

THE LOVE OF GOD

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Do we all know God on a personal level? There is always a danger of possessing knowledge ... and ... stopping there? Do we feel superior to those around us ... are we smug? In that way, we can deceive ourselves. But ... the question is ... do we have a strong, personal relationship with our God?

John 17:1-3 THE "REAL LORD'S PRAYER"

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

We are not married to The Book ... we are married to the person.

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 THE MESSAGE BIBLE

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

John 5:39-40

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me

that you may have life. (The scriptures tell us about Jesus ... they testify of Him the scriptures are food to our inner man ... but ... we are not married to the scriptures, but to Jesus)

John 5:39-40 THE MESSAGE

"You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from me the life you say you want.

John 5:45-47

Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

1 John 1:1-7

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have **fellowship** (Greek... koinonia ... a shared life ... partnership, closeness, intimacy, companionship) with us; and truly **our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son** Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have **fellowship** with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 4:7-10

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 (agape)**. 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.

In today's evangelism ... this is a commonly used expression ... "God is Love". It is a key part of their message. And ... because God loves us ... we should/need to "give our heart to The Lord". This is the major plank of most churches. Is that the most important message to teach?

Some facts: **There are very, very, very few references to "The Love of God". It is actually very rare** ... about 1 verse in every 1,000. Nothing in Genesis. Exodus ... Once. Leviticus ... none. Numbers ... none. Deuteronomy ... once. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel ... none. 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles ... none. Isaiah ... once. Jeremiah ... once. Ezekiel ... once. Daniel ... none. Etc. Well of course, that is the harsh God of the Old Testament.

But ... what about the New Testament? Matthew ... none. Mark ... none. Luke ... none. John ... a few references. Acts ... none. Maybe a dozen references up until we get to the last 3 or 4 books of the New Testament. All told ... no more than 35-40 references in the whole Bible ... and most appear in John's writings.

Almost every time the Love of God is mentioned ... it is directed towards God in praise ... or it's a reference made directly to believers. Virtually no verses mentioning The Love of God towards unbelievers.

What does the Word, "Love" mean?? We use it freely and loosely ... I love chocolate ice cream, I love my dog, I love relaxing in my garden, I love my wife, my son, my husband, my daughter, my job. The way we use the word is usually towards **something we like, something that makes us happy, I'm attracted to** ... I find pleasure in eating chocolate ice cream, etc.

Matthew 5:43-45

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, **love your enemies**, (agapao ... verb ... show agape to your enemies) **bless** those who curse you, **do good to** those who hate you, and **pray** for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

We are to love our enemies ... this is a commandment from God ... but ... that doesn't mean we have to like them ... does not mean enjoy their company. Potentially ... our enemies could become a son or daughter of God. Do good where we can!! **Love is not a feeling of warmth or attraction ... no hint at all!!** Agape means more to bless ... do good to these people ... to pray for them.

There are at least 3 Greek words for love. Agape, Phileo and Eros. This is how they are widely used.

Agape ... the purest, the most noble, Godly.

Phileo ... the love of ... affection, fondness ... family love.

Eros ... a physical love ... like erotic.

But the Greek itself is not as black or white as that!!

Matthew 24:11-13

Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the **love of many (agape) will grow cold**. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Does the use of the word here mean a falling away of true Christians?
You can't prove it from this verse!!

John 12:39-43

Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,

Lest they should see with their eyes,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.”

These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved (agapao) the praise of men more than the praise of God.

So ... is that a selfless love? A Godly love? Was that possessed by these hypocritical rulers? No. We always have to look at the context.

2 Peter 2:15-16

They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved (agapao) the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

This man loved money. He was greedy. Selfish. Looking after number one. So here, the word Agape means more than selfless, God-like love.

Is Agape the highest form of love ... Godly love? But ... what about Phileo? It is used in some impressive circumstances.

John 5:19-20

Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves (Phileo) the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

John 16:25-27

“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. (Phileo in both cases)

The words Agape and Phileo are both used interchangeably. Usually ... but not always ... Agape is a decision of the will. The context will make it more clear.

Usually... in general ... Phileo has the meaning of family affection.

Some people say God's love is unconditional. Is it true? Does it make no difference with God who we are or what we are doing? Some will say ... God hates the sin, but loves the sinner. That is not a Biblical verse. That quotation is from Mahatma Gandhi. You can't separate the sinner from the sin.

If God's love was unconditional ... we could carry on living exactly as we are. Nothing we do can make God love us more and nothing we can do to make God love us less. That is misunderstanding the word, "Love". The major problem here is that people confuse love with liking and fondness.

The other reaction, particularly amongst skeptics, atheists, agnostics ... is that God cannot be love!! ... A God of Love wouldn't tolerate the evils that happen in the world ... wouldn't permit sickness/disease/earthquakes/wars or the death of millions of innocent people. No God of love could permit that. So they reject, despise any message of God's love and throw it back in your face. The true meaning of God's love is lost on them. They can't appreciate it. It is like casting your pearls before swine. That is probably why there is little or no evidence that it was ever preached to unbelievers.

The Love of God is only properly understood by believers.

God does love us in a special way. After all, we are His sons and daughters. To us ... we are family.

John 3:16

For God so-o-o-o-o-o (a huge, broad, all-encompassing love ... that God has for the world) loved (agapao) the world that He gave His only begotten

Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

It doesn't imply in the slightest that God so loves the world. Agape is a decision to do good for the whole world, to meet the needs of another ... to take action.

But!!! There are people God HATES!!

Proverbs 6:16-19

These six things the Lord hates,

Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

A proud look,

A lying tongue,

Hands that shed innocent blood,

A heart that devises wicked plans,

Feet that are swift in running to evil,

A false witness who speaks lies,

And one who sows discord among brethren.

Psalms 11:4-6

The Lord is in His holy temple,

The Lord's throne is in heaven;

His eyes behold,

His eyelids test the sons of men.

The Lord tests the righteous,

But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.

Upon the wicked He will rain coals;

Fire and brimstone and a burning wind

Shall be the portion of their cup.

John 3:16

For God so (Greek: Houto ... it doesn't mean so very, very much!! It means:

In this manner, in this way, thus ...) loved the world that He gave

His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

In what manner? It doesn't start in verse 16. "For" is a conjunction. We have to connect it to verses 14 and 15.

John 3:14-15

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so (Houto) must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

What's that all that about? Nicodemus would know. But many people today might not know that.

Numbers 21:4-9

Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes (detests) this worthless bread. (the manna!!) " So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us." (God didn't take away the serpents.

They were punishment) So Moses prayed for the people.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

God did not remove the judgement, didn't remove the punishment. The death penalty is still running. You will all perish unless you believe these instructions ... walk across the camp and gaze at the uplifted serpent on

the pole. **There was a way of escape.** Those who acted on the instructions ... lived and those who didn't ... died.

And in John 3:16 we are told ... in this manner God loved the world.

Today. God has not taken away and will not take away the death penalty for sin. He has not removed the judgement. Just as the people could look at the bronze serpent and live ... so people can now look to the resurrected Christ.