

# Life Lessons for Me from the Book of I John

See Topic for December 5th—1 John 4. 7-21.

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**T**HIS First Epistle of John is not an epistle in the ordinary sense of the term, as are Paul's letters to the Corinthians, to the Romans. It is not a theological writing, as is Paul's letter to the Romans. It is not controversial in its character, as is Paul's letter to the Colossians. It belongs to the wisdom literature of the Bible. In the wisdom literature of the Bible we have wise observations on various aspects of life, generally couched in language that is pithy and pointed. In this epistle it is Christian life or experience that is considered from the standpoint of the Christian philosopher.

Wisdom literature in its simplest form consists of a number of short, pithy sayings, of which the Book of Proverbs is a good

I have seen a heavy piece of solid iron hanging on another, not welded, not linked, not glued to the spot; and yet it cleaved with such tenacity as to bear not only its own weight, but mine, too, if I chose to seize it and hang upon it. A wire charged with an electric current is in contact with its mass. Cut that wire through, or remove it by a hair's breadth, and the piece drops dead to the ground, like any other unsupported weight. A stream of life from the Lord, brought into contact with a human spirit, keeps the spirit cleaving to the Lord so firmly that no power on earth or hell can wrench the two asunder. In that circuit the feeblest Christian is held safely; but if the circuit be broken the dependent spirit instantly drops off.—Arnott.

example. In the Book of Proverbs these pointed sayings or literary units are not arranged in any logical or methodical manner, but seem to be jumbled together in a sort of haphazard fashion.

Passing by other forms of wisdom literature we make special mention of the essay, since it is this form that is found in the epistle we are now studying. The essay in Bible literature treats of a single theme; but it treats that theme in a peculiar way. The subject is not developed by a process of reasoning, but usually by a succession of short, pithy sayings setting forth different phases of the subject. These sayings may be more or less independent the one of the other, there being little or no logical connection between them, though they all bear on the same general theme.

The first Book of John contains about fourteen short essays of this kind. The theme of the book is

## CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

spoken of in the opening verses as *fellowship with God and with one another*. This theme is developed, not from the standpoint of the logician, nor from the standpoint of the theologian, nor yet from the standpoint of the preacher, but from the standpoint of the practical philosopher. A series of essays bearing on different phases of Christian life and experience is presented to us. Occasionally the subject of an essay may be suggested by the last thought in the previous essay, but for the most part they are independent of one another. Yet they all seem to be related to the central theme *fellowship with God*. For instance, God is light, therefore if we would have fellowship with Him we must walk in the light as He is in the light. God is righteous, and if we would have fellowship with Him we must do righteousness. To have fellowship with Him we must purify ourselves even as He is pure. God is love, therefore to have fellowship with Him we must live the life of love with reference to our fellow men. Love is a sure way of experiencing the presence of the invisible God.

The essays in this epistle treat of such subjects as: God is Light, Cleansing from Sin, The Commandments our Surety, Sons of God, Love, Faith, etc. If the reader is willing to do a little study for himself he will find that the following sections treat of separate and, to some extent, independent subjects, being fourteen in number, in addition to the prologue and the epilogue: 1 John 1, 1-4, 5-7; 1, 8-2, 2; 2, 3-6; 7-12; 12-14; 15-17; 18-28; 2, 29-3, 12; 3, 13-23; 3, 24-4, 6; 4, 7-21; 5, 1-5; 6-13; 14-17; 18-21.

The section of the epistle to which we are asked to give special study is an essay on

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE (4. 7-21).

This section on love is a good example of the literary form of the epistle as a whole. It will be seen that this essay contains fifteen sentences or sayings, most of them self-evident, and all bearing a relation to the general theme of the essay—love. Though bearing on the same subject, yet there is but little logical connection between them. Each stands by itself as a contribution to the general theme and is independent of

the others, so that any one or more of them might be left out without breaking the connection, or they might be re-arranged without affecting the sense.

The central thought in each of these fifteen sentences may be stated thus, in the order in which they occur: Love is divine. Where no love is there is no fellowship with God. God's love is manifested in the Son. Love originated with God. God is our example in love. The presence of the invisible God is realized in love. Experiencing the presence of the Son. Confessing the Son. Experiencing the love of God. The Source of love. Love gives courage. Love knows no fear. The motive of love. Love toward God is incompatible with hatred toward man. The commandment of love.

## THE POWER OF LOVE.

Love is the greatest power in heaven or earth.

Love is great in its origin. It has its origin in God. Just in proportion as a man's life is controlled by love, just in that degree is he living a Godlike life, for love is of God.

Love is the greatest motive power in heaven. It was love that moved heaven to save the earth. It was love that moved God to crown His work of creation by making men in His own image. It was love that moved God to choose us before the foundation of the world, for it was in love that He ordained us unto the adoption of sons (Eph. 1, 4, 5). It was love that moved Him to give His only begotten Son for our redemption (John 3, 16).

Love is the greatest motive power on earth. It sends the deacons into the home of suffering and poverty, sometimes into the home of filth and disease. It sends the missionary away from his home of comfort to the home of the cannibal and the savage, where his life is offered as a sacrifice to the God of love. It was love that moved John Howard to seek the salvation of the criminal, that moved Dorothea Dix to help the unfortunate insane, that moved Florence Nightingale to alleviate the suffering of the wounded soldier, that moved Frances Willard to spend her life in one great effort to save the unfortunate victims of the liquor traffic. It is love that enables the missionary who represents our League to turn his back upon wealth and worldly ease and spend his life in a mighty effort to uplift fallen man by the power of the gospel.

Love finds its greatest example in the person of Jesus Christ. It was love that moved Him to divest Himself of the glory that He had with the Father before the world was, and take upon Himself human flesh and live as a man among men. See how He was persecuted, how He was reviled and He reviled not again; how He endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself; how He did good to all classes of men, even to the poor, the down-trodden, the beggar, and the sinful; how He yielded His life into the hands of His enemies and prayed upon the cross that they might be forgiven. And all this for us.

Love is the most prominent characteristic of Christian life. Love rules the Christian in his private life; it rules him in his business life; it rules him in his relation to his fellow men.

When the worries and cares of the day fret you and begin to wear on you, and you chafe under the friction—be calm. Stop, rest for a moment, and let calmness and peace assert themselves. If you let these irritating outside influences get the better of you, you are confessing your inferiority to them by permitting them to dominate you. Study the disturbing elements, each by itself, bring all the will-power of your nature to bear upon them, and you will find that they will, one by one, melt into nothingness, like vapors fading before the sun. The glow of calmness that will then pervade your mind, the tingling sensation of an inflow of new strength, may be to you the beginning of the revelation of the supreme calmness that is possible for you.—William George Jordan.

A man is living the Christ life just in proportion as his conduct is ruled by love.

Love knows no limitations. It gives boldness, it banishes fear. It overcomes all difficulties, it laughs at impossibilities. Where the sword has failed love succeeds. It heaps coals of fire on the head of an enemy. Christian love crosses mountains and seas and spends itself lavishly upon the peoples that are alienated from God. It discovers the sinful and the lost and finds its way into their life. It wins its way through darkness and sin into the heart of the savage. Love redeemed man from sin, and love will yet win the world for Christ.

Leagueers, have we this love? Is it a power in our lives? Lynedoch, Ont.