



Young People's Bible Class

March, April, May 2017

• SPRING QUARTER

For Adults Ages 18 Through 25

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March, April, May 2017

The Quarter Ahead.....	2
Editorial.....	3

The Love of God

UNIT I: The Nature of God's Love

Mar. 5—The Source of All Love—I John 4:7-19.....	5
Mar. 12—God's Overflowing Love—Eph. 2:1-10.....	10
Mar. 19—Manifesting God's Love—John 15:1-17.....	15
Mar. 26—God's Merciful Love—Joel 2:12-13, 18-19, 28-32.....	20

UNIT II: The Work of God's Love

Apr. 2—The Lord Is My Shepherd—Ps. 23:1-6.....	25
Apr. 9—God's Saving Love in Christ—John 3:1-16.....	30
Apr. 16—God's Love Triumphant (Easter)—John 20:1-10; I Pet. 1:3-5, 8-9.....	35
Apr. 23—God's Reconciling Love—Rom. 5:6-11; 8:31-39.....	40
Apr. 30—The Good Shepherd's Love—John 10:1-15.....	45

UNIT III: The Extent of God's Love

May 7—God's Disciplinary Love—Jonah 1:7-17.....	49
May 14—God's Protective Love—Jonah 2:1-10.....	53
May 21—God's Love for the Lost—Jonah 3:1-10.....	57
May 28—God's All-Embracing Love—Jonah 4:1-11.....	61



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The Quarter Ahead

By following the curriculum of a series of lessons derived from Scripture, students are given a comprehensive overview of the Bible. Sometimes the quarter's lessons will focus on one book, but more often than not the lessons will come from several books.

The theme for this quarter is "The Love of God." This is obviously a very important theme to consider, as we realize that humans are the special objects of God's love and concern.

The first four lessons deal with the nature of God's love. Four passages from four different books consider this theme. Two lessons come from the pen of John, sometimes called the apostle of love. John earned this title because he emphasized God's love in both his Gospel and in I John, his brief yet profound letter toward the end of the New Testament.

You have probably heard a number of sermons and sung songs about God's grace, a concept related to His love. One lesson comes from Ephesians 2, where Paul stated, "For by grace are ye saved" (vs. 8). This is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible.

Likewise, one lesson comes from the Prophet Joel. There are many questions about this Old Testament book, but one thing is certain—God's love is merciful. This is seen in God's giving to Israel many opportunities to respond to His love. Joel also prophesied the coming of the Holy Spirit, fulfilled on Pentecost.

Lessons 5 through 9 comprise the second unit, dealing with the work of God's love. The texts for two of the lessons will certainly be familiar. One comes from the beloved twenty-third Psalm and

the other from John 3, including verse 16, one of the first verses memorized by many children in Sunday school.

The spring quarter always includes an Easter lesson. Lesson 7 is the account of Mary Magdalene arriving at the tomb, only to discover that the Lord's body is gone. After being informed of her discovery, Peter and John raced to the tomb to verify her story. Coupled with this text is a passage from I Peter, where the apostle reminded believers that they had accepted the testimony of others even though they had never seen the risen Lord. Not only is Jesus our risen Saviour; He is also our Good Shepherd, the theme of lesson 9 from John 10.

Two passages from Romans comprise another lesson in this unit. Certainly a weighty epistle, Romans is one of the most important in the entire New Testament. Understanding concepts presented by Paul in Romans is undeniably of critical importance for comprehending the rest of the Bible.

The final four lessons cover the unit dealing with the extent of God's love. The book of Jonah is certainly appropriate in this regard. Jonah himself was a rebellious prophet, but the Lord still loved him and gave him a second chance to obey Him.

Not only did God love His wayward prophet, but He also loved Nineveh, the evil Assyrian city. While Jonah was not eager to see the Ninevites repent, God was. Important lessons concerning how we should love all people can be gleaned from the story of Jonah. Enjoy your study.

—John Alva Owston.

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The Greatest Commandment

JOHN ALVA OWSTON

You may not be aware of it, but more is recorded in the four Gospels about the final week of Jesus' life than in all the rest of the New Testament put together.

For example, take the Gospel of Mark, the briefest of the four and possibly the first to be written. Although Mark covered the three-year ministry of Christ in his sixteen chapters, he only told what happened on about thirty-five of those days. This is true with all the Gospels, as they do not tell us everything that happened on every day.

The Apostle John admitted that not everything was recorded, saying, "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25).

During the final week (likely on Tuesday), Jesus was peppered with many questions, perhaps with even more than are recorded in the Gospels. A question was asked concerning paying taxes to Caesar as well as a hypothetical question concerning marriage in the afterlife.

One of those who came with a question was a certain unnamed scribe (Mark 12:28). These teachers of the Mosaic Law were often associated with the Pharisees. They were frequently at odds with Jesus primarily because He did not hold to their traditions, which He saw as human additions to Scripture, not as divine commandments.

Be that as it may, this particular scribe was impressed with how Jesus had bested the Sadducees with their question about the resurrection (Mark 12:18-27). But the scribe himself had a question he wanted to ask the Master Teacher. Called a "lawyer" in Matthew



22:35, according to Matthew's account, his question was a means of "tempting," or testing, Jesus.

This legal expert asked, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28). By "first commandment," he meant the greatest or most important commandment given by God. As it was, religious authorities had counted up all the commandments in the Mosaic Law and had come up with a total of 613.

With all these commandments, even the religious leaders realized that some had to be more important than others. They likely had endless debates over this question, probably discussing it into the wee hours of the morning.

One of the commandments considered extremely important by the scribes concerned the Sabbath. Jesus often found Himself at odds with the Pharisees on this issue. Christ, of course, kept the Sabbath, but the scribes had added numerous details to the original commandment and considered Jesus a lawbreak-

er in this regard. The Lord healed numerous people on the Sabbath, probably as a way to call attention to their misunderstanding of this day of rest.

Perhaps the scribe in question was trying to draw the Lord into a debate concerning the Sabbath or some other commandment. Either way, Christ answered in a manner probably not anticipated. In fact, His answer was very orthodox. Few could argue with His answer, and by the end of the day, no one attempted to ask Him any more questions (Matt. 22:46).

Trumping all other commands in the law is the *Shema*. This is the first word in the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the basic creed of Judaism. These are among the first verses taught to children, and faithful Jews still recite them every day.

That “the Lord our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:29) acknowledges the essential unity of the God revealed to Israel. Unlike the nations around them, Israel worshipped one God (monotheism) as opposed to many gods (polytheism). As an aside, some assert that Christians are not monotheists because they believe in the Trinity. That Christians believe the one God has revealed Himself in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is not a denial of monotheism. There is still only one God. The one God revealed in the law was now standing before this questioning scribe.

That God is to be loved above all other people, places, and things is implicit in the Ten Commandments, where both the worship of other gods and the fashioning of graven images is forbidden (Exod. 20:1-5).

While distinctions can be drawn between “heart,” “soul,” “mind,” and “strength” (Mark 12:30), the thrust of the original command quoted by Jesus was that God was to be first in the hearts and lives of His people. All our devotion and our affections must be di-

rected toward Him. Otherwise we will end up worshipping material things, which is a real danger in places like the United States. Of course, in some parts of the world raw idolatry is alive and well. In these nations, people still worship the false gods that were prevalent in the ancient world.

Here is the real question: Do we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? We should not be too quick to answer, as we may think we love the Lord when our actions indicate otherwise.

For example, do we tell others about how Jesus died on the cross to save us from the penalty of sin? Do we strive to live with integrity, following His commandments? Do we show love to others?

When Christ answered the scribe, the questioner got more than he asked for. We are to love not only God but also one another. Quoting from Leviticus 19:18, Jesus declared, “The second [commandment] is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12:31). The Lord then added, “There is none other commandment greater than these.” In short, these two commandments summarize all the other teachings of the law of God. As Jesus states in Matthew 22:40, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Agreeing with the Saviour, the scribe reiterated what Christ said and then stated that these two commandments were “more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33). This revealed that his understanding of true devotion to God encompassed more than mere ritualism.

To this Jesus replied, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). This man was on the right road because his comprehension of the law of God surpassed that of his contemporaries. Do we understand what this scribe understood?

Scripture Lesson Text

1 JOHN 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spir'it.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Je'sus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

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.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

NOTES

The Source of All Love

Lesson: I John 4:7-19

Read: I John 4:7-19

TIME: about A.D. 90-95

PLACE: probably from Ephesus

GOLDEN TEXT—"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:11).

Lesson Exposition

Be honest. What are the things you really, really love? Are you having a hard time coming up with a list? Just ask yourself the following simple questions: *How do I spend my time? How do I spend my money? Where do I like to go? What do I like to do? What kind of people do I like to be around?*

You will note that the original question was about *love*, but the additional questions mostly revolve around what we *like*! Most of us realize that loving someone or something is more serious than just liking someone or something, although the two concepts are frequently confused or used interchangeably.

In some way or another, all our lessons this quarter focus on God's love. As we will see, loving God cannot be separated from loving others. But there are people who claim to love God yet seem to have little love for people. "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:18).

PURSUING LOVE—I John 4:7-9

Jesus commanded, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). The new birth is therefore a necessity. But for some, the new birth is merely an emotional experience, perhaps something that oc-

curred at a church camp or a youth convention. If the experience was genuine, it will be revealed in many ways, not the least of which are loving God and loving one another.

When John wrote his epistle, false teachers called Gnostics were emphasizing the importance of knowing God. To be sure, God's children must know Him; but what is the evidence of this? Throughout this letter, John stressed the importance of the outward manifestations of knowing God, particularly the fact that we have love for one another. Since "God is love" (I John 4:8), those who profess to love Him must show it in definite, concrete ways, such as helping those in need (Jas. 2:15-16).

The greatest demonstration of God's love was the sending of His Son to save us. He also came "that we might live through him" (I John 4:9). This includes both eternal life and a more abundant life in this present world.

Since many young adults think they are invincible, talking to them about going to heaven when they die often falls on deaf ears. After all, death is a long way off, or so they think. Remind your peers of those who departed this world all too soon. Be sure to model before