

Spiritual Growth Lessons

LESSON 6 of 32

♥ OUR LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD ♥

" . . . he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Ephesians 1:4).

Before the world was ever created, God had a plan. That plan was to bring into being a group of people who would willingly choose to love and serve Him--His church, His bride! "Us in him" in the above verse speaks of a close relationship. "Before him in love" tells us that this is to be a relationship based upon mutual love. Personal holiness is necessary, not to create a bunch of Pharisees, but because God is holy, and He cannot have fellowship whenever sin exists in the human heart.

Genesis is the "book of beginnings." It especially relates to us the beginning of God's plan of action to bring into existence His special people. It was Satan's desire to thwart that plan of action in every way possible, and he did succeed in causing the first man Adam to lose his relationship with God. Yet, the failure of man became an opportunity for God to reveal His love and mercy. Although Adam and Eve had to pay dearly for their sins, their relationship with God was at least partially restored by the introduction of the sacrifice system.

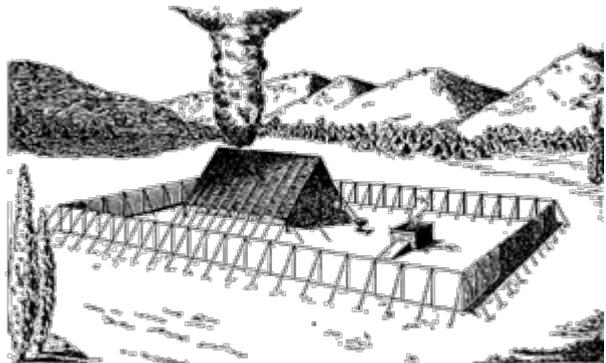
When do you suppose Adam and Eve loved God the most--before they sinned, or after? No doubt it was after God manifested His love towards them through the redemptive act of killing the two animals-- instead of them. Abel, their son, must have learned love and obedience to God from them--and also something about God's plan of redemption, because he was faithful to offer the required sacrifices (Genesis 4:4; Hebrews 11:4).

ISRAEL, GOD'S OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH

Israel was God's "church" because of two reasons. First, they belonged to God because of the covenant God had made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), Isaac (Genesis 26:1-5), and Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel (Genesis 28:10-16).

Secondly, the word "church" means: "called out ones." God brought them out of their Egyptian bondage, redeeming them by the blood of a lamb without blemish (Exodus 12:1-13). Moses was called of God to be their "saviour," leading them out of Egypt to the promised land of Canaan (a type of the kingdom of God).

When Israel came to Mount Sinai, God clearly expressed His love for them: *"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar (special) treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation . . ."* (Exodus 19:4-6).



"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because

the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

At Mount Sinai, God also clearly expressed His desire for their love in return: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).*

What words was Israel commanded to have in their hearts and teach their children? Only that which pertains to the Oneness of God? No! It is not enough to know the truth that God is one. We must love that One with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. The command to love God is called by Jesus Christ the first and great commandment (Matthew 22:37-38).

Israel never became that which God had desired her to be, because she never fulfilled her part of the covenant.

GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

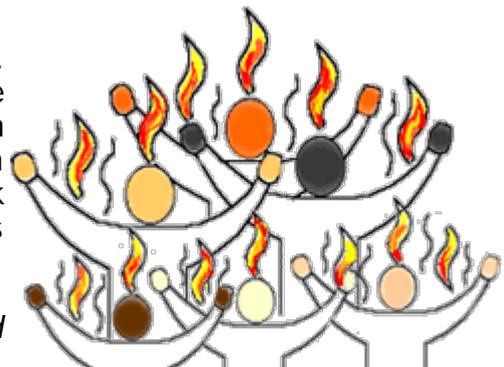
The love that was commanded under the law was not possible to attain, because the law is spiritual, but man is carnal (Romans 7:14). But deity took on humanity to pay the price for our redemption. God became man, and came into this world to woo, win, and redeem the people who would become His bride.

1. From the side of Adam, a bride was formed for man: *"And the rib or part of his side which the Lord God had taken from the man, He built up and made into a woman and brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:22, Amplified Bible).*
2. From the blood that flowed from the side of Jesus (John 19:34), the bride of Jesus Christ is being formed today. What Israel could never attain to, we can, because of the blood that cleanses us from all sin, and makes it possible for us to experience a new birth! (John 3:1-7)

God told Israel, *"If you obey my voice . . . ye shall be a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."* They did not obey His voice. But Peter wrote to those who are a part of the New Testament church of Jesus Christ: *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar (special) people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).*

If we have been born of the water and the Spirit, we are a part of the bride, God's chosen people. But chosen for what? Just to have free fire insurance (hellfire)? Were we chosen just so we can experience the good feeling that comes to us when we are "high" on the Spirit? Let's take another look at the verse of Scripture at the beginning of this lesson:

". . . he hath chosen us in him . . . that we should be holy and without blame before him in love"



Is this the kind of relationship that we have with Jesus? Do we serve Him because we love Him, or because we fear Him? Do we attend church, pray, worship, and testify because of our love for God? Do we obey God's Word, and the Biblical standards set forth by it out of a heart of love for Jesus? It is possible to do all the right things for the wrong reasons. God expects--nay, demands your love. We must love Him more

than anything and everybody!

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37).

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

To the one who denied him three times (Peter), Jesus questioned, *"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"* Three times Peter answered, *"Thou knowest that I love thee."* (John 21:15-17) Yes, Jesus does know just how little or how much we love Him. It is important to Him. Many years later, God, through John the beloved, gave this message to the church at Ephesus: *"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"* (Revelation 2:2-4).

The Amplified Bible's translation of verse 4 is: *". . . you have left (abandoned) the love that you had first--you have deserted me, your first love."*

We can be busy doing Christian works, we can take a strong stand for the truth--all for the wrong reasons. The chief question Jesus is asking us today is, "How much do you love me?" *ds*

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