

## **1 John 4:7-14**

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

*By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.*

## **What Love is Not**

Love is such a meaningful word in our culture today; so many nuances wrapped up in four letters, yet almost without fault, we can discern a specific nuance of love through the context in which it is said. One may hear phrases such as “I love my mom,” “I love pizza,” and “I love spending time with my friends.” The difference between them is clear by our experience with our language, even though each uses the same word.

“God is love.” This common refrain is taken right from our passage in 1 John. Secular culture likes to use the phrase to advocate for their social agendas. Many Christians say it casually. It seems the biblical phrase “God is love” has lost its power and no longer enjoys the clarity it once did. Our passage uses *love* to prompt God’s people to a specific response. So what is love? And what is love not?

The world in which Jesus and the New Testament writers lived had seven Greek words that each communicated a specific nuance of our English word ‘love.’ Because of this, the NT writers assume their readers know precisely what they mean. To mix up one’s love for pizza with love for mother is a laughable prospect in our English language; yet, without realizing it, this is precisely what we do when we blur the nuances of these otherwise clear Greek words.

The first Greek word is *ludus*. This is a playful love often shared by casual friends, such as someone you love spending time with, but whose absence does not affect you. When you are apart, you do not feel empty or long for the other, and so you have a merely *casual* friendship.

The second Greek word is *pragma*. This is a long-standing, proven love. For example, this is what a husband and wife have toward one another when they have been married for fifty years. That said, *pragma* is not restricted to marriage relationships. Lifelong friends can also have *pragma* together. The emphasis is on *proven loyalty*.

Now these first two are found nowhere in the Bible, but they were words in the common vernacular to Jesus and the New Testament writers, who for whatever reason never used them. Therefore, we can safely conclude that Biblical love is *neither* casual nor does it involve needing to be prove anything before giving or receiving it.

The third Greek word does not appear anywhere in the New Testament; however, it is used in the standard Greek translation of the Old Testament used in Jesus’ day. This word is *eros*, used for example in Est. 2:12-18, referring to a love nuanced by sexual passion. We live in a “swipe-right” culture, and the encounters resulting from these apps are sinful *eros*. Yet, we have a Biblical license to experience *eros*, within the blessed confines of exclusive marriage. *Eros*, in and of itself, is not sinful love—but like most things, it can be sinfully reoriented.

The fourth Greek nuance of love is *philautia*. This is a self-love; a deeply rooted *narcissism*. In 2 Tim. 3:1-2, we can identify the end-times are near because people will hate what is good, and *philautia*. They will hate what is good, and love themselves.

The fifth Greek nuance of love is *phileo*. This is a *deep-friendship*; one of the root words in Philadelphia, which means brotherly love. Regardless of the length, *phileo* refers to the depth of a friendship. This is a love with a great sense of priority to you. The absence of a person you *phileo* does affect you emotionally.

The sixth Greek nuance of love is *storge*. This is a familial love; the type of love a father has for both his wife and his son or daughter; it is neither sexual nor romantic. Instead, it is the duty or obligation one has toward their family, and is typically *expressed* through affection.

These two words *phileo* and *storge* are combined into one word in Rom. 12:10, which reads *philostorgoi* with *Philadephia*, or in English “Love one another with brotherly affection.” In this verse, Paul tells us that biblical friendships ought to have real depth and contain a familial obligation or duty to care and concern for the other. Since other Christians are our brothers and sisters in Christ, the bond and duty one ought to have toward their biological family is extended to all Christians.

## What Love is

Yet even this is not what John is talking about in our passage this morning. You see there is but one more, a seventh Greek word for love. *Agape*. *Agape is an others-focused love typically expressed through sacrificial giving with the goal of edification*. This is my definition. This word is the most common Greek word for love in the NT. Scholars are not certain where the word came from, and many believe it was first uttered by the mouth of Jesus. While *agape* is used across the various New Testament writers, only a small handful of times is *agape* referenced in any first century literature outside the New Testament. Competing with the first-century Greek philosophies of their day, the NT gave *agape* love a unique home to its ever-expanding audience.

Our passage makes six bold claims about God, us, and love. *Agape* is from God; *agape* does not derive from us (v.7). Because God is *agape*, no one who does not *agape* knows God (v.8). God showed *agape* to us by sending Jesus into the world so that we may live (v.9). God *agape'd* us even when we did not *agape* him by sending Jesus to propitiate our sins (v.10). Since God *agape'd* us, we ought to *agape* one another (v.11). And God and *agape* are so interwoven, that if we *agape* others, then we show God to others (v.12).

These claims about God, us, and love climax with vs.9-10, that even when we showed no love to him, God showed love to us by sending Jesus into the world to deal with our sin so that we could live with him. These words reminisce one of the most known verses in the whole Bible: For God so *agape'd* the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

## Pentecost and Gospel Presentation

*Agape* is an others-focused love typically expressed through sacrificial giving with the goal of edification. This is precisely what the Father did for you and for me. And we know this “because he has given us his Spirit” (v.13). It was at Pentecost when the Spirit poured out on all flesh, and Peter stood before the thousands and declared “that God has made this Jesus who you crucified both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). These are two distinct titles for Jesus.

“Lord” stands for Jesus’ complete ownership of our lives. The Psalmist declares, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers” (Ps. 24:1-2). “Christ” stands for what

he has done for us. We call him both Lord and Christ because by his redemption, Jesus completely owns our lives. Paul says, “In him we live, move, and have our being” (Acts 17:2).

Jesus is both Lord and Christ because he descended from heaven (John 3:13) to take the form of a man (Phil. 2:7) through his birth in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1). He was hid in Egypt during an infanticide (Matt. 2:13), and then raised in Nazareth (Matt. 2:23). He was baptized in the Jordan River (Matt. 3:13) and tempted forty days by Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-2). He performed miracles for the outcasts in the outskirts. By the touch of his hand and the sound of his voice the multitudes were healed. He won every battle, challenge, and argument that came before him. He even had the nerve to stand before the Jewish leaders and declare, “I AM GOD,” for which they crucified him (John 8:58). He walked the streets toward Calvary to hang your sins and mine on his cross. While hanging on his cross, a thief crucified beside him questioned his power, saying, “If you are the Christ, then save yourself and us!” (Luke 23:39). “To that taunt,” an evangelist would later say, “Jesus never said a mumbling word. But the silence seemed to have said, ‘You just wait until Sunday morning, and I’ll show you that it’s better to come up out of the grave than it is to come down from a cross.’”<sup>1</sup>

And on that cross, he cried out to the Father in agony (Matt. 27:50), the reason for which he came was finished, he dropped his head (John 19:30), he breathed his last (Luke 23:47), and he died. The significance of his death was abundantly clear to all who witnessed that day. The curtain in the temple was torn in two, the earth began to shake, rocks were split, and the tombs opened with the bodies of the OT saints roaming the streets (Matt. 27:51-53). When there should have been light, darkness covered the earth, for in that moment the Light of the World was no more (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45). Those who crucified him marveled at what unfolded before them, confessing: “Surely, this must have been the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

On that cross, Jesus took your sins and mine, and carried their immense weight upon his shoulders. Every just, eternal sentence of death that befalls you and me and all other people throughout all of human history instead fell upon that innocent man in that moment. And the Father turned his face away from Jesus not because of anything wrong Jesus had done himself, but because in that moment Jesus carried the totality of the sins of the world, which required God to pour out onto him the totality of his wrath. Consider for just a moment your own sins from this past week. The eternal wrath of separation from God that those sins deserve fell upon him in that

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<sup>1</sup> S.M. Lockridge, “Where Sick Men Can Be Made Well.”

moment instead. By suffering all the way to death, Jesus paid the penalty for them all. After his death was clear to all that day, Joseph of Arimathea, a member from the Sanhedrin that sentenced him to death, buried Jesus in his tomb (Matt. 27:57-61).

Oh, to consider the wonder that such a one would die and be buried in a tomb! The one who brought forth all of creation out of chaos beginning in the garden (Col. 1:16; Gen. 1-2). The one who clothed himself with light and stretched out the heavens like curtains (Ps. 104:1-2). The one who paints the sky with every sunrise and sunset (Ps. 19:1); the one who gives songs for the birds to sing (Ps. 104:10-13). The one who lifts every valley and flattens every curve (Isa. 40:4). The one who causes the earth to shake just by looking at it, and the mountains to smoke by his touch (Ps. 104:32). The one who numbers the dust of the earth and weighs the mountains according to his scale (Ps. 33:7; Isa. 40:12). The one who gathers the seas and measures the waters in the palm of his hand (Isa. 40:12). The one who rebuked the storms and calmed the winds (Matt. 8:26-27). The one who approached the demon-possessed and cast them out (Matt. 17:18). The one who opens the eyes of the blind and opens the ears of the deaf. The one who causes the lame to leap and the tongue of the mute to speak (Isa. 35:5-6; Matt. 11:5-6). The one who sets captives free by the gentleness of his voice (Luke 4:18). The one who gives power to the faint and strength to the weak (Isa. 40:29). The one who takes broken lives and makes everything new.<sup>2</sup> The one who trades mourning in the evening for dancing in the morning; the one who replaces your ashes with beauty; the one who turns your shame into his glory; the one who turns seas into highways; bones into armies; and graves into gardens.<sup>3</sup> Oh, to consider the wonder that such a one as this would die and be buried in a tomb.

Those crushed in spirit laid the dead body of the Son of God in Joseph’s tomb and rolled a stone over the entrance to seal his defeat. But just like the man who was thrown on the bones of Elisha, on the third day by that same power Jesus rose from the dead.<sup>4</sup> And that morning at the tomb, the women and the guards saw the angel of the Lord roll away their stone of defeat (Matt. 28:2), and they heard the news that would forever change the world: “Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified is not here! He is risen! He is alive!” (Matt. 28:5-6; Mark 16:6). He is the treasure that cannot be taken (Matt. 6:19-20), the well of living water that will not run dry (John 4:14).

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from “Author / Perfector” by Caleb Choo (Rivers and Robots)

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from “Graves to Gardens” by Elevation Worship

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from “Rattle” by Elevation Worship

The Creator of the universe and all things within knew you from the beginning. He knew all your guilt and sins before he created you, and he knew your sins would cost him his son’s very life, yet he created you anyway! Rather than abandon you to your sin, Jesus sacrificially gave himself all the way to death to restore you, purify you, and give you life. The news these women were first sent to proclaim has confronted the world ever since its first utterance and it is news that now confronts every one of you under the sound of my voice. Every one of you must respond to this news today!

The NT writers are clear: all who declare Jesus as Lord and believe the Father raised him from the dead are born again! And so, I ask you these two questions: Do you submit your life completely to Jesus as your owner? Do you believe in his resurrection? Really consider those two questions; they are the most important questions you could ever answer. Do you submit your life completely to Jesus as your owner? Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

If the answer to both is yes, then you are born again—you are saved! It really is as simple as that. The NT writers are also clear: those who are born again receive the complete forgiveness of all their sins—every wrong you’ve ever committed and ever will commit—and forgiveness does not mean forgotten; your sins put you in debt, but your debt was paid by another who took your debt upon himself. Those who are born again receive a new heart, which essentially means you receive a new worldview and value system—as you receive God’s love, you begin to know God—and the things he cares about become things you care about, such as the right treatment of widows and orphans, the protection of the vulnerable, respect for human life of all races at all stages, justice, and redemption, to name a few. Those who are born again receive the promise of eternal life in the presence of the LORD—this is the chief theme of all Scripture, God’s holy presence with his people. When Adam and Eve sinned, they could no longer remain in the presence of God, so God’s plan since the Fall has been to make a way for his people to dwell again with him—he made the way for you by the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of his Son Jesus. And from those that first Pentecost Sunday to even this very day, all who are born again receive the immediate indwelling of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to turn away from sin, turn toward the LORD, and contribute to the service of the global and local Church.

He loved you enough to stay on that cross and give himself fully so that you would have life more abundantly than you could ever imagine (John 10:10). Have you ever known a love greater than this? And so I ask you again, do you submit your life completely to Jesus as your

owner, and do you believe in his resurrection? If the answer to both is yes, then you can assuredly say that Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

## Conclusion

“What is love?” God’s love is that even when we hated him, he sacrificially gave his son not to give us what we wanted but to instead give us what we needed. And because of such a love as this, our passage prompts us to respond by showing *agape* to others: sacrificially put others ahead of ourselves—especially those who do not yet believe—give them the freedom we know they need so they may share our hope, our peace, and our joy. Since God and *agape* are so intertwined, when we show *agape* to others, *we show God to them as well*.

This is no short task, but we know this task will succeed because he gave the Spirit to us, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17). God showed love to us by sending Jesus into the world so that we may live, and even when we hated him he forgave our sins and appeased his wrath. Are you correctly showing God’s love to others? Let us hold in our hearts the words from a precious hymn: “Ever since by faith I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply, redeeming love has been my theme, and it shall be till I die.”<sup>5</sup> Let the love you received from God be your theme in all you do. I challenge you to find an opportunity this week to share that theme with one person who needs to hear it. Thanks be to our God who is *agape*!

Let’s pray.

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<sup>5</sup> “There is a Fountain (Filled with Blood)” by William Cowper (1771).