

Finding *Renewal* in the Love of God

Unit 5: Claiming the Life in Renewal through Sacrifices of Love

Study Questions with Answers

In 1978, psychiatrist Scott Peck wrote *The Road Less Traveled*. He had not totally settled on Christianity at the time, though he would have described himself as “spiritual.” Thus his book, a primer on the “true” meaning of love, approached its topic primarily from lessons learned during years of experience while practicing psychiatry. I have often wondered if writing the book drew Peck closer to making a commitment to the Lord. As I read his “discoveries” about the essence of love, I often felt that I could have supplied him with the appropriate scripture to back up his suppositions—many straight from the pages of 1 John. Yet between the lines of the book, one could easily tell that experience, not scripture, represented the ultimate authority. The truths he explained came from insights fully—if not exclusively—his own. By the time he wrote his second book five years later, all that had changed. In fact, Peck **was** baptized two years after the publication of *A Road Less Traveled*. He wrote, “After many years of vague identification with Buddhist and Islamic mysticism, I ultimately made a firm Christian commitment — signified by my non-denominational baptism on the ninth of March, 1980....” Somehow, God had found a way to testify to this seeker concerning the essence of true love, about commitment to God, and obedience to His Word. Peck’s book, written totally from a position outside scripture, defined true love as extending one’s ego boundaries to include another, thus giving oneself to the spiritual nurturing of another. There can be no love with sacrificing oneself.

1. Read 1 John 3.16. How does this passage define “real love?” Make a list of several ways we might be called upon to “give our lives for our brothers and sisters.”

By surrendering ourselves (what we desire) for others. I have not, so far, been called to surrender my physical life, but I am called upon many times every day to surrender my pride, my time, my dignity, my money, my sense of what I BELIEVE to be correct/incorrect responses or behavior in certain situations—actually my preferences regarding almost everything—any and every part of me. God does not usually call me to surrender my values (sometimes he does require that I grow up in my prioritizing my values), but he often requires that I place my personal values and preferences BEHIND loving others and honoring THEM.

- a. Giving up my time (with my husband, my family and for myself)
- b. Letting it go when I am right (and someone else is not) or when someone talks about me, misunderstands me, or judges me; not attempting to “set the record straight” when doing so will create a conflict of its own
- c. Recognizing that others have issues in their lives and circumstances that make life difficult for them and which affect their reactions to me. Therefore, giving up my “right” to have my feelings hurt or to be angry or indignant.
- d. Opening my door, my home, my heart, and my wallet for those in need (physically, spiritually, or emotionally) even when I don’t feel like it

- e. Looking beyond the immaturity of another; understanding that they, like me, are “under construction”
 - f. Understanding that I am not going to be “known” by this world—maybe not even by my brothers and sisters (sometimes not by my family); trusting that “God knows” is enough.
 - g. Choosing to love and recognize those who do not love me; doing good for the benefit of my “enemies.” Paul wrote that “while we were still enemies of Christ, he died for us.”
 - h. Forgiving another even when they haven’t asked and don’t think they need to ask.
 - i. Setting aside prejudices in order to be willing to get my hands (and my home) dirty for others who do not think, look, or act like I do.
2. According to 3.17, how might a believer express her “real love” to other believers? **By helping someone with physical needs.**
When a believer fails to express such love, what does John say about that person’s relationship to God? **If a person is capable of ignoring such need, that person does not possess the life of God.**
3. Elaborate on John’s judgment of the person who fails to express “real love” to her brother or sister (as seen in 3.17) in light of 3.20.
Since we are children of God, so we should live like Jesus did; we should **give our lives. The world wants to please itself (2.16), but the child of God **GIVES** up for others. Knowledge that we are like Him gives us “peace” before God, since we love like He does.**
4. What is needed in addition to speaking about our love for one another according to 3.18?
We must love with actions, truly caring for one another. In 1 John people “claim” many things—to know God, to have a relationship with Him, to love one another. John, however, says a person has to put something with the words. One has to walk the talk or admit that his claims are mere lies.
5. How do both the Father and Son model such active love (see 2.1-2 and 4.9-11)?
2.1-2. Jesus died in our place to take away our sins; and not only for our sins but for the sins of all people. We are often willing to do things for our friends or those we “love.” Jesus gave for everyone—regardless of who they were or how they treated Him.
4.9-11. God showed his love to us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him. Real love is not that we love God, but that He loved us. He sent his Son to die in our place to take away our sins.

6. The opposite of loving God and loving one another is to love the world and the things in this world. What are three indications that we love the world?
 - a. Wanting...**to please ourselves**
 - b. Wanting...**whatever we see**
 - c. Being... **too proud**

7. Examine these texts: 1.9, 2.1, and 2.29, and 3.7. What is the common element found in each of the beings described in these texts?
 - 1.9—**God does what is right; he can be trusted**
 - 2.1—**Jesus does what is right; he died for our sins and helps us in the Father’s presence**
 - 2.29—**All children of God do what is right**
 - 3.7—**All who are “like Christ” do what is right’ they are righteous**

8. Consider 3.10, 4.7, and 4.19-21 in light of 3.1-2. Why would it be both normal and necessary for the child of God to love her brothers and sisters in Him?

3.1-2. Children of God are in the process of growing up to be more and more LIKE HIM. “Children of God” REALLY ARE His children—this is not just some analogy John is using or even one that God used to help us understand His love for us. It is a reality! The WORLD—they are the ones who don’t get it. The children of God—“we” are the ones whose future is so bright when it comes to becoming like the Father, that we can’t even imagine it. It remains a mystery to us until the day it is fully accomplished!

Therefore, are we of the world? Or, ARE we truly children of God? There is nothing in the middle.

3.10. Children “resemble” their parents. God does what is right; so do His children.
 4.7. God loves; therefore, as His children, if we ARE His children, we love.
 4.19-21. God loves us. He loved us before we loved Him; if we are His children, there is NO REASON we would fail to love our brothers and sisters (that is, if we love God and desire to be like Him).

9. What can be learned about sacrificial love in each of the following texts?
- a. 2.9-10—sacrificial love is WILLING to sacrifice.
 - b. 2.19 in light of 2.16—sacrificial love REMAINS; it does not seek its own will or leave; it remains.
 - c. 3.1-5—sacrificial love causes us to give up (sacrifice) sinfulness (v.3—all who hope in Christ keep themselves pure as He was pure.)
 - d. 3.9 in relation to 3.11-12—Obedience is two-pronged in 1 John—both being obedient to God’s righteousness, but included in that is LOVING OUR BROTHERS. Sacrificial love is a love that surrenders to BOTH types of obedience and righteousness,
 - e. 5.16—sacrificial love PRAYS for her brothers and sisters and THEIR sins—not just her own. Jesus died for the sins of others; we too must sacrifice for others.