

Women & More

The One Good Debt

Lesson 22: April 7, 2016—*agape*'

We are great sinners, but Christ is a 'greater-than-great' *saver*. He is our Savior! Someone has penned:

“Upon a life I did not live;
Upon a death I did not die
Another's life, another's death,
I stake my whole eternity.”

2 Corinthians 5:14a “For Christ's love compels us....”

Webster defines debt—1 : sin, trespass 2 : something owed : obligation 3 : a condition of owing. By placing our faith in the atoning work of God's Son, our sins and trespasses are forgiven. **Our sin was beyond our ability to pay, so God paid it with pardon!** Charles Spurgeon: “Salvation is the gift of God, in opposition to wages—not the payment of debt but the gift of grace. God chose to give it; it was His royal prerogative.” For believers, our **sin** is PAID-IN-FULL, our **trespass** is PAID-IN-FULL: And in consequence to that payment we've got “something owed”; an “obligation”, and “a condition of owing”—it is the continuing 'debt' of love: the only 'good' debt!

I. LOVE GOD—Deuteronomy 6:5 tells us to love the LORD our God with **all our heart** and with **all our soul** and with **all our strength**. This is God's command to Israel and to the 'seed' of Abraham—including those who have placed their trust in Jesus—us. Galatians 3:29 “*If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*” We will need every bit of human love to attempt that 'love' command, but we must have God's love to accomplish it. Remember, that God never tells us to do anything that he means for us to do in our own heart, soul and strength without him. **We will need agape!** **There are consequences to not loving God**—1 Corinthians 16:22a “*If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him.*”

♥This is a good place to define *agape*'—in 1 Corinthians 13:4a “*Love is patient, love is kind*” expresses the attributes of *agape*' in proper order. God's love is first of all **patient**, longsuffering, and enduring, and then it is **kind**! Human love can be kind, but after much patience is spent, more often than not, it will not be so kind. Human love may be patient, but when it reaches its limit, it is unkind—if not in action, certainly in thought. The Old Testament is a picture of God's enduring patience with his chosen people, Israel, and then the New Testament opens with the greatest act of kindness ever rendered—the gift of His one and only Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. That is *agape*!

II. LOVE ONE ANOTHER—Romans 13:8a “*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.*” And we have gone here so many times before in *Women & More*, so we will concentrate on the command to love those who do not love us back—to truly love like Jesus. Jesus was hated and despised. Though he came to seek and to save all who are lost—and that would be ALL—and though he came in love and compassion, ► Jesus was despised and hated to death!

- Isaiah 53:3 “*He (Jesus) was **despised and rejected by men**; a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces **he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**”*
- Matthew 26:59 “*The chief priests (the religious) and the whole Sanhedrin (the ruling 70 with the high priest as leader) were **looking for false evidence** (lies) **against Jesus so that they could put him to death.**”*
- Matthew 27:12 “*When he was accused by the chief priests (the religious) and the elders, **he gave no answer.**”*
- John 15:18 “***If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.**”*

III. LOVE THOSE WHO HATE US—What about the Christ-follower—the believer—is she (he) ever despised or hated, and what is our response? **We are to love those who despise and hate us—absolutely and especially!** There is no challenge to loving those who love us. If we look at the Lord Jesus Christ, we see that he loved us when we despised him; he died for those who hated him—herein is agape⁷—the love we need. God’s people being hated or despised is subject in Psalm 124:2-5 (David of the Israelites) “*If the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive; the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away.”*

► Be sure that Christ-followers are hated: Satan hates people, because God loves people. And he regularly uses humans to help in his schemes against us. A vicious battle is being fought for—not the believer’s soul, because Christ has their soul—the believer’s life, health, influence, ministry and witness for Christ.

- Proverbs 26:28 “*A lying tongue **hates** those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.*”
- Matthew 10:22 “***All men will hate you because of me**, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*”
- Luke 6:22 “***Blessed (glad) are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.**”*
- Ephesians 6:10-12 “*Our battle is **not with flesh and blood** (though it appears to be) **but with powers of darkness.**”*
- 2 Timothy 3:12 “*Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will be persecuted.**”*

► What are we to do when people hate us? • Luke 6:27-28 says that we are to love them, do good to them, bless them and pray for them. *“But I tell you who hear me: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”***

“Our toughest challenges most often involve people rather than circumstances,” said Beth Moore. “People are much more difficult to get over than inanimate situations. **Even if we haven’t experienced many people’s vicious attacks, we’ve encountered Satan’s whether or not we’ve realized it. We must let God open our eyes wide to the reality that we have a powerful enemy who...absolutely hates us.**

“I’ve had the experience a few times,” Beth goes on to say, “**particularly in ministry**...we who belong to Christ are not imagining that we have an enemy who hates us.”

Sometimes people refuse to receive the message of God, because they **despise the messenger**, and then there are those who refuse the messenger, because they **despise the message**. Be assured that those who speak God’s truth will be despised by some, because **He** (and His message) **was despised!** When the truth of God is spoken, we need to be careful to receive the message as from the LORD Almighty—testing its truthfulness by Scripture.

Titus 2:15 *“These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. **Do not let anyone despise you.**”* *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says of this verse: “Titus must not permit **his message and work to be disdainfully rejected**. Since this letter would be read in the churches, the remark was intended as much for the Cretans as for Titus himself.” Though we may be despised or hated because of Christ, we must not allow the despise or hatred to keep us from speaking and teaching the “truth” of God’s holy Word—always in love (agape’).

And finally, Christ-followers are admonished to **love what God loves, and hate what God hates**, but our hating never, ever includes people!

• Leviticus 19:17a *“Do not hate your brother in your heart.”*

• Proverbs 14:21 *“He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.”*

• 1 John 2:9-11 *“Anyone who claims to be in the light (professing Christianity) but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because **the darkness has blinded him.**”*

- 1 John 4:19-21 “*We love because he first loved us. 20If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet **hates his brother, he is a liar.** For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21And he has given us this command: **Whoever loves God must also love his brother.**”*

► We are to hate sin, wickedness, evil, a lying tongue, etc.

- Psalm 97:10 “*Let those who love the LORD **hate evil**, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.*”
- Psalm 45:7 “*You love righteousness and **hate wickedness**; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*”
- Romans 12:9 “*Love must be sincere. **Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.**”*

The Gospel of Jesus Christ—the Word of God—is an offense to the world.

- Jeremiah 6:10 “*To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. **The word of the LORD is offensive to them**; they find no pleasure in it.*”
- Romans 9:33 (quotes Psalm 118:22) “*As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and **rock of offence**. And whoever believes on Him (Jesus Christ) will not be put to shame.’”*
- 1 Peter 2:7-8 “*Therefore to you who believe he (Christ) is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’, and ‘A stone of stumbling, and **a rock of offense**’. They stumble, being disobedient to the word to which they also were appointed.*”

We are top-heavy with Scripture in this lesson, but God’s Word is what speaks. The concept, even from Holy Writ, that God is hated and that because we are his children we will be hated because of him is difficult—and not really to our liking. We must be careful, though, that we are not being hated for our own unloving acts. If we find that we are despised or hated, we should ask the LORD to show us where we may have sinned against someone, causing them to hate us. Which, by the way, they have absolutely no right to do according to God’s Word no matter what we did! Then love those who hate us for Christ’s sake!

When we are following Christ, implicitly, and obeying him and desiring the Holy Spirit to conform us to His image, then our being hated is honorable. We will lose nothing worthwhile by being despised for our Lord! It is a ‘sin’ for us who know to do it, not to love. Let’s do not be delinquent on our continuing debt to love, because nothing is more costly than loving...except not loving! A prayer that I had written out on a calendar March 28, 2007—5 years ago—said: “God, I love you and want to love others to You—to love someone to life.” This remains the prayer of my heart. Psalm 42:8 “*By day the LORD (Covenant Father) directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.*”

♥Luke 23:32 tells us that two criminals were crucified with Jesus, one on his right and one on his left. They “heaped insults on him”, according to Matthew’s account, but there came a moment—Luke 23:42—after seeing the loving way that Jesus responded to being hated and mistreated, that one of them asked Jesus in faith to remember him. And in verse 47, a centurion who had also seen what had happened “praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’”

People are particularly inclined to respond positively to Christ and his message through us when we love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us. It is the love of God—agape’—manifest in us. Love is a choice—not a feeling! It’s a choice God made when he planned to redeem us from our sinful selves before the foundation of the world, and carried out his loving rescue mission through Christ—John 3:16.

Jeremiah 31:34c *“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”* Alistair Begg said, “When God forgives, not a single sin is left unforgiven. The debt of sin is completely wiped out, and the sinner’s guilt is canceled.” The road to forgiveness was paved by agape’—God’s love. Resultant to his unbounded love for us, we who believe on him and trust in him will love Him back. We also will love one another, and we will especially love our enemies. We should strive to have only one debt—the “**good debt**” of love!

Charles Spurgeon: “Believers love Jesus with a deeper affection than they dare to give any other being. They would sooner lose father and mother than part with Christ. They hold all earthly comforts with a loose hand, but they carry Him fast locked in their bosoms...**It is scant love which the fire of persecution can dry up; the true believer’s love is a deeper stream than this.** Men have labored to divide the faithful from their Master, but their attempts have been fruitless in every age.”

Let us stay true to God’s love! Luke 7:23 *“Blessed is the man (woman) who does not fall away on account of me.”* Luke 17:1 *“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.’”* God is the very ‘picture’ of agape’—patient and then kind—and He is revealed to us through the *Love* of His Word: Jesus.

†An elementary teacher had asked her students to paint a picture of something important to them. Approaching a student busily painting, the teacher asked about his subject. “I’m painting a picture of God,” the boy announced.

“But,” the teacher objected, “no one knows what God looks like.”

“They will when I get done,” was his ready reply.