



## “A Different Kind of Love”

### Part 1: “God’s Love for Man”

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
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#### **1 John 4:7-21** *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of*

*God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*

Back in 1967, the Beatles sang “All we need is love...” and then they broke up. It was the flower power age when “love” was on the lips of a generation. It was a decade of extremes, of transformational change and bizarre contrasts: flower children and assassins, idealism and alienation, rebellion and backlash. For many in the massive post-World War II baby boom generation, it was both the best of times and the worst of times. Espousing love, it was a generation of sexual promiscuity and the venereal diseases and divorces that followed. Experimentation, exploration, and the eventual drug abuse. Addictions began its steady climb to where they stand today. And it seems that somewhere in the dust of those years, the definition of love was lost in revolution, narcissism, and emotional sensualism. It was the first “Me-Generation.”

It seems that everyone innately wants to be loved and most people want to love others in return. Yet do we really know anymore what love even is? For it’s as if the instructional manual has somehow been lost in the pages of time, and now we would be hardpressed to find two people who would agree on the definition, let alone how to actually live it out.

However, the Bible speaks much about love, and what it is. Of course, the world has a very different and fluid definition and how such is to be manifested. Although both versions have a strong sense of concern, a focus on meeting needs, and a desire for well-being and fulfillment, the *priority* focus is very different. In the world's interpretation of love, the *self* is the recipient of all these things, the receiver of its attributes, and the litmus test of its quality. With Biblical love, others are the recipients, as we receive and then share the selfless love that God has given us.

Though they share the same label, the differences are stark and obvious. The central contrast between these two models is that the world's definition of love is completely self-centered. We indeed give of ourselves in worldly love, but we do so with the full expectation of reciprocation. We give because of how it makes US feel and what we get in return, not how the receiver benefits from our sacrifice. In fact, the world's view is essentially void of any hint at "sacrifice." If it doesn't feel good, we're not in love!

The world tells us that we have found love when we find someone who makes us feel special, makes our days brighter, meets our needs, and realizes how special we are. But the Bible tells us that true love, revealed in Jesus Christ, finds its power in God and is expressed in our care for others. This is true in every arena that love touches. It is true in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is true in our families and homes. It is especially true with our spouses.

The version that the world is peddling these days is wholly determined by **conditions**.

*I love you as long as you love me.*

*I love you as long as you stay with me.*

*I love you as long as you accept me.*

*I love you as long as you're good to me.*

Once these conditions are no longer met, or even falter in any way, our love becomes precarious and fleeting. It can come and go...ebb and flow. It can dissipate. We can "fall out of love."

John 3:16 says that God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten son.

This He did for a world that did not know him completely, a world that did not accept him. A world that most definitely did not love Him. Yet God gave without any promise of reciprocation. He loved while we were a shambles and had nothing to offer in response. He even encouraged us to receive from Him without any implied remuneration. Isaiah 55:1 "*Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink — even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk — it's all free!*" He even invited us to come with all of our 'baggage'...all of our 'issues.' Matthew 11:28 says "...*come all those are heavy laden and I will give you rest.*" Don't come when you've improved yourself. Come as tired, hurt, and sinful as you are.

Romans 8:32 says He who did not withhold his only Son, would he not freely give us all things? He who made the ultimate sacrifice of love has no conditions for his love. It is a free flowing well that never runs out.

The difference between the love of God and what we men call "love" is that God's version is unrestricted and unconditional. There is nothing we have done to earn it or merit it. We never will because of how imperfect we are. Yet He still freely loves us. We breath, our hearts beat, we touch, feel, smell, and see. All because of His created love for mankind.

The problem with this subject and how it directly affects us, is that having effectively lost the original recipe the world's version of love has crept into the vacuum of the church, and has supplanted the "agape" love of Christ with a knockoff. The result of this profound ruse has been dramatic to say the least. In fact, it is arguably the greatest cancer the greater church as ever faced because of the far-reaching consequences of getting this issue wrong. If "God is love" and we incorrectly define and understand just what that love is, we no longer know or have any real understanding of the person of Jehovah God, how He works amongst us, and how we are to live out true Christianity. The ramifications of this problem are legion.

So as we must do in all such matters, let us return to the roots...the scriptural description for our baseline. Let us look at a biblical definition of love and see in what ways it is different from its worldly counterpart. Today let us look first at "How God loves us." How his love is exercised toward His creation and in His greater plan.

## 1. God's love is all-encompassing

God does not select only the beautiful people to love, nor does He even select the ones who will love Him in return. He *could* do that you know. I mean, He knows all things, so He knows fully who will reciprocate. But scripture uses careful language to express the magnitude and the specifics of God's manifest love. It says God *so loved the world*. He "agape loves" all of the world's inhabitants. Agape is the perfect love of God that makes up His very person and nature. He loves us so much that He sacrificed His only Son to die for the sins of that world, even for those who would hate, despise, and work against Him for doing just that. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him*" (John 3:16-17 ESV). Notice that God's love is for everyone in the world; yet the effectual result of that sacrifice is received by only those that "believe in Him." (More on that later)

## 2. God's love is sacrificial

"*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). God manifested *his* love for *us* in that while we were still sinners, Christ *died* for us. The magnitude of that fact is still so often lost in a millennial of repetition; "*Jesus died for your sins.*" We have heard it ten thousand times and its impact is thus muted by familiarity. Yet consider that fact for a moment. CT Studd understood, saying "*If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.*"

Has anyone else made such a sacrifice for you in your lifetime? Especially considering that such took place before you were born...before you came to Christ...before you even committed the sins for which He paid. He did this despite that at that point...*and even now*, we lacked any quality, attribute or action which would even begin to illicit such a sacrifice, especially from deity!

"*For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:7-8 ESV). Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, endured the pain of the cross (Hebrews 12:2) because He so loves us. Jesus gave up His place with God in heaven in order to come down to earth, experience humility, shame, suffering, and death, *because He love us* that much... and He did so with no promise of loving Him in return.

## 3. God's love is steadfast and unmovable

The apostle Paul, writing to the Roman Christians, assures us, "*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:38-39 ESV). God's love is sure. And to the degree that we accept and embrace that reality profoundly alters the trajectory of our lives. For we are told that "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*" (1Jo 4:18) For those that receive and embrace this fact, they are the ones who can "live large." They alone can experience life truly with "No Fear." These folks are easily spotted in the crowd. They are the individuals with a tangible peace, passionate zeal, and an unstoppable spirit...

Scripture tells us that God loves us whether we respond to Him or not. His love for us is not based on our reply, but rather on His innate character. Again, the Bible says that God literally *is* love (I John 4:8, 16). That does not mean He is without form, personality, and entity. It means that the manifest of love so embodies His person, that it envelopes His being, His actions, His heart. So therefore, does it not become clear to us that the attributes of true love, real love...*agape love*, are then the very manifest attributes of our Creator?

The world's version of love is fickle. Those who claim they love us are there during the good times, but are conspicuously absent when the going gets rough or when self-interest and fluid emotions lead them away. God will not leave us during the tough times. In fact, it is often in those tough times that one experiences the love of God in its fullness. God will not suddenly become emotionally disenchanted with us. God's promise is, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5 ESV).

#### 4. God's love is personal

In the act of the coming of Christ, God became very personally involved in our life and salvation. Such a precept is not unusual or out of character for God. Really, the entire biblical record shows us that God's character is that He is *personal*. He did not simply lay down a corporate set of rules to follow and then sit down in Heaven to watch us in mass attempt to stumble through the keeping of those rules. On the contrary, the rules God gave were given to reveal to us the fact that we are unable keep enough rules to be holy, to stand in His midst, rather He sent Jesus to do it for us. What makes us holy is a personal relationship with Christ. From Genesis to Revelation the witness of God's Word is that God is a personal God who desires to have a personal relationship with every one of us.

Worldly love is so often impersonal; it will "send you a check" but will seldom offer you a hand, a shoulder, or affords sweat. It will love an *ideal*, but not you personally. Jesus however literally bled for me...

**The secular world** has constructed an idea of love that is moving further and further away from true love that is found only in God. As with so many things, godless people have attempted to construct a false imitation of the reality. One that is cheaper, but still has visual appeal. Yet when it comes to love, humanity's version is but a pale shadow compared to the truth of God's love. The apostle Paul wrote a passage in First Corinthians that contains a concise picture of true love, God's love: "*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*" (I Corinthians 13:4-7 ESV). This is God's love and it is this type of love that God would have us both live out as well as show to others.

But if God loves us all unconditionally, are we then led to believe that He asks for nothing in return? This is where things get sticky, because there are plenty of people who would argue that God does indeed ask for, require, even *demand* reciprocation. The "pound of flesh." The "Great Enforcer." But the confusion lies in the question "reciprocation for what?" Reciprocation for His love? *No*. Reciprocation for his relationship? *Absolutely*. It is God's love that *initiates a relationship* with me. It is my response that solidifies my relationship with *Him*. But He will not, *cannot*, love me more than He did before.

This picture is presented so clearly in the scriptural model of marriage. (Something else that has been "redesigned" for the world's use!) When a couple begins dating, the emotions come into play and eventually plans for marriage emerge. Up unto this point...if the situation is Godly, there is plenty of love in play yet there remains limits in their *relationship*. There is no sex yet, none of the intense intimacy that comes with marriage. They are not living under the same roof, not sharing a breakfast table. They are not sharing a bank account, procreating, or sharing in all the relational aspects of proximity and unity that is developed after marriage. Indeed there may be "love" *before* the wedding, but there are aspects of unity and relationship that comes as a benefit of concrete promises, faithfulness, and commitment.

In our relationship with God, there is love poured out upon all of mankind "before the marriage." Unlike our "dating" example, His love is perfect, unilateral and unconditional. However, there is nothing implied as to *blessing and relationship*. Meaning God loves us perfectly even if we are a pagan rejecter of Christ. But the "marriage stuff" isn't going to happen without the marriage. There is up unto that point, no implied principle of overt care on His part, or blessings or the joy that is experienced by the redeemed. According to scripture he

doesn't even hear your prayers unless it is the prayer of repentance and salvation. This would no doubt be a shock to all of the unredeemed people who suddenly "get some religion" at the hospital bed of a family member and start praying to someone who effectively they don't even know!

**Psalms 66:18** *"If I had harbored sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."*

**Pr 15:29** *"The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous."*

**Isa 1:15** *"When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood."*

In both examples, God love and earthly love, there is grace and other centeredness meted out before our "wedding day." In both the marital earthly one as well as our spiritual one. But the difference is that we can at that point...before the wedding, still walk away with "no strings attached." We can do this in both cases. We are still free. I may still love you when you leave, but the benefits of marriage do not occur. However, after our "commitment" day in both situations, there are benefits of relationship that come into play, as well as promises of and yes *demands* of faithfulness. Once that commitment is made...once the "wedding" has occurred, there is blessings, benefits, as well as responsibility. But effectively there is no "walking away." Scripture says *"...I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."* (John 10:28-29) Those verses apparently includes even *you* in the "no one." Like marital divorce, it is not permitted. I have now been "...enlightened," I have ... *"tasted the heavenly gift, ... become a partaker of the Holy Spirit, ... tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come..."* (Hebrews 6:4-5) I made a **relational** promise and I have received the blessing and pleasures of such. And for that I am now and forever required to 'step up.' To hear and obey. To walk in monogamy, in holiness, to do and be.

Once again however, this is where the world knee-jerks. For we don't want to actually commit to anything these days, unless again it is ourselves. We want to live together and have all of the relational "beni's" without any of the promises, commitments, responsibilities and effort. And the same goes with our dealings with God, and often His bride the church. We want all the benefits of a committed relationship with Christ, without all the actual commitment. We just want all the "stuff." And the roads herein divide in opposite directions. Because that is simply never going to be the case with God.

His love for us is eternal and "max'ed out." He will always redeem us if we come to Him no matter the baggage. He will forever forgive us if we come to Him and ask and repent. He waits even now to "finish" this earth, but because He desires that "all men might be saved," ... He waits a little longer...desiring that you come to Him and be reborn.

To say or even imply that because God loves you, that that means He is "ok with the way that you are," is unscriptural at best and blasphemy at its worst. To take this position is to flagrantly reject the Bible at its core, deny its clear instruction and to imply that God is OK with sin because He "loves you." This is the position that many churches take today, seeking of course to keep their head down and themselves out of the cultural fray. How can I say I love you if I watch you driving 90 miles an hour forward when I know there is a 100 foot cliff up ahead? *When we distort grace and see it as approval instead of undeserved favor, our joy is diminished because we miss the truth that God predestined us for a purpose, to conform us to Christ. We tell ourselves, "God loves me and accepts me just the way I am"—which isn't true at all. God loves us and accepts us not as we are but as Jesus is, and God loves us so much that he refuses to leave us the way he found us.* — Timothy Paul Jones. The truth is, God loves you enough to want you to be like Him. **"Be holy as I am holy."**

**Le 20:7** *"So set yourselves apart to be holy, for I am the LORD your God."*

**1Pe 1:15** *"But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy."*

**1Pe 1:16** *"For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."*