



## “A Different Kind of Love”

### Part 2: “Man’s Love for God”

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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.*

Over the past few weeks we have looked at how God’s love for us is starkly different than the world’s definition of love. We looked at how God’s love is unilateral, unconditional, and innately honest in its dealing with us personally and corporately. It seems that it is all the things that the world’s version is not. This love is “agape” love; God’s perfect fatherly love for His creation.

We followed that with instruction as to how we are to reflect that love back to our Father Creator. How to love God with that same love manifest that He loves us with. What it looks like to truly love God as his child... a bond-slave of the kingdom with its priorities and pursuits. How to love God back with that deep priority agape love with which He loves us. And what Jesus meant when He called us to “... *love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*” (Mt 22:37)

Now today we want to go on to make note of that very passage as it appears in Luke’s gospel, where He added the words of Christ which followed that initial call, and that was that we are also to love ‘*our neighbor as ourselves.*’ For many of us, this is where things start to get uncomfortable. For most of us are generally receptive and thankful for that level of love that God exercises toward us. We are also at least philosophically on board with what is expected of us in our return love toward our God. But when it comes to manifesting that “God love” towards our brethren, *well*, things quickly grow quiet.

Truth be told, this is actually one of the most accepted sins in Christendom. We dodge, excuse, explain, and justify *why* we aren’t obedient in this matter. Yet scripture gives us virtually no wiggle room. Now nobody, not even Christ says this is always an easy task. However, the way scripture in its totality deals with this matter is that if we are truly born again and filled with the presence of the Spirit of God, this **is** an ability that we have.

*You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. - Galatians 5:13–16*

If we are indeed reborn, He is in us and His love for others comes even if it's not easy. In fact, scripture strongly states that if we do not, that we are certainly not filled with the Spirit of God, and quite possibly we are not truly born again at all! Verse 8 of our text says *"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."* What that really says is this: *He who does not 'agape' does not know God, for God is 'agape.'* Hmm...quite a clarifying measurement it seems.

1John 4:20 – 5:1 says *"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? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him."*

Scripture presents a scenario in which loving someone who is not innately lovable or has offended you in some manner is a *choice*. Parents understand this kind of love, for they keep loving their children even when the children don't seem to love them back. Familial love is similar -- but not as steadfast -- as God's love for us. He loves us when we aren't at all lovable and then He commands us to return the favor -- that is, love other people as He loves us, and make *giving*, not *getting*, the goal of our love.

*"Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much!"*  
(Luke 6:32-33)

The way our "loving" generally flies is I will love you as long as you love me. And if that is not sufficiently contrary to God's love to convict us, one must ask the next question: *"what does it mean to love you?"* And from there things really start to unravel. Because the definition of that...the answer to that, can ramble wildly out there. It can mean if you love me you will give me what I want, say what I want to hear, speak words pleasing to my ears, and generally do what pleases me in my flesh. Most often it means you must *support* the things I do and the decisions I make. Let me ask you a clarifying question: *"Does God support every decision you make and everything you do?"* No? But HIS love is agape perfect love and if He doesn't give you that latitude, why must I in order to express love to you?

Sometimes the most perfect expression of love from God or from a brother or sister is to not back your play! Unless you are ready to say that everything you do is absolutely right and expressly perfect! But the reality is, there are untold thousands of individuals who confess Christ that will essentially burn down the village in response to your lack of support for something they are doing or want to do! Now I'm not saying our response to folks should be overt blunt smack-downs or stark, cruel, and insulting "truth-telling." I'm talking about a *loving* truth that is gentle, caring and yet unwavering. But know this: there cannot be true agape love without there being real truth.

Jesus told the rich young ruler that what he needed to do was sell everything he had and give it to the poor. No doubt that guy thought those words were certainly harsh and extreme, for he walked away from Jesus. But Jesus loved this man! And notice that Jesus did not go after him. He let him go. 1 Corinthians 13 says that real love *"...does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful..."*

The standard answer here is "ya, but you don't know what that guy did to me, or said, or insinuated, or *etc etc...*" But God has that covered also! Scripture has some very specific mediation directions for that kind of

thing, none of which is to hate the guy. (And note that the original language means “to detest” in case we want to justify ourselves by saying “well, I don’t *hate* him...!”) Matthew 18 instructs us “*Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*”

But let’s face it. Nobody has this love thing down pat. The fact is, loving others can be extremely difficult at times. We call them “extra grace required” people. But even those we find easy to like can sometimes be difficult to love. The main reason we run into difficulties in loving others is **sin**, both ours and that of those we try to love. Humans are fallen creatures. Apart from God and **His** power, we are selfish, and loving ourselves comes much more naturally than loving others. But agape love is **not** selfish. And once again, we are given no “out” in this practice. John 15:12-13 says “*My **command** is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*”

We generally see love for the most part as an emotional response. The problem is that we cannot always control our emotions. However, as spirit-filled believers we can certainly control how we respond in action to those emotions. This is Spirit-filled and mature. Loving others is a matter of the will and the volition, not the emotions.

The essence of *agape* love is sacrifice. God’s love for us is a *sacrificial love*, the kind that took Him to the cross for our sins. Thankfully, He didn’t choose to save us based on whether we were lovable. He saved us because His love caused Him to sacrifice Himself for us. Do we love others enough to sacrifice for them, even when they are not worldly lovable? Do we love **God** enough to sacrifice for others even when they are not lovable? The fact is, *as Christians*, we often love with no real motivation other than our love of God and our subsequent desire to be obedient to the one that so perfectly loves us first.

Christ died for us when we were at our worst, in the midst of our sin, when we were totally unlovable (Romans 5:8; John 15:13). When we make sacrifices in order to love someone, we get a view of the magnitude of God’s love for us. When we love *despite the situation*, we reflect Him and His true character to the world. When we show spite, bitterness and anger instead, we misrepresent Christ, and can inadvertently therefore support the lost in their sin by backing their play against what God says. Again let us read the words of Jesus to His disciples, “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*” (John 13:34–35). Notice He didn’t say, “*Feel* loving toward one another.” He said, “**Love** one another.” He commanded an **action**, not a **feeling**.

In Mark 10:29-37, Jesus showed us what he meant by telling a story about a Samaritan man who helped an injured Jewish man. Read the story. When you do, you will see that loving your neighbor doesn’t mean feeling sorry for them but rather seeking the best for them in action and honesty.

With all this being said, we must note that often we will try to adhere to His call to love others by trying to do it under our own strength and efforts, feigning feelings of love where none exist. This of course is merely hypocrisy and “play acting” when our hearts are in reality cold toward another. We need to know that we cannot truly “agape love” apart from God. It is only when we are **of** Jesus, we remain **in** Jesus, and the Holy Spirit **remains in us**, that we are able to love even when our flesh wants to do contrary.

This, by the way, says I am indeed filled with the Spirit of God, because loving the unlovable is a sole attribute of our God and thus a clear attribute of Him in us through His Holy Spirit. We are told that God is love and that our love for one another is both enabled by God and a response to His love in us (1 John 4:7–12). Thus it is clear that when we fail to love...when we harbor bitterness, anger, and animosity toward another, we are thus saying that we are *not* of Christ, are **not** connected to Him, and the Holy Spirit is **not** dwelling in us.

*“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”— Proverbs 4:23*

One of the greatest “slippery slopes” to hatred and personal anger is bitterness.

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. - Ephesians 4:31-32 (NLT)*

Bitterness is innately focused on what has been done to **you**. So to overcome such personal bitterness, you must legitimately be willing to look at what **your** actions have done to **others**. You must be willing to be controlled by God and **act** instead of controlled by emotions and feelings. This will require humility, an open heart and open ears. Did I mention humility? Because you will need a lot of that! Pride after all, is behind every sin we commit, and it is deadly in its destruction of us and our world. You must be willing to get the log out of your own eye prior to examining your neighbor’s eye.

If we are to love others as God loves us, we must be prepared to take personal and concrete action to correct hatred, anger, and bitterness within us. Often we take a deep breath and verbally apologize, but we then do nothing to functionally correct the situation. Once we have ‘burned the village down,’ an apology does little to correct the situation. It becomes merely a balm to smooth over the wounds, usually *our wounds*, and has all the appearance of a wholly selfish move, not the other-centered action that is called for. It doesn’t heal, and it doesn’t correct. So in order to love as God loves, we often need to move to correct the situation on a greater scale than merely apologizing. Jesus didn’t come to *apologize* for our sin. He came to **fix it**, and He did so at great personal and physical expense.

*“Love must be **sincere**. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another.”— Romans 12:9-16*

I would think then that if I was looking for a righteous community to be a part of, this would be a critical trait I would seek. Because a lot of other things can be found wanting, but not this one. It is the ultimate proof that God is in their midst. And ironically, it is the also the one thing that will rule out such a fellowship for many, because again, if it is of God, it is not emotionally motivated nor "me-centered" so in our selfish want we keep 'shopping' until we find a church that “delivers.”

*“You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you. And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity.”— Colossians 3:12-14*

*“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”— Ephesians 4:2*

*“Do everything in love.” - 1 Corinthians 16:14*

We know that the thrust of Scripture is vertical, meaning it primarily deals with the relationship between God and man. Often, however, God clarifies the vertical via the horizontal, using horizontal imperatives—“Do this”—as a test for the presence of vertical realities. So it is with love. Just as God’s love for us in Christ was sacrificial, so should our love be for each other: *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* (John 13:35).