

Lesson 20: “God Is Love”

1 John 4:7-10

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We have come today to one of the outstanding passages of Scripture. It is the only place in all of the Bible that plainly and dramatically states, “God is love.” What a spectacular headline: “God is love!” It should be written across the skies for all to see, everyday and for all time. Yet God has chosen for it to be written in and through the lives of us, His children, as we interact day by day with our world. We are to be the headline of “God is love!” Just like the guys we see on our streets holding and waving those advertisements to get our attention (and they do), we are to be the living and active advertisement to our world of “God is love!” Let’s get to this great passage.

1 John 4:7-10 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so 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.

POTENTIAL CONFUSIONS

As wonderful as this passage is, there is potential for great confusion. One can read, “*everyone who loves is born of God*” and conclude that he is a born-again Christian because he has love for others. So it is essential to realize that this “love” that is here spoken of is translated from the Greek word “agape,” which is a specific and special love that is the highest form of love – selfless, sacrificial and without conditions. It is not to be confused with brotherly or romantic or charitable love. The Greeks reserved its use for the love as from the gods; and the Biblical, Christian usage refers exclusively to the love that comes alone from the One true God.

The next confusion can come from thinking that “God is love” and “love is God” is interchangeable. But we don’t worship the act of love. Love is not “all you need.” God is not “love incarnate.” God is a rational, infinite, all-powerful and all-knowing eternal being that has the very nature of this specific and special love. So “God is love” is a statement of His nature, not of His being. It is a metaphor, similar to John’s previous statement of “God is light” (1:5).

Yet, “God is love” means more than just “God is loving.” Here is yet another potential confusion. Yes, of course, God is a loving God. But more than that, this specific and special “agape” love emanates from the very essence of God’s person. He doesn’t choose to be loving – He *is* loving, which is the very essence of His divine nature.

So as to be perfectly clear, let’s review.

- ✓ “God is love” does not mean God has an emotional, brotherly and charitable love for all.
- ✓ “God is love” refers to a specific and special love that is selfless, sacrificial and unconditional.
- ✓ “God is love” does not mean “love is God,” for we do not worship love.
- ✓ “God is love” does not mean simply that “God is loving,” for He does not choose to love.
- ✓ “God is love” means that He is love by the very essence of His nature. He can be nothing else.

LIGHT AND LOVE

John gives us two memorable statements about God in his little epistle of 1 John: “God is Light” (1:5) and “God is love” (4:8). The first (“God is Light”) is a metaphor of the power and purity of God in His perfection. It is a statement of His inherent greatness. The second (“God is love”) is a metaphor of the kindness and mercy of God in His nature. It is a statement of His inherent goodness.

Just this week I ran into a Muslim acquaintance of mine whom I have befriended, and greet every time I see him at Costco, where he works. As we parted, I said, “remember, God is good!” And he replied, “no, God is great!” In this, he felt he was relaying the true aspect of God that we should be acknowledging. Of

course, as a Muslim, his god is Allah, not Jehovah of the Bible. And to the Muslim, “Allah is great” is their creed.

I reflected on this brief interchange in light of John’s revelation of “God is Light” and “God is love.” Yes our God is Light, for He is great – in every sense of the word. But far more specific and personally wonderful is that “God is love,” for He is good in every sense of that word. He is merciful, kind, compassionate, caring, sympathetic, empathetic and more. In a word, He is love. And this is not the God my friend, Ahmad, knows. He only knows his god of power, who to him is great, but only great.

Have you ever mused on the thought that you could have been created by an all-powerful ogre, who was a mean and cruel taskmaster? Your God could have been great enough to create you, but not good enough to love you. Oh, but how wonderful and glorious it is that our God is both great AND good – both Light and Love.

GLEANNING FROM THE TEXT

Notice that our passage begins with a loving invitation: *“Beloved, let us love one another.”* And we can now know that this does not mean simply to be loving to one another. Rather it means to employ the specific and special love which is the selfless, sacrificial and unconditional love of “agape” which God gives to us from His very nature to share with others. That love is now living in us in our new nature as regenerated believers. It is the very nature of God with which he asks us to share with others, as no unregenerate person can. Do you notice my intentional repetition of “special and specific love” and “selfless, sacrificial and unconditional” love?” I want you to be able to clearly define and differentiate this agape love that is so divine and different from all the other “loves” of this world. For this love is nothing less than “out of this world!”

After the invitation to love others, I see 5 great truths of this godly love taught in our passage.

- 1) The SOURCE of love
- 2) The CONFIRMATION of love
- 3) The HEADLINE of love
- 4) The ultimate DEMONSTRATION of love
- 5) The ESSENCE of love

1) The SOURCE of Love

We read simply that *“love is from God.”* Just as the source of all hatred is from our enemy, Satan, the source of all love is from God. Now this world for “love” is still “agape.” But it can be truly said that all kinds of love – sexual, brotherly, charitable, motherly, fatherly – all have their source in the God of love. It can be said that wherever you find love being expressed, you can find God at work. Let your non-believing friends know this. The love they feel and express has its source from God. But specifically, this phrase is telling us that only selfless, sacrificial and unconditional love comes from God.

2) The CONFIRMATION of love

Only a Christian can truly “agape,” for only a Christian has this love of God living in him/her. And conversely, a non-believer cannot “agape,” for he/she does not know or have this love of God within. This is an amazing revelation. Though all of the human race has the capability of expressing love, for they are created in the image of God, only a regenerated follower of Christ can express the special and specific love which is the “agape” love of God. That is why it is by observing this divine love in others that you can know their true credentials as a follower of Christ (“by their fruits you will know them” – Matthew 7:16).

I do believe there is theological room to suggest all kinds of love are a sign of God’s gracious activity and presence, even apart from Christian faith. But here we see yet another test, or confirmation, of genuine Christian faith – that of exhibiting selfless, sacrificial and unconditional love. Only Christians have it – so use it!

3) The HEADLINE of love

We have already spoken of this, but I point out again John's dramatic headline: *"God is love!"* And just to reiterate, this is not only saying that God is loving. Nor is it saying that love and God are the same thing. Rather it is a statement of the very nature of who God is – a compassionate, merciful and caring being that truly loves His creation of people. And that takes us to the fourth truth:

4) The ultimate DEMONSTRATION of love

We see this in both verse 9 and verse 10. In verse 9 we are told this agape love was "manifested" or "demonstrated" or "put on display" when God the Father sent His only begotten Son (same phase as in John 3:16) into the world so that we might live through Him. The emphasis here is on the gift of eternal life that God wants to give all who receive this Son of His. This is how much God loves each of us.

In verse 10 we are told that God demonstrated this agape love by sending his Son as a *"propitiation for our sins."* This is harkening back to his previous comments about propitiation in 2:2. The emphasis here is that God wanted/needed/demanded satisfaction and payment for the sin and sins of mankind in order to redeem them unto Himself. This provision of Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins is a clear demonstration of his immense "agape" love.

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love [agape] toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

John 15:14 *Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*

5) The ESSENCE of love

The beginning of verse 10 gives us the final truth about this agape love from our passage: *"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us."* This amazing divine love cannot be defined or understood by anything within ourselves. The greatest love of a parent, or the greatest sacrifice of a missionary, or the noblest charity of a philanthropist cannot begin to compare with the love of God. Love cannot be measured by our love of God, weak and inconsistent as it is. Neither should the heavenly light to the earth be measured by the moon, which is only a reflection of the true light of the sun.

After all, the best of our love is only a reflection of the ultimate of love of the Heavenly Father which has been given to us to reflect to our world. The essence of love is that God loved us by sending His Son to die for our sin, that we might have a relationship with God. God bought that relationship with the precious blood of Jesus. And it is that depth of love that is ever our inspiration and example of how we must love others.

John has so much more to teach us about this amazing "agape" love of God in the verses to follow. But for now, let us rejoice in the truth that we have a God of love. Yes, He is also a God of justice, and His love is sometimes expressed in discipline and even retribution and punishment. But He can only be loving – He can do no less nor more, for it is His nature.

Oh how our world needs to hear and recognize that God is a God of love. This is how the gospel message must begin – that God loves you, and wants a relationship of love with you. Be the "headline" that your world needs to hear and see – that GOD IS LOVE!