

How can I love?

They hurt me. They said this thing that hurt me. I tried to ignore it. I said to myself, "It doesn't matter, move on, be mature about it, it was just this dumb little thing.

But still, I kept thinking about it. I wanted to put it out of my mind, I didn't want to think about it...but there it was.

As Christians we are told to we are to love each other, but there are times, if we are truly honest with ourselves, there are times where we find it is really, really difficult to love.

We are commanded to love, but how can we really love like we are commanded to love?

Here in our Scripture, John gives us insight into how God enables us to love. We cannot love the way God wants us to love on our own, we need God to enable us to love.

Before I read the Scripture this morning I need to briefly explain the meaning of the word 'love' in Scripture. In English we have one word for love, and in English the word love can have a very wide meaning from romantic love for my spouse, I love Katie, to the way I feel about chocolate, I just love chocolate. But, in Greek, the language this passage was written in, there are four very specific words that describe love: There is family love, brotherly love, romantic love, and also, agape love. Agape love is sacrificial love, it is a love where I serve the other, over myself. It is a love where I place the other before me, even at great sacrifice to myself. Here in our passage today John exclusively uses agape love.

As we read our passage today, follow along with me in your bibles and everywhere it says love, I will read agape love. I think this will give a great start in understanding what John is trying to teach us. Agape love is sacrificial love.

Read passage - 1 John 4:7-12

In this passage, John methodically works through agape love. John not only tells us that as Christians we should be exhibiting agape love; He tells us where agape love comes from; He tells us what agape love looks like AND he shows us that if we practice agape love we will have enormous blessings from God.

Let's start with verse 7. Here John tells us that we should love one another, with sacrificial love. Now, remember as we have been working through this book of 1 John, the author John, is explaining living our faith out in the context of the church. Here John is explaining that we need to love each other within the church with agape love. John is speaking specifically about brothers and sisters in Christ loving each other. Now we certainly could love others outside the church with agape love - but here in this passage, John is only talking about you and I, those who are brothers and sisters in the church.

So John wants us to love with agape love (John will define agape love for us in verse 9). But, for the moment we need to understand that John is asking us to do something that we as humans are incapable of doing. John is asking us to love in a way that is impossible for us to do. The short of it is: John asks us to do what we cannot do.

How do we know that? How do we know that John asks us to do what we can't do? We know because agape love does not come from the human heart. You and I cannot manufacture agape love. We can produce brotherly love, family love, and romantic love, but we cannot produce agape love. We cannot love sacrificially, it is beyond humans to be able to exhibit agape love. How do we know that? Look at verse 7, there's the answer as plain as day - where does agape love come from? God. I don't have agape love, you don't have agape love, only God has agape love.

I think the Beatles said it best when they sang, "all you need is love"and then they broke up.

So, if I don't have agape love, and you don't have agape love, and only God has agape love, how in the world can we do what John asks us to do? Again, Scripture being so clear and so practical, gives us the answer, verse 7, "Everyone who {agape} loves has been born of God and knows God."

So, if we exhibit agape love, remember agape love is sacrificial love, if we exhibit agape love, then obviously we are born of God and we know God. To 'know' God here in verse 7 means to intimately know him, John means to know him means we are true believers who have committed our lives to Jesus.

John has told us over and over in 1 John that our outward behavior reveals the condition of our heart. Here he continues with that spiritual truth saying that if you have agape love

you will exhibit agape love. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you have the ability to agape love - why? Because if you believe, you know God and those who believe and know God have agape love.....John explains this further in verse 8.

In verse 8 John gives us the negative of verse 7. He loves to do this doesn't he? John gives this positive / negative contrast so we can starkly see the affect of what he is teaching us.

Let's read verse 8. Whoever does not {agape} love does not know God, because God is {agape} love." See, how can I do something I don't know? How can I do calculus if I don't know calculus? How can I speak Portuguese if I don't know Portuguese? How can I agape love if I do not know agape love? God is agape love. If I do not know God, who is the essence of agape love, how in the world can I agape love?

I might be able to love in other ways, but it is beyond my pay grade to agape love if I do not know God. It is beyond me to love sacrificially, because I do not know the one who is agape love. I cannot do what I do not know. If I do not know agape love, agape love is not in my personal universe.

What is the implication here? If I know God, If I have been born of God, then this will lead to agape love of others. The fact is, a person cannot come into a real loving relationship with God without being transformed into a loving person. Now, John does not outright explain how this all happens, but John does imply how this all happens. John implies that the agape love of God takes ahold of our lives, and transforms us - it the agape love of God, not our love, that is at work here. The agape love of God falls upon me because I know God and have been born of God (perhaps this process is too complex for the human mind, so John doesn't even try to explain it) but the result of this agape love of God falling upon me is that I can agape love too.

I want us to note that when John says that, "God is love" John is not in any way speaking in the abstract, rather, John is talking about the action of God. Saying that God is love does not exclude the other attributes of God, it includes the other attributes as well. John is not saying that agape love is God, no he is saying that God is the pure definition of agape love. See, God is love, is not a philosophical statement, it is a statement of action. God is love, is not an ideal we are to attain, no, it is a practical everyday action we are to live out.

Here is what John is teaching us: Jesus has come to release us from our sin and so his love for us is action oriented.

If Jesus' love was Sensitive – Jesus would say, "I feel for you in your sin."

If Jesus' love was Rational – Jesus would say, "Your sin is illogical."

If Jesus' love was Judgmental – Jesus would say, "Only bad people sin."

If Jesus' love was Therapeutic – Jesus would say, "Tell me about your sin."

If Jesus' love was Pitiful – Jesus would say, "You should have seen your sin coming."

If Jesus' love was Meditative – Jesus would say, "Relax and don't think about your sin."

If Jesus' love was Pessimistic – Jesus would say, "Get ready, your sin is going to make your life worse."

If Jesus' love was Optimistic – Jesus would say, "Don't worry about your sin, things will get better."

But Jesus' love is Agape love – and so Jesus says, "Take my hand and let me pull you out of your sin."

God is the definition of agape love. John shows us this in verse 9, "This is how God showed his {agape} love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."

Since agape love is an action, not an ideal or a philosophy, but an action, agape love must exist in action...and so it does in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. What is the definition of agape love? Pure, selfless, sacrifice - Jesus, the all powerful awesome God, becomes human - so that you, you can live.

Jesus gives up everything that he is - so you can live. There was no sacrifice that Jesus was not willing to make, so that you could live. Agape love is even when you didn't know of the existence of Jesus, Jesus gives you life.

This is love without expectation. This is love without hope of the return of love. This is love without the need of acknowledgement, without the need of payback, without the acknowledgement of personal existence.

Verse 10 - this is agape love - not that we love God, but in spite of who we really are, God loves us anyway. Even if we refuse to follow him, even if we hate him, even if we

can't stand the thought of Jesus - Jesus loves us anyway, his love is agape love, Jesus dies for us, even though we may never return love to him, ever.

Listen to this: You are highly valued by Jesus. It doesn't matter what bad things you have done; it doesn't matter what bad things you have said; it doesn't matter who you have hurt, or what you have thought or even what you have neglected to do; it doesn't even matter that you have never had an ounce of faith - Here is the truth of the matter:

What someone is willing to pay for something determines the value.

Jesus was willing to give his life for you, because you are of ultimate value. You are so valuable, Jesus was willing to do what ever it would take so you would have the opportunity to be free from you sin. That is agape love!

Notice verse 11. Here is an amazing key spiritual insight. Look carefully. Grammatically what John should say is - 'Since God loved us, we should love God'. According to the structure of the language, that is what John should say, but John doesn't say that does he? What does John say? "since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

John is telling us this: God's agape love is what enables us to agape love. We have seen that I cannot produce agape love, so I should not try to produce agape love on my own. John is telling us that the experience of agape love will generate agape love in us.

Here is John's thought wrapped up in a practical application: The more I experience God, the greater ability I have able to agape love others. Since God is the definition of agape love, the more agape love I experience the more I can agape love. So what I want to do is, experience God.

The developing of agape love is not instantaneous, but it builds over time. How do I build agape love in my live? I experience God. How do I experience God? Be in the presence of God. What kinds of things bring me into the presence of God? Worship, prayer, mediation, bible study and reflection. We have talked about these things many time. Today I would encourage you to add to your life, if you don't do this already, a personal time of worship - for me personally, I have found a personal time of worship, one of the most healing things in my life. I have found it as something that gives me the ability to love, that I do not naturally have. What a blessing that is.

Look at verse 12, there is the blessing. God will complete us if we exhibit agape love. What does John mean by "complete in us". Well, what is missing right now in your life? Peace, security, hope, justice a sense of belonging? There could be any number of things that make you....somehow feel empty.

The best way I can describe it is this: That thing that eats away at you, or that thing that is missing from your life (you may not be able to put your finger on it), in time will complete you, God make the thing that eats at you irrelevant; in time God will make the thing missing in your life inapplicable. How? In the ever increasing experience of the agape love of God all things, all things pale in comparison.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.