

"What is Love?" 1 John 4:7-21

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(7) 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

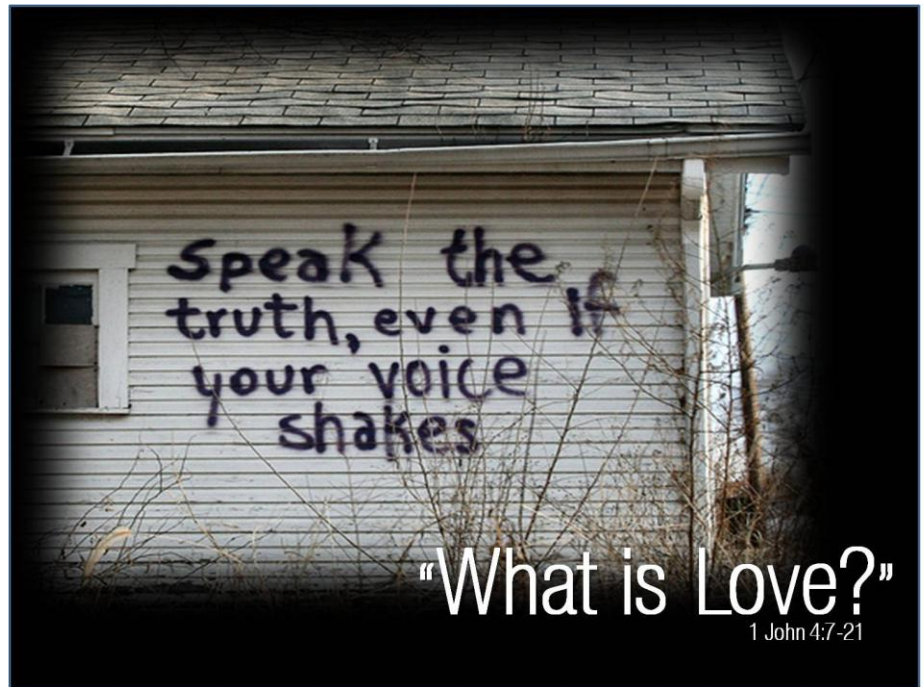
time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. (13) By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. (14) And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. (15) Whoever confesses that 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.

The apostle John has been pounding home the principle of love throughout this letter. Serving as his definitive "line in the sand," loving God and loving the brethren would go on to encompass John's legacy as well as the framing our very understanding of Christianity lived out.

As John begins again to 'revisit' this issue in this letter, we really need to 'push pause' and ask a couple of clarifying questions. Because frankly, if we really grasped what this letter is saying, one would literally expect some seismic activity within the greater church today. In truth, we can tend to personally, and frankly *quietly*, discount John's letter and his message, or, *as often is the case in Christianity*, we don't receive it as speaking to us personally. And then there is a third possibility, in that maybe we just don't know what love really is. But few of us are willing to even consider that possibility let alone admit it as factual. But hey, humor me, and let's look into the matter! **So, what IS John meaning when he says 'love?'**

Eros Love

The Bible uses several words and presents several ideals that in English invariably are interpreted as 'love.' One is **Eros Love**. Eros is a Greek term which actually means 'desire and longing,' and appears in Greek mythology as the Greek god of love. Eros is often referred to as erotic love, or sexual love and such is therefore commonly based on people's physical traits and on emotional passions and let's admit it, often *shallow connections*.



The truth is, unless 'Eros' is redeemed by the Lord's presence, we tend to find that it has no real long term redeemable aspects because such ends up being possessive and selfish, with a goal of conquering and controlling another for one's personal pleasure and experience. That's why we hear the phrase used so often; "*we fell out of love.*" Eros is a love you *fall* into and therefore *fall* out of, certainly not *walk* into with clear direction and purpose!

All the traits of eros are selfish. Eros is always in a hurry. Eros *needs* no counsel and *takes* no counsel, because it is about only me! And I think I know me! Marriages that are founded upon eros will either one day end *apart*, or one day end *together*. But **end** they do, even if we continue to share the same house. They end when I no longer get, feel, enjoy, or receive what I think I ought to get, feel, enjoy and receive. Eros relationships are built on the "me-aspect", not the Father-style other-centered aspects that we are called to in a faith based marriage.

Those marriages are VERY concerned, in fact PRIMARILY concerned with preparing, learning, and providing the God ordained rolls of other-centeredness so prescribed in scripture; *to fulfill the crucial call to bless the other*. Because in Eros, we think as long as I get sex and give sex I will be happy and fulfilled and I'm sorry but you are going to be terribly disappointed, not to mention a very poor witness to the world who is watching you to see if you do things differently than they do.

Now God indeed created physical attraction between a man and a woman, but He never intended for it to be selfish. He created the desire and longing which makes up sexual love and is crucial in any marriage. This kind of love was meant to be preserved between a couple and it is essential for any healthy marriage. And while we seek the high road on sexual purity as believers, the fact is that unless there is the higher innate attributes of faithful God-centered marriage when participating on any level with Eros, then Eros itself is less satisfying and more apt to eventually ring empty. Because without such being centered on the aspects that God brings to relationship, then inevitably it is based on *self* centered *self*-benefit.

Phileo Love

This is the unique kind of love that you have for a friend. It encompasses the loving of one another like you would your brother or sister. This is not speaking of an acquaintance relationship or interaction, but rather something that is between two people who are really close and dear to each other. It encompasses their shared experiences, and practically speaking tends to be the kind of love that many church people practice towards one another. Although phileo love can be great in a relational dynamic, it is truthfully also so often unreliable. For Phileo rarely encompasses other aspects like loyalty, faithfulness, endurance, and consistency, traits that do not come naturally to us. We have all experienced at some point in our lives how this kind of 'love' can end up souring at times, because it too is so often based on emotions and self like eros is. For the vast majority of the population and even that of Christendom, these two 'types of love' will be the only ones they will ever know or experience.

This is, on some level, why those outside the church just don't 'get' Christians, and why those even within the physical parameters of the church that are not saved can so easily 'flip' and depart and will even throw those under the bus that they once expressed great affection for. They know no other love, thus they are incapable of expressing any other love.

Agape Love

This is John's point when he says again in this chapter that (verse 7-8) "...everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, (but) He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." Because this love that John speaks of in that passage is '*agape love*,' and it is the third love spoken of in scripture. Agape love is a special term which represents the divine-love between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, between truly redeemed people and toward all *other* people. It is the love that God commanded all those who claim redemption to have for everyone else whether the 'everyone else' is a believer or not.

Agape love is not determined by feelings, but is more of a set of behaviors or actions. It is an *action love*, as much as is all of Christianity, when honestly embraced, is an *action lifestyle*. Those outside of true redemption, know only Eros and Phileo with all their shortcomings, and just like in those versions of love, their faith too is controlled, determined, and manifested by **emotion**. Fickle, erratic, nebulous, fluid, and *selfish* emotions.

With agape, you do not have to actually *feel it* for you to *give it*, thus it supersedes all specifically human interaction which invariably encompasses those emotions I mentioned and therefore only *responds*. Agape *moves first* and frankly often *moves independently* of anyone else or any other feedback, thus it continues faithful no matter what response to it is given. Outside of the realm of Christ however, how we feel tends to determine how we act toward one another. But not with agape love, and therefore not with true Christianity. Because according to John, without this love you do not know Jesus and are not one of God's kids. And if you really do know God, you know this love. It is the essential manifest of our God and when that God lives in us through the indwelling Holy Spirit, then the attributes of our God begin to become *our* attributes. Agape love and true Christianity are mutually determining, and their absence...either one, mutually invalidates. They are inexplicably and undeniably connected.

So while we are quick to say "Why yes! I love people!", please note that the way it reads is "*He who does not agape does not know God, for God is agape...*" Well, what *is* this special love? What are the 'ingredients' of this '**agape love?**' 1 Corinthians 13, famously given the title of the 'love chapter,' says the following:

Agape is patient and kind. Agape is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. Agape does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Agape never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (1 Cor 13:4-7NLT)

Agape love is the love of God expressed through the lives of those who possess Him. So what does it look like when expressed by God? If this is the essential manifest of our Creator in our daily lives, what does it look like when He expresses it? In that chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that "*Agape does not rejoice about injustice, but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.*" (1 Corinthians 13:6). Thus we can take from this teaching that Agape love is inerrantly possessing the *truth*, no matter the emotional response to such. Sometimes such feels good and sometimes it really doesn't. But our response to such changes nothing.

Now I'm not talking about 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 there cannot be true agape love without there being real truth. Such seems to be a positive thing and innately a 'no-brainer.' And yet, as Al Pacino said, "*The truth? You can't handle the truth!*" Indeed! So often, *we can't*. This is one of the main reasons why agape is so often not palatable for many. Thus Fleetwood Mac sang those lyrics into history, "*tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies.*"

God's agape love...again His very characteristic and attributes, encompass great patience but not limitless patience. Eventually and inevitably His agape takes on some discipline. Hebrews 12 reminds us that "... *our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening — it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.*" (Heb 12:10-11) Elsewhere we are told "*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.*" (Proverbs 12:1 ESV), "*Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.*" (Proverbs 13:24 ESV), and "*My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*" (Proverbs 3:11-12 ESV) Thus we can acknowledge that this God love...this 'agape,' at some point will incorporate this aspect of discipline. Which is yet another reason I think for us to reject this kind of love as we tend to immediately and universally reject any and all discipline.

Hebrews 10:23-25, (literal translation), says "*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider one another how to stir up to love and good deeds, . . . encouraging one another.*" The aim of our "considering one another" and "encouraging one another" is that we stir up love. When we mix our "confession of our hope" with insight into "each other," we then "stir each other to love." Our Christian interaction must possess an active pursuit to "stir" each other in this manner, all with an aim to love and to encourage love in others.

Nothing about this kind of loving is easy and often it is anything but pleasant to the flesh. Verse 7 says that "*everyone who 'agapes' is born of God and knows God.*" So when agape is expressed, one can be sure God is present, because we cannot manifest this trait and practice without God being in the middle of it. This love does not come natural in us. Thus, if we are children of God, we got it and practice it, and if we got it and practice it, we have God.

I would think then that if I was looking for a righteous community to be a part of, this would be the singular 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, it is not emotionally motivated nor "me-centered" so we keep 'shopping' until we find a church that delivers.

Verses 16-17 tells speaks to us that are His children saying "*...we have known (experienced) and believed (lived out) the love that God has for us. God is (agape)love, and he who abides in (agape) love abides in God, and God in him. (Agape) Love has been perfected among us in this (for this reason): that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.*"

As He is, so are we in this world. Are we?

Verses 20-21 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."