

“God Is Love” (1-3 John)

LESSON GOAL: To understand how the Father and the Son show love for us and how we show love to them.

INTRODUCTION TO 1, 2, 3 JOHN:

John wrote his epistles at a time when apostasy was threatening the Church. Even though it had been only a few decades since the death of Jesus Christ, false teachers were teaching a “doctrine” different from that taught by the Apostles (2 John 1:9–10). John was the surviving member of the early Church’s presidency. **As the final witness of Christ among the Old World Apostles, he penned his firsthand knowledge of Jesus.**

Of all the books that John wrote, the Book of Revelation was written first, then the Gospel of John, and then these three epistles, about 97 to 100 A.D., before the Church lost the priesthood keys and authority through unrighteousness and in response to many groups of members of the Church who professed heretical doctrines. **These are the last words written by a prophet in the Bible.** Bruce R. McConkie stated, “As far as the Biblical Dispensation is concerned, this treatise is probably the **last recorded inspired writing** of which we have record.” (DNTC, 3:371-2).

John’s reasons for writing 1 John:

The major theme of the three epistles of John is **love**. As you read, you will see the word “love” many times. Watch for:

- teachings about the **love of the Father for us**
- the **love of the Son for us**
- especially watch for **ways in which we can show our love for them both.**

1. Manifestations of Heavenly Father’s love for us

I John 4:8, 16: He that loveth not knoweth not God; for **God is love**. . . 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.**

I John 3:1-2: Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. **Beloved, now are we the sons of God**, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, **we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.**

I John 4:7, 10-11: Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. . . Herein is love, not that we loved God, **but that he loved us**, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.**

I John 4:16, 19: 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. . . We love him, because he first loved us.**

I John 5:11-15: And this is the record, that **God hath given to us eternal life**, and this life is in his Son.

2. “Walk in the light” (1 John 1:7)

Bruce R. McConkie: “There are two great scriptural tests which show whether men have the light and are walking therein, one pertaining to **beliefs**, the other to **conduct**. John, speaking to members of the Church said: *“He that saith he is in **the light**, and hateth his brother, is in **darkness** even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in **the light**, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in **darkness** because that **darkness** hath blinded his eyes.”* (1 John 2:8-11) (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], 445-446).

Look at the pattern. Light leads to salvation; it edifies and uplifts.

- **D&C 50:23-24:** *And that which doth not edify is not of God and is **darkness**. That which is of God is **light**; and he that receiveth **light** and continueth in God, receiveth **more light**; and that **light** groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.*
- **D&C 88:67:** *And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with **light**, and there shall be no **darkness** in you; and that body which is filled with **light** comprehendeth all things.*
- **1 John 1:7:** *If we walk in **the light**, as he is in the **light**, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*
- **Rev. 21:24:** *The saved shall walk in the **light** forever. **Ps. 4:6:** Rejoice in the **light** of the countenance of their God”*

Joseph B. Wirthlin: “To be a light for others, we ourselves must live in the light. To do this, we must make correct choices, walking in the ways of the Lord. . . How could anybody willingly prefer darkness and misery over light and warmth? Yet **darkness** and misery will be the lot of those who willingly and knowingly **reject the Lord**. John wrote, “**God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.**” (1 John 1:5.) **Familiarity with darkness can eventually erode our sensitivity** until we choose **darkness** rather than **light**. Let us seek the **light** and keep our **own lights** shining, thus inviting the Spirit of the Lord into our lives, our homes, and the lives of our children and neighbors” (*Finding Peace in Our Lives* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1995], 83-84).

Spencer W. Kimball: "When we hear sermons decrying transgression and urging the need for repentance, most of us are peculiarly apt at applying the point exclusively to others. Someone said that we spend too much time **confessing other people's sins**. Apparently it is much **easier to see those sins than our own**, and to walk complacently through life without acknowledging our own need to mend our ways. . . But when most of us think of repentance, we tend to narrow our vision and view it as good only for our husbands, our wives, our parents, our children, our neighbors, our friends, the world anyone and **everyone except ourselves**. If we are humble and desirous of living the gospel, **we will come to think of repentance as applying to everything we do in life, whether it be spiritual or temporal in nature. Repentance is for every soul who has not yet reached perfection**" (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, Ch. 3).

3. Manifestations of the Savior's love for us

1 John 2:1-2: My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, **we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous**: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*.

1 John 3:8, 16: He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. **For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil**. 16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, **because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren**.

1 John 5:12-15: **He that hath the Son hath life**; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, **if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us**: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

David H. Yarn Jr.: "The scripture, '*a new commandment*,' suggests additional meaning in the Lord's statement when he said '*I give unto you, That ye love one another*.' He gave his disciples a new criterion. Earlier he had taught '**love thy neighbour as thyself**,' but now he said, '**love one another; as I have loved you**.' No longer was it adequate for man to use his own mortal self as the criterion for loving, but he was to use the divine criterion, namely the Lord himself." ("The Night before He Died," *Ensign*, July 1975, 20-21).

Victor L. Ludlow: "God is love (1 John 4:7-5:5)... The word **love is used thirty-four times** in these twenty verses, which highlight at least five characteristics of love: **God, through his Son, is the source of love** (1 John 4:7-12); **love is a gift of faith** received through the Spirit (1 John 4:13-16); **love brings confidence** and dispels fear (1 John 4:17-18); **love of God is manifest in our love for others** (1 John 4:19-21); and the ultimate reward of keeping God's commandment to love is **to share in his Son's victory** (1 John 5:1-5). For John, these are the cardinal principles of Christian discipleship" ("John: The Once and Future Witness," *Ensign*, Dec. 1991, 54).

4. Showing our love for Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and others

1 John 2:3: **And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments**.

1 John 3:11: For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, **that we should love one another**.

1 John 3:18: **My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth**.

1 John 4:21: And this commandment have we from him, **That he who loveth God love his brother also**.

1 John 5:1-4: Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments**: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

2 John 1:5-6: And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, **that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments**. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

3 John 1:4-5: I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. **Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;**

C. S. Lewis: Charity means 'Love, in the Christian sense'. **But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will**; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people. . . **Ask yourself, 'if I were sure that I loved God, what would I do?'** When you have found the answer, go and do it. . . **Christian Love, either towards God or towards man, is an affair of the will. If we are trying to do His will, we are obeying the commandment, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.'** (*Mere Christianity*, 131-2)

Bernard Brockbank: Jesus asked us to know our Heavenly Father and to know Jesus Christ. He said of this life, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3.) Remember those words. They were given by a living God, and they are clear and complete and do not need correction or adjustment. To have the full measure of eternal life in a divine way you must know the only true God and Jesus Christ. I repeat, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." **Knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ is the most rewarding and precious of all knowledge.** If you were asked these questions--"**Do you know God?**" "**Do you know Jesus Christ?**"--what would your answer be? It is important to know that the scriptures contain divine tests to determine the effectiveness of the doctrines and commandments in our lives. I repeat the questions: "**Do you know the only true God, and do you know Jesus Christ?**" **If your answer is "yes," then let's see how you measure up to the test** as given by the apostle John. He said, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1 Jn. 2:3-4.) And I don't mind telling you that test has been translated correctly. Be careful not to get carried away with any foolish thoughts that might justify weakness and failure to know and keep God's commandments. **Does your knowledge of God impel you to know and keep his commandments? Knowing and keeping the commandments of God are the divine ways to perfection and eternal life in the kingdom of God.** ("To Know God and Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, Feb. 1977, 85)

Neal A. Maxwell: "Resist the rhetoric of the world, and you will find that, if you stand fast, so will others—some surprisingly... Since you don't let people come in and walk around in your house with muddy feet, **do not let them walk through your minds with muddy feet**" ("The Stern but Sweet Seventh Commandment," *New Era*, June 1979, 41-42)

Marion D. Hanks: "God's children need to be loved, and to have someone to love. But it is written, "*let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth*" (1 Jn. 3:18)... We speak of the love of Christ that is greater than faith, greater than hope; that expresses itself in sacrifice, in service, in giving. Now, some of those who need our love are near at hand, others are far away. . . The **widowed** and **divorced** suffer devastating displacement, also, often **alone** and often in need of encouragement and help. **Broken-hearted parents** who have really tried, but whose progeny have chosen another path, are heartsick and often find little comfort in sermons or in the success of others. The numbers of **single-parent families** burgeon, each one representing special needs not understood by those who have not experienced them.

We have the testimony of scripture that the Lord God weeps when we do not choose him or truly love each other. The saddest circumstance any of us can envision is in not choosing Him and thus to be separated from him. But the companion tragedy—one that also brings **suffering that makes Him weep**—is to **fail in our affection** for each other, affection expressed in unselfish efforts to **give to the hungry, the naked, the oppressed**, those who are **cast out: the widow, the orphan, the afflicted, the brokenhearted, the bruised, the abandoned, the elderly, the sick, and the imprisoned.** **We have two great challenges, you and I, and the challenge never ends as long as breath lasts: to choose him and to love each other.** (*Ensign*, May 1980, 30-31)

Gene R. Cook: I John 3:21—"If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." I believe that many people are confident that the Lord's will will be done and that the Lord can do anything, but **they're not confident that he will do it for them** or that he wants to do it now. **This lack of confidence in our ability to gain access to the powers of heaven is a major reason why more of our prayers aren't answered.** In fact, as I travel around the Church I often meet people who say, "My prayer wasn't answered because it just wasn't the will of the Lord." They want to place the responsibility for their unanswered prayer on the Lord. But often the truth is that **they just didn't exercise enough faith; they didn't have enough confidence in their ability to receive an answer**" (*Living by the Power of Faith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985], 78).

Kenneth L. Higbee: "...Each member of the Lord's church should ask himself **why he lives God's commandments and what motivates him to seek the spiritual goals** he has set for himself. Remember that fear of punishment, a spiritual motive to avoid failure, is not bad. It is better to obey the commandments because of fear of punishment than to not obey the commandments at all. We will surely be happier if we obey God's commandments than if we do not, but that happiness will likely be increased **if we are motivated to do so by love of virtue rather than by fear of punishment.** We will likely find more joy in the achievement of our spiritual goals if we seek them **because we want to** rather than because we ought to" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1971, 20).

Brigham Young: "When you see a neighbor begin to slip, pray for him that he may have the Spirit of the Gospel as he once had. And if you feel this Spirit within yourselves, **pray for an increase of that light you received when you first received the Gospel, and you will save yourself and house.**" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, selected and arranged by John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954], 272).

Gordon B. Hinckley: This must be the foundation of our instruction: the love of God and love for and service to others—neighbors, family, and all with whom we associate. That which we teach must be constantly gauged against these two standards established by the Lord. If we shall do so, this work will continue to roll forward. (*TGBH*, 316-17).

A TRUE EXAMPLE OF LEARNING TO CHOOSE TO LOVE AS CHRIST DOES

Ed J. Pinegar: I was teaching high school Seminary in 1966. We were covering the subject of love and expressing love. The students all seemed to be anxiously engaged in the conversation of the day. I got the idea of asking for a volunteer to do a special homework assignment. I stopped the class and said, "Who will do me a favor?" The hands all flew up. A young boy near the back of the room named Dennis seemed quite anxious. I called him up to the front and I said, "Dennis, do you really want to do this favor for me?"

He said, "Sure!"

I said to him, "This is really hard."

He said, "I can do it. That's no problem. I can do it."

I said, "Well, this is really going to take some effort."

He said, "I can do it!"

I said, "Are you sure you can do it?"

In exasperation he said, "I'll do it. Just what do you want me to do?"

I said, "**This is it. When you go home tonight, you call out for your mother. When your mother comes to you, you take her in your arms and give her a big embrace. Yes, Dennis, a big kiss. And then you whisper in her ear, 'Oh, Mom, I love you,'**"

He stopped, looked at me, and said, "No way! No way can I do that."

I said, "Dennis, do you love your mother?"

"Of course I do."

I said, "Then why won't you do it?"

He replied, "You just don't do things like that."

I said, "Dennis, if you love her, you should tell her."

"No way!"

Well, Dennis and I were pretty good friends, and so I said to him, "Dennis, I think I can hear a chicken clucking in this class." The class all started to laugh, and Dennis felt uneasy. "In fact, Dennis, I think there's a yellow stripe coming right up your back." Now everyone was laughing—even Dennis.

We played around for a minute, and finally he relented and said, "Okay, okay, I'll do it. Just let me go back to my seat." So Dennis went back to his seat. The class period ended, and life went on.

The next day, as I was greeting the members of the class, I said, "Dennis, how did it go last night?"

He looked at me and said, "Oh, it was wonderful!"

I said, "Can you tell me about it?"

He said, "Can I tell the whole class?"

So, after introductory remarks to the class, I said, "We have a special report today from Dennis."

Dennis came up in front—the big junior in high school, but something was different. His lips began to quiver, and his eyes began to fill up with tears, then he blurted out, "Oh, you guys, it was the greatest day of my life. My mom cried for two hours. I can't believe it." They all laughed. Then he said, "You don't realize what we've done to our parents. We've locked them out of our lives. They've done everything for us, and we treat them like dirt. We should be ashamed. **They're starved for our love just like we're starved for their love. But you've gotta say it. You've gotta tell 'em.**" Well, the class was just on fire. And he said, "You've all gotta go home and do it just like I did."

At that moment in class, silent commitments were made, and needless to say, they went home and did it.

A couple of weeks went by, and we had Parents' Night. In our class, we had all of the parents sit in the chairs of their children. I stood up in front and told them how we were discussing different things in class. One parent said, "What do you do in this class?" I attempted to explain again. She said, "No, you don't understand. My son's nice to me now. He even told me he loved me. And the only thing I can think of that's been different in his life lately is this class." Other hands came up. "Yes, that happened to me too." Well, the class was on fire. **The parents suddenly felt so good about their children.**

When I responded, I merely said, "Oh, it's just their goodness. You've just learned how good your children really are." Well, lives were changed by that experience of Dennis. He made a difference in all those young people's lives, for he had set an example and challenged them. They took the challenge, made the commitment, and families were blessed. Parents were happy, families were happy, and life was beautiful. **Yes, the power of love, expressed can make all the difference in the world.** (Ed J. Pinegar, *Teachings and Commentaries on the New Testament*, 496-497),

N. Eldon Tanner: Our feelings toward one another must be those of brotherly love. . . Sometimes I am almost convinced that it is **human nature to magnify the weaknesses in others in order to minimize our own.** Let us always remember that men of great character do not belittle others nor magnify their weaknesses. In fact, the thing that makes them great is the showing of love for and interest in the success and welfare of their neighbors. **True love does not permit us to hold grudges or ill feelings, to bear tales, or to steal a good name. We should not talk about or criticize one another, but strive to build and strengthen one another.**

A friend of mine related the following experience. His father and his father's cousin lived in the same community and were competitors in the construction business. A bitter rivalry, triggered in the beginning by some contract bidding, grew up over the years and was eventually inherited by the immediate families, even after the death of my friend's father. It was difficult for them to be civil to one another, even in their church callings, where my friend was the bishop of one ward and his cousin in another. The situation festered.

Suddenly my friend found himself with a call to serve as a mission president. He and his family were thrilled with the prospect, but he had an uneasy feeling. He kept asking himself if he were really worthy for such an important call. He knew he was living the Word of Wisdom, was a full tithe payer, faithful in his Church activities, was morally clean, and so forth, but the uneasy feeling persisted.

In the midst of his preparations he was returning from his office one afternoon when something said to him, **"You must go to your father's cousin and straighten things out. You cannot go out to teach the gospel of love while this feeling exists between you."**

So he went to his cousin's home, rang the doorbell, and waited fearfully, but there was no response. He turned away feeling that at least he had tried and that this attempt would conclude the matter. But the uneasy feeling did not go away.

The next day at a funeral service his cousin came in and sat across from him. He asked his cousin if he could see him after the service. I quote from my friend's account:

"When I rang the doorbell he invited me into the living room and congratulated me on my mission call. We talked a few minutes about things in general, and then it happened. I looked at him with a feeling of love which replaced all the old bitterness, and said: **'I have come to ask forgiveness for anything I have ever said or done that has tended to divide us and our families.'**

"At this point tears came into our eyes, and for a few minutes neither of us could say a word. This was one time when silence was more powerful than words. In a few minutes he said: 'I wish I had come to you first.' I replied, 'The important thing is that it is done, not who initiated it.'

"At this moment we had a rich spiritual experience which caused us to purge our lives and our souls of those things which had separated us. That experience has resulted in our having proper family relationships. Now I could go on my mission and teach the true meaning of love because **for the first time in my life I had experienced its deepest dimension.** Now I could honestly say that there wasn't a person in the world that I didn't love and appreciate. Since that day my life has never been the same, for it was then that I learned in a most positive way, as I had never understood before, this injunction of the Master to his disciples: **'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another'** (John 13:34)." ("The Great Commandments," *Ensign*, July 1980, 3-4)

Moroni 7:48: Wherefore, my beloved brethren, **pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love,** which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; **that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen**