



The "Agape" of God

A SUMMER SERIES ON THE EPISTLE OF 1 JOHN

1 John 4:7-16 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 John 15:9-17

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In the New Testament, the loftiest word for love is called *agape* (ἀγάπη). It is the Greek word that describes *God's love* for us in Christ; at its core is the idea of sacrifice; *giving up* for someone else.

In the Greek language there are several different words for **love**, each highlighting a different kind of love. For instance, there is a specific word for the *friendship kind of love*¹. There is another word for the *love of family* that exists between parents and their children. There is another word for *romantic love*². And there is yet another Greek word for *passion*³. All of these words describe various aspects of love; and the common thread between them is that it's subjective; they all define love from your own point of view; from a self-viewpoint where you get something back from the other person.

The New Testament Greek word *Agape* is a different kind of love because it is **OBJECTIVE**; it's other-centered, not self-centered. It is concerned about giving and not receiving; its focus is on the other person and it makes sacrifices for them⁴. This is how *God's love for us* is described; and when it's used to describe our love, it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and a work of Christ in your life.

¹ This word is PHILEO and it has the idea of cherishing and valuing others in friendship. You see it in English, for instance, in the name "Philadelphia" --> literally "love of brothers".

² This word is EROS and has sexual connotations. This word is not used in the New Testament, but its idea is one of the themes of the OT book "Song of Solomon."

³ This word is often times used in the negative in Scripture for sinful passions, lusts, and coveting.

⁴ Agape love is objective love that loves no matter what it gets back. It shows patience and kindness to all people, even enemies. This kind of love is a choice of your will, not of your feelings.

The Apostle John uses this word frequently in his writings. Here is an example:

By this the love of God was revealed among us: that God the Father sent His Only Begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. 1 John 4:9

This is the love of God, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10

All of these words for love are the Greek word *Agape*; and they are teaching us that God's love is active and busy. God's love for you is always seen in His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the ultimate sign of God's love to the entire world and to you personally. No matter how you think about God, His love and His work in your life, it will always lead you to His Son Jesus Christ: *every time and in every way*. God's love for you comes through His Son Jesus.

In these verses, God the Father has sent His Son into the world. This sending reminds us that we need a Savior; that we needed someone to rescue us; someone outside of us; someone to do the work of salvation that we were unable to do. Your sin separates you from God; and leaves you spiritually dead. Without God's help, you have no hope of surviving death nor escaping the final judgment.

So God in His *agape* love sends His only begotten Son into the world to (1) live a perfect and holy life for you, (2) to face the wrath of God for your sins, and (3) to die a sinner's death on a cross for you. Jesus is the *agape* love of God! On the cross you see God's love and care for you: He sent His Son, knowing that He would be a substitute for you; the sacrifice, who gave His life for you. That is God's *agape* love!

Now the Father showers you with the gifts of salvation. You have eternal life through the Son of God. Your sins have been *propitiated*; that means that the wrath of God has been satisfied in the death of Jesus.

You will never see the wrath of God; you only receive the grace and mercy of God! That's all because of God's *agape* love for you in His Son Jesus.

If you want to understand the “*agape* love of God”, then look to the cross. Jesus is the *agape* love of God who’s sacrifice reconciles you to the Father and gives you eternal life.

Now that you know and believe God's *agape* love for you in Christ, you are empowered to love other people with an *agape* kind of love.

We love because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34-35

God's love transforms you; there is something different about you; you have spiritual life and God lives within you. You are now able to love others and make sacrifices for them. Your love for others is motivated by God's love for you and His Son Jesus⁵. John summarized it very succinctly when he wrote: *We love because God first loved us.* If you were to look at the verse in the Greek, it says, *We agape because God first agaped us!*

⁵ This is called GOSPEL MOTIVATION. The Gospel of Christ motivates and empowers your holy living. Good works are a response to God’s love. “Gospel motivation is Christ-centered, truth-based, and love-inspiring. It grows, with faith, and is encouraged by the experience of God's promises kept. The gospel creates a whole subset of motivations. Gratitude explains why the Gadarene demoniac—or a recovering alcoholic—wanted to drop everything and follow the Lord. Compassion is the heart of Christ moving us to answer need and alleviate hurt. Mission is the zeal of the apostles and the drive of an evangelist inspired by a salvation too great to keep to oneself. Joy is Zacchaeus hustling down the sycamore tree with his wallet open as wide as his heart. Confidence is the change in posture and attitude accomplished by Christ's empty tomb. Identity is the gospel's reaffirmation of who we are in Christ which empowers what we do for Christ. The gospel so permeates a Christian's life, so penetrates a Christian's psychology, that we can't isolate gospel motivation into a simple, single drive. The gospel is a simple, single reason why Christians experience a complex set of responses that together explain our Christian life.” <http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/may-1992/gospel-motivation?page=0,1>

St. Paul defined this kind of *agape* love for us today in 1 Corinthians 13.

Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
It is not rude, it is not self-seeking,
it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
It always protects, always trusts,
always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

In this passage, *agape* love is defined by using 15 different VERBS! Love is an **action word!** The Bible tells us exactly what **love** looks like; **love** is **active** and it is **busy** --- and it takes **hard work!!**

In this passage, there are 2 key words: **Patience and Kindness**, and then it is clarified and expanded with the 13 other verbs. *Love is patient;* *Love is kind.* That's the core of *loving one another!* That is loving others as Christ has loved you⁶.

Loving other people is a fruit of the Holy Spirit at work within you; It is a response to faith in Christ; it helps your neighbor and glorifies God⁷.

For the apostle John, **love** is a summary of the Christian faith. God loves us in a self-sacrificial way when He sent His Only Begotten Son into the world to die on the cross to be our Savior. And now, in faith, and in response to this Gospel good news, we love other people.

May the Holy Spirit give you both faith to believe this, and power to put it into practice! ***We love because God first loved us!*** Amen!

⁶ Understanding *agape* love helps you to understand what Jesus means when He teaches us to “love our enemies (Luke 6:35).” He uses the word *agape*, not the other words for love. He means that you are to be patient and kind to them; that you are to obey the Commandments in your dealings with them. He is not telling you to be friends with them, to treat them as family, nor to put them in your trusted circle.

⁷ An important clarification and distinction needs to be made here. Many misguided “Christians” have warped and twisted the idea of God's love into tolerance and diversity of all kinds of immorality and rebellion. They use “God's love” to justify and accept their unrepentant sin. A variation of this is the term God's “unconditional” love --> which they claim means God loves people unconditionally as they are and He doesn't call them to repent. This is a false teaching. (If you're going to use the term God's “unconditional” love, then understand that it means Christ died for all sinners on the cross, as in Romans 5:6-8.)

John 15:9-17

Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 John 4:7-16

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

God the Father, we thank you for sending Your Son Jesus into the world to be our Savior. We thank and praise you for your love for us and all men in which You have rescued us from sin and death and have given us forgiveness and life. Send Your Holy Spirit so that we may love our neighbor as Christ has loved us. Help us to glorify You by loving our neighbor, and showing ourselves to be Your disciples. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.