

**Pastor Paul Bawden**  
**Grace Evangelical Church**  
**Sunday, December 6, 2009**  
**Communion Sunday**  
**"God – Is Love"**  
**I John 4:7-13**

Love is certainly a many splendored thing, as the song writer has penned.

Yes love has been written about, sung about, and talked almost since the beginning of time. Yes, love has existed from all eternity, as our text tells us that the biblical God is love.

**Some of the words that man has penned about love go like this. Let me quote some lines from Roy Croft. Remember some of these lines?**

I love you,  
 Not only for what you are,  
 But for what I am  
 When I am with you.

I love you,  
 Not only for what  
 You have made of myself,  
 But for what  
 You are making of me.  
 I love you because you  
 Are helping me to make  
 Of the lumber of my life  
 Not a tavern  
 But a temple;  
 Out of the works  
 Of every day  
 Not a reproach  
 But a song.

I love you  
 Because you have done  
 More than any creed  
 Could have done  
 To make me good,  
 And more than any fate  
 Could have done  
 To make me happy.  
 You have done it  
 Without a touch,  
 Without a word,  
 Without a sing.  
 You have done it  
 By being yourself.  
 Perhaps that is what  
 Being a friend means,  
 After all.

**In fact children** can have some idea of what love is. (From What Kids Say About Love – Questions posed to a group of 4-8 year olds).

**"Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK." (Danny, age 7).**

**"Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."  
- Bobby - age 7**

**"If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate."  
- Nikka - age 6**

**"Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken."  
- Elaine-age 5**

Human love is powerful. You and I can love because we are created in the image of God who is love. Our love, though, is not perfect for it is tainted still with our selfishness and jealousy. In that process we can display attitudes that depreciate others, and speak words cause relationships to become frayed and broken. Sometimes, sad to say, there is so much hatred that another life is taken.

That's why when we talk about love we need to find the one who has perfect love, yes, love that is not tainted by any sin, any wrong doing whatsoever, and see if that kind of love is available to us.

To do that let's first consider the kinds of love.

### **I. The kinds of love.**

#### **1. In The Old Testament – For the Hebrew people.**

##### **(1) Aheb - Main word that is used for love.**

**\*\*It can be used of God's love for Israel.**

**Deuteronomy 7:13** – "He will love you and bless you and multiply you" (If they would listen to the Lord as they would come into the promised land).

**\*\*It can be used for man's love for God.**

**Deuteronomy 6:5** - "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

**\*\*It can be used for man's love for his neighbor.**

**Leviticus 19:18** – You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."

##### **(2) Chesed – translated mercy – lovingkindness.**

It has been likened to the love and grace of the New Testament. It is what is used to describe the covenant God of Israel who never goes back on His promises. God revealed Himself as a God of lovingkindness to Moses after Moses had appealed to God not to destroy His people and God agreed not to do so (**Exodus 34:7**).

**In Deuteronomy 7:9** – God revealed Himself again to Moses as the God who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

In that David Covenant with David in **II Samuel 7:15**, God made that promise to David that His throne would and kingdom would endure forever, based upon God's lovingkindness, His "chesed." Of course looking forward to the coming Christ whose birth we celebrate this month.

**In I Kings 8:23** – Solomon in his dedication of the temple to the LORD spoke these words,

**"He (Solomon) said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart."**

Psalms 114 extols the mercies, the **lovingkindnesses (the "Cheseds")** of the true and living God some 6 times, urging its readers to give thanks for the lovingkindness of the LORD.

If you want to see the many instances that "chesed" is used in the Bible use a Bible Concordance like Young's Analytic Concordance, and look up the word mercy, and your life will be blessed with God's lovingkindness.

#### **2. In the New Testament.**

There were different words used in the Greek world when the New Testament was written.

**1. Eros – Erotic type of love.** (C.S. Lewis calls this romantic love). It describes sexual desire, but it is also that which focuses on self-gratification rather than spiritual growth. It is becoming attached to and dependent on the object of one's desire. Actually it can become idolatry as it fails to recognize and respect the other. This kind of love can become lust. To denote lust, the New Testament uses the word *epithumia*, translated "lust" (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:22) or "concupiscence" (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:5). The word is not used in the New Testament.

**2. Storge – (natural love)** - the natural love and affection between parents and children – not used in the New Testament either, except for two occurrences of the negative form, *astorgos*, translated "without natural affection" (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3). The texts employing *astorgos* treat it as a sign of extreme depravity.

**3. Philia or Phileo – (friendship love)** love of friends – brotherly love – a commonality in the body of Christ. Of course used in the New Testament.

Interestingly the word is used of the Father loving the Son.

#### **John 5:20 – The words of Jesus regarding His Father**

"For the Father **loves** (phileo – present tense, on-going action) and shows Him all things that He is doing. . ." Evidently stressing His close relationship with His Father as His Friend.

#### **John 16:27 – The words again of Jesus speaking to His disciples.**

"For the Father Himself **loves** you (disciples) (phileo – present tense – on-going action), because you have **loved** ME - Christ (phileo – with the idea that they love the Lord and are continuing to love HIM), and have believed that I came forth from the Father." Again stressing the fact of the Father's friendship with His disciples and their friendship with Christ.

**Of course in John 15:15**, Jesus told His disciples that He no longer called them slaves, but friends (philon) – His friends.

**Of course "phileo" (In John 21:15-17)** was used by Peter to tell the Lord that He loved Him as Christ restored Peter to His fellowship after his denial of Christ before His crucifixion. It's interesting that the third time Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, Christ used "phileo", where the first two times Christ used "agape" to question Peter. Perhaps suggesting to Peter that he was restored to complete friendship with his Lord, after his three denials of his Lord.

**Then in Romans 12:10** – "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" – referring to love among each other in the body of Christ. The word, for brotherly love, is "philadelphia," with its root from "phileo," stressing committed friendship among the saints in Christ's body, His church.

**I Thessalonians 4:9** – "Now as to the love of the brethren (philadelphia), you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another."

**Hebrews 13:1** – "Let brotherly love (philadelphia) continue."

But then there is the last word used for love by the Greeks and in the New Testament.

#### **4. Agape love.**

Agape love is rarely used in Greek literature, although the word can be found in a classic Greek Lexicon and a few references are made to Greek writers. It is really not defined by the English language. Actually the biblical God defines agape love. For agape love is the love displayed in the New Testament by being a revelation of God Himself to mankind, expressed ultimately in the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, (Immanuel – God with us) and demonstrated eternally in the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of His Son to pay for the sin of mankind in disobeying the Holy, righteous, and just God. It actually is the summary of what God's lovingkindness, His "chesd" is all about in the Old Testament." The believer in Christ can also express agape love.

Rather than try to define agape let's consider

#### **II. The origin of love (I John 4:8).**

What does our text say in I John 4:8?

"God (The biblical God) is love, is agape."

#### **1. Man is not the origin of agape love.**

Certainly, as mentioned earlier, you and I can show love to one another, brotherly love. Husbands and wives can show love to each other. Love can be shown to each other in the family setting. At the same time, we know that our love for one another, and in our families can be clouded with our selfishness, our jealousy, our covetousness, our bad thoughts, yes with our sin.

**The human love we show in different settings is not pure love without any sin. Human love can be shown because we are created in the image of God who loves. Of course, in the public arena today such is not accepted. Somehow we are able to love coming from an animal world that**

**In addition, the love we show from ourselves to one another is here today and gone tomorrow because we are finite people.** That is, since we are finite people, our love is finite as well. We can experience human love now, and it can be remembered when a person passes from this life, that the individual showed love in his or her life, but the love shown has ended. It starts in this life and ends in this life.

Since man is not the origin of love, this brings us to our text in I John 4:8 ff.

## **2. The biblical God is the origin of agape love.**

The God of the Bible is agape love. Such love comes from is very person who is love. He is the source of agape love. It is part of His very nature, indicated by the absence of the article before LOVE. Love comes from the biblical God's very being.

## **3. The biblical God defines agape love.**

**It is well to point out that the text doesn't say that love is God, which some seem to think today. In fact the statement can't be reversed for there is an article before the word, GOD.**

**Rather, the text says that God is love, meaning that love does not define God, but the biblical God defines love.**

**This means that since God is holy, which we will consider in depth next week, God's love is holy – without any sin. Since God is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting He is God, God's love is eternal. Since God is righteous, acts in accord with His truth, God's love is righteous. Since God is just, is fair in all His dealings with humanity, His love is just.**

That's why when the biblical God's love is talked about we always have to keep the entire character of God in view.

**As one pastor was told to only talk about love at a person's memorial service, his response was that would be impossible without talking about God for God is love.**

**That means if one has a low view of God, or one's god is what one makes him out to be, or humans are god which is popular today, than one's behavior is carried out according to the standards of one's own person, so one can do what one wants – morality is determined by one's own standards rather than the standards of the biblical God whose love is holy and eternal.**

**Perhaps you saw on the news the ad the American Humanist Society will have on Washington, D.C. buses through December. "Why believe in a god? Just be good for goodness' sake," The American Humanist Association will spend \$40,000 on the ads.**

I ask, what is the basis for being good for goodness sake? There is none, only humans who can be "good" to some degree because they are created in the image of the biblical God who is GOOD. Otherwise, the action is only based upon human goodness which is here today and gone tomorrow. Again a denial of the biblical God leaves man wanting for true goodness and true love that lasts forever.

Tim Wildmon, of the American Family Association commented this way on the Humanist Ad, **"It's a stupid ad," he said. "How do we define 'good' if we don't believe in God? God in his word, the Bible, tells us what's good and bad and right and wrong. If we are each ourselves defining what's good, it's going to be a crazy world."**

For many, sad to say, it is a crazy mixed up world as people try to live life without the biblical God who sent His Son, Jesus, at this Christmas time. No biblical God, no lasting basis for love or goodness.

### III. The biblical God's ultimate display of agape love.

Again notice our text. (I John 4:9).

"In this the agape love of God was put on display, was brought to light in us or to us (so all could see) that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him."

This verse is almost like John 3:16 – For God so loved (agape love) the world that He gave His only begotten Son. that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life." Yes will live through HIM.

#### 1. The biblical God's eternal decision.

He made the decision to put His agape love on display – that is for all to see.

#### 2. The biblical God's eternal action.

He sent His only begotten Son into the world – the words, only begotten do not mean that Jesus Christ is a created being. The fact that God sent His only begotten Son into the world tells us that Christ was already existing before His incarnation - Jesus was God – before He took upon Himself humanity and became the God-man. "Only Begotten" can refer to the only born one – referring to Christ's incarnation of being born the God-man, referring as well to His eternal generation. Yes Christ is the unique gift of God to us – the God-man born to give us life – His kind of life – eternal life, resurrection life.

#### 3. The biblical God's eternal purpose.

God sent His one and only son, to bring us LIFE – eternal life, resurrection life, which we don't have in ourselves because we are filled with physical and spiritual death (Romans 3:23). We desperately need Christ's kind of life, eternal life. God's purpose in sending His Son into the world was to provide us HIS LIFE!!

However the biblical God's decision, action and purpose could not come to realization for any of us without. . . .

#### 4. The biblical God's eternal basis. (I John 4:10).

There would be no eternal life for anyone unless someone came and paid the penalty for breaking God's law which is death. So before there could be the fulfillment of God's eternal decision, action, and purpose, there had to be the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ, dying in our place to pay the penalty for our breaking God's law, which is death.

In fact that is what I John 4:10 is all about. The eternal Christ became incarnate so in His death for us He could be made sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21) and satisfy (propitiate) the wrath and justice of God. Then in His resurrection, Christ could provide us the eternal life and forgiveness that we need before God.

Through the death of Christ in our place to satisfy God's justice for the payment of the penalty of sin (which is death), and by His bodily resurrection, NEW LIFE, is now available to all who accept Christ as personal Savior.

Put more succinctly, through Christ's death and bodily resurrection for us (in our place), comes HIS ETERNAL LIFE for us!! That's why Christ taught that He came to provide LIFE and to provide it in SURPLUS.

#### 5. The biblical God's eternal agape love defined.

- ∞ **Risky** – God was willing to send His Son into a wicked world, where He would be betrayed, beaten and killed. But He knew that the risk was worth it, for He knew His love was greater than any of man's threats and eventual death, and salvation would be won for world.
- ∞ **Costly** – God's love for us cost Him to give for us the best that He had – His one and only son for us.
- ∞ **Unconditional** - He loved us when we didn't love Him – He proved His love for us for while we were
- ∞ yet sinners Christ died for us. He loved us without expecting anything in return.

- ∞ **Selfless** – God was willing to let His Son suffer for us, and Christ was willing to do it. Look at I Corinthians 13 where it says that agape love is not arrogant. Love doesn't seek its own.
- ∞ **Sacrificial** - He was willing to sacrifice His sinless Son in our place for us who are sinners.
- ∞ **Ever Forgiving** – “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Doesn't keep track of wrongs.
- ∞ **All-consuming** – God's love didn't just go half way. He loved us so much that He sent His Son to be our Savior through faith. Christ loved His Father so much and us so much that He went to the Calvary for us. God held nothing back. Christ held nothing back. The Holy Spirit held nothing back.
- ∞ **Indestructible** – God's love is eternal. No one or nothing can stop the eternal love of God displayed on Calvary and in the open tomb – the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's why Christ said that the gates of hell could not destroy His church – God's agape love is indestructible. It goes on forever.
- ∞ **Eternal LIFE Giving** – Those who accept the gospel that Jesus died for their sins, was buried, and rose again, receive **Christ's eternal life** – to have eternal purpose here, and to live with God forever after this life.

#### **IV. The biblical God's agape love for us today (I John 4:7, 11-13).**

##### **1. Those to whom John is writing – believers in Christ.**

**“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (I John 4:7).**

**Then note I John 4:11.**

**“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Then John goes on to say that as they love one another it is evident that God abides or lives in them, and that is the evidence that God is alive, for no one can see God.**

John is writing to those who have accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Those he says, “know” God, that is they have a personal relationship with God through faith in Christ, and in that relationship they have some knowledge of God's love for them and that they are to love.

**Apart from knowing Christ personally through faith in Him, there is no understanding of the reality of God and His agape love and that the believer can love as God does.**

Need to make sure that we have accepted Christ as personal Savior, if we are going to have some understanding of God's agape love.

**I trust that you have made that decision to accept Christ as your personal Savior.**

##### **2. As believers in Jesus Christ, we need to recognize that we possess God's agape love in our lives (I John 4:12; Romans 5:5).**

When God comes to live in the believer, He also gives the believer His nature, His life, which includes the mind of Christ, the will of Christ, and the emotion, or the agape love of Jesus Christ.

Paul puts it this way, “And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God (God's agape love) has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

That's why John is telling his readers and us in these verses that the one born of God, who has received Christ's new life by faith, can love as God does, because His love is within the believer. Since God lives in the believer, His agape love lives in the believer.

**John may have been remembering the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35 when Jesus told His disciples that as He loved them (agape love) they also are to love (agape) one another. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love (agape) for one another.”**

##### **3. As believers in Jesus we need to use the agape love we have by obeying the indwelling Holy Spirit (I John 4:11, 13).**

Since God loves us as followers of His, we should love like God loves us. Of course, this all happens as we obey the Holy Spirit of God who lives within us. We show God's agape love by letting God's Holy Spirit urge us on to show God's agape love.

## What does using God's agape love in our lives look like?

### Let's mention what it doesn't look like first. (From the Interactive Bible).

#### (1) It is not an "IF" kind of love.

An "IF kind of love says that I will love you IF you do things my way, IF you give me gifts, IF you become a good provider, IF you get a good report card at school." It is a conditional love based upon future expectations. If these conditions are not met, then like a legal contract, love is broken. This is a selfish love because it is solely based upon future expectations. It is love that must be earned. Most marriages fail because they are based upon this conditional love. Children are often heard saying, "I will be your friend" IF you let me play with your new toy; till then I hate you. Thus the IF kind of love is a fickle unstable love. This is the childish love we are all born with. It is a worldly love of natural instincts. We need to mature out of the IF kind of love!

**(2) It is not a "because of" kind of love says,** "I will love you BECAUSE you are now young and beautiful, BECAUSE I now desire you, BECAUSE you are now popular, BECAUSE you are now in good health or wealthy, BECAUSE I *feel* good when I am with you." This kind of love is common among teenagers because it is solely based upon the others current status. The BECAUSE OF kind of love is also doomed to failure in marriage. When someone proclaims, "I have fallen out of love" they have fallen out of the "because of" kind of love, not true love. This kind of love is not in tune with reality when it demands that things stay the same in an ever changing world. Like the If kind of love, it is unstable and fickle. It is full of doubts and fears for what tomorrow might bring.

Of course, "IF" kind of love and "BECAUSE" kind of love are not God's agape love.

### Let's mention what God's agape love is.

**(1) It is "in spite of" kind of love. Agape Love –God's eternal love - true love.** It is the "in spite of kind of love". It says, "I love you IN SPITE OF your faults, IN SPITE OF being fat and ugly, IN SPITE OF the times you are selfish and inconsiderate, IN SPITE OF when you sin against me," True love is unconditional. It is the love that God loves us with. It is a love we don't naturally possess but must learn in the power of the Spirit of God to love with agape love. It is an enduring love, an indestructible love, that doesn't even keep a score card. It will always be there tomorrow regardless of what we have done today. This is the kind of love that 50th "golden" anniversaries are made of. Romans 5:6-8 says, "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the *very* good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Notice the contrast between conditional and unconditional love in this verse. Christ didn't die for us BECAUSE we were very good and worth dying for. Rather He died for us IN SPITE OF the fact we were worthless sinners. Oh "to know the love of Christ which surpasses comprehension," Ephesians 3:19.

**Yes God's agape love does risk, it is costly, it is unconditional, it is selfless, sacrificial, ever forgiving, all consuming, indestructible, and life giving.**

**Yes, as we come to the Lord's Table this morning we are again reminded of God's agape eternal love for us.**

**We are also reminded as Paul exhorts us in I Corinthians 11 to take a few minutes to examine our lives to see how we are doing in the agape love God has given us.**

**Are we loving Him as we ought, with mind, soul, and strength, an all consuming love?**

**Is there anything with those I have contact with, or those in my family where I need to make reconciliation?**

**How can I show God's agape love in a greater way to my wife, or my family, or to my children, or children to children?**

**Am I available this week, to share the agape love with someone else who I know has challenges in life or with someone in need? (cf. I John 3:16-18).**

**May we let the Holy Spirit activate Christ's agape love through us this week to the glory of God.**

**Then God will be seen in us!**

