

# Lambs Among Wolves

By

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Chapter 3

## The Great Secret

WE HAVE been considering the fact that the key to the experience of victory over all sin, embracing complete obedience to the law of God, is LOVE. This victory gives us the assurance of eternal life in the kingdom of God. His Word says, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Revelation 22:14. Jesus came to save His people from their sins and to give them eternal life. What many sincere souls are longing for is a clear explanation of the provision God has made for us to gain this experience.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17:3.

Notice how beautifully these truths fit together to form an impregnable foundation for our faith and life. Why is it "life eternal" just to know God? Because if we know God, we shall love Him. We cannot really know Him and not love Him. And if we love Him, we shall obey Him. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words." John 14:23. Obedience is the real test of knowing God.

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John 2:3, 4.

Love is the fulfilling of the law, but we cannot love God unless we know Him; therefore knowing God is life eternal. There are many who sincerely desire and purpose to be Christians, but they do not know how to obtain that love, without which it is not possible to stop sinning. John, who was known as the beloved disciple, had much to say about love; and as we study his message, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit, we shall understand the wonderful provision God has made by which His true children may live in the heavenly atmosphere of love.

"Although there may be a tainted, corrupted atmosphere around us, we need not breathe its miasma, but may live in the pure air of heaven. We may close every door to impure imaginings and unholy thoughts by lifting the soul into the presence of God through sincere prayer. Those whose hearts are open to receive the support and blessing of God will walk in a holier atmosphere than that of earth, and will have constant communion with heaven."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 99.

### **The Two Commandments**

Those who are acquainted with the Bible know what we mean when we speak of the Ten Commandments, but probably many would not be sure when we speak of the Two Commandments. Let us look at the first one of the pair, the "old" commandment:

"Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning." 1 John 2:7.

A little farther on in his letter John makes plain just what the commandment is:

"For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." 1 John 3:11. "And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another." 2 John 5.

How easy it is to regard this command superficially, to say, "I love all my friends, and I do not really hate anyone." But there is a vast difference between not hating anyone and loving everyone. If everyone in the world kept just this one commandment, there would not be a man, woman, or child on earth suffering today for lack of food, clothing, shelter. There is plenty for all, but some hoard up their millions, while others die of hunger and privation.

John states that this commandment came from the beginning. Let us go back a few thousand years and see how it was stated then: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Leviticus 19:18.

As we read this, we may think of that dear neighbor who has always been so kind and has been such a help and inspiration to us. Sometimes when we have faced serious problems and hardly known which way to turn, this neighbor has insisted on sharing the burden and has given us relief and courage to press on. Of course we love him.

Then I think of a neighbor I had years ago. We lived just across the road from him, and for years he and his wife were pleasant and friendly, and we often did things to help each other. Finally his wife died, and he had our sincere sympathy and efforts to comfort and encourage him during this time of sorrow.

I had to go for several months on a trip to the mission field, and soon after my departure my wife discovered that someone was coming into the yard during the night, emptying the gasoline barrel, stealing our garden tools and chicken feed. A friend came to help my wife, did some careful investigating, and discovered that it was our neighbor across the street who was doing the stealing. Do you suppose this old commandment, which says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," really means that God expected me to love that man as much as I love myself?

I confess it gave me something to think about, and more than that, as I studied God's Word, I realized that I must do much more than just think about it. Notice the words of the Apostle Paul: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Galatians 5:14.

Here are the words of Jesus on the subject: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Matthew 22:37, 38.

I do not wish to offend anyone, but I would like to put a frank, personal question to every reader: Do you really love anyone else in the world as much as you love yourself? Naturally we resent that question, for we are positive that we have dear ones whom we love even more than we love ourselves. But if we will analyze our conduct for a whole day, we may be astonished at our discoveries.

### **Loving Others**

What would be involved in loving others as much as we love ourselves? We certainly would not quarrel with them, or criticize them, or neglect them, for we do not treat ourselves that way. Here again the Apostle Paul has given us some practical instructions:

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let everyone of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." Romans 15:1-3.

Again let us ask ourselves a frank question. Have I done anything today to please myself? Have I done anything to please anyone but myself? When we meet a person who is constantly on the alert to do kind, unselfish, helpful things for others, not only for his friends but for all who are in need, we are impressed with the genuineness of his Christianity. He seems never to think about himself. He is following the pattern, for Jesus lived to bless others.

After considering these statements from the Bible, we may realize that if we are to measure up to this standard, it will require a decided change in our lives. And we may be more profoundly impressed, as we study further, to find that all we have studied thus far in this lesson has been Old Testament standards and comes far short of the standard for our day.

In 1 John 2:7 the apostle begins with the statement that he is writing no new commandment, but the old one which we have heard from the beginning. Then he continues: "Again a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." 1 John 2:8.

In the Old Testament times the people were taught about God and His love by means of the sacrifices and offerings which pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah. God recognized their human limitations and did not expect such a full conception of His infinite love until they had seen it demonstrated in the death of His beloved Son on Calvary. "Now," John says, "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."

The world was flooded with divine, unfathomable love, when its Creator willingly went to the cross and laid down His life for poor, lost, degraded sinners. And Jesus gave this new commandment, the second of the Two Commandments, to His people a short time before He returned to heaven: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John 13:34.

Let us consider for a moment the difference between what is called the old commandment and the new commandment which Christ gave His disciples. The first says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The new command which the Saviour gave is, "Love one another, as I have loved you." If you love others as much as you love yourself, will you be loving them as Jesus loves you? In other words, do you love yourself as much as Jesus loves you? You can only love yourself with your weak, human love. Jesus loves you with divine, infinite love. See how He demonstrated His love:

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:6-8.

We are thrilled when we read the account of a heroic sacrifice made by some man for his friend or companion. Nothing seems more sublime than for a man to lay down his life for his friend. Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy." Matthew 5:43. This might be termed the human philosophy of all pagan times. But Jesus brings to His people an entirely new philosophy. His command is, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

When we remember that He laid down His life for His enemies as freely as for His friends, we must acknowledge that it is a new principle of love. He gave His life voluntarily for those who hated Him, cruelly tortured Him, and crucified Him. *Why?* Because He loved them and was bearing their sins so that they might escape eternal death.

Someone may say, "I do not believe it would be possible for me to love my enemies, those who hate me and persecute me." Their conclusion would be correct, for Jesus Himself said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13.

How then is it possible for us to keep His new commandment?

### **God's Wonderful Provision**

The question which naturally comes to us is, How can Jesus command me to love others as He loves me, when He Himself says that "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"? May the Holy Spirit enable us to grasp and appreciate one of the most wonderful and glorious provisions revealed in the great plan of salvation. We find it in the prayer of Jesus to His Father: "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:26.

How marvelous to think that our heavenly Father will take that divine, infinite love, which caused Him to give up His only-begotten Son to die an ignominious death on the cross to save sinners, and pour it into your heart and mine! Then we shall love not only our friends but also our enemies and all mankind with the very love with which God loves His Son. That is what God has planned and promised: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Romans 5:5.

Now we may understand more clearly why John says he is writing a new commandment, "because the darkness is past and the true light now shineth." When that "true light" has shined in our hearts, we understand as we never have before that "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Let us be sure that we have that light.

"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." 1 John 2:9-11.

When, in answer to your earnest prayer, God pours His own love into your heart, you will understand more fully His word, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." Romans 13:8. This is what the Lord Jesus was seeking to reveal when He brought to a climax that wonderful Sermon on the Mount:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:43-45.

One evening at the close of a meeting in which I had lectured on this precious subject of love, a woman came to me with her face radiant with joy. She told me of the great change that God had wrought in her heart that night. Then she told me that about two years before, she and her beloved sister had been walking down the road in that village. The streets were covered with snow and ice. Another woman, driving carelessly down the street, struck her sister, and in a few hours she was dead. The shock was terrible for her. She could not rise above the feeling of hatred and resentment toward the woman who had killed her sister. The woman was at the funeral and came to her with outstretched hand, saying, "I am sorry," but she refused the hand, and said, "That does not give me back my sister."

The experience of those two years had been bitter, for she was lonely without her sister, and she finally realized that her hatred for that woman was robbing her of the peace and joy she had once known. As the beloved disciple said, she was in darkness and knew not where she was going.

But that night God had caused the darkness to pass and the true light to shine in her heart. She said, "Tonight I have seen the situation as it is. I know I can never be saved with that bitter resentment and hatred in my heart, and I would forever be separated from my dear sister. But I have cried earnestly to

the Lord to take that hatred all away and fill me with His own love. Oh, how happy I am to tell you that God has forgiven me! I love that woman. I am going at once to tell her how sorry I am for the way I treated her, and ask her to forgive me. I want her to be saved." Do you not think that was love from the heart of God? Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:35.