

## 8. Loving Brothers and Sisters (3Q 2009—Loved and Loving: John’s Epistles)

**Biblical material:** Mark 12:28–31; John 14:15; 1 John 3:11–24; 4:7–5:4; James 2:15, 16.

### Quotes

- Goodness is stronger than evil. /Love is stronger than hate. /Light is stronger than darkness. /Life is stronger than death. *Desmond Tutu*
- God embraces not only this tiny globe of ours, but millions and billions of such globes. How can we—little crawling creatures so utterly helpless as he has made us—how can we possibly measure his greatness, his boundless love, his infinite compassion? *Gandhi*
- I am not what I might be, /I am not what I ought to be, /I am not what I wish to be, /I am not what I hope to be, But I thank God /I am not what I once was, /And I can say with the great apostle, /”By the grace of God /I am what I am.” *John Newton*

### Questions

Can we force ourselves to become loving brothers and sisters? How do we make sure our love is not just talk? Where do we find true assurance when we don’t *feel* that way? How can love be commanded? How does the fact that God knows everything help us to have confidence? What does the on-looking universe see in us?

### Bible discussion

“My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it should be true love, which shows itself in action.” (1 John 3:18 TEV). Love is not just to do with what we say and what we claim, it is proved and demonstrated in what we actually *do*. God is love *in action*—and this must apply to us too. This is why Jesus “commanded” love: “My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.” (John 15:12 NIV). The words of Jesus are summed up in the message “we should love one another” (1 John 3:11 NIV). The *kind* of love is clearly defined: as Christ loves, we must love. The *result* of that love is demonstrated: if you love, then everyone will recognise you as a follower of Christ. The *origin* of this love-message is identified: this is the true message that convinced you in the very beginning.

But the question we often ask ourselves is, “How do I find peace and assurance when I don’t feel like that?” The answer is sure and certain: “This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set out hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” (1 John 3:19-20 NIV). We often feel self-condemned. We feel worried about what we’ve done, and hesitant to even mention this in prayer, remember that God knows everything—and He is greater than our hearts. There is nothing God cannot forgive except what we do not ask forgiveness for. We cannot embarrass God. So why be reluctant? And we can set our hearts at rest in His presence knowing that we really *do* love in actions and the truth.

What does this tell us about the way we are to act? We may complain about being unloved and unappreciated, but how much do we love and appreciate those around us? While the church is to be more than a “mutual admiration society,” the demonstration of Christlike love will solve many of those petty problems that so divide us... Feelings can be

both a help and hindrance in the Christian life. When you are having a “mountain top” experience the emotion of praise and joy can be absolutely wonderful: a thrilling and inspiring sense of God’s presence that uplifts and sustains. But when you are “down in the valley” the negative feelings can lead to spiritual discouragement and depression. Like David in the Psalms, we need to “call to mind” what we *know* to be true, and trust in God, however bad we might *feel*. So we should ask ourselves, “Where is my confidence? In myself and how I feel from day to day? Or is my confidence in the promises of God?”

### **Comment**

“As the presence of murderous hatred is a token that one does not belong to the family of God, the presence of brotherly love is a sure sign that one does belong to it, that one has, through the new birth, ‘passed out of death into life’ (cf. John 5. 24)... Love is the supreme manifestation of the new life, so much so that any one who fails to manifest it shows that he has never entered into the new life; he ‘abides in death’.” F F Bruce, The Epistles of John (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1970), 95-6.

“Our hearts condemn us when our emotions overpower our intellect. We respond to situations on the basis of how we *feel*, rather than by relying on what we *know*... When our hearts condemn us, we allow our emotions to get behind the wheel; our intellects are thrown into the backseat. When this happens, we must remember two things, The first is that ‘God is greater than our hearts’; the second is that ‘He knows everything’ (v. 20). This is why we must live by what God says, and not only by how we feel.” Roy Matheson, Loving God’s Family (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 112-3.

### **Ellen White Comments**

He [God] 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.. {DA 22}

[1 John 1:5-10; 2:9-11, quoted.] Could any description be more sharp and clear than John has given us? These things are written for us; they are applicable to the churches of Seventh-day Adventists. Some may say, “I do not hate my brother; I am not so bad as that.” But how little they understand their own hearts. They may think they have a zeal for God in their feelings against their brother, if his ideas seem in any way to conflict with theirs; feelings are brought to the surface that have no kinship with love. They show no disposition to harmonize with him. They would as lief be at swords’ point with their brother as not. And yet he may be bearing a message from God to the people—just the light they need for this time. {16MR 104}

The religion of Jesus Christ means something more than talk. The righteousness of Christ consists in right actions and good works from pure, unselfish motives. Outside righteousness, while the inward adorning is wanting, will be of no avail. {TDG 182}

Many seem to think that they must beg pardon of all the world for being a Christian. John did not regard it so. He says, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). The Christian does not take a step down to a low level; he is constantly progressing forward, and the religion of Jesus Christ never degrades the receiver. It refines his taste; it sanctifies his judgment. Why should it not, when he is in connection with a pure and holy God, and the power which is invested in God He imparts to His sons and daughters. {8MR 406}

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