

1-Jan-02

“Loving God is impossible unless we believe that He is One,” Mr. Wise states.

“Believers in the New Testament gathered together to obey Jesus in love. Acts 2 shows that after they repented and were baptized, they applied the apostles’ teaching to their lives. They practiced loving fellowship, gave generously, celebrated the Lord’s Supper and prayed powerfully. The first church started from this united, loving obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. True love born of God results in joyful obedience; it is the essence of our faith.”



Practical Work

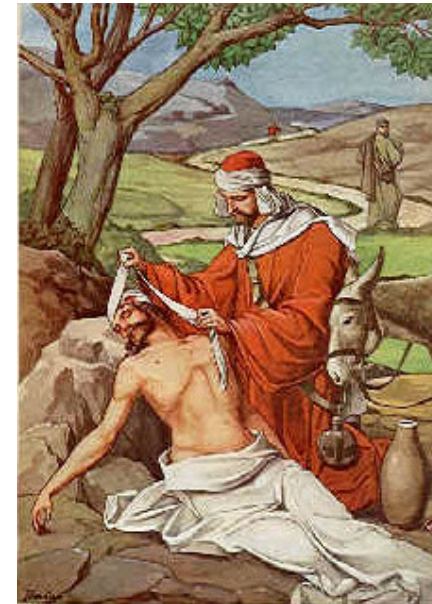
- Pray that your congregation will be rooted and established in love.
- Help your congregation to memorize Jesus’ command to love, in Luke 10:27.
- Arrange for your congregation to serve people who have physical or spiritual needs.

Plan activities as a body that will build loving unity with each other and with other congregations.

Shepherd’s Storybook II—4

Command of Christ #4

Love



Learner and his brother Helper visit their neighbours and friends, telling the good news about Jesus. Helper sings for them. They live in different neighbourhoods, a few kilometres of distance, so one day they visit in Learner's area, the next day in Helper's. Helper's neighbour, Mr. Caregiver, tells Helper, "I am a schoolteacher, but I have been ill and unable to work."

Helper tells him about Jesus, but Learner remains quiet. When they leave his house, Helper asks Learner, "Why were you so silent? We ought to help him some way. His family is suffering."



"I do not like Mr. Caregiver," Learner admits. "He is Mr. Foolish's brother-in-law. Last year I made a set of chairs for him and he never paid me. I later asked for payment and we argued. He got angry and threw a book at me. He is my enemy. I will not visit him again."

They return to Learner's house and find Mr. Wise waiting. Helper tells him, "Learner does not want to help Caregiver in his time of need, because they have had a disagreement since last year."

Mr. Wise advises, "Learner, you must obey Jesus' command to love, in Matthew 22:36-40. It is the greatest of God's commands. Let me tell you what Jesus said about The Good Samaritan."

Mr. Wise tells Mr. Foolish and Learner, "You two men need to get along better with each other. God's people are united in His church. We are all one in Jesus Christ. A local church is a group of people united to obey Jesus in love, wherever they are. God wants us to help one another and build each other up. Jesus does not tell us to follow Him each one in his own way, alone. We do it together."

"What do you mean, we are all one in Christ?" Learner asks.

"The Holy Spirit unites us in the Body of Christ in a way that men cannot explain with human reason. Jesus said in John 17 that we are one in Him just as He is one with God the Father."

"I do not understand that," Mr. Foolish grumbles. "I do not believe anything that I cannot understand."

"No man fully understands the mystery of God's being and our new holy life that is hidden in Christ, as Colossians 3:1-7 reveals. Our understanding is not the most important thing to God. He prefers our obedience. We can learn much doctrine and that is good. But it is better to learn to obey Christ. The best thing of course is to do both. Learn and obey. That strengthens the congregation, the Body of Christ!"

"Why do you call the group the Body of Christ?" Learner asks.

"The New Testament church is the Body of Christ--not a denomination or a building. We mean God's people, those who gather to worship and serve Him. We learn as members of the body to show practical love to the one true God and to each other."

"Why is love so important?" Mr. Foolish asks Mr. Wise.

"It is the most holy motive for all we do. Learner, do you remember what Jesus said about it?"

"Yes. He affirmed the ancient command from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'."

While others leave after the meeting in Learner's house, Mr. Foolish tells Mr. Wise, "You certainly made Learner proud! But I do not like the way he leads. Those new people in our group stammer and give silly answers to his questions. He lets them participate too much. They have not earned that right yet. He gives them too much freedom! The group needs a leader that will be strict. I could lead better!"

"Oh, no!" Mr. Wise groans. "You are too stingy with God's grace! Listen to the story of The Jealous Workers."

Exercise

Please find in Matthew 20:1-16:

- What should our attitude be toward new believers, even though we have worked hard for Christ and suffered much for Him, and they have not?

Mr. Foolish remarks to Mr. Wise, "I do not understand your teaching! New believers would have the same right to God's grace as we older ones have!"

"We receive them into the church with as much grace as God showed us."

Learner approaches and Mr. Wise urges them to strengthen the unity of the church body. He tells about Jesus' prayer For Us to Be One and to Love One Another.

Exercise

Please read John 17:20-23 to find:

- What did Jesus ask God to do for us?
- In what way is our unity with each other like the unity between God the Father and God the Son?
- How did Jesus say the world would know that God sent Jesus?



Exercise

Please find in Luke 10:25-37 what Learner discovers that practical love does:

- To whom are we to show love, besides God?
- What did the Samaritan do to show love for his neighbour?
- Who is our neighbour, from God's viewpoint?

They continue talking about this in Learner's house. Mr. Wise advises, "Learner, the religious leaders that passed by the injured traveller knew they were commanded to love their neighbour, but they did not stop to help him. The Samaritans and Jews were historical enemies. But the Samaritan did stop to help the injured Jewish traveller. A person in need, even an enemy, is our neighbour as God sees it. He requires us to love them all."

"Do I have to love Mr. Caregiver?"

"What do you think?"

"I guess so."

“God is love, and we were created to be like Him. He made us to love Him and to love each other just as He loves us. Love must be useful. Merely talking about Jesus is not enough. People know that we belong to Christ when we look for ways to show useful love for each other. We are no longer interested only in what God can do for us.”

“What do you mean by ‘useful love’?”

“Love is useful when we do the things that Jesus commands. Our worship and all our church activities come from this first great command. We prove our love for our neighbours by serving them in useful ways, especially when they need help.”

Mr. Foolish arrives at Learner's door with bottles of a dark green liquid. “It is Voice Tonic,” he announces. “Take a spoonful daily for a month and you can sing better, Helper. Mr. Wise, people will hear you preach from a long distance. Here, I will demonstrate it with the cat.” He fills a spoon and lowers it. The cat sniffs it, snarls and bites his finger. Mr. Foolish scolds the others, “You do not have to laugh so much! You lack good manners.”

Sara bandages his finger and says, “Jesus commands us to love even those who mistreat us. Did you know that, Mr. Foolish? I read it this morning in Matthew 5:44.”

“But you cannot let an enemy offend you and do nothing! Even cats know that you have to bite those who they think might mistreat you! Make people suffer for doing wrong so it will not happen again!”

“Please!” Mr. Wise interrupts, “Let me tell you about The Unforgiving Servant.”

Exercise

Please find now in Matthew 18:21-35:

- How much of the debt did the master cancel?
- How did the first servant treat the second, poorer servant?
- What did the master do to the unforgiving servant?

They continue talking about love and forgiveness in Learner's house. Mr. Wise explains, “We show our enemies love when we forgive them. That is how Jesus forgave us. We also show love to new believers by welcoming them into our church family. We show love to our disciples by listening to them and helping them have fruitful ministries. Ephesians 4:11-12 says that teachers must help all the believers to have some kind of effective ministry.”

After praying, Learner sighs. “I will forgive Caregiver. But it is hard to stop hating him. Sara, please prepare some food for his family. I will help them.”

He takes a large basket of bread, eggs and other supplies to Caregiver, who is very grateful. Learner tells him, “You need employment but cannot work a full day yet. Come work in my shop part time until you gain back your strength. You can do light work like painting small designs on some wooden cases that I'm making. You can stop working any time during the day if you feel tired. You will earn enough to care for your family.”

Caregiver looks at Learner for a long moment. “Thank you. I will be there in the morning.”

A few weeks later he tells Learner, “I am able to teach full time again. Listen. About the dispute we had last year. I was wrong. Please forgive me. I will pay you what I owe.” Caregiver begins to attend the church services. Before long he receives Christ and is baptized.

At a worship service, Mr. Wise tells the group, “God has given you a good leader. Learner now leads the worship services well without needing my help. And he does it the biblical way. All of you participate. You give testimonies, speak words of exhortation, repeat verses by memory and tell Bible stories. Some sing, others dramatize Bible stories. You answer the questions that Learner asks after someone reads a Bible passage or tells a story. This is what Paul tells us to do in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 through 14. It is all very biblical and spiritually healthy. You should all thank God for giving you a leader that is able to lead in the way the Bible says he should.”