

# TRUTH

“. . . Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

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## THE LOVE OF GOD

In every place and heart, people are looking—and longing—for love. Songwriters write songs about love, and singers sing about it. Movie producers make movies about love. Human nature leaves us longing for love. And love abounds, even though we may sometimes feel unloved. Yet, **nothing** compares to the love of the God of heaven! God’s love for humanity is revealed in His inspired word, the Bible. What do we learn from the Bible about the love of God?

**The love of God is unconditional.** There is nothing we can do to earn God’s love. In fact, since “*all have sinned*” (Romans 3:23), and since “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23), it could be said that the only thing humans truly deserve is God’s wrath. Yet, God tells us He “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4). The great invitation of Revelation 22:17 is, “*Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*” God extends His love to sinful humanity and bids all to come to Him for grace, mercy, and forgiveness. And when penitent, confessing believers come to Him and are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:26,27), God—in His great love—makes all things new! “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Even toward sinful men, God’s love is unconditional!

**The love of God is active.** God is not all talk; He demonstrates His love daily. Even to those who are not His covenant children, God’s love is displayed in the fact that He “*makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*” (Matthew 5:45). God’s greatest act of love was sending His only begotten Son into this world to die on the cross, purchasing humanity’s salvation: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16). The Bible, in fact, tells us, “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). Though humans have sinned (and still do), God actively demonstrated His love for humanity in sending His Son to die that we might be saved. God even took the first step,

loving us first (1 John 4:19). God demonstrates love toward humanity in so many ways, but none more so than in sending Jesus to die that we might live. Truly, “*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us*” (1 John 3:16). God’s love is active!

**The love of God is unending.** God’s love reaches into the eternal past, as seen in Jesus’ statement of “*the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matthew 25:34). And Paul says God’s love, plan of salvation, and church are “*the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Ephesians 3:10,11). God’s love also continues in the present time, as He “*is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9). God’s love is such that He wants all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), and in His longsuffering, He is patient with humanity, ever seeking their coming to Him in obedient faith. God’s love reaches into the eternal future as well. Paul says Christians are “*more than conquerors through Him who loved us*” (Romans 8:37) and then proceeds to affirm that nothing/no one—in heaven or on earth—“*shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:38,39). Even when His people turn away from God, He still loves them and longs for their return to Him (as seen in Jesus’ Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-32). God’s love is unending!

**The love of God is virtually indescribable!** Only God Himself could fully portray His amazing love... and He does so in His word, teaching us that His love is unconditional, active, and unending. Since people are ever looking for love, and since “*God is love*” (1 John 4:16), then God is just what people are looking for! However, though God’s love is unending, man’s opportunities to respond to His love in obedient faith are not, for “*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27).

Dear reader, do you know the love of God in your life? Have you taken advantage of His loving offer of salvation? The only proper, logical response is, “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). And if we love Him, we will obey Him (John 14:15).

-- Chad Dollahite

## TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 11-13

One more plague. After four chapters that are packed with all manner of events, Exodus 11 opens with God telling Moses that the end of his time in Egypt is near. The next two chapters detail that final plague, the nation of Israel finally leaving Egypt, and how God's people were supposed to remember this extraordinary event.

11:1-10 – After nine, very memorable plagues, God gives Moses the approval to share with the people that they are about to be let go by Pharaoh. Moses gives the details to the people of what will occur during the tenth plague: about midnight, the Lord would go out, all the firstborn in the land shall die, and there will be a great cry in the land (11:4-6). In this chapter, we read a great, biblical principle: God's people are to be different. As had occurred in other plagues, this would be something that would not afflict the nation of Israel. For us, as Christians under the new covenant, we are to be different from the fleshly, sinful ways of the world. But even here, in the Old Testament, God shows that there is a difference between His people and worldly people. God says, *“that you may know that the Lord does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel”* (11:7).

12:1-28 – Before the plague occurs, God speaks to Moses and Aaron and gives instructions both on how the nation of Israel can avoid the plague (12:3-11) and how they should carry out a yearly memorial of this event throughout their generations (12:14-20). The instructions on how to avoid the plague involved killing a lamb without blemish, cooking and eating the lamb, and being dressed, ready to leave. It also included putting the blood of the sacrificial lamb on their doorposts. And God tells Israel, *“And when I see the blood, I will pass over you . . .”* (12:13).

This is a statement that echoes through the ages. The people of Israel would be saved when they were covered by the blood of the lamb. And today, people can be saved when they are washed in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. What is known as the Passover (both the event and the continuing memorial) is one of the great previews of what God now accomplishes in Christ Jesus.

The biblical principle of obedience is also seen in this moment. Even as Noah many years before had been obedient to the instructions of God and been saved in the ark, the children of Israel hear the word of God and follow His commands (12:28).

12:29-30 – It is difficult for us to imagine what this plague must have been like. We can read the words that are given to us in Scripture, but it would be hard to truly understand the magnitude of the loss of life in one night; as well as how awful the *“great cry in Egypt”* (12:30) must have sounded as people began to mourn their loved ones. We also understand the power of God in the fact that every firstborn dies. As is recorded, *“the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock”* (12:29).

12:31-42 – Pharaoh has now had enough. The ten plagues are complete. Pharaoh calls for Moses and Aaron and tells them to leave (12:32). All that has been done, but especially including the tenth plague, has had an effect on the Egyptian people because they even join in on sending out the people of Israel, *“For they said, ‘We shall all be dead’”* (12:33). 430 years is the full amount of time that the children of Israel had been in Egypt (12:40).

13:1-22 – Exodus chapter 13 discusses two things the children of Israel were to do by command of God. The first is what is known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They were to eat no leavened bread and not even have any leaven in their house! This was to be done for seven days at the specific time that God had commanded. The second situation involved the setting apart of the firstborn of both man and beast as belonging to God.

Both of these things are to be done as a way of reminding the children of Israel what God had done for them (13:8,9; 13:14,16). These would be helpful reminders in the future for God's people to remember His mighty works.

This section of Scripture concludes with God sending His people a different way away from Egypt than the nearest route (13:17). This is significant because it takes them near the Red Sea, an important part of the next two chapters. The main point is that we understand that God will be their guide. He will guide them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (13:21).

These chapters may get lost among the vastness of the Old Testament, but they should stand out in the mind of all people. Why? Because these chapters paint for us a beautiful picture of a God who saves, both then and now.

-- Joel Danley

## Overcoming Hatred

Hatred is a powerful emotion. Along with love, expressing hatred is something that is part of being a human. While it is appropriate to hate every false way (Psalm 119:104) and hate lawlessness like God does (Hebrews 1:9), hating other humans is unacceptable.

Today we see hatred “all over the place” as people interact with one another, including folks hating those who have opposing political viewpoints, hating those who are of a different nationality or race, and even harsh hatred between family members. When hatred raises its ugly head, we see humanity at its worst. From the Bible, we think of Cain hating Abel, Joseph’s older brothers hating him, and Haman hating Mordecai. The worst case of hatred was the world hating the sinless Son of God (John 7:7; 15:18).

Hatred is a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19,20), and a child of God who hates his brother is called a murderer (1 John 3:15). Hatred leaves a path of destruction wherever it goes. It destroys the one who does the hating, causing one’s thinking to be unstable, chaotic, and irrational. Hatred destroys innocent people, it breeds more hatred, it ruins relationships between people, and most importantly, it destroys the hater’s relationship with the God of heaven. Yes, the fruits of hatred are rotten (Matthew 7:16,20).

Believe this statement: it *is* possible to overcome hatred. Paul and others first-century saints did (Titus 3:3). So can you and I. How? Consider these ideas:

- ▶ Fill our heart with a longing to be like Jesus, whose heart was hate-free (Philippians 2:5).

- ▶ Fill our heart with gratitude for the Lord’s forgiveness. Even though we were ungodly, sinners, and His enemies (Romans 5:6,8,10), He forgave us.

- ▶ Fill our heart with a desire to please God (John 8:29). Hating others and pleasing God do not go together.

- ▶ Fill our heart with love — love for our God, the Scriptures, and our fellow man (2 Peter 1:7). Where such love abounds, there will be no room for hatred.

- ▶ If we have been hurt by others, we must learn to let any hatred go. Otherwise, it will “eat us up” inside. Esau “got over” his hatred for his brother Jacob.

- ▶ Never forget the eternal consequence of hatred. It prevents people from inheriting God’s kingdom and enjoying eternal life (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 John 3:15).

It is a beautiful sight to see people overcome their internal battle with hatred. As they trust in the Lord, they lay aside all malice (1 Peter 2:1), and their love for God moves them to treat their fellow man like they would want to be treated by others (Luke 6:31).

-- Roger D. Campbell

## What benefits can a person receive by studying the book of Leviticus?

Some portions of God’s word are difficult to understand. Other sections are challenging in this sense: it takes great effort to stay focused as we read their content. The book of Leviticus may feel like that at times. Since it is part of the old law that the Christ abolished, why should we even bother studying it?

The Old Testament Scriptures were written for our learning (Romans 15:4). The book of Leviticus fits into the period of history known as “Wilderness Wanderings.” The events recorded in it transpired when the Israelites were at Mount Sinai (Leviticus 7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34).

Only **three historical events** are recorded in Leviticus, including: (1) the anointing of Aaron and his sons as priests (8:1-35); (2) the death of Abihu and Nadab (10:1,2); (3) the death of one who blasphemed Jehovah’s name (24:10-16,23). We can learn some great lessons from those memorable occasions!

Throughout the book of Leviticus, there is an emphasis on **holiness**. God’s clear message to Israel was, “*For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy*” (11:44; cf. 19:2; 21:8). You and I should pay attention to that instruction, as the charge to be holy is repeated to Christians (1 Peter 1:15,16).

**Worship** to the Lord is depicted in Leviticus as being sacred and serious. Details are given about various types of sacrifices/offerings (chapters 1-7). The role of priests is highlighted: they were to (1) help the people worship Jehovah (1:5-8,11; 3:2,8,13) and (2) teach God’s children all of His instructions (10:10,11). As God’s priests under the new covenant, disciples of Jesus offer up *spiritual* sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5).

Leviticus 23 provides instruction regarding **special feasts**, including the Passover, Pentecost/feast of weeks, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. This chapter serves as a background to a number of incidents about which we read in the life of Jesus and in the book of Acts. In that connection, we can better understand the book of Hebrews when we have studied the instructions in Leviticus about the priesthood, Day of Atonement, and other matters.

Another plain picture in Leviticus is the need for God’s children to **obey Him at all times**, along with His promise to bless them when they do (18:4,5; 26:3-12). And, if you ever wondered why it is wrong in God’s sight to eat blood or what God told Israel about same-gender relations, you will find the answers in the book of Leviticus (17:10-14; 18:22). Happy reading!

-- Roger D. Campbell

## THE PARABLE OF THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

This parable of Jesus is recorded in Matthew 20:1-16. We observe that this story begins with the word “For” (20:1). In this case, “for” means “because.” It is a connector word, connecting the story that follows with what the Christ had just said. So, let us go back to the latter portion of Matthew 19 to see the context.

After a young, rich man went away from Jesus with sorrow, our Lord observed that it is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom (19:22-24). Following that, Peter affirmed that he and his fellow apostles had left everything for Jesus’ sake, and Simon wanted to know, “*Therefore what shall we have?*” (19:27). As part of His answer, Jesus told His apostles, “*But many who are first will be last, and the last first*” (19:30).

That is noteworthy. Why? Because at the conclusion of Jesus’ parable about workers in the vineyard, He repeated that message, saying, “*So the last will be first, and the first last*” (20:16). The parable, then, is sandwiched between two statements about the first being last and the last being first. That has to be a key thought in understanding its purpose!

The essence of the parable is this: a landowner goes at different hours of the day to hire people to go work in his vineyard. At the end of the day, each worker receives the same wages (one denarius), regardless of how long each had worked. Those who worked the longest complained to the landowner. Why? They thought they should receive more money because they had worked longer. The landowner defended his action, saying he had done no wrong.

The landowner in the story (20:1) would need workers to help pick ripe grapes in his vineyard. The landowner represents God. The marketplace (20:3) symbolizes the world. The laborers (20:1) stand for lost people who become Jesus’ disciples — they accept the call of the gospel and enter His vineyard.

Jesus said “*the kingdom of heaven is like*” the scenario He painted in the story (20:1). The vineyard in which folks go to work would be the kingdom of heaven/the church. The day’s wages/reward of one denarius (20:9) represents eternal salvation.

What were the hired laborers expected to do? Work, of course. In the same way, Jesus’ followers are expected to work for Him (1 Corinthians 15:58). In the parable, where were the laborers hired to work? In the landowner’s vineyard. He would not pay them for working in someone else’s property, correct? The same holds true for God: He rewards those who work in His vineyard/church with a crown of life (James 1:12). Those who work in a man-made spiritual vineyard will be reward-less on the Day of Judgment.

If we want to please the Lord, we need to avoid

the attitude of those workers in the parable who were the earliest ones hired. First, they “supposed” that they would receive higher wages than others (20:10). It is never right to “suppose” anything in our service to God. Second, they complained against the landowner (20:11). Complaining against Jehovah is blasphemous, and it is forbidden (Philippians 2:14). Third, the complainers had an envious spirit, being unhappy that the workers who were hired later in the day were paid as much as they were. Envy will destroy a person from the inside out (Proverbs 14:30). The landowner accused those disgruntled workers of having an evil eye/heart (20:15). That was the root of their problem.

What about the Master’s message about the last being first and first being last? In the parable, some workers were hired early in the morning, while others were hired at the third hour, sixth hour, ninth hour, or eleventh hour. Some people obey the Lord early in life and serve Him faithfully for tens of years. Such folks “*have borne the burden and heart of the day*” (20:12). Others obey at a much later stage of their life. The reward for our service to the Christ is not based on when we entered His vineyard, but rather on the kind of faithful service we give to Him. What counts in the Lord’s sight is not seniority, but service! Again, what matters is not how long we have served, but the quality/loyalty of that service.

The apostles, to whom this story was addressed, often quarreled about who was the greatest among them. They needed to take heed to what Jesus said! They needed to become servants, which many count as being “last” (Luke 22:24-26).

Some individuals are first in opportunity, but they fail to use such, so they end up being last in actual service. Others appear to be “sure bets” to be great in the Lord’s service, but they end up being last because of their lack of commitment (think of Judas Iscariot).

On the other hand, some may appear as though they have nothing to offer (“the last”), but turn out to be a tremendous blessing to God’s family. We recall a poor widow who gave all she had (Luke 21:1-4).

Being among Jesus’ earliest followers did not make the apostles better than everyone else. Would they accept that truth? It is the Lord’s task, not ours, to sort out whom He will reward and how He will do it. Let us learn to rejoice in Him and totally eliminate carnal competition in His service from our thinking.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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