

Introduction

Children of God, what is love? C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *Four Loves*, and the last of the loves, the highest and most important of the loves is agape love. And Agape love is what John is talking about in his passage here. Agape love can be defined as the steady intention of the will to another's highest good. It is an ongoing benevolence—willing (-volence) what's good or best (bene-) for another.²

In order for love to be love in truth, and not just word play, love must therefore presuppose a standard of good. And an action in which a person seeks the good of another must be in conformity with that standard. Thus the silly T-Shirts and Yard signs I see around town which say Love is Love, only confuse us as to what really is love. Not everything called love is truly love.

Love is not love if it does not truly seek a person's highest good according to God's standard of what He says is good. And any attempt to redefine the word love to mean anything other than God's standard of good is to engage in lying and deception. It is meant to deceive and cloud the mind so that the unacceptable becomes acceptable.

Now as we examine Love today in our passage from 1 John, we will see what love is in greater detail as we examine the root of love, the revelation of love, and the results of love. And this will serve as my outline for today.

The Root of Love

The Nature of God

We first come to the Root of Love. John tells us where love comes from. Love is from God.

He says, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*

Love originates from God because God is love. Love by definition needs someone else to love. Love is a strong affection **for another** that arises out of kinship or personal ties in which the steady intention of the will is for another’s highest good. In other words, in order for love to exist you need a lover and you need a beloved. Love does not exist as an impersonal force. Love is personal and it requires a lover and a beloved. This then excludes Islam and Allah from being Love. It excludes the New Age Brahma from being love.

Only the Trinitarian God fits this definition of love because God is Father and Son and Spirit. God is a divine family and his kinship ties within the Godhead bind him to love himself, Father, Son, and Spirit, and to live for the highest good of the other.

God is love because from all eternity the Father has loved the Son who has been eternally begotten of the Father’s love. And the Son has eternally loved the Father in return. And the bond of love that exists between the Father and the Son that binds them together in perfect love is itself another person of love, the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. To say God is love is a statement about the trinitarian nature of God.

The Cross of Christ

So the root of Love is within the Trinity, but it is also found in the cross of Christ. John says,

In this is the love of God manifest – God sent his 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 of our sins.

What does it mean to say God is love? John says it means that Father sent the Son to give his life for us. The Father sent the Son to be the propitiation of our sins. He says that God is love means that he sent his Son to die for you and to give you life and to cover your sins. This is how the Love of God was manifest in the world. That is how we know that God is love, because God loves you in Jesus Christ.

We need to realize that when God sent His Son to die for our sins it is not as if God did something that was foreign to His person. God is love, and that is why he sent Christ. Because God is love, God gave His Son to give us life. The loving character and nature of God is to be life giving and others focused from all eternity.

Before Man was even created God was always giving of his own life to others. The Father has been eternally giving of his life to the Son, and the Son in return has eternally giving of his life to the Father. God is an eternal life giving others focused others centered being. The Father does not seek his own glory, but only glorifies the Son. And likewise the Son does not seek his own glory but glorifies the Father. And the Spirit likewise glorifies the Son.

Our salvation and eternal life is to be brought into this inter trinitarian love and glory.

Jesus in His high priestly prayer mentions this in John 17:24 when he prays that the Father would grant that we would see Jesus' glory which the Father had given him because he loved him before the foundation of the world. And he does not mean just see with our eyes, but that we would participate in it.

To say that God is love means that God is totally and completely an others centered non selfish being who glories in giving life to others. And we know that this is God because this is what he has done for us. The Father has sent his son to die for us, to give us His life in the Spirit, so that we could be brought into the love of the Triune God.

Now what does it look like for us to brought into the love of God? It looks like when we do the same thing that God does, and we love each other.

He says, *If God so loved Us, we also ought to love one another.* The love of God within the Trinity and manifested to us in the life death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the His sending of His Own Life Spirit to live within us is proof that God loves us, and so, If God loved us, then we ought also to love one another in the same way, as much as we creatures can. We are to be giving of our own lives for the sake of others, we are to give glory to others, we are to guard and protect the reputations of others, we are to one another one another. This is the Trinitarian Love of God lived out among us. This is how we love one another - as God so loved us.

The Revelation of Love

Now that we saw the root of the love of God is in the Trinitarian nature of God which overflowed to us in the cross of Christ, we can see in further detail how the Love of God was revealed to us.

And John does something interesting here. In order to show us how God's love is revealed, he mentions the unrevealed nature of God. He brings up the fact that God is invisible. *12. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

Our loving one another provides the world with a solution to the problem of the invisibility of God. God is real, but He is a spirit, and so we can't see him. This seems to be a problem for some, who say, they will only believe

what they see. Seeing is believing, they say. Well John concedes to them a bit here, but he puts the burden on us. When the Church loves as God loves, then you can see God, John says.

The invisible God who is love manifests himself in Jesus, first off, by giving of his life for ours. But then he is revealed further in the love that exists within the body of Christ, the Church. You want to see God? Then you should look no further to the love that believers have for each other.

The Holy Spirit is the bond of love within the Trinity. And he is given to us individually and as a body so that we can abide in God, and He in us. This abiding results in us loving one another. He says, *13. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, he has given us His Spirit.*

But once we have the Spirit and abide in God and God in us, and we are loving one another, we are to imitate the Trinity even further by bringing more people into this trinitarian love. *14. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the World. 15. Whoever confesses the Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him, and He in God.*

So the Love of God is manifest in Jesus dying for our sins, in filling us with the Spirit so that we love one another, and in empowering us to testify about Jesus and calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus so they too can abide in God and God in them. This is how God's love is manifested and revealed in us.

16. So we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

The Result of Love

Now that we have seen the Root of Love in the Trinity and in the Cross of Christ, and we have seen that the Love of God is Revealed in the world through the Church loving one another and telling others about Jesus, Let us spend the remainder of our time examining what the Result of God's love will be.

The first thing we see is that the love of God leads us to have **no fear of judgment, but rather we have confidence before God on judgment day.**

17. By this the love of God is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as He is, so also are we in the 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.

You see children of God the Lord loves us. He has done everything within his power to show that he loves you. He is no liar. God sent his son to die for our sins, to give us life, to give us His spirit so that He would abide in us and we in Him. These are not accidents of the salvation, this was God's intention. God loves you. So then ask yourself - What is there to fear? The very God who will judge you has already sent Christ to be the propitiation for your sins. He has already absorbed God's wrath against your sin. Your judgment day essentially already happened on the cross.

Who can bring any charge against God's elect? Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord. When you are confident in the love of God for you, you have no fear of judgment, but instead, love is perfected with you - which really just means the love of God is brought to maturity in you.

When we know the love that God has for us, in what he has done for us in Christ and by the Spirit, which manifests itself in love for others and gives us boldness to testify to others of the love of God in Jesus, God's love is

becoming more mature in you. And so, you have no need to fear the day of Judgment. You are filled with the very love of God. And as God's love is perfected in you, and is maturing in you, that love casts out all fear.

Another result of the Love of God is you will have a **Love for your brother.**

19. We love because he first loved us.

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.

21. And this is the command that we have from him: whoever loves God must love his brother.

5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him.

He says, we love because God first loved us. This is so important to remember. God loved us before we loved him. There was no love for God that made us attractive to him. We were by nature children of wrath, enemies of God, and left to our own way we went about hating God and hating each other. There is nothing good in us that made God love us. And yet, in His sovereign grace he chose to love us simply because it was according to the good pleasure of his will. And when God chose to love us, he made us born again, gave us repentance and faith, and made us alive in Christ and put his spirit within us and filled us with his inter-trinitarian love in the Spirit, so then we were able to love God and one another.

Therefore, because God loved us when we were unlovely, we ought to imitate God and love our brothers whose faults and shortcomings and sins we so easily and eagerly see. For the love of God was manifest to us in this, that while we were still sinners Christ died for the ungodly.

Therefore, because we have that love in us, which comes from the Holy Spirit and because we are born of God, we should have the same love within us for the brothers. We need to be quick to overlook the sins and shortcomings and character deficiencies of others. We need to not take things personally. We need to look upon one another in the church with the same eyes that God has for us, with unconditional love, with our sins covered and removed in Christ.

And so, if you say you have been born again, if you say you love God, and yet you hate your brother by not forgiving them of their sins, by not covering over their short comings, by not laying down your life for theirs and considering their honor and reputation and dignity and worth as more precious and valuable than your very own, then you are a liar. You cannot love God whom you have not seen if you do love your brother whom you have seen.

We need to say with King David, who says in the 16th Psalm, “*As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight.*” And that means, trying to be pleasing and delightful to the other saints. That itself is an act of love. Don’t be a horses patoot to people and then demand people love you. Make yourself lovely, and others will find it easier to love you.

The next result of God’s Love for us and in us, is we will **keep God’s commandments**. John says,

2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments.

3. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

Keeping God’s commands are not burdensome. In fact, by obeying God’s commands, you are loving God, and the children of God. This is the

standard therefore we need to keep in our minds when we talk about what is love.

There are those today who think that love is to be free from any constraint or obligation. That in order for love to be love it must be a free exercise of emotion and will, unconstrained, and we can love in whatever way we want to express our will or emotions or desires. The idea of placing obedience to a command at the center of love strikes at the heart of the modern worlds' definition of love.

But God's word informs us that love and obeying commands are not opposed to each other. Now the whole idea of a command is that something is imposed upon you and you are obligated to fulfill a duty. You do not get a choice in the matter.

God says, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only you shall serve. You get no say as to the content of that command. Your obligation is to obey it.

God says, you shall not take God's name in vain. God's name has been given to you in baptism, and you bear his name. You are obligated to bear His name with dignity and honor and love and to represent your God with faithfulness. Guess what. You did not choose that. It was imposed upon you.

God says you must honor your father and mother. Again, you did not choose your father and mother. You were born to them, at a particular place and time not of your choosing. They make decisions for you, and you are required to obey. They make hundreds if not thousands of decisions that affect you and they have responsibilities that are imposed upon you that you did not choose to have binding upon you. And yet, there is a great relief in knowing that God's commands are not burdensome.

Rod Dreher in his book *Live Not By Lies* says this: “*Now, in liberty and relative prosperity, the children of the last communist generation have fallen to a more subtle, sophisticated tyranny,*” one that tells them that anything they find difficult is a form of oppression. For these millennials, unhappiness is slavery and freedom is liberation from the burden of unchosen obligations.” Pg. 184.

Children of God, your whole life is an unchosen obligation. You did not choose to be born, you did not choose to be born to your family, with all its relationship ties, and commitments to people and beliefs that were set in place before you were born. You did not choose to be a male or female, and so your obligations to be a protector or a life giver are unchosen. You were born in this country, and you live in this state, and in this town, most of you without your express permission. All of your life is filled from beginning to end with unchosen obligations.

You are not free when you try to escape from those obligations. You are not free when you choose obligations for yourself that are contrary to nature. You are not free when you reject all responsibilities and obligations and duties and requirements and abandon all loyalties and cut all ties that bind you. You are not free when you do that. You are only a slave to your own selfish and autonomous desires.

Yes, life is difficult. Yes, life is filled with suffering and a whole host of discomfort. And it is filled with a million choices. But you know what? You know why there is such a high percentage of people who suffer with anxiety, especially young teenage girls? It is because there is this pressure from the culture to find yourself, to choose who you want to be. To form for yourself your own identity, and to meet some expectation that you should be able to navigate those millions of choices and make the right ones.

Who is capable of doing such things? Such a weighty thing that is mentally and spiritually taxing and is driving our young people crazy. This modern lie that you have to create your autonomous and genuine self that is free from all unchosen obligations is the biggest burden and lie that are young people are being told today.

Jesus and John both say, that His commands are not burdensome. It is so freeing to not have to choose who you are going to be, who you are going to associate with, who you are going to have loyalties to. What your base identity is. Believe me. Your identity is wrapped up in God and Christ and the Church and your families and nation and town, all things that you did not choose for yourself. And those things have their own responsibilities and obligations bound up within them. Embrace that. Life and happiness are to be found there.

A poll taken in 2019 in the Wall Street Journal found that 4 out of 5 young people believed that self fulfillment is the good life. And that means, seeking your own identity, and choosing those things that you think will give you meaning and purpose and a fulfillment. But if these people would listen to the other 1 in 5, they would understand that it's by being loyal to the unchosen obligations that give real fulfillment. Religion, family, patriotism, these are things that a person is born into and have duties and responsibilities that are unchosen. And these things when embraced, are not burdensome, but truly liberating.

God wants you to love your family, and to have children, and to love your parents, and to love your God and your church and traditions and your country. These things were chosen for you. And believe me, it is such a relief to be able to say, OK, here is where my allegiance lies, here are the ties that bind me to my people, here are my responsibilities. These things

have been chosen for me. Embrace it, love it. God's Commands are not burdensome. It is so freeing, and it is loving.

And the last result of God's Love for us and in us, is we will **Overcome the World**

4. For everyone who has been born of God has overcome the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.

5. Who is it that over comes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

The term world has a wide meaning here – referring to the whatever is against the Spirit of God and is opposed to Jesus Christ, the lusts of the flesh, the crafts of Satan, and the corruptions of nature that are fighting to lead us away from God. With such a great and deadly force against us, we can sometimes get overwhelmed that we have been caught up in such an immense war.

And if it were not for the grace of God and His protection we would have already been destroyed a hundred times daily. But God encourages us to continue fighting by promising us the victory. And when you know that you have already won the victory, the fight and battle become all that much sweeter. And you can even then fight with joy in your heart and a song on your lips. Like *when all the host of Rohan burst into song, and they sang as they slew, for the joy of battle was on them.*

This is the way it is, children of God. We do not lose heart simply because there is fight. We are not to act as if all is lost simply because we have enemies. We are not to cower in fear and dread as if the world is more powerful than Christ the Lord. For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. And the power by which we destroy dark forces of Satan is by faith in Christ the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords. For

Who is it that over comes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

The faith that overcomes the world is not some general faith in God. It is definitely not some ambiguous and mushy faith in faith. The faith that overcomes the world is a very specific faith. It is a faith that Jesus is the Son of God from Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, who is enthroned on high, exalted above the host of Heaven and earth, and ruling and reigning victorious over all things, where the Father is putting all his enemies under His feet.

The Son of God is the Royal title of the Davidic King. The Son of God was promised possession of all the nations of the earth and before His ascension we are told that Jesus has all authority in Even and Earth, and that it is his plan through us to disciple all the nations into obedience to His commands. It is faith in this very specific truth that over comes the world.

The result of having the love of God within us, is that we boast in Christ's kingship and have faith that he will and is, and has already conquered all our foes. This is the faith that overcomes the world. And it is an act of love to fill one another with such hope and good news that Jesus is the victorious Son of God. He is Christus Victor – the Victorious Christ.

Conclusion

And so we have seen the Root of Love is in the Trinitarian Nature of God and the Cross of Christ. The Revelation of the invisible God's Love in the world is seen through you when you love your brothers, and when you tell others about Jesus. And the results of loving God by loving others and telling others about Jesus will be that you have no fear of judgment day, you will love the brothers, you will keep his commands, and you will overcome the world with the victory of your faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. May God so fill us with His love that we may likewise love one another. Amen.