

Exhortation: **Herein Is Love**

As Christians there are many words and terms which we use but do not always have a clear definition for them.

Some examples would be words like glory, holiness, mercy, grace and even a common word like love.

These words may be associated with God, or portray an attribute of God, but each of them can only be truly understood in reference to God and how He chooses to reveal them.

John 1:18

No one has seen God at any time.

Since none of us has seen God, how can we truly know what God is like and how any words in reference to God are to be understood?

John 1:18

*No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, **He has declared Him.***

Declared = *exegeomai* (exegesis)—to declare, tell, unfold

Jesus was the exegesis of God.

John was stating that all that Jesus is and all that Jesus does declares, unfolds, and reveals who God is, what He does, and what He is like.

God cannot be known through any man-made religious means.

John 6:45-46

*It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes to Me. **Not that any man has seen the Father, except He who is of God, He has seen the Father.***

“Except He who is of God”—Only God the Father, God the Son or God the Holy Spirit could reveal who God is and what He Himself is like.

Jesus’ declaration and demonstration is the only true insight into what God is like.

John 14:6-11

*Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, except by me. If you had known Me, you should have known My Father also: and from now on you know Him, and have seen Him. Philip said unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us. Jesus said unto him, Have I been so long a time with you, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? **He that has seen Me has seen the Father;** so how can you say then, Show us the Father? **Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?** The words that I speak unto you I do not speak on My own authority: but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.*

Jesus revealed to us what God would look like as a man; what holiness and the glory of God would look like in a man; how mercy, grace and the love of God would manifest itself through a man.

All of the terms mentioned—holiness, glory, mercy, grace, love—are seen all throughout Scripture and therefore able to be approached from many different angles and are seemingly inexhaustible to study.

Today we are going to take a look at “love” as revealed by God in His word.

Our core text will be:

1 John 4:7-11

So much of what John has conveyed prior to these verses has been about walking in God's light, knowing God and His love.

As we read some of these earlier verses, notice how what God is like and what God does is what we will become like and do also.

1 John 1:5-7

*This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but **if we walk in the light, as He is in the light**, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 2:3-6

*And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that says, I know him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. **He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk, even as he walked.***

1 John 3:1

*Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: **therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.***

1 John 3:16

*By this we know the love of God, because **He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.***

1 John 3:23

And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Belief in Christ and love for the brethren are inseparable.

So what is John's outflow and directive from all of this which he gives us prior to chapter four?

Beloved, let us love one another...

Why?

Because love is of God;

When something is "of God", that means God is its source; it comes from God; it therefore demonstrates how God is, it represents Him, His attributes, His nature, His way, His truth, His life.

"Love is of God."

Love is such an overused word its meaning has become misconstrued.

Since God is love's source, we have to see how God loves in order to really understand it.

Much of the time when someone is talking about loving something they are actually talking about liking something.

I love doughnuts, means I very much like the pleasure which eating a doughnut gives me.

Think about all the times we say we love something.

What we are expressing is a fondness for something, a feeling of affection, sentiment or personal attachment; which almost always is based on the value or benefit we receive from that thing which we say we love.

As many of you may know, in the Greek, there are two words for love, *phileo*, which is the kind of "be a friend to" feelings of love which I have just described.

The other Greek word is *agape* which has a wider meaning.

Strong's concordance says *agape* "especially embraces the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety."

Thus, when Scripture says, "Love is of God", it is talking about a love that is not based on personal benefit or pleasure derived from something, but instead God's love is a decision and exercise of His will to benefit the one He has chosen to love.

Phileo is sort of an "I love you and you love me" mutually affectionate and mutually beneficial type of love or liking.

Agape is a sent forth love with no regard for any personal benefit or return on that love.

It exercises one's will to act in whatever would be right and proper to do in principle or in duty.

Verse seven goes on —*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*"

It does not say "everyone who claims to be born again and who claims to know God, loves".

Because the love which is "of God" can only be known and done by those whom He has caused to be born from above; reborn as His children through Christ Jesus.

John goes on: *He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

To know God's kind of love, one has to know God; to know God one has to be born from above; to be born from above one has to be loved by God.

God's love (agape love) is not a response, God's love is sent forth and poured out on those He has chosen to love.

But someone might ask, Doesn't *1 John 4:19* say, *We love Him because He first loved us?*

This is not referring to our response to God because of something He did that benefitted us.

That would be self based love—"I like Him because He first liked me."

The verse says, we agape Him, because He first agaped us.

If God had not first sent His love forth toward us, we would not be able to know God, or to know the love that is of God.

Verse 9—In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God sent His only begotten son into the world, that we might live through Him.

If God had not first sent His love forth toward us, we would not be able to become partakers of His love, or ever be able to love Him or others with the same agape love.

We could not love Him unless He **first** loved us and **first** enabled us to love.

Listen to the agape love of God at work in the following verses:

2 Cor. 5:17-21

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. [18] And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, . . . [19] God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; . . . [21] For He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

By His own determination, based on His merciful lovingkindness, by deliberate assent of His will, He acted and carried out the principle, duty and proper actions necessary to reconcile us to Himself, by making His own sinless Son to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

God's love is not a response; it is love that is sent forth by an act of His will.

Verse 10—In this is (agape) love, not that we loved (agaped) God, but that He loved (agaped) us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (wrath removing sacrifice) for our sins.

Without the agape love of God there would be no gospel.

Let's review what characterizes the love that is "of God".

It is:

Love that moves toward the needs of others more than tries to have its own needs met.

Love that gives itself for others more than seeking to benefit from or use others.

Love that is willing to bear the penalty of the sins of others more than convict and condemn.

Love that is willfully sent forth more than waiting to be enticed and drawn forth.

Now here is the clincher:

Verse 11—Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4 12-21 re-iterates these truths and gives an example of an application:

V12—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.

*V20—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?***

V21—And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Personal and practical applications:

* Perhaps you have already had one come to you.

* Perhaps you remembered from two weeks ago what we saw about forgiveness:

Colossians 3:12-13

*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, an forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; **even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.***

Agape love decides on and sends forth mercy with grace to forgive even before it is asked for.

John 13:34-35

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; **as I have loved you, that you also love one another.** By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have (agape) love for one another.*

There is probably no greater way to manifest the agape of God than through forgiveness.

Could that be why in the Lord's prayer we are to pray "*Forgive us our debts, **as we forgive our debtors***"?

Jesus added the emphasis to this with the verses following the Lord's prayer in *Matthew 6:14-15*---"*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*"

Without the agape love of God there would be no forgiveness; without forgiveness there would be no gospel.

* Or perhaps marriage came to mind:

Marriage is a 2 become 1 arrangement where opportunities for laying one's life down for the other occur frequently.

Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, and wives are commanded to submit themselves to their husbands as unto the Lord just as the church is subject to Christ.

The problem is that since we fall into sin, both of these commands run contrary to the fallen nature of the husband and the wife.

The husband doesn't want to lay his life down, and the wife wants to lead.

In a marriage, (or any family relationship) there may be times when there are no supporting "lovey" phileo feelings to draw you to love the other person.

In order to act with agape love toward your spouse and exercise the will to do what is needed according to principle, duty and propriety in that relationship, we are going to need the transforming mercy and grace of His agape love for us brought into focus.

As we recall and rehearse His agape love toward us we will find the grace to send forth the love that is of God toward our spouse.

Then we will find that it is as we move toward them and invest in the relationship that the missing feelings will emerge.

* Finally, perhaps you thought it is in the church where agape love could and should be applied. In our O.T reading today, the Israelites were commanded to show mercy to the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, and they were to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt, and that the Lord had redeemed them from there.

Remembering what was done for us, and how we were loved is foundational in determining what our action is to be toward others.

Once out of Egypt, the Lord gave His law.

The fourth commandment was about keeping the Sabbath Day.

The Sabbath was a day to stop, cease from the busy-ness of life, and remember what God had done for them.

Deuteronomy 5:15

And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm: therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

They were to keep the Sabbath Day holy.

How was that to be done?

They were to give grace because they had been given grace.

They were to show mercy because they had been shown mercy.

They were to agape others because they had been agaped by God.

The Sabbath is the day the when the whole body of redeemed, forgiven people of God gather together to worship, have fellowship, and enjoy the agape love of God with one another.

I mentioned two weeks ago that an unforgiving Christian is an oxymoron.

The two words—"Christian" and "unforgiving" are incompatible.

To gather together and have "*aught against any*" violates the very spirit of the Lord's Day.

That is why we are told to leave our gift at the altar and first go and get reconciled to our brother.

Every Sunday is a day to remember His mercy, grace and agape love.

It is a day when forgiveness because we have been forgiven should dominate our hearts and have central focus in our worship and fellowship.

The Sabbath is our weekly opportunity to celebrate God's love for us and opportunity to love one another as God has loved us—with agape love.

1 Peter 1:22-23, 25

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

Prayer for blessing on the word received:

Response: Amen!