

IS LOVE ENOUGH?

By Mike Fortune

1. To pray? (Luke 22:31-34; 1 John 4:10; Hebrews 7:25; Revelation 12:10)
2. Not slay? (Luke 22:35-38; Isaiah 53:12; Luke 10:3-4; Genesis 22:6; Judges 19:29; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 1:1; Exodus 22:2-3; Nehemiah 4:13-14,16-18,23; Hebrews 1:2; Matthew 5:39; Quote; Acts 12:1-2; Romans 13:1,4; Luke 6:27-28; John 17:9,15,17,19; Luke 22:39-46)

Last month, National Public Radio (NPR) asked elementary and high school teachers to give the following prompt to their students: "Love is ... " Students then filled in the blank with a line or, in some cases, a whole poem. More than 2k entries were submitted and our church tech team has compiled an online poll that allows you to vote on a few of our faves in real time, as I speak. So just for fun, if you have a phone or device that gets you online, get it out real quick and type in the link on the screen and vote for your fave student response to the prompt love is. Will you do that for me? This will be fun you'll see. And in a few minutes I'll circle back to share the results. Do we have any phones in here today? Let's see them. Everybody got the Bible and Sabbath School apps downloaded on them already? I hope so. I do. But while you're voting, let me tell you about Donald and Arleen Edward.

Their love story started 61-years-ago. "Valentine's Day I proposed to her...I asked her if she would marry me and she said yes and that was extra special," said Donald. Years later, when Arleen moved into Elizabeth Church Manor nursing home in the Town of Dickinson, New York 9-years-ago, Donald wasn't able to see her every day. He was living with family in the area because his health was declining too, and couldn't care for her anymore. But three months ago, he moved in right next door. "[Now] I can come over and they'd push me and we have lunch together and to us that's a lot," said Donald.

Their story might seem picture perfect, but the journey hasn't been. "She [Arleen] was paralyzed. Fell off a roof," Donald explained. "When she fell, I mean I was there with her all of the time." And through it all Donald stayed by her side. "I was surrounded by love and prayers from our family, our children, and especially you [Donald]," said Arleen. Now, Arleen is helping Donald. "Sometimes she reminds me of things that I have forgotten," he said. Donald was diagnosed with Dementia. "It's awful hard. Awful hard. I can't remember," said Donald. But their love, is so much more than just the memories. Donald explained, "It's doing something for each other that we don't think about it"

(<https://wbng.com/news/local-news/2019/02/14/true-love-story-valentines-romance-stands-test-of-time/>)

You should Google these guys. They're so cute. And that last line would be a good response for the poll question too don't you think? Love is more than memories. It is doing things for each other. So now, let's circle back and at begin with the options. There are actual responses remember, from students across the country:

(https://www.npr.org/2019/02/14/694635029/love-is-_____-more-than-2-000-entries-filled-in-the-blank)

Love is...

- something that 1st graders say "ewwww" to
- something 2nd graders say "hmmmmm" to
- something 3rd graders can't stop talking to each other about
- the smell of fresh daisies and laundry sheets
- when your dog doesn't bite you
- A make-belief connection
- A journey not undertaken lightly
- A reward not gained easily
- A day full of hugs
- A safe place to stay, to be
- God. Because God is love

That last one, I confess, I added. Love is...God, because God is love. NPR didn't publish that one. But I bet if they had, they would have gotten more people choosing it! Which got the most votes? In our passage today, we'll come across some verses that illustrate God's love. Let's take a closer look beginning in Luke 22 verses 31-34.

Luke 22:31-34

31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. 32 But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers." 33 Peter said, "Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you." 34 But Jesus said, "Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me."

We saw recently that Satan had already entered Judas (Luke 22:3). And now he was coming for Simon Peter. Just like he had come for Job (1:12; 2:6). Amos 9:9 has a similar sifting analogy only in that one, God is doing the sifting. Check this out: "9 For I will give the command and will shake Israel along with the other nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, yet not one true kernel will be lost." Yes, there has always been a spiritual battle behind the scenes. Whether you, like Peter, realize it or not. And Amos 9:10 adds an interesting twist in verse 10 which says, "Those sinners who don't depend on God, will die by the sword." Revelation 13:10 says the same thing quoting that verse. But not one person in Israel or any other nation that depends on God and loves God, not one true kernel will be lost. Yes, God's love is a safe place to stay and be! 1 John 4:10 describes it this way:

1 John 4:10

10 This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

It's because of God's love that we are safe. Love is God because God is love. You wanna know what real love is? Look to the cross. It's spread out there from east to west. For every tribe, nation, language, and people to understand. Where even on the cross, Jesus was interceding for sinners. He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for what? They know not what they do." And then he died. And rose. And ever lives to intercede for us. Hebrews 7:25 proclaims

Hebrews 7:25

25 Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

Jesus doesn't just intercede for Judas and Peter and the crowd crucifying him, He is pleading for you right now. In heaven. As our heavenly high priest. And it's a good thing too because we still makes mistakes and fall short and because Satan is still accusing you. But Satan can accuse us all he wants and it doesn't matter because

Revelation 12:10

10 Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, It has come at last—salvation and power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth—the one who accuses them before our God day and night.

1 John 2:1-2 adds, "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. 2 He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world."

Good news! There is a voice in heaven shouting louder than Satan's accusations, all across the heavens, about Christ's authority and salvation and the Kingdom of our God. Is love enough to pray? It is for Jesus. Take some time this afternoon to journal or draw what that looks like to you.

Can you see Jesus loving you so much that there is shouting about you in heaven louder than Satan's accusations? I wish that was on a Hallmark card. I'd definitely buy that. Point number one: Is love enough motivation to pray? It is for Jesus. Shouldn't it also be enough for us?

Jesus says in verse 32, "I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail." But Jesus knew it would. Because the rest of verse 32 says, "So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers."

Make no mistake my Catholic friends. Jesus is the rock and Peter's declaration about Jesus in Matthew 16:18 is what Jesus was referring to when He said, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." Long before Pope Leo I implied otherwise in 445 AD, the early church fathers like Augustine, Chrysostom, and Eusebius agreed (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Volume 5 p.431) that statement about Jesus being the foundation was rock solid and faithful and true unlike the pebble who gave it which is where Peter's name derives (from the Greek word petros; or small stone).

In Luke 22:33, the pebble boasts, "33 Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you." 34 But Jesus said, "Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me." As we shall see in Luke 22:56, he did. But for today, continuing on in verses 35-38, Jesus asked the disciples

Luke 22:35-38

35 Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you out to preach the Good News and you did not have money, a traveler's bag, or an extra pair of sandals, did you need anything?" "No," they replied. 36 "But now," he said, "take your money and a traveler's bag. And if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one! 37 For the time has come for this prophecy about me to be fulfilled: 'He was counted among the rebels.' Yes, everything written

about me by the prophets will come true.” 38 “Look, Lord,” they replied, “we have two swords among us.” “That’s enough,” he said.

People misunderstand the meaning of this verse because they miss the prophecy it fulfills. And the change in circumstances that precede it. First the prophecy. One of the most famous in all of Scripture found in Isaiah 53:12. Which says:

Isaiah 53:12

12 And He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

That’s the prophecy Jesus is referring to in verse 37 when He says “For the time has come for this prophecy about me to be fulfilled: ‘He was counted among the rebels.’” And just to make sure we don’t miss the prophetic rationale for the two swords, He repeats the connection saying, “Yes, everything written about me by the prophets will come true.” Rightly understood, Jesus is promoting prophecy not the purchase of literal swords.

As we shall see next time, the context clearly rules out literal swords. “In short, two swords are not enough to resist arrest, to pull off a revolt of some kind, or to fully protect themselves in the Garden of Gethsemane” (<https://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Arlandson/pacifism2.htm>).

Jesus was figuratively referring to the very hostile world that now existed. When most men in their worldly wisdom would call for a sword. But if Jesus wanted his disciples to defend themselves with lethal force, why does he reprimand Peter for doing so? And why in the entire account of the book of Acts of the Apostles is there no record of any apostle using or carrying one from this point forward? Instead, why did all the faithful apostles (except John who died of old age) die as martyrs?

Therefore, the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Volume 5 p.869 concludes, “In view of Christ’s own teachings and of the NT record of apostolic methods of advancing the gospel, we conclude that Christ here speaks figuratively, warning the disciples of the persecution they and their converts were to suffer, not of the literal use of weapons of any kind.”

The disciples initially misunderstood the prophetic fulfillment of Jesus’ words. And the circumstances preceding them. Remember, previously in Luke 10:3-4 Jesus said:

Luke 10:3-4

3 Now go, and remember that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. 4 Don’t take any money with you, nor a traveler’s bag, nor an extra pair of sandals. And don’t stop to greet anyone on the road.

But now, as He nears the end of his ministry, the circumstances have changed. Can you hear the comparison change Jesus is making in verse 35?

35 “When I [first] sent you out to preach the Good News and you did not have money, a traveler’s bag, or an extra pair of sandals, did you need anything?” “No,” they replied. 36 “But now,” he said, “take your money and a traveler’s bag. And if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one!”

And that’s where people stop reading. Ignoring the prophetic fulfillment Jesus applies next. And many of Jesus’ future disciples would as well. In his notorious papal bull Unam Sanctum of 1302, Pope Boniface VIII added to the confusion by building on this text his doctrine that the pope has the right to exercise secular as well as spiritual autocratic rule over mankind – the two swords, he said, are the spiritual sword and the secular sword (Geldenhuys).

And likewise, many Christians today use Luke 22:36 to substantiate their claims that Jesus expected them to have swords and anticipated a time when those without swords would need to acquire them to use in self-defense. They say, among eleven disciples, they had two swords so almost a 1:5 ratio. And that Jesus knew and approved of this (see Tom Hughes' "The Biblical View of Self-Defense"). But isn't there a difference between knowing and approving?

Yes, Jesus knew they carried small knives. Probably every fisherman did. But based on the teachings of Jesus, do you really think Jesus approved of using them to fillet anything but a fish? Additionally, did you know the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, used the same word for sword in this verse as "knife" in Genesis 22:6?

Genesis 22:6

6 So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife [LXX: μάχαιρα].

So a sword didn't necessarily have to be huge. It could be smaller and often was something smaller to sacrifice small animals. Abraham was gonna use his knife to slay his only begotten son Isaac. Which sadly, wasn't rare in ancient times. Child sacrifice was a thing. As was violent gang rape as described in probably the most sordid story recorded in Scripture found in Judges 19. They may put it on the screen but I'm not gonna read it out loud it's too graphic. But the same word for knife can be found there.

Judges 19:29

29 When he got home, he took a knife [LXX: μάχαιρα] and cut his concubine's body into twelve pieces. Then he sent one piece to each tribe throughout all the territory of Israel.

But moving on, knives or swords need not be literal. Which is a third reason many people misunderstand Jesus' words. Scripture sometimes uses sword literally and sometimes figuratively. Hebrews 4:12 is a good example of the latter.

Hebrews 4:12

12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword [Gr: μάχαιρα], cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

Do you see how in the Greek, it's the same word in all these verses we've been looking at? Sometimes it's translated knife. Sometimes sword. Sometimes it's prophetic fulfillment. Sometimes it's circumstantial. Sometimes it's literal. Sometimes it's figurative. Context, the words of Jesus Himself, or how other inspired Bible writers apply them help us decide. Ephesians 6:17 is another example of figurative.

Ephesians 6:17

17 Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword [Gr: μάχαιρα] of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

But sometimes, Christians want to ignore the context, application of Jesus or other Bible writers to support their own convictions to slay not pray. And they can turn to a myriad of verses in the Old Testament to warrant their use of weapons. Since Hebrews 1:1 says,

Hebrews 1:1

1 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets.

And since the prophets like Moses said it was okay to own and use weapons in the Old Testament, they say it is okay in the New. Exodus 22:2-3 is an interesting example.

Exodus 22:2-3

2 If a thief is caught in the act of breaking into a house and is struck and killed in the process, the person who killed the thief is not guilty of murder.

3 But if it happens in daylight, the one who killed the thief is guilty of murder.

In this example, the Bible describes a burglary and some scenarios. Notice, it doesn't say the home owner does nothing. Even then, non-lethal violence does not mean non-action. It says in the process if the thief is struck by something (maybe a baseball bat or frying pan or rubber bullets who knows), the person who killed the thief is not guilty of murder. Or God would have been wildly inconsistent. But the 6th commandment forbids murder not killing. And sadly, there have been and remain "just" wars as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, whose criteria remain the basis of Just War Theory, is still used today.

But if a burglary occurred in daylight as described in Exodus 22:2-3 and the thief is killed by being struck with something, in God's view you are still guilty of murder. Because you apparently could have seen enough in broad daylight to choose a non-lethal response in self-defense. Even after the state of Ohio passed, as they did in November 2018, the "stand your ground" bill that eliminates any "duty to retreat" before using lethal force in self-defense of your home, this verse in Exodus 22:3-4 says you would still be guilty of murder if the burglar was shot and killed in daylight (<https://www.cleveland.com/politics/2018/11/ohio-house-passes-stand-your-ground-legislation-prepares-to-approve-heartbeat-bill.html>).

Another passage some Christians quote is Nehemiah 4:13-14 and following. Here, the theocracy led by God and his prophet Nehemiah have been charged with re-building the walls of Jerusalem. And they were

encountering significant opposition from their enemies. So what does Nehemiah do?

Nehemiah 4:13-14,16-18,23

13 So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. I stationed the people to stand guard by families, armed with swords, spears, and bows.

Maybe (as Tom Hughes' suggests in previously cited source) if it was written today they would be carrying handguns, shotguns, and rifles. But these were not trained soldiers or law enforcement officers. They were residents and settlers—citizens, not professional soldiers or law enforcement agents. Nehemiah 4:14 says

14 Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, "Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!" 16 But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The leaders stationed themselves behind the people of Judah 17 who were building the wall. The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. 18 All the builders had a sword belted to their side. 23 During this time...we carried our weapons with us at all times, even when we went for water.

Which sounds an awful lot like concealed carry today. So there are many verses, especially in the Old Testament, that Christians can turn to warrant their carrying and use of weapons in self-defense. But do we live in a theocracy today? Aren't we citizens of two kingdoms? And if so, shouldn't are citizenship in heaven be more significant to us than our citizenship on earth? Ephesians 2:19 says it this way: "19 So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's

holy people. You are members of God's family. 20 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself."

Regardless of what the laws of the state of Ohio allow, shouldn't we be most concerned with what Jesus says and does? Aren't appealing to Old Testament verses about violence in a theocracy a little bit like comparing apples with oranges? The Old Testament says the Levite in Judges 19 had a concubine. Should Christians have more than one wife today too? The Protestant Reformers emphasized one of the most important hermeneutical principles (*Solus Christus*) being ignored today: That Scripture must be interpreted through the life and teachings of Jesus not the other way around. Hebrews 1:2 says it this way:

Hebrews 1:2

2 And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son.

And the Son said in Matthew 5:39

Matthew 5:39

39 But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.

That's why the Christian missionaries Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, and Roger Youderian chose not to defend themselves with guns in 1956 when they landed their plane on the shores of the Curaray River in Ecuador and were subsequently speared to death by indigenous tribesmen. End of the Spear is a violent but true 2005 Jesus movie from my recommended list that describes their heroic efforts to reach a previously unreached people group with the gospel of Jesus Christ. So if you and your teens haven't seen that yet, you should. And talk about it. And ask yourself: Is love enough to pray not slay?

In the movie, one of the most poignant scenes includes the following dialogue between the missionary Nate Saint before his plane departed and his young son, at the time, Steve Saint who was worried about his dad. Young Steve Saint asks his dad: If the [WAH-DONNY] Waodani attack, will you defend yourself? Will you use your guns? His dad, Nate Saint, replies:

End of the Spear (2005)

Steve Saint: If the Waodani attack, will you defend yourself? Will you use your guns?

Nate Saint: Son, we can't shoot the Waodani. They're not ready for heaven...we are.

Shane Claiborne in his book "The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical" is right. Redemptive violence is a myth. Martin Luther King in his writings "Strength to Love" is right. He said, "The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Gandhi, who wasn't even Christian, is right.

And spoiler alert, Nate Saint is right. So at the end of the End of the Spear movie, make sure to watch the heartwarming outtakes following the final credits featuring the fully grown son of Nate Saint touring America with the man who killed his father. Steve Saint actually moved to Ecuador and lived there with the same tribe for years before returning to the United States. Today, Steve lives in Ocala, Florida. And Mincaye, his father's killer is 84

years old now, but previously visited and toured with Steve at numerous Christian conferences in the United States. Is love enough to pray not slay? It was for Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, and his son Steve Saint.

But what about our other citizenship? Aren't we also simultaneously citizens of earth? Doesn't the New Testament say the government (not the papacy; why we disagree with Pope Boniface VIII and his "two swords") and the military and police have the right to rule even with the sword? Yes, it does. Sometimes they get it right. And sometimes, like Peter, they get it wrong. Like in Acts 12:1-2 which says

Acts 12:1-2

1 About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. 2 He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword [Gr: μάχαιρα].

Did you notice the state uses the same word for sword found in Luke 22? And before Jesus returns, Revelation 13:15 says the state will use the power of the sword to kill anyone who will not worship the image of the beast. Sadly, there have been many martyrs and will be many more. America hasn't always been and according to prophecy, will not remain land of the free and home of the brave. Accused witches in Salem. Native Americans at Wounded Knee. Mormons on their way to Salt Lake. Black Americans during the Civil War. Catholics in Virginia, Protestants in Maryland, and most recently Japanese Americans can all attest to that.

But as startling and sobering as it is to say, what the Rwandan Adventist Christians who lived through the 1994 genocide taught us when they told us their story and taught us to conga dance in our fellowship hall years ago is: The worst thing that can happen to your loved ones is not dying. The worst thing that could happen to them is not living. For Jesus and those He died to save.

As startling as it sounds to some, our job is not to defend ourselves. Or even those we love with deadly force. Our job is to proclaim way, the truth, and the life. And if you know Him, you're ready for heaven. But the thief may not. Or they wouldn't be doing illegal, immoral, and unChristlike things. And even when the state gets it wrong, and persecutes Christians or any of its citizens, Romans 13:1,4 still states

Romans 13:1,4 (NKJV)

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword [Gr: μάχαιρα] in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Even if you or your loved ones are betrayed? Or attacked? Or God forbid are wrongfully imprisoned or murdered in front of you? Yes, even then. Jesus knows this is hard to hear. And challenging to accept. But still He says it in Luke 6:27-28

Luke 6:27-28

27 But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. 28 Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote: "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." But as professed Christian citizens of both heaven and earth, shouldn't we still try? Aren't we all individually accountable to God? Don't we all get to ask and answer this question: Is love enough to pray not slay?

I cannot choose for you and you cannot choose for your children. But know this, whatever you decide, Jesus will be praying for you. We know this is true because John 17 says

John 17:9,15,17,19 (Scripture Reading)

9 My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. 15 I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. 17 Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. 19 And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

Luke 22:39-46 concludes.

Luke 22:39-46

39 Then, accompanied by the disciples, Jesus left the upstairs room and went as usual to the Mount of Olives. 40 There he told them, "Pray that you will not give in to temptation." 41 He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." 43 Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. 44 He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. 45 At last he stood up again and returned to the disciples, only to find them asleep, exhausted from grief. 46 "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation."

May the Lord add a blessing to hearing of His word.