no family. That's their problem not mine. All I cared about was what I got for Christmas, and I'd throw a fit if I didn't get what I wanted.

I am also participating in a Secret Santa program...I drew the name of a fellow student and I crocheted a scarf for her. I also participated in the Red Cross Holiday food drive.

I gave my day's tips from haircutting to a homeless man on the side of the road.

And after doing all this I am feeling things I've never felt...contentment...and pure joy...being proud of myself.

I am no longer feeling I need Christmas gifts. Right now they seem insignificant.

And I'm learning that by being selfish you are NEVER content, you will always want more, you can only feed it with one thing at a time.

But by being selfless you have done TWO things:

1. Help others
 2. You have helped yourself
- And that quells all selfishness

And I know that's the lesson God has wanted me to learn for a very long time ;}

And I could never have made these steps if not for your tough love and guidance. I think I know that's one of the reasons you never gave up on me, because you saw past the selfishness and saw the selfless, people loving, healthy woman I could be.

Thank-you ;}

And by meditating on God's love and giving of myself, I am moving towards health.

Thoughts?

MONDAY

Read last paragraph, "Think for a moment..." – thoughts?

Can we experience families where love abounds and genuine grace is experienced by utilizing force, coercion, commands, orders, requirements, impositions?

How does love expand and grow? By giving, sharing, sacrificing, living love in action, by love is love awakened. Why do we love

God? Because He first loved us – in action, in real sacrifice, in giving Himself to save us!

Listen to the following story from Philip Yancy's book, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (page 49).

Thoughts? Can such love ever be commanded? This is God and the angels and the brothers and sisters of all the unfallen worlds waiting with banners held high tell you and me – “Welcome Home!”

What an incredible God! But does everyone love such a God? How do some still argue against such a God of love?

In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice. When men broke the law of God, and defied His will, Satan exulted. It was proved, he declared, that the law could not be obeyed; man could not be forgiven. Because he, after his rebellion, had been banished from heaven, Satan claimed that the human race must be forever shut out from God's favor. God could not be just, he urged, and yet show mercy to the sinner. {DA 761.4}

Some today make the same argument, that a forgiving God is a marshmallow God and that God must inflict punishment for sin or He is not a God of truth and justice.

WEDNESDAY

Read first paragraph, “If we are to...” thoughts? I received the following email from one of our online class members, this is just a portion:

What I wanted to discuss is Jesus request that we love our enemies and pray for those that persecute us.

My question is even though Satan has at present made a decision that is against God should we not in accordance with Jesus teaching to love our enemies/pray for those that persecute us still pray for him anyway?

Here is what is driving my question. Tim, my heart just breaks for our Father. I used to think about things like what will our mansions look like, will my dog be there. Then I moved to wanting to relish in being taught by God how our universe was created. Then I moved to thinking about how he will be there to comfort me as I see my unsaved loved ones final moments of existence. Then I moved to considering his heart as he watches beings he loves experience their final moments of existence. I want to be there to comfort him. I look at my children and what I would go through to have to bury one of them and I can't even imagine what it will be like for him. I don't want him to have to experience that.

While I understand the concept of freedom and that Satan has the freedom to make the choice. Don't I still have the ability to make a choice how I respond to his attacks on me? Something that puzzles me and maybe I'm outside of scripture here I don't know (that's why I'm talking to you) is it seems like we (Christians) read the bible and see that Satan, demons, the unsaved will be destroyed and we kind of relish in it. Some feel sad for the humans in this process, but the people who believe in a fiery hell where people are actively punished can't wait to see Satan get his. And those of us who believe it's God turning and our souls just being snuffed out we sort of do the same thing, we can't wait to see the blame get put "where it belongs". Why are we doing this? Our Father will be hurting. He will give Satan his wish, but I can't imagine him doing it without tears in his eyes. If our father takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked why do we either take pleasure or just not care.

You are free to tell me I'm wrong but if I respond to Satan's attacks on me with anything other than prayer for him, I think I'm outside of being in alignment with God. I don't think when God asked me to pray for my enemies he was only talking about the people who cut me off in traffic or those humans who actively seek to discredit me. I think he intended a larger mission for me than my little world of personal annoyances.

Thoughts?

Part of my response:

What I think Christ was trying to do with instructing us to pray for our enemies is primarily to help prevent us from becoming hostile, hard hearted, bitter, resentful etc. When we pray for our enemies it moves us from being their enemy to being one concerned for their welfare and this changes us and opens our hearts to the Holy Spirit so the Spirit can heal us from our enemies attacks. Further, we become witnesses of God's grace as we maintain loving and grace filled attitudes toward our enemies. Such love toward our enemies is one of God's weapons for melting their hearts and winning them to trust.

However, there are some beings who have persisted so long in sin that prayer for them is not fruitful or helpful because there is nothing God can do for them. Satan is one of these beings. So, prayer for an enemy is useful for the person praying to prevent them from hardening their hearts and keeps their heart open to God's Spirit. It is also useful for those enemies who haven't persisted so long in rebellion against God that they have destroyed the very faculties which respond to the movements of God's Spirit. As we pray for these individuals our lives and God's agencies can be useful in reaching them. But praying for enemies who have gone beyond the point of healing will have no benefit on them as they can no longer recognize or respond to truth and love.

Thoughts?

TUESDAY

Let's do the exercise the lesson suggests – let's turn the negative statements about what love is not into positive statements about what love actually is:

- Love does not envy – love rejoices in the success of others
- Love does not parade itself – love uplifts others
- Love is not puffed up – love is humble
- Love is not rude – love is polite and courteous
- Love is not self seeking – love is other centered, seeks to benefit others
- Love is not easily provoked – love is patient and tolerant of others
- Love thinks no evil – love thinks righteously
- Love does not rejoice in iniquity – love is grieved by iniquity

Read bottom green section – “As we contemplate...” Well said!

SUNDAY

The title, “Love Is Multidimensional” how did you read it? Is it referring to the word “love” and how it can be applied to many different situations like, “I love my car,” & “I love hot bread,” & “Let's go the bar and find some loving,” & “God is love”? Or do you think it is referring to the genuine love of God being multidimensional?

Clearly the word is multidimensional – what about God's love? How is it multidimensional?

THURSDAY

Read first two paragraphs – what's wrong with the lesson of this story?

It is a contrived situation to try an expose some problem in the heart of the theology students – but do you think the students

would have responded the same way if they saw the man crossing the street and hit by a car that sped off and left him there bleeding and dying? Don't most of us think that the students would have gone and gotten help for the man, even if they were late or missed a preaching appointment?

What is the problem with the story? The man was placed in the school surrounded by a society filled with agencies to help him and in no danger of dying or starving to death. It isn't even clear if the man needed help. Further, in our society there are many people who actually prefer a life on the streets and when agencies work to get them some type of shelter they refuse it or leave it to go back to the street – not everyone of course, but some.

Other thoughts?

The lesson asks who is my neighbor – thoughts? Who is our closest neighbor? A spouse? How is a Christian supposed to show Godlike love to an abusive spouse? What is the most loving course to take? Concern for the eternal salvation of the abuser? And what happens to the heart of a man who abuses his wife? If the wife loves the man and wants to prevent his heart from hardening and work toward his eternal salvation what is the loving course?

Read bottom paragraph, "Consider..." thoughts

How do we balance Christ's words with Paul's counsel:

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." 2Thes 3:10

And what about the old Indian proverb, "Give a man a fish feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime"? How does this wisdom play into charity?

FRIDAY

Question 3 read and discuss