

## SINCERE LOVE OF THE LORD

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It's almost unthinkable that anyone would not acknowledge God's love except for the foolish person who imagines in his heart, "*There is no God*" (**Psalm 14:1**). God loved us so deeply and sincerely that He gave us the best of heaven—His only Son Jesus Christ (**John 3:16**). That fact in itself is really amazing! But, equally amazing is that Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself for us: "*while we were yet sinners*" (**Romans 5:8**). "What great love!



*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him* (**1 John 3:1**).

But Love is reciprocal; therefore, we owe the Lord a profound debt of love because He has forgiven our many sins just as He forgave those of that sinful woman in Luke chapter seven. Similarly, even if we could love and serve the Lord our entire life time, we still wouldn't be able to repay our debt for His love and grace.

Loving the Lord with all our might and being is what Jesus termed the first and greatest commandment (**Mark 12:30**). So, our love for the Lord is mandatory but also it is consequential, according to James' teaching:

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him* (**James 1:12**).

James goes on to teach in chapter two that those who are rich in faith, even if they are poor in this world, are the ones who will receive the reward if they "*love Him*" (**James 2:5**). The Apostle Paul teaches the same principle when he quotes from the prophet Isaiah:

*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him* (**1 Corinthians 2:9**).

The rich and wonderful promises of God, then, await those who love God. The scriptures, however, provide an alternate consequence for those who do not love God or Jesus: "*If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed*" (**1 Corinthians 16:22**).

Realizing that all the great promises and rewards from God are only for those "who love the Lord," we automatically ask the question, What, then, is love for God? Jesus, as One of the Godhead, answers this question for us:

*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and manifest Myself to him...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him* (**John 14:21, 23**).

The kind of love described here and in other scriptures must be sincere. Paul teaches the Romans, "*Let love be without hypocrisy...*" (**Romans 12:9**). Yes! Love must be real and without deceit or insincerity. It must be genuine, pure, and perfect to be true love. It must not be "*in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*" (**1 John 3:18**). John further teaches, "*Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him*" (**1 John 3:24**).

The concept of true love for the Lord has often been grossly misunderstood. Paul exposes how meritorious and sacrificial efforts can be offered without true love. Astute teachers of God's word, great speakers of immense knowledge and oratory, wonderful givers who can give their all and even offer their bodies to be burned about, yet without real love for God (**1 Corinthians 13:1-4**). Real love for God, then, must not be for show or recognition: it must come from the heart.

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## SEPTEMBER 2019 NEWSLETTER

God demonstrated His love for us by providing a way for our salvation, thus the opportunity to be in Heaven with Him some day. We demonstrate our love for God by following the instructions He has given us in His word; that is, by always remembering the eternal principle Jeremiah laid down long ago: *"O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps"* (**Jeremiah 10:23**).

### THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

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The Old Testament contains many symbolic images pointing to the coming of Jesus Christ and the role He would play in God's wonderful scheme of redemption for mankind. One of the most prominent of these images is the Passover lamb, introduced before Israel's exodus from Egyptian bondage. God sent many terrible plagues upon Egypt in response to Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to let the Israelites go free. The final plague was the death of every firstborn throughout Egypt, including animals and even the firstborn son of Pharaoh. In **Exodus 12**, God gave Moses and the Israelites detailed instructions about how to save their own firstborn sons from death when this plague passed through the land.



These instructions involved the sacrifice of a lamb. God specified exactly how the lamb was to be sacrificed, even detailing that the blood was to be placed on the doorposts of each Israelite house:

*And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt* (**Exodus 12:13**).

This blood would be a sign that made God's people distinct from the Egyptians, allowing them to escape this plague of death.

The qualities of this Passover lamb and the spreading of its blood were extremely significant. This was not only God's plan to save the Israelites but it was reflective of another Lamb who would come later to save people from their sins. John the Baptist says: *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (**John 1:29**). Many striking similarities exist between the Passover lamb and Jesus, the "Lamb of God." These parallels are what Paul has in mind in **1 Corinthians 5:7** with his reference to *"Christ, our Passover..."*

One important quality of the Passover lamb was that it was to be a lamb *"without blemish"* (**Exodus 12:5**). The word blemish means a small imperfection that flaws the appearance of something; therefore, for this lamb to be acceptable to God, it had to be spotless. Just as the Passover lamb was physically unblemished, Jesus was morally and spiritually unblemished. He lived a sinless life (**1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15**). No other human was worthy to die for us because all mankind was guilty of sin. We can be redeemed from sin only *"with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (**1 Peter 1:19**).

Many other parallels exist between the Passover lamb of the Israelites and our sacrificial Lamb, Jesus Christ. For example, just as there was to be only one Passover lamb sacrificed per household (**Exodus 12:3**), so is there only one Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world. Jesus, then, is the only way to Heaven:

*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me* (**John 14:6**).

Also, not one of the lamb's bones was to be broken (**Exodus 12:9, 46; Numbers 9:12**). It was no coincidence that when the soldiers went to break the legs of Jesus and the two thieves hanging on those crosses, they did not break Jesus' legs because He was dead already (**John 19:31-36**). The scriptures were fulfilled that Christ, *our* Passover lamb, would not have a single broken bone (**Psalms 34:20**).

Besides these requirements, the most significant detail of the Passover lamb pointing to God's plan of salvation is the spreading of the lamb's blood on the Israelites' doors, indicating those inside were God's children. This blood saved them from the plague of death.

Similarly, God's word tells us there is coming a day of destruction that will be far greater than the death angel that passed through Egypt. We can find assurance, though, in God's masterful scheme of redemption, knowing the blood of Jesus can save us from sin and eternal death! His blood was shed for the remission of our sins (**Matthew 26:28**). The Hebrew writer explains, *"...without the shedding of blood, there is no remission"* (**Hebrews 9:22**). To be saved, then, we must come in contact with the blood of Jesus.

We do so when we are buried with Christ in the watery grave of baptism; we are baptized *into his death* (**Romans 6:3-6**), not simply as a public proclamation of our faith but as a picture of the *death* of Jesus, our sacrificial Lamb. We put to death our old man of sin and rise to walk in newness of life: *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (**Galatians 3:27**). We are then God's children.



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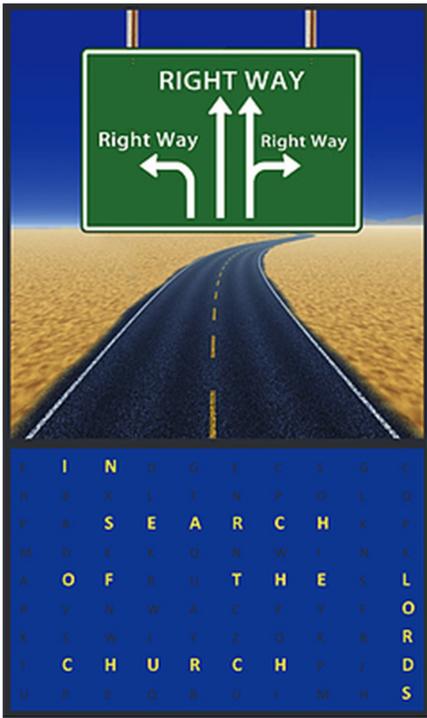
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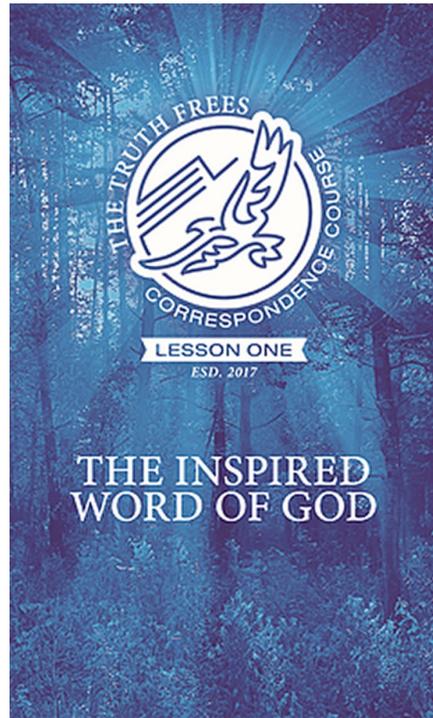
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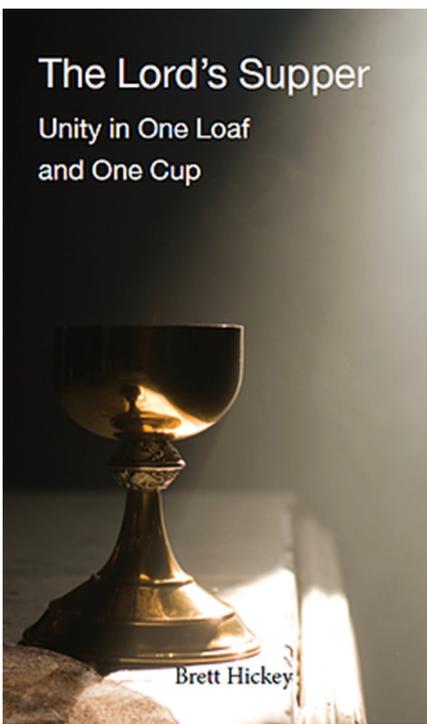
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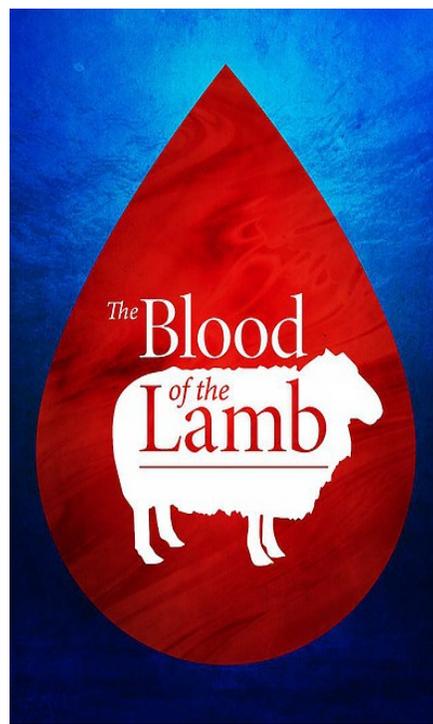
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