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

Be Like Him

Lesson Aim: To encourage believers to love one another as God loves them

L349. Date: August 1976. **Text:** I John 4:9-21.

Topic: God: Love of; Love: Of God.

An old Negro spiritual declared, “Eva’ body talk ‘bout heb’n ain’t agoin’ there.” It is the truth, of course. Equally true is the statement, “Not everyone who talks about love truly experiences it.” Today’s study deals with the Bible concept of love. Its aim is to encourage Christians to love one another as God loves them.

If one asks other people what love is, he will get a confusing variety of answers. If he asks God, he will get the truth. “. . . **God is love,**” I John 4:8. That does not mean, “God is in love,” nor “God shows love,” nor “God receives love,” but “God is love.” If one wishes to know what love truly is, he should learn what God is.

John is called “the apostle of love.” He seems to have comprehended the meaning of love, as manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, better than any other. He wrote four books of the New Testament one of which provides the lesson text for today’s study. He had a choice of three words which he could have used for “love.” since he wrote in the Greek language. (1) He could have used **eros** — fleshly love, lust, passion. (2) He could have used **philia** — pure and honorable human affection. (3) He rather used **agapa** — self-giving devotion which desires the best for the one loved. The Apostle of Love can teach believers the meaning of love.

Agapa is a new concept of love. It is wholly unselfish, loving solely for the sake of the one beloved. It can be extended to the undeserving since it is not dependent upon the merits of the one loved. It loves for the purpose of lifting. **Agapa** is divine love, not human love, even though it is placed

within the hearts of believers.

Each New Testament reference to the love of God uses the term **agapa**.

Each New Testament reference to Christian love uses the term **agapa**. God is love (I John 4:8); His Holy Spirit puts His love in the hearts of believers (Romans 5:5); the Christian loves people with the love of God (John 13:35; 1 John 4:12).

I. GOD LOVES MEN.

God is concerned about people. When the Bible speaks of His loving “the world,” it does not refer to inanimate creation, but to people. Neither does it speak of humanity as one great mass, but of individual persons.

A. God loves men evidently (verse 9). **“In this was manifested the love of God toward us . . . God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him.”** Does anyone wish proof of God's love? It is manifest in Jesus.

How much does God love men? He loves them enough to give His Son for them. That act of love can neither be defined or described, categorized or classified. It is beyond human comprehension.

It would have been great love if the Creator had visited His creation to be praised. God came to His own things and His own people received Him not, John 1:11. He came, not as the Creator demanding His rights, but as a servant willing to serve even though it cost Him life itself. His coming involved His emptying Himself of the divine glory which was eternally His. Only once did the glory shine through in all His earthly ministry. Oh, how the Creator loves the people He has created.

The incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus is the eternally astounding demonstration of the scope of God's love. One should never doubt that God loves him. He proved it at Calvary.

B. God loves men redemptively (verse 10). God's love did not cease when man sinned; neither did He pretend that the sins were not serious. True love is not blind; it does not overlook faults. It rather admits them and seeks to correct them. That is why the love of God reached out to men. He loved them so much He resolved to redeem them from their sins. **“. . . God sent his only begotten Son into the world . . . to be the propitiation for our sins,”** I John 4:9, 10.

The Bible teaches much about the significance of the death of Jesus Christ. He suffered for men's sins, the Just one for the unjust ones, I Peter 3:18. He actually bore men's sins in His body on the cross, I Peter 2:24. His death provided atonement for the sins of all men through all time and in all

areas of the world, I John 2:2. His death opened the way to the presence of God for all believers, Hebrews 10:19-23. His death redeemed them and His resurrection life saves them, Romans 5:10. God's love is manifest in the death and resurrection of His Son.

C. God loves men continually (verses 12, 13, 15, 16). God's continuing love is manifest in His abiding presence with and within His children. Each Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God; therefore, the love of God abides unceasingly in him. "God is love." The closer the believer lives to God, the more he experiences the love of God. Praise God, He never stops loving men.

II. BELIEVERS LOVE GOD.

“. . . The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength . . .” Mark 12:29, 30. The first response of the believer to the grace of God manifest in salvation is for the whole of his being to go out in devotion to the Savior. That principle is so important that it is stated in both the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5) and the New Testament (Mark 12:29, 30).

Only a miracle of grace could cause a man to love God. The Bible pictures man as being “without strength . . . sinners . . . (and) enemies,” Romans 5:6-10. In his depravity, man lives a life which God describes thus: **“. . . foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another,”** Titus 3:3.

How can such a person be changed? God moved in grace so that **“. . . the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared . . . he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour,”** Titus 3:4-6. That is the miracle which enables a person to love God.

One should keep the correct order, if he would understand God's love. “We love him, because he first loved us,” I John 4:19. Men's love is but a dim reflection of His love. Had He not loved men, they could not have loved Him nor any other.

Although men loved one another before God came in the person of Jesus Christ, the Bible speaks of a different kind of love (**agapa**, divine love) when it speaks of love in relation to true religion. Man would never have realized there was such unselfish and holy love if God had not first

loved him.

It is of utmost importance that men love God. **“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha,”** I Corinthians 16:22. Paul taught that if any person does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, he should be accursed. Apart from love to God there can be no true service to Him and He will not be glorified in the professed believer.

Love to God gives assurance. **“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love,”** I John 4:18. One should never doubt God's love. Believers know that in love He always desires and provides that which is best for them.

Some people are afraid to be truly available to God's will because they fear what He will do with them. That spirit indicates a lack of understanding of the Lord, particularly of the love of God. Believers should look at life with this assurance: **“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”** Romans 8:32. God gave His greatest and best when He gave Jesus to die for men. He will provide everything else that believers need.

III. BELIEVERS LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Love for man is the natural expression of love for God. It verifies that the love of God is in one. The Bible speaks of believers as being “the body of Christ” (Colossians 1:18), and of Jesus as being the Head of the body. How can one love the Head of the body and not love members of his body? It is impossible. No wonder John wrote. **“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,”** I John 4:11.

The Christian loves with **agapa** kind of love — divine love. His love is a reflection of God's love. He loves what and whom God loves. He loves because God loves. God's love initiates: the Christian's love responds. God's love is both the example and source of Christian love.

It is human for one to love those who love him. It is divine for him to love those who are unlovely and unloving. God loved depraved men while they were in the very act of sinning: He loved them enough to lift them. Christians are to love the undeserving, also. Jesus said. **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,”** John 13:35.

A holy obligation rests upon each Christian to love his brethren. John wrote, **“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,”** I John 4:11. Did you catch the sense of “ought-ness” in the passage? Read it

again, remembering that it is a divine requirement. How obedient are you to that heavenly command?

Do not object that some people are so unlovely. So were all men in spiritual ugliness until God made them new in Jesus Christ. The essence of divine love (**agapa**) is that it is extended to the unlovely. **Agapa** always loves to lift.

Agapa is more than emotion; it is action. That is why John admonished, **“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue: but in deed and in truth,”** I John 3:18. A practical example of loving in deed, John said, is to help the person who is in need of food and clothing (I John 3:17). James agreed (James 2:15, 16). He who says he “loves souls,” but never tries to minister to a person so as to lead him to Christ or to build him up in the faith is not manifesting divine love. There is no real love unless emotion and action agree in ministry.

How can one love with divine love? He can let God love through him. That is what August Van Ryn expressed when he wrote, “I do not love my brother because of what he is, but because of what I am; not because he deserves to be loved, but because the love of God goes out to the deserving. I love him because he is Christ's; because he has been bought with the tremendous price, the precious blood of Jesus. I love him, because I love the Lord Jesus. I love him, because it is the divine nature to love; that nature indwelling in me asserts itself in loving all who are of God.”

Are you familiar with the concept of loving by faith? It is the only way you can honestly love some people. Dr. Bill Bright has written a booklet, entitled, “How to Love by Faith.” Loving by faith can revolutionize your life.

Briefly stated, here is how to love by faith. Remember that everything in the Christian life is by faith. God commands you to love people, John 15:11. There are probably some people whom you do not love. God commands you to love them, too. How? Love them by faith.

To love by faith is to ask God to love people through you with His divine love. Believe that God answers your prayer, basing your assurance upon His promise in I John 5:14, 15. Trust God to enable you to love the unlovely by loving that person through you.

Here is how to start loving by faith. Make a list of people whom you do not like, and begin trusting God to love them through you. Pray for each by name, asking God's choice blessings upon them. When you meet one of those persons, remind yourself of how much God loves him and ask God to love him through you. You will be amazed at how the day filled with love for people will also be filled with joy and meaning. Start loving by faith and

you will never want to stop.

God would not have commanded you to love others if He was not able and willing to enable you to love. Ask Him to take control of your life and make you a truly loving Christian.

The aim of today's study seeks to encourage you to love others with the same spirit and motivation that God has in loving you. Has it realized its goal in you? Do you comprehend more clearly the love of God? Do you know beyond any doubt that God's love is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit according to Romans 5:5? Are you willing to ask the Holy Spirit to fill your life (controlling and empowering you) and make you a loving Christian?

God's messenger can only point the way. You are responsible before God for what you do with what you learn. Remember the saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." Make the rest of your life a life of Christian love.

Questions

1. What are the meanings of the three Greek words for love?
2. Which is used in the Bible to speak of God's love? Why?
3. How did God manifest His love to you?
4. How may you manifest your love to Him?
5. How can you be sure that God loves you continually?
6. How can you be sure that you love God?
7. What does I Corinthians 16:22 mean to you?
8. How does I John 4:11 apply to you?
9. How can you love through faith?
10. What does divine love in you lead you to do for people?