



The Christian Life

Module 10

*How to Have the Love
of God*

MODULE TEN

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INTRODUCTION

Love is at the root of our Christian faith. Because of God's love He sent His son to die for our sins on the Cross, thus providing for our salvation, as He took our sin on himself as the ultimate sacrifice for us. **This is the greatest expression of love possible.**

In this lesson we want to look at some of the aspects of Christian love. We will start with a study of God's love, and then examine His command that we love one another. **We realise that it is not always easy to love some people.** Therefore, we will explore some of the hindrances you may face and try to offer a few tips on how to overcome them.

Most importantly, we will show you how God has provided a **source** for love that will keep you filled with His love. **You can have God's love in your heart.** And once you have received His gift of love you will want to share it with someone else.

Why not pray right now and ask God to help you better understand this important subject. As you study, be sure to check each scripture reference carefully and make some notes.

We pray that this lesson will be a stepping stone to start you on a love-filled life, a life that will bless you as well as others.

1. THE LOVE OF GOD

STUDY 1 John 4:7-13.

It is important as we study these scriptures to set straight the fact that **God is love.** We don't have to look far to see man-made advice on love and to be lovely. Modern advertising and media is saturated with all kinds of advice on the subject. This is a phony kind of love. That's not what real love is all about.

God is the author of real love. He has loved us from the beginning of time, and **His love abides forever.** Verse 7 of our study passage tells us that we should love one another because love is of God. Love is part of our inheritance as His children. **It is a mark of those who are truly born of God through Jesus Christ.**

The Qualities of God's Love.

STUDY Psalms 86:15.

Just how is God's love different than man's love? First of all, God's love is **compassionate and merciful.** God **care's** about our every need, our every joy, and our every sorrow. In fact, Jesus said that God knows the number of the very hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30). What a **loving** and **caring** God we have!

On the other hand, our friends and neighbours do not always care what's happening to us. We may come to them with our problems only to have them answer. "So what else is new?" And when that happens we feel worse than ever.

Sometimes as Christians we find it difficult to care for others. But Jesus told us in Luke 6:36, "You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate". **To be compassionate we must care, and to care we must have the love of God.**

STUDY Psalms 130.

Secondly, God's love is **forgiving**. It says in 1 John 1:9. "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness". It is human nature not to forgive. People have been known to hold grudges for decades.

But God forgives us through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, who took the punishment for our sins (1 John 4:10). **God forgives us because He loves us.** When we have His love in our hearts we can then forgive others.

STUDY Romans 8:38-39.

Third, God's love is **everlasting**. It will never fade away. On the other hand, man's love is temperamental and thus often temporary, here today, gone tomorrow. It is a contingent and selfish love, based on what it can get in return.

But God's love asks nothing in return. He loves sinners and saints alike. His love is constant and steadfast. If there is anything we can depend on in this world, it is the love of God.

Furthermore, Paul says that **nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.** We can reject God's love and miss the glories of Heaven entirely if we so choose. **But we can never be separated from His boundless love.**

The greatest example of God's love, encompassing all three characteristics we just discussed – **compassionate and merciful, forgiving, and everlasting** - is found in 1 John 4:9-10. The love of God has been made known in the world through Jesus Christ; God did not send His Son to die for our sins because we loved Him. Rather, **God sent Him because He loved us.** John 3:16, sums it up well: "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life".

This is God's great love.

2. THE NATURE OF REAL LOVE

STUDY 1 Corinthians 13.

In our last lesson we talked about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the purpose of each one in the body of Christ. Paul emphasises in our study chapter that none of these gifts mean much if a person does not also have love. He says that if one has prophetic powers, wisdom, knowledge, and great faith - quite a collection of spiritual weaponry - but has not **love, he is nothing.**

We need to meditate on Paul's words, for it is a tragic fact that some Christians who have received many spiritual gifts are running to and fro **without love in their hearts.** Many have become puffed up because of the gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit. **And yet Paul says they are nothing.**

Furthermore, their works, numerous though they may be, are **worthless.** Paul says that even if they give away everything they own and sacrificed their bodies (not a Christian concept but an illustration of the extreme) **their works would be worthless if they had not love.** For a spiritual life without love is one that has no effect on anyone. The world has wearied of legalism, phoniness and self righteous attitudes.

But real love - Gods love - will always have great power in reaching the lost and ministering to the needs of mankind.

What Love Is All About.

Let's examine some of the aspects of the kind of love we are talking about. First of all, Paul says that **love is patient** (v.4). In other words, **love is willing to wait.**

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians he tells us to be patient with **everyone** (5:14). Here is where we need the help of the Lord each day. His love will help us to be patient each time we are about to lose our cool with someone.

Love is kind (v.4). This does not mean a sugary kind of goodness that is only outwardly sweet, but rather an inner kindness, a kindness that springs from a heart of love. You can't pretend to be kind for very long, for others will see right through you. But the kindness of a genuine love is appreciated and remembered. It is the kindness which Jesus showed to all men, even those who persecuted Him.

Love is not jealous (v.4). Are you jealous of those who have more than you, or are you content with what you have in this life? Jealousy has no part in a love-filled life.

Love is not boastful (v.4). Another aspect of love is **humility.** In other words, a loving Christian does not go around arrogantly boasting of his accomplishments. Rather, as Paul says, "If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD." (1 Corinthians 1:31).

Love is not proud or rude (v.5). Here again Paul tells us that love is **humble.**

Love does not insist on its own way (v.5). Some Christians always want their own way. They not only want it, but they insist on it. But love is not selfish. Let us take for our example Jesus Himself, who said, "I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will". (John 5:30).

Love is not irritable and keeps no record of being wronged (v.5). We all have times when we get irritable and its real struggle to even smile. It may take a daily effort on your part to be the kind of person who doesn't let every little thing upset him. But when we let God's love into our hearts He gives us a loving attitude toward others, and a divine joy and peace which far transcends human irritations and resentments.

Love does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out (v.6). Gossip is a sure sign of a lack of love among believers, for we are told by Paul to "rejoice when the truth wins out." When we share unkind remarks about others we can do great damage not only to a person but to a family, an organisation, or a church. The old adage "If you can't say something good about someone, don't say anything," is good advice to follow. **Love has no part in gossip.**

Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful and endures through every circumstance (v.7). If you love someone you will stick by him no matter what may happen. The only way we can do this is with the help and perseverance of God's love, to put ourselves in their shoes for a while. Looking at life from the other person's point of view makes it much easier to endure difficult moments and believe and hope for the best.

Lastly, Paul says that **love will last forever, it is eternal** (vs. 8-13). In the Song of Solomon, we read, "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it." (8:7)

STUDY Acts 16:18-34.

How we need the love of God! Not only will it sustain us through trials and difficulties, but it will give us a better attitude toward our fellow men. God's love enables us to respond like the Apostle Paul who, though he took the brunt of severe physical abuse, had a genuine love for the Philippians jailer. Paul could have walked away when he asked Paul what he needed to do to be saved. Instead Paul told him about Christ, and not only he but his whole household was saved!

Paul had real love - God's love - in his heart. Probably very few men could have written 1 Corinthians 13 as Paul did. Yet it is nevertheless true that **each of us can have the love of God. We can love others, even those who despise and abuse us.** Believe it right now and decide that this very thing will come to pass in your own life. In the next topic we will show you the source of divine love and how you, just as Paul, may have God's conquering love.

3. HOW TO LOVE OTHERS

STUDY John 13:34-35.

The first step in having a genuine love for others is understanding that **love is not an option. It is a command.** Jesus did not say we can love one another whenever we feel like it. Nor does He say we should love one another a few minutes each day. Rather, He tells us love should be a part of our lives 24 hours a day.

Furthermore, we are not to love only those who are worthy of our love, but all men. **Real love is not choosy. God loves everyone.** Work through the following SELF-STUDY and see what Jesus has to say about loving the unlovely.

SELF-STUDY #1

STUDY Luke 6:32-36 and answer each question.

- (a) Do you deserve credit for loving those who love you? _____
 - (b) Do even men and women without Christ love those who love them? _____
 - (c) What kind of an attitude should we have when we lend someone money?

 - (d) What kind of reward will you receive when you love your enemies?

 - (e) How does God treat the unthankful and the wicked?

 - (f) What other characteristic of God's love should we have toward others?

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STUDY 1 John 4:19-21.

Perhaps the most important thing to note about this passage is that we can love others only because God first loved us.

We will come back to this vital truth in a moment. First, however, we need to discuss John's comments about a man who does not love his fellow believers.

John flatly states that anyone who hates his fellow believers does not really love God. His argument is this: How can a man love someone whom he has not seen if he cannot even love someone whom he has seen? From a divine standpoint, John is referring back to his statement in verse 8, "But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

What John is really saying is this: **Love for God is demonstrated by love for one's neighbour.**

Unfortunately, some Christians often beg forgiveness for lack of love, saying, “I can do anything else. I can memorise the Bible. I can pray. I can witness. But don’t ask me to love others. I just can’t do it!”

John’s answer to that is simple, yet profound: “Yes, you can. You can love others because God first loved you.” This is the secret of Christian love.

Love for others is not always easy to appropriate. However, we can have it if we want it, and this is the first key. **We must want to obey Jesus’ command to love our neighbour.**

Secondly, we must realise that **God is our source of love.** We can have love in our hearts for others because Jesus Christ brought God’s love into the world. When we receive Him as Saviour, that divine flow of love is available to each and every one of us. Jesus, in fact, prayed that **the love God had** for Him would also be in our hearts! (John 17:26).

Love for our neighbour begins, then, when we receive Christ as saviour, our love grows **only as we fully commit our lives to Jesus.** Remember, love is the first fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22, and the fruits grow in our lives as we commit ourselves to Christ each day.

You will recall in our lesson on commitment that we discussed the fact that Christ is the vine and each believer is a branch. Fruit cannot grow without proper nourishment from the vine. So it is in our lives that we need to be in communion with God each day through Bible study and prayer if we are to have love in our lives.

It’s a good idea to include in your morning prayers a **prayer for love.** Ask God to help you love others. You’ll be amazed how a simple, sincere prayer such as this will change your relationship with those around you. God will never withhold love from us. Rather, He is more than willing to help us love our neighbours if we really want to love them.

4. HOW TO DEMONSTRATE LOVE FOR OTHERS?

STUDY Galatians 6:2.

John tells us, "Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions" (1 John 3:18). That is what "sharing each other's burdens" is all about. Paul is saying that we as Christians should **share one another's trials and struggles**.

Before we discuss the practicality of the obligation, we first need to look at a related subject, that of church attendance. For, if we are going to share ourselves with our fellow Christians, and they with us, we must establish real relationships with one another; and the way we can effectively do that is through belonging to a church or discipleship group that is instructing Christians to do the work of ministry.

STUDY Hebrews 10:25.

Some people may think it doesn't matter whether they attend church or discipleship group or not. They think they can get along just fine by themselves. They think they can drop in at their local church whenever they feel like it. But this study passage tells us differently. We are told **not to neglect meeting together**.

What is the reasoning behind this sound advice? Mainly, it is because **we need to help and encourage each other, really love one another**. There is nothing more precious than the fellowship one can find in a warm and loving church or discipleship group.

That's what love and church attendance should be all about. When we love Christ, it is the most natural thing in the world to want to be together with other Christians. It is true we can have friends who are not Christians, but there is a special closeness between fellow believers.

You may be saying to yourself that it's impossible to have a church without cliques - one where everyone gets along perfectly. Maybe so. But it's your responsibility as a believer to be the kind of loving person who won't put up with this kind of thing. As you enter into the activities of your church the Lord will use your influence there for good.

We hope you realise the importance of church or discipleship group attendance. If you don't have a church home, start looking for one today. And when you find a church, take an active part in its ministry. Find a job to do that will suit your individual talents. But always keep in mind that no matter what you do, do it in the spirit of Christian love.

Now let us get back to the discussion of how we may share one another's burdens. First of all, we have to **listen - really listen** - when someone comes to us with a problem. Listening produces understanding, and understanding produces compassion. You will be amazed how many times God will send people your way who have problems that you once had. As you listen to them pour out their hearts, you will experience a loving tenderness toward them as God enables you to share their burdens.

Sometimes people need continuing counsel. **But on many occasions the Holy Spirit will lead you to pray, and you will see** God immediately lift their burdens. What a joy it is to know that through the love God has given us for others we can minister to them and see God meet their needs!

Words Without Deeds

STUDY James 2:15-16.

It's important to listen, and it's important to talk about a problem or a need. And it's important to pray. But it's also important to **love in practical ways**. All the words in the world won't help a young mother who is recovering from surgery to care for her family. What she needs is someone to help her with the children and the cleaning and cooking. That is the meaning of bearing one another's burdens.

STUDY Matthew 20:26-28.

Christ reminds us that Christian greatness is not measured in how much others do for us, but **how much we do for others**. The world has a tendency to judge the greatness of a man by his intellect or his bank account. But God is more concerned with how we serve each other in love.

This passage makes it clear that in God's eyes the servant is of greater importance than the master. A willingness to **put others first** is a necessity if you expect to be fruitful in this part of your Christian life. The greatest example of this is when Christ gave His life as a ransom for many. **Truly He came not to be served, but to serve**. And that should be each believer's desire.

If we want to help other people we have to realise that we are not better than anyone else. We should not let our egos be so inflated that we become self-centred. We should not let ourselves get in the habit of judging others, but rather we should love others in spite of their shortcomings. This sort of humble attitude will show the world that we love the Lord more than we love ourselves. **And it will show others that we really love them**.

There is yet another way God wants us to demonstrate the love He has given us. For that we look at James once again.

SELF-STUDY #2

STUDY James 2:1-9 and answer each question.

(a) Should we show favouritism to people because of the size of their bank accounts?

(b) Does the fact that someone wears expensive clothes to church matter to God?

(c) What should our attitude be when a shabbily-dressed person comes into our church? _____

(d) What does James say about the spiritual life of some poor people?

(e) How are we to love our neighbours? _____

5. THE BLESSINGS OF A LIFE FILLED WITH LOVE

STUDY Psalms 84:11-12.

In a love filled Christian life we **gain as we give**. The Lord has promised that He will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. In other words, He has promised to bless those who show His love to others.

The blessings of the lord would be far too numerous to list in this lesson. But we will try to mention a few. At some time, you may want to make your own list by searching the scriptures.

STUDY Proverbs 10:12 and 1 Peter 4:8.

It is beautiful thing when Christians love one another, for love does indeed cover a multitude of offenses (or sins). We need to be careful, however, how we interpret the twin statements by Solomon and Peter. They do not mean that if you have love for others God will overlook your sins. Rather, as the first half of Proverbs 10:12 points out, love does away with all sorts of sins. In other words, if you love others you will not be involved in jealousy, anger, strife, dissension, greed, theft, immorality and a whole host of sins.

As Paul points out, the Ten Commandments and any other commandment “are summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfils the requirements of God’s law.” (Romans 13:8-10).

When we let God’s love reside in our hearts, our lives are totally reoriented. Love does indeed cover a multitude of sins.

STUDY Ecclesiastes 2:26.

This verse makes it very clear that the source of true wisdom, knowledge and joy is God Himself. There is nothing more precious and pleasing to God than a Christian who truly loves others, and so when we love, God releases a divine flow of His goodness to us.

And it is always true that joy goes along with love. Anyone who loves knows what joy is all about. Not only does God bestow His joy upon us, but there is inner warmth that radiates from a loving attitude. The joy of helping others is a joy that cannot be obtained anywhere else.

This ends our discussion of the love of God and how to have it. We would suggest that you review this lesson on love from time to time and also spend some time on your own looking up other scriptures on love. We pray that the love of God will grow in your life and that you will know the joy of sharing this love with others. The words of Jude found in verse two are our wish for you: “May God give you more and more mercy, peace, and love.”

SELF-STUDY #3.

- (1) We should love other people because God loves us. T () F ()
- (2) List three qualities of God's love.
- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____
- (3) Satan has the power to separate us from God's love. T () F ()
- (4) Love is not as important as the gifts of the Spirit. T () F ()
- (5) Teaching a Sunday school class is of little value if done without love. T () F ()
- (6) Which of the following statement is NOT true about Christian love.
- (a) Love is patient with all men.
- (b) Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.
- (c) Love seeks its own way.
- (d) Loyalty to a friend in trouble.
- (7) Paul was concerned with the Philippians jailer because he needed his help to escape town. T () F ()
- (8) A person who does not love his fellow men does not really know God. T () F ().
- (9) We demonstrate our love for God by showing love to our neighbours. T () F ()
- (10) List the three steps to having God's love in your life.
- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____
- (11) Church and discipleship group membership enables us to more closely care for our fellow Christians. T () F ()
- (12) God needs us to share His love in a local church. T () F ()
- (13) The most important thing in bearing one another's burdens is to give them advice. T () F ()
- (14) Our faith in Christ is actively demonstrated in deeds of love. T () F ()
- (15) If we love others, God automatically forgives us of our sins. T () F ()
- (16) If we have love in our hearts we will not commit a number of sins. T () F ()
- (17) Love for one's neighbour is a fulfilment of the law. T () F ()

ANSWERS FOR SELF STUDY #1

- (a) No.
- (b) Yes.
- (c) We should lend without expecting to be repaid.
- (d) A very great reward from God.
- (e) He is kind to them, showing real love.
- (f) Compassion.

ANSWERS FOR SELF STUDY #2

- (a) No.
- (b) No. He is no respecter of persons.
- (c) He should be treated no differently than anyone else.
- (d) Some poor people are rich in faith.
- (e) As ourselves.

ANSWERS TO SELF-STUDY #3

- 1. T
- 2. (a) Compassionate and merciful
(b) Forgiving
(c) Everlasting
- 3. F
- 4. F
- 5. T
- 6. C
- 7. F
- 8. T
- 9. T

10. (Any three of the following):
- (a) A desire to obey Jesus' command to love our neighbours.
 - (b) Recognition that God is our source of love.
 - (c) The full commitment of our lives to Christ.
 - (d) Pray for love.
11. T
12. T
13. F
14. T
15. F
16. T
17. T