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The Saving Power of Love

A SERIES OF FOUR LESSONS

Lesson Number Three

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Combating Evil With Love

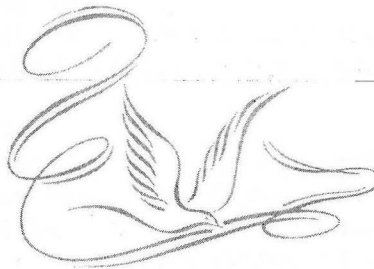
God Commands Us to Love

Avoid Self-Righteousness

Take the Initiative

Be Willing to Forgive

Affirmation



Beloved Perfection:

This Lesson is the third in the Series: THE SAVING POWER OF LOVE. It will help you to comprehend and apply the principles by which you can use the tool of Love to combat and overcome whatever evil threatens your peace and happiness.

Fear, suspicion, and self-interest generate hate. If allowed to run rampant in the world, these negative attitudes dictate policies which bring war and destruction. They instigate cut-throat methods in business, bringing loss for all concerned. They foster family tensions that lead to divorce and juvenile delinquency.

Selfishness, intolerance, and hate are the sources of much of the evil we encounter. They breed dissension, they cause unrest, and they destroy peace.

Each of us has at his disposal a power with which he can combat these evils. It is the power of LOVE. As has been pointed out in an earlier Lesson, there are two kinds of Love: the "erotic" love that seeks for personal satisfaction and the "agapé" Love, which is like the Love God has for us.

When you are filled with God-like Love you become a partner with the Lord in bringing goodwill and harmony to the earth. You vote for the men and the laws that promise increased justice. You spread friendliness and mutual concern in your community. You maintain, at school, at business, or at home, an attitude of patient understanding that takes the sharp edge off irritations.

This does not mean that Love can obliterate every conflict. Differences will arise that must be clarified. But time, resources, and energy will not be wasted by petty friction. Love will open up avenues of communication. It will reveal common interests and wipe out the evils which, if allowed to fester, would destroy any sense of well-being.

Today, and every day, you may face situations fraught with tension, or with feelings of despair. Love is the power that can transform discord into harmony, as well as discouragement into hope.

As you approach this Lesson on COMBATING EVIL WITH LOVE, humbly pray for the wisdom and the guidance which you need:

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, too often I drift into ways that are unworthy of a child of God. I say unkind words and think unkind thoughts. In an effort to help someone, I harm another. Often I become confused, sad, and discouraged.

Grant me divine insight. Show me the nature of Thy Love and how to use it to bring joy and concord into every situation that I face. In Jesus' name, Amen.



GOD COMMANDS US TO LOVE

In the first Lesson of this series on THE SAVING POWER OF LOVE we considered the truth that the Love of God is measureless. Our Heavenly Father is always reaching out to give us the guidance and care that we need. Let us now see what implications this has for each one of us personally:

The Bible says: "God created man in his own image." (Genesis 1:27) God gave to man dominion over the earth, but He intends that the rule should be administered with the same loving concern that He has for every one of His creatures.

Too often even those who profess to believe in Christ water down His teachings until they conform to some degree to their own desires. Take, for example, the command: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." This is commonly expressed by the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you." When accepted at its full value, taking into account the deep inner longings of each person who is involved, it presents a tremendous challenge. But frequently even a religious person is content to substitute fairness for Love.

If you are fair you will respect the rights of your neighbor. You will not trespass on his property. You will not poison his dog. You will speak kindly to his children. This attitude is an advancement over a spirit of animosity, but it still may be far removed from God-like Love. You can be courteous to those with whom you associate, without having any true concern for their welfare. You can treat each member of your family with justice, without sharing his aspirations. You can fulfill your business obligations, without really caring whether your partner, or your client, is securing his full rights.

We live in a society in which success has been equated with personal advancement. Egotism has been tempered to some degree by rules that demand honesty and morality, but only in exceptional cases does a man or woman attempt to consistently extend to others the same boundless Love that God shows to him.

Let us not lower our ideals because our society is controlled so often by those whose primary interest is profit. As Mayans we have never proposed to conform to the average level of behavior, or to test our lives by the standards of respectability. We have heard the Master say: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) This challenges us to extend to everyone a Love that is like the Love God has for man.

You will recall that in our first Lesson of this series we saw how Jesus, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, emphasizes the truth that God is always reaching out to us, seeking for opportunities to bless us. We, likewise, should reach out to others and take an active interest in their welfare.

The absence of ill will is never the equivalent of Love. We know many people who assume they are virtuous if they have done nothing wrong. They drift from day to day, mentally lazy, even when physically active. They allow drowsiness to dull their thinking and their feeling. As a result their ability to love is greatly diminished - and, of course, their spiritual satisfactions are drastically curtailed.

Thousands of men and women destroy their chance for happiness by being constantly self-centered. An equal number waste enormous amounts of time and energy by lethargy. They are both bored and boring. They could think clearly and have experiences that would bring them the deepest satisfactions of life, but they miss opportunities that come to them. Obviously, one can do little to create goodwill unless he is alert.

As you strive to combat evil with Love, become increasingly aware of the needs and longings of others. Use all your powers - physical, mental, and spiritual - to promote an atmosphere of understanding and harmony.



TAKE THE INITIATIVE

Only genuine Love can save us from cruel intolerance, or from an equally devastating tolerance of evils that are sapping the strength of those we should be assisting and protecting. Agapé Love enables us to distinguish between right and wrong. It gives us the courage to say and to do the things that are helpful - to say them, or do them, at the best time and in the kindest spirit.

Love will not allow you to become spineless. It will prompt you to open your eyes to injustice, and to refuse to bow and scrape to those who are ruthlessly seeking their own welfare.

Christ's injunction for us "to turn the other cheek" is frequently misunderstood. Look at his fearlessness as he drove the money-changers from the temple and as he sought no escape from the Cross. You will see in these actions the nature of genuine Love. It is the spirit which does not permit us to overlook evil, or to weakly yield to it. Love makes us keenly aware of injustice and impels us to take an active part in combating all which is degrading.

Paul's challenge, given in the first century to the faithful followers of the Master, may well be heeded by those in our generation who are seeking to overcome evil with Love:

"Let us have no imitation Christian love. Let us have a genuine break with evil and a real devotion to good. Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other man have the credit. Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning as we do our work for God. Live in harmony with each other. Don't become snobbish, but take a real interest in ordinary people. Don't become set in your own opinions. Don't pay back a bad turn by a bad turn to anyone. Don't say 'it doesn't matter what people think', but see that your public behavior is above criticism. ... Don't allow yourself to be overpowered by evil. Take the offensive - overpower evil with good!" (Romans 12:9-21 Phillips translation)

In this passage Paul, with keen insight, sets forth many of the ways in which Love can transform personal relationships. He indicates that the follower of Christ is to take the initiative by using Love to break down prejudice and to wipe out discord.

To do this may cause a man unspeakable suffering. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German pastor, found the teachings of his government to be revolting. He refused to be silenced, even when he knew that if he continued to criticize those in authority he would surely face imprisonment and death.

With courage, but without anger, Bonhoeffer used Love to combat evil. He chose to return to his homeland and suffer with his countrymen, rather than to enjoy security in England. He voluntarily took the course he knew would lead to torture. He did not boast of his own sacrifice, but counted it a privilege to march in the endless line of those who have given their lives to build a better world. He said, with confidence, that whenever we forget and lose ourselves "we

become part of what once took place for our salvation."

The sacrifice that Jesus made that men might better comprehend the Love of God has inspired countless men and women to gladly give their lives in service for others, not counting the cost, nor wishing any recognition for themselves. The Cross has been, and still is, the emblem that reminds men that Love is more powerful than military might.

Saints, missionaries, and preachers have declared that through the power of prayer they found how God would have them use their talents, and then they took delight in humbly serving in Christ's name. Millions whose sacrifices have never been recorded, have known that indescribable joy and satisfaction which comes to those who see that they are having a part in building a better world, or even in helping one person to live a nobler, more satisfying life.

This, Beloved Perfector, can be your experience, too. Forgetful of self, you can discover wider avenues of service and deeper joys than you have ever known before.

As you seek to use Love to combat evil you will not be indifferent to wrongs, nor will you attempt to crawl into a corner to hide from them. You will not try to seek personal peace by living in isolation from the problems that plague society, your neighbors, and your family. You will not withdraw from every controversial issue, but will take the stand that is required of one who is both kind and just.

You will take the initiative, letting God-like Love shape your decisions, control your speech, and direct your actions. You will encounter evil with positive Love.

How can we apply this purposeful Love to the specific situations with which we are trying to cope?

We will not only be terrified by the threat of war but we will use our time and effort to raise both the physical and moral standards in the communities in which we live. A festering wound must sometimes be cauterized before it can be healed. Love will prompt us to seek to wipe out slums and questionable districts, as well as to establish wholesome recreation centers for youth and older citizens.

Concern for the general welfare should also dictate a man's business policies. Any person who aids in the manufacture or sales of a product which is destructive of human values violates the law of Love, while the farmer who raises high-grade produce, the physician who battles against disease, and the teacher who implants high ideals in the minds of youth is using spiritual power to combat evil.

Genuine Love will prompt us to take positive action to correct any behavior which is degrading. I think of the woman whose husband was a heavy drinker and often insulted and abused her. For years she vacillated between nagging and indulgence. Then she caught a vision of the man her husband might become. She challenged him to go to Alcoholics Anonymous for help, and she patiently went with him week after week. In numerous little ways she showed that she was counting on him. Her Love gave her husband the strength to break the grip of the habit that had threatened to destroy both their lives.

Parents are neither wise nor kind when they ignore their children's undesirable conduct. Boys and girls who fail in their family obligations have to be taught to respect the rights of others. Any person who flagrantly disregards those rules which have been established for the welfare of all, needs to be corrected with a firm but loving hand.

A few years ago the judge of a juvenile court found that a boy of fourteen was being brought to trial for his fifth armed robbery. With bravado the boy had told his friends, "Our lawyer will get me off. He always has."

Surely it is not kind to let any child, time after time, go unpunished for mischief - either major or minor - and then suddenly call him to account for his acts. Many family tensions, as well as more serious offenses, would be prevented if from an early age parents were not over-indulgent.

Let Love make you courageous as well as patient. In every encounter with acts or attitudes that deserve censure, take the initiative. But always combine your intolerance of reprehensible behavior with benevolence toward the offender.



AVOID SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

As you strive to use Love to combat evil, you may find again and again that you are tempted to feel self-righteous. Any victory which is won over wrong will soon seem empty if it is achieved primarily to satisfy the ego, or a longing for esteem.

But if efforts to make reforms are prompted by eagerness to wipe out injustice, or by Love for the person who has fallen short of his God-given possibilities, then one will not be inclined to become dictatorial. With tenderness one can guide those who need help. With true humility we can ask the Almighty to point out our own failures. With patience we will wait for results.

Love that is free of vanity can accomplish far more than love that is over-cruised with pride. The people whom we are trying to help would be either humiliated or antagonized should we imply that they are inferior. How could we possibly lift their sights and call forth their best efforts if we are puffed up with a sense of our own importance?

When William Cary set out to rid the people of India of crippling superstitions, he did not think of himself as a hero. His passion to tell the unfortunate masses of the great Love of God so gripped his mind and heart that there was no longing for self-preservation or self-glory.

When Sir Wilfred Grenfell set sail for the lonely wastes of Labrador he showed no sign of self-righteousness. After he arrived on the bleak coast he identified himself with the common fisher-folk. He suffered with the sick, even as he strove to relieve their pain. He prayed with the dying, comforting their souls when he could not heal their bodies. He put his arms around the orphans and found a new home for each of them. He exhibited the Love that combats evil in its

many forms.

These, and many other men and women, have gallantly forgotten any wish for personal comfort as they were caught up in a compelling desire to alleviate distress. When we, also, forget ourselves and realize that the part we are called to play - whether it is large or small - dramatic or inconspicuous - is but part of God's larger plan, we work without feverishness or impatience. We are neither tortured by a sense of our inferiority, nor bigoted by our pride. We do each task in the calm assurance that it counts in God's final reckoning.



BE WILLING TO FORGIVE

There is an old proverb: "Hate the sin, but love and forgive the sinner." We all agree that this is what we should do, but when we, or our loved ones, are suffering at the hands of some offender, it is difficult indeed to separate the deed from the doer.

Yet, as seekers for the perfect life - the life which is controlled by perfect Love - this is the ideal we hold before us. So let us consider how we can learn to be forgiving.

Obviously it is impossible for us to stir up a feeling of affection for some of the people whom we know. To follow Christ's command: "Love your enemies", is so difficult that we are inclined to toss it aside.

If, however, you are to succeed in using Love to combat evil you will need to acquire the knowledge and the spirit that makes forgiveness possible. Begin by trying to understand some of the qualities that are not expected of you.

God, who is All-wise, does not require you to Love the repulsive attitudes or the annoying behavior of the one toward whom you are inclined to feel antipathy. It is not necessary for you to like the one who has behaved in a stupid or hateful way.

On the other hand, you can come to feel that any person, regardless of his misdoings, is a child of God. You can honestly attempt to see the circumstances that led him to behave as he does, and then try to share his anxieties and his frustrations.

Admit to yourself that you can never completely understand the factors that motivate the behavior of the one who offends or repulses you, and that it is not necessary for you to do this before you can think of him in a charitable way. Earlier we spoke of the peace and power that can be yours as you become aware of the Heavenly Father's limitless Love for you, and of His willingness to forgive your errors. As you comprehend this it becomes more and more possible for you to think of someone who has harmed you, not as an enemy, but as a brother who has lost his way.

Use both your faith and your will-power to rise above prejudice and animosity. Wipe spite and malice out of your thoughts. Leave judgment to God and

it will help you to overcome any desire for vengeance.

This will put you in the right frame of mind to receive divine insight for the step ahead, which may involve saying or doing something to help the one who has hurt you. When this is beyond the range of possibility, compassion may prompt you to assist some person whose need you had not noticed. When you work off pent-up anger by performing deeds of kindness, resentment seeps away.

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How this works is well illustrated by an incident that Bishop W. Y. Chen tells. It is of a man in an Oriental city who had lost his wife, his children, and his home in a bombing raid. He cried out, "I'm either going to commit suicide or find some way to take vengeance on the enemy." The bishop patiently told him that there was a better choice: "Accept the Love which God extends to you, but also to our enemies. Then find some way to translate that Love into action."

A few months later the man met Bishop Chen in the marketplace. He said, "I'm buying candy for my children. Come and see them." The bishop followed him and soon they were surrounded by a crowd of laughing boys and girls. The man's face was radiant as he said, "I now have a new house and these orphans are my foster children. I've found what is meant by 'the way of the Cross'."

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To forgive is never easy, but that is no excuse for ruling it out of our lives as an impossible demand. When we become sensitive to God's Love and recognize His forgiveness of our trespasses, we can so open our lives to the Almighty that Divine Love will flow through us into the lives of others.

In the seventh chapter of Acts we read how, in the first century, Stephen forgave those who were stoning him. In LETTERS FROM A PRISON CELL we read how, in the twentieth century, Olin Stockwell was able to rise above bitterness and resentment. The consciousness of God's charity enabled these men not only to forgive because they thought it was a Christian duty, but to know joy in hours of persecution.

This experience can be yours. Don't wait until a crisis comes before you try to practice forgiveness. You may never suffer a great injustice, but life is a school, and you gain in spiritual strength as, day by day, you meet unkindness with compassion, and meet prejudice with goodwill.



TO SUMMARIZE:

Combat evil by extending Agapé Love - Love which is like the Love God gives to us.

Be tolerant of offenders, but never of the offenses. Let Love spur you to take the initiative in eliminating evils.

Avoid self-righteousness. Leave judgments to God.

Let your forgiveness be so complete that you are willing to help the wrongdoer find his true self and live more nobly. When this is impossible, still refuse to seek retribution, or even to hold a grudge.



AFFIRMATION

I will show mercy toward those who wrong me.

I will let God's Love flow through my words and deeds to combat evil in any form.

Blessings,

YOUR INSTRUCTOR.