

Quarter One: God's Love and Justice

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Lesson 1—God Loves Freely

Sunday: Beyond Reasonable Expectations

December 29, 2024

- **Last Quarter:** “Themes from the Gospel of John”
 - Prologue; Book of Signs; Book of Glory; Epilogue
 - Written for 2nd generation of believers
 - 7 signs point to Jesus as Messiah
 - 7 “I AM” statements
 - 7 theological discourses
 - Jesus & the “one”
- **This Quarter:** God's Love and Justice
 - Written by: Elder John Peckham, associate editor of the *Adventist Review*
 - Time of writing, professor of theology & Christian philosophy at the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University
 - 1 John 4:8 – “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”
 - He doesn't **do** love; He **is** love
 - Foundational thought for entire quarter: our God is love
 - God is love
 - Entire theology built on this premise
 - Love is at the core of who God is
 - At the core of everything we believe
 - At the core of everything we do
 - Vitally important to understand the character of God
 - Faulty theology built on skewed understanding of the character of God
 - *spent years trying to be good enough for God to love me
 - Sometimes, we think we have to earn His love, as if it's doled out or somehow merited. We think it's capricious or fickle or human-like. And it's none of that: so vast and deep and strong and unearned, unmerited, just because we exist. Because He made us, and wants us. Because He bought us back on the Cross and He wants to spend an eternity with us.
 - On the cross, see the love & justice of God
 - **God of love & justice:** some Q's answered this quarter
 - Does God's love contain emotions?
 - Can His love be rejected?
 - Is anger incompatible with love?
 - How do love & justice fit together?

- How can a God of love allow evil and injustice in this world?
 - Specifically, allowing evil & pain to children & the elderly?
 - How do we reconcile a loving God who also brings judgment?
 - The flood; destruction by fire at the end of time; the Canaanites that the Israelites were told to destroy
 - **God of Love**
 - He's the God who
 - Raises the dead
 - Heals the sick
 - Sets the captives free
 - Enables the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear
 - Forgives sins, transforms hearts and homes, breaks the chains of sin and addiction
 - He's the God who
 - Forgives
 - Heals
 - Cleanses
 - Sanctifies
 - Loves
 - Accepts
 - Cherishes
 - Redeems
 - **God of Justice**
 - He's the God who
 - Allowed His Son to die on the cross, to satisfy the claims of the law
 - Delivered the Israelites by destroying Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea
 - Ordered the destruction of the Canaanite nations by the Israelites
 - Destroyed sin by the flood and will destroy sin again by the final eradication of sin & sinners
 - How do we reconcile a loving God with a God who brings judgment?
 - God of Love & God of Justice
 - Fit together so perfectly that we cannot have one without the other
 - *Difficult to understand because as humans, we don't see love & justice together in humanity well
 - Justice – we see harshness & anger
 - Love – what we see as love is only tolerance; we want God to tolerate or love what we know He doesn't approve of, so we sometimes make Him out to be a bully & reject His protective love that wants better for us than we want for ourselves because we prefer our sin too much.
 - Love & justice interconnected:
 - From lesson: "Because God is love, He is deeply concerned about injustice & suffering in this world, and He identifies Himself with the

oppressed & suffering, willingly entering into the pain & grief that evil has wrought in creation – Himself suffering most of all, so much so that God Himself is the greatest victim of evil.”

- The entire theme of the Bible is about God
 - What He’s done & what He’s doing to restore love throughout the universe
- **3 Foundational steps for this Quarter:**
 - 1. Don’t be afraid to ask questions
 - 2. Don’t need all the answers now
 - Answers don’t come immediately – sit with the question as we go through the quarter.
 - 3. Trust God when you don’t understand
- **This Week: “God Loves Freely”**
 - When God restored Peter in John 21 (last week’s lesson)
 - Jesus asked Peter 3 times: “Do you love Me?”
 - Peter answered 3 times: I love You
 - This question comes down to our time: “Do you love Me?”
 - **Everything** depends on our answer to this question

Memory Text: “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him” (Hosea 14:4, NKJV).

The week in brief:

- 1. **Sunday:** Beyond Reasonable Expectations (Jill)
 - Ex 33:15 – 22 – golden calf experience; God’s love & compassion for the people, even when they didn’t deserve it
- 2. **Monday:** Unrequited Love (Daniel)
 - Hosea’s story & God’s story of love, even when His people don’t love Him back
- 3. **Tuesday:** Love Freely Given (John D)
 - Various Scriptures – God created this world & chose to love us – even after we sinned
- 4. **Wednesday:** Many Are Called, but Few Are Chosen (James)
 - Matt 22 – free will in the context of love; all are called, we have free will to choose to love Him back
- 5. **Thursday:** Crucified for Us (SQ)
 - The cross as the ultimate example of love – God’s free will to love us and give us opportunity to spend eternity with Him

Sunday: Beyond Reasonable Expectations

Ex 33:15 - 22

Example of God’s love, beyond reasonable expectations

- Golden calf experience: Mistake, Ex 32
 - Children of Israel just delivered from Egyptian bondage

- Broke His commandment on graven images
 - Stepped into sexual immorality
- **God's love:** beyond reasonable expectations
 - Rom 5:8 – “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were **still** sinners, Christ died for us.”
 - Still = Gk, Still, yet, even now
 - **Steps to Jesus #1: Christ took the first step**
 - While I wallowed in sin & guilt
 - While I even enjoyed my sin
 - While I didn't even know I had sin – He died for me
 - Substitutionary death, atonement
 - **Takeaway #1:** It's not reasonable to be nice, to love, to help or even take the punishment for another – when they didn't care or didn't ask you to
 - That's the depth of our Father's love
 - Ex 32
 - Golden calf experience – punishment for sin
 - Levites stood on the Lord's side & 3,000 men were killed
 - Ex 33 - God's presence was withdrawn temporarily from the people
 - Consequences for sin
 - No consequences, would cease to be sin
 - Consequences are not God's fault; result of the sin
 - Rom 6:23 – “For the wages of sin is death; **but** the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”
 - Ex 33:14 – “And He said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’”
 - **Step #2: Christ offers to reconcile us to God**
 - He will give us “His presence”
 - Significance of His presence
 - Sin brings fear & guilt – separation from God
 - Christ came to bridge that gap & reunite us with the Father
 - 2 Cor 5:18, 19 – “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, (19) that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”
 - **Takeaway #2:** It's not reasonable for God to extend His presence, His rest, His reconciliation, even after we've sinned
 - That's the depth of our Father's love
 - Ex 33:19 – “Then He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’”
 - Moses asked, “Show me Your glory” – God ans with this Scripture

