

REAL LOVE  
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1 JOHN 4:7-21

**If someone asked you to define love, how would you respond?**

This morning we're talking about REAL LOVE. The kind of love that only comes from God. The kind of love that shows up among those who have an intimate fellowship with God. The kind of love that surprises unbelievers (and even believers.) Only those who have experienced God's gift of salvation through Christ can practice this kind of love.

If we had to have the world's shortest Bible study, three verses in this passage would give us the essence of things: verses seven, eight, and twenty-one. I'm reading those verses in the NLT.

1 John 4:7–8 (NLT)

7 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. 8 But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

21 And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.\*

Christians should love other Christians. That's how you can spot a genuine group of Christians.

Jesus taught us in John 13:35 (ESV)

35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We could stop right there; sing the doxology; and go home. But...we won't! John unpacks this for us in verses nine through twenty. Let's see what it says; what it means; and what it means for you and me this week.

- These verses are describing a specific kind of love.
- The ancient Greeks had four words to express different kinds of "love":
  1. *eraō* for "sexual passion," a word not found in the New Testament;
  2. *storgeō* for "family devotion,"
  3. *phileō* for "friendship," a word appearing frequently in the New Testament; and
  4. *agapaō* for "loving-kindness." This is used in 1 John 4:7-21 thirteen times.
- So, what IS this different AGAPE love like?

Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words tells us:

*"In the New Testament, the word agapē took on a special meaning. It was used by the New Testament writers to designate a "volitional love" as opposed to a purely emotional love, a "self-sacrificial love," and a "love naturally expressed by God," but not so easily by men and women. It is a word that speaks of compassion, regard, kindness, and true love. It is an unselfish love that transcends natural affinities. In short, it is a love that we don't naturally have. It is divine."*

- Note the term: "volitional love" vs emotional love. **Any idea what that means?**

- Agape love is not about feelings, it's about deciding to love even the unlovable...those who don't seem to deserve our love. We can only do that through God's Spirit in us. That's why followers of Christ are able to love in this way.
- Every time we see the word "love" in these verses. it is this special, unusual, supernatural love called AGAPE love. Let's begin back with verses seven and eight. John writes:
- "7 Beloved," (meaning fellow Christians) "let us love one another," (a very direct instruction) (why?) "for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."
- Whoever loves with this AGAPE love has been born of God. The reverse is true, verse eight:
- "8 Anyone who does not love" (in this AGAPE way) "does not know God," (why?) because "God is love." John MacArthur: "Christians love because God is the essence of love."
- Let's be sure we get that: Christians loving other Christians with this AGAPE love is evidence that we ARE Christians (born of God), and are in intimate relationship with God (know God).
- If we aren't loving each other this way, we either aren't saved or at least, not in a close enough relationship with Him. Caution: Lack of agape love doesn't mean a Christian has lost their salvation, it means they need to confess, repent, and get back on track loving others.
- Question: **Any thoughts on how the statement, "God is love." has been misinterpreted?**

Warren Wiersbe writes:

*"God is love. This does not mean that "love is God." And the fact that two people "love each other" does not mean that their love is necessarily holy. It has accurately been said that 'love does not define God, but God defines love.'* "

- God showed us His love to mankind by the most "supreme" example, verse nine:

9 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. 10 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.

Romans 5:8 (ESV)

8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:19 (ESV)

19 We love because he first loved us.

- God is the initiator of love. He always makes the first move. God's love is "self-sacrificial."
- **How does that teach us we are to love other Christians? How do we naturally tend to be "reciprocal" in loving others? How is this kind of loving different than our nature?**

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

12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (Perfected = "made complete")

- "No one has ever seen God"...but they see how Christians love. **What are the implications of that for us as believers? Why does this make loving each other with agape love important?**

John MacArthur: "The only demonstration of God's love in this age is the church."

- God's agape love in our hearts gives us assurance of His Spirit in our hearts:

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because 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 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

- You know, becoming believers, doesn't mean people stop ticking us off. In fact, perhaps it makes it worse! **As a Christian, how might your response to someone's bad conduct reassure you of the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?**
- Though our sins are forgiven, one day believers will have to explain our actions on earth. We call that the "judgment seat" of Christ (bema seat.) God's agape love in our lives also removes our fear of that moment.

17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

- Finally, one more test of whether we are saved, and in a right relationship with God.

20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

- I'm not sure any commentary on that verse can make it any clearer.
- Any other thoughts about this passage?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We learned that real love is AGAPE love. We defined it as: "...a *"self-sacrificial love," naturally expressed by God," but not so easily by men and women. It...speaks of compassion, regard, kindness, and true love...an unselfish love that transcends natural affinities...a love that we don't naturally have.*" It only comes from God.
- The summary of this passage is: Christians are to love one another, because love comes from God, in fact, God is love. He loved us so much that while we were sinners, He sent His son to die so we could have everlasting life. If we don't love other believers with this agape love we're either not saved, or at least not in a close, intimate relationship with God.
- This passage may have uncovered one of the most overlooked sins believers need to confess on a regular basis: not showing this agape love for one another.
- I'm very sensitive to evil thoughts, pride, greed, covetousness. But how sensitive am I to the sin of not loving as God has called me to love?
- Isn't it sad that Christians have been stereotyped as unloving and judgmental...known more for our fights than our love? Isn't it sad that we've contributed to that stereotype by our behavior?
- Some questions:
  - Do I initiate love to other believers even if they haven't shown love to me?
  - Do I respond in defensive irritation to an offense, or do I just let it go?
  - How easy is it for me to find fault and criticize other brothers and sisters?
  - Is my love for other Christians a witness to God's Spirit living in me, or an embarrassment to the cause of Christ?

- Is my “agape level” low? If it is, how is my “intimate relationship with God” level? If that one is low the other one will be too.
- What do I do about it?
- Confess it. Promise to change it. Ask God to help me. Then do what John says in verse 21:

21 And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.\* (NLT)