

God's Love

1 John 4:7–12

Introduction

We have taken a break from our 1 John series entitled “Authentic Christianity” for a couple of weeks. We are returning now to the book of 1 John. As you have noticed, while we are walking verse by verse through this book, John has a very unique writing style and way of thinking. God used this human instrument’s personality to pen down exactly what He desired to be written.

The book of 1 John has been compared to a spiral staircase because it keeps returning to the same three topics: love, obedience, and truth. Though the themes recur, it is not true that they are merely repetitious. Each time we return to a topic, we look at it from a different point of view and are taken more deeply into it.¹

You see, Paul’s style of writing was much different than John’s style of writing.

Paul’s Style	John’s Style
Paul was not very polemic in his writing.	John was very polemic and straightforward.
Paul’s writings were filled with exceptions. He concedes a point here and concedes a point there.	John has only one exception in 2:1—“I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin . . .”
Paul was a master of logical argumentation.	John, like a loving father and caring mother, again and again reiterates the same truth to the readers.
Paul moves from Point A to Point B in the quickest possible way—a straight line.	John moves from Point A to Point B, but he does it differently. He makes progress and then circles back around to reiterate a topic he has covered before.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Real: Turning from Hypocrisy to Truth* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1972), 121.

This picture may be the best way to describe how these two writers both arrive at their point; both continually make progress, but they go about it in a different way.



I needed you to understand this because we are coming back around to a topic that we have covered before: love. This does not mean that John ran out of ideas. John is going to reiterate love, but from a slightly different angle than before.

Let's also keep in mind that John is giving a spiritual test throughout the book to discern if you are truly a Christian or not. These are tests for you to know if you are truly saved. Some of these tests are doctrinal ("Do you believe this?" or "Do you believe that?"). Most of these tests surround the person of Jesus Christ and His deity.

Not all the test are *doctrinal*; some of them are *moral*. John is asking you to take this test and fill in the blanks with the way you live your life. You do not fill in the blanks with knowledge in your head, but with the actions in your life. If you are a Christian, you will act a certain way.

According to John and, ultimately, according to God . . .

- You can look at someone's belief and say, "You do not know God."
- You can look at someone's life and say, "You do not know God."

In this passage, John is putting our life to another test: a moral test—the test of love. He brings us back to the subject that "makes the world go round." John cannot get enough of love. In the six verses between verses 7 and 12, the word *love* appears thirteen times. It is no wonder Augustine, the early church leader and theologian, said, "John has spoken many words, and nearly all of them are about love."²

Transition: The theme in this section of Scripture is God's love. Here is the first truth we need

² Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 112–24; *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 119.

to understand about God's love:

1. God is Agape³ (1 John 4:7–8).

1 John 4:7–8 says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for **God is love.**”

You say, “That sounds like a fish!” No! It’s not “a guppy,” but *agape*. It is one of the Greek words for love. We have one main word in the English language for love, and we use it very broadly: “I love my wife, and I love my mother.” Is that the same kind of love? No, but it is the only word I have. “I love that restaurant, and I love my friends.” Is that the same kind of love? No.

We use the term *love* broadly. The Greeks did not, because they have different words for love that meant different things.

Essentially, they could have used one of four words. They could have used . . .

- **Storge** – *Storge* was a word for family loyalty or family commitment. When I grew up, there were members of my family that I only saw at Christmas. Even though we did not spend much time together throughout the year, we had a bond when we saw one another. It was a family attachment—a love for the family.

The text could have said God is *storge*, but it doesn’t, because God’s love is stronger. In fact, it supersedes this love. Jesus even said that we are to love Him in such a way that we are willing to say goodbye to mother and father and forsake family if necessary.

It is this *storge* love that keeps a lot of Catholics, Muslims, and other groups from coming to Christ. Their *storge* love (love for their family) is so strong (too strong) that it keeps them from a higher love. This higher love should be pursued even at the cost of the *storge* love.

- **Phileo** – this love speaks of a love for a friend: An enjoyment love—a friendship love. You could say it is a brotherly love. *Phileo* is the Greek word from which we get our

³ I decided to take very different approach in the outline with this sermon. Instead of using alliteration or parallelism, I decided to use short crisp statements that build upon one another: God is agape, Jesus proved it, and now you should demonstrate it.

English word “Philadelphia.” You know: the city of brotherly love. Has anyone here ever been to Philadelphia? You know, that incredibly loving city?⁴

This word has a negative and positive connotation to it. On the positive side, it is the easy love and affection of the soul. This love is filled with emotion and feeling. In Scripture, Jesus loved His disciples this way.

On the negative side, this love can be selfish. We have this love for those who share common interests with us. The problem with this type of love is that it can be self-centered. It could mean you love someone because they laugh at the same jokes, like the same sports team, wear the same clothing, or even have the same skin color. Used this way it could be very shallow. It is very self-centered.

Someone whose bond for someone is nothing more than *phileo* is someone who really never gets past themselves. In fact, when they say they love you, what they really mean is, “I love me and you make me feel good about me—and I want to keep you around me because you make me feel happy.”⁵

Historians tell us that this was the most popular word for love in this day. Why doesn’t the text say, “God is *phileo*”? This was the word that was closest to John. It was the one for him to reach the easiest. Everyone used it, but God did not choose this love to represent His love.

- **Eros** – this was romantic love. It is hormonal and sensual. Used appropriately, it leads to a family with two kids, a house with a white picket fence, and a dog frolicking around in the yard.

It is interesting that this word is never mentioned in Scripture. It certainly is not evil. I mean, it can be evil, but it can be holy. It is one of God’s gifts to us.

Let’s summarize:

- You tell your mother, “I *storge* you.”
- You tell your friend, “I *phileo* you.”
- You tell your wife or husband, “I *eros* you.”

⁴ Stephen Davey, “God Is Agape,” Colonial Baptist Church, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://media.colonial.org/files/PDFs/CBC/20130623-am.pdf>. I leaned on Stephen Davey’s understanding of this passage throughout the sermon.

⁵ Davey, “God Is Agape.”

What do you tell God? Or, more accurately, what does God tell you? He says, “I *agape* you.”

- **Agape** – an unconditional love with staying power. It is a sacrificial love that says, “I prize you, I value you, and I am unwilling to depart from you.” This is the love that God had toward us that moved Him to send His only Son to die for us!

This word is used more than three hundred times in the New Testament. It is God’s favorite word for love.

What do these four types of words say?

- *Storge* – I will love you because you are in my family.
- *Phileo* – I will love you because we have lots of things in common.
- *Eros* – I will love you because you make my heart beat fast.
- *Agape* – I will love until my heart stops beating!⁶

We need to understand that God is not just love; He is *agape*-love.

Before moving on to show how God illustrated *agape*-love to us, let’s pause for a moment and address a fallacy.

If God is love, then love is God, right? This faulty conclusion has led people to worship love and not God. They say that love is king, love is supreme, and love is worthy our gaze. It is the message of most songs and most movies. It is wrong. It is actually called pantheism.

Love is not God any more than a “cow is black” would make “black a cow” or “grass is green” would equal “green is grass.” Besides, in the original language the definite article is before the word *God*. It literally says *the* God is love. The emphasis is on the subject. Love does not define God. God defines love.⁷

Transition: So we know from the first two verses that God is love; the next two verses show us how . . .

⁶ Davey, “God Is Agape.”

⁷ Wiersbe, *Be Real*, 138.

2. Jesus proves it (1 John 4:9–10).

1 John 4:9–10 says, “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. 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.”

Notice the word *propitiation*. It has the idea of satisfaction. God sent His Son to be the satisfaction for our sins. It means that there is holy, justified, completely righteous wrath that is going to fall on you from God. “You mean the God who is love has wrath?” Yes! Because He is love, He has to express wrath. To be consistent with His holy character, He has to express wrath toward sin. That wrath of God, dear friend, is in your future. You will face the billows of God’s wrath.

The only escape is through someone who already satisfied His wrath—Jesus Christ. Because the God of the Bible does not just communicate in words, but also in actions, He proves His love. The Christian God is a moving God, an acting God, and a demonstrating God. He sent His Son Jesus into the enemy territory of sinners and haters of God in a search-and-rescue mission. He invaded time and space and put boots on the ground to be our propitiation.⁸ He faced God’s wrath for you. He faced your punishment.

One pastor recounted the story of reading about a Midwestern fire that swept across the prairie, devastating crops and houses and anything else that stood in its path. One particular family saw the smoke a long way off; it wasn’t long before they knew that they could never outrun it—they had nowhere to run or hide. Then the father did something. He ran and got a brand from the fireplace and started their field on fire. He knew it would be burnt soon enough. He also lit fires all around that area so that the wind swept the fire along a mile or so ahead of the coming prairie fire. Then he and his family drove their wagon to the middle of their now-burned field. There they stopped and waited, and within a few moments that great wall of fire came to the edge of their field toward them. Finding nothing to feed its hunger, it licked its way around and along the sides of the field the farmer had already torched. Then that huge wall of flame picked its way back up on the other side of them and moved away.

⁸ Daniel Akin, “God Is Love,” accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.danielakin.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/1-John-4.7-12-God-is-Love-Manuscript-mjh.pdf>.

They were safe. Why? Because they were standing on ground that had already been burned. That ground they were standing on was their propitiation. It had already endured the fire, satisfied its demands, and, thus, could not be burned again.

Do you know why you will never have to face the wrath of God in fiery judgment? Because you stand in Christ, He is your propitiation, and holy justice has already consumed Him as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin. God the Father is satisfied with Jesus and, because you are by faith in Jesus Christ, God is satisfied with you too!⁹ Jesus (God in the flesh) showed *agape*-love to you—until His heart stopped beating.

That's how God expressed His love to us. Maybe another human example will help to demonstrate this divine love. Heather Town lived in Florida with her toddler when a tornado struck her mobile home. Her flimsy mobile home was no match for the fierceness of this tornado which spawned from a tropical storm. She took her baby in her arms and braced herself for the worst. The tornado hit, and it left wreckage in its path, including Heather's dwelling.

When the storm passed, neighbors went out to check on everyone. They could not find the 32-year-old Heather or her toddler Ann Marie. As they searched, they heard a whimper. They followed the sound until they found Heather holding Ann Marie approximately two hundred feet from where their home once stood in a very dense section of woods. Ann Marie was covered in barbed wire and was having difficulty breathing. When they reached to grab the toddler, they discovered that the mother was dead. This toddler was miraculously found alive in the arms of her dead mother.

Her father Elmer Town told My Fox Tampa Bay that his daughter's final act shows how much she loved her children. He said, "We know she held onto that baby and saved her life, and that's the type of person she was." That is *agape*-love. She had a willingness to do anything to save her child.

If you were to look at the body of Jesus when they took Him off that cross and placed Him in a tomb, you would have found a dead Savior who took the blows that could have come to His children. His final act shows us just how much He *agapes* us.

Transition: God is *agape*, Jesus proved it, and . . .

⁹ Davey, "God Is Agape."

3. Now, you should demonstrate it (1 John 4:11–12).

1 John 4:11–12 says, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 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.”

Obviously, John had a problem with people in his day professing the name of Christ, but living contrary to that profession. There were people who were not very loving, who were not gracious, and who were not Christ-like.

Alexander the Great, one of the greatest military generals who ever lived, conquered almost the entire known world with his vast army. It is reported that he was made aware of a soldier whose acts were certainly less than heroic. In fact, they were questionable, if not cowardly. The soldier was named in honor of Alexander the Great. They called him Alexander.¹⁰

Alexander the Great told the generals to bring the soldier to him immediately. The soldier named Alexander stood before Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great, with intensity, looked him in the eye and said, “Soldier, either change your name or change your conduct.”

As a Christian, you bear the name of Christ. It is no small thing to profess to be a Christian. Does your life match that profession? God, through His Word, is bringing you before His face, and He is saying to you, “Either change your name or change your behavior.”

This is the moral test of Christianity. No one has ever lived a life and stood before the sacrifice of Christ, comprehended and accepted it, and gone back to a live a habitual life of selfishness. If you have, you do not know God.

You cannot say, “I am the one exception. I failed the moral test, but don’t worry; I am still a Christian.” No, you are not. You cannot possess the divine life of Jesus in you and continue to be hateful and spiteful. “I can blow up at my home or at my job. That’s my personality and that’s who I am?” No! Change your name!

Do you know why this is so vital? Because when you see someone expressing this *agape*-love to others, you see God in their life. Now, no one has ever seen God, but you can see Him in someone’s life.

¹⁰ John MacArthur, “Manifesting Perfect Love, Part 1,” recorded July 20, 2003, streaming audio, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/62-34/manifesting-perfect-love-part-1>.

You can't see the wind, but you can see the effects of the wind's presence. You can't see God, but you can see the effects of God's presence—it's called *agape*.

John's argument, however, takes a beautiful turn. No one can see God in His essence, but we can see God through the lives of those who demonstrate His love to others.

Conclusion

John Piper sums up this section well: "Love is from God the way heat is from fire, or the way light is from the sun. Love belongs to God's nature. It's woven into what he is. It's part of what it means to be God. The sun gives light because it is light. And fire gives heat because it is heat. So John's point is that in the new birth, this aspect of the divine nature becomes part of who you are."¹¹

¹¹ John Piper, "The New Birth Produces Love," *Desiring God*, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-new-birth-produces-love>.

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