

## Known for Love – 1 John 4:7-21

Some 4–8-year-olds were asked what love is... "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love." Rebecca - age 8 "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth." Billy - age 4 "Love is what makes you smile when you're tired." Terri - age 4 "Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK." Danny - age 7 "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen." Bobby - age 7 (Wow!) "Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day." Noelle - age 7 "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well." Tommy - age 6 "Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken." Elaine - age 5 "Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford." Chris - age 7 "When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you." (what an image!) Karen - age 7 And the final one... Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four year old child whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his Mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, **"Nothing, I just helped him cry."**

Those three little words, *"I love you"* are easy to say and sometimes it's even easy to do...for a while...until it's not. Then what happens? What happens when the one who is supposed to love you doesn't anymore? What happens when the one you love is hard to love? I think I've told you before about going with my girlfriend at the time to her parents' house for a Thanksgiving family reunion. All her family was there; uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews and there was her grandmother and grandfather as well, "Mamaw and Papaw" or whatever their names were. Everybody was having a great time, laughing and eating and finally the conversation lagged for just a second and one of the young adult ladies asked Papaw a question. *"Papaw, if you could do it all over again, would you?"* she asked with a smile on her face. Papaw simply just said *"No"* which was kind of awkward. The lady tried to clarify. *"I mean, you know, marrying Mamaw and having kids and grandkids and all. Wouldn't you do that all again?"* **"No", said Papaw. "Too hard."**

Too hard. What was hard about it? Love is hard! At least it's hard to do for any length of time. It's hard to love in a real way. Oh sure, you can love peanut butter and you can love puppy dogs and you can love riding motorcycles but try loving somebody who is hard to love (you know, like you) and do it for the rest of your life even if it means sacrificing everything you have. That's hard. In fact, I would say, based on what scripture says, that it is impossible to do without God doing it through you.

Are you ready for me to back that statement up with scripture? I hope so and I hope you have your copy of scripture and if you do please turn way to the back, nearly to **Revelation** to the great little book of **1 John**. We are going to look at **1 John 4:7-12** as we continue our emphasis on knowing what our church should look like. The books of 1,2,3 John were written by the disciple John who had been with Jesus and who called himself the disciple whom Jesus loved so it is appropriate that John would help us understand what it means to be a disciple and what it means to love and be loved. 1 John is one of those books that is just chock full of those apples of gold in settings of silver, if you know what I mean. (Proverbs 25:11)

**1 John 4:7-12** says, *"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God*

*showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”*

Now, to really understand this passage, it's important that everybody knows Greek. Is that gonna be a problem for anyone? Yes? Good, because I don't know it either but I have books that tell me that there are several words in the Greek that mean love. You can love your brother or your neighbor with one word. You can love your spouse with another and you can love like God loves with the word that John uses here. That word is agape. You could read the passage, *“Dear friends, let us agape one another, for agape comes from God.”* Those other kinds of love don't necessarily come from God like agape does. **Galatians 5:22** says that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, etc. That love, agape, comes from God because God is agape. When Galatians says it is a fruit of the Spirit, it means that it is what shows up when the Spirit shows up. It is a characteristic of having the Holy Spirit in your life. It's not even really described as a gift. When John says that God is love He means it is the chief characteristic of God; the characteristic that all His other characteristics revolve around. When God shows up as the Father, Son or Holy Spirit love is going to be there. It's the same with His children. When we as disciples and believers, who the Bible says have the Holy Spirit living in us, show up then love automatically shows up as well. That's why John says in **verse 8** that *“Whoever does not love does not know God.”*

I have 2 dogs, Bam and LilBit. I often refer to them as “my kids” since I don't have human kids of my own and if you are wondering, I recommend dogs over kids any day but that's another story. But if you didn't know me and I introduced myself and then introduced LilBit to you as my daughter you might find that a little strange, right? If I dressed her up all pretty in a little dress and let her sit at the table and gave her her own iPhone and expected the school to treat her as a human, you would think I was crazy. I could even talk about how I remember when my wife gave birth to her and how that it was the best day of my life. You would know that no matter how beautiful she was and that no matter what I said that she was not my real daughter. It's the same when somebody talks about being a Christian and dresses themselves up as one but does not have agape love. That person is not of God; not a born-again child of God because where God is, love is. Agape love comes from God; it permeates everything He does, every command He gives, everything He gives and even everything He takes away. Do you believe that?

Oh, I hear you. I know what you're thinking when I say that. *“Todd, you don't know what has been taken away from me. How can God be love when He took my (fill in the blank) away from me?”* I understand that line of thinking. I really do and I could give you examples from my own life or examples of way too many people sitting around you of when God took something or someone away and then years later it all became clear why He did that. It's sort of like a mother who takes her baby to the doctor for a vaccination. He gives the baby a shot and the baby screams and cries and looks at Mom in horror wondering why she would allow it. But it was done out of love and for the benefit of the child. We all know that.

But sometimes...sometimes it never makes sense. Sometimes we never understand and we never will understand until we see Jesus face to face. Until then we just have to trust Him because He has proven Himself trustworthy. Until then all we can do is quote that little part at the end of **verse 8**. Do you see it? It says, *“...because God is love.” “...because God is love.”* That answers every “why” question you have so just memorize that. Why did God take my loved one? *“...because God is love.”* Why don't I have that job I need? *“...because God is love.”* Why do I struggle with all these things? *“...because God is love.”* I can't understand it. It's not easy. It hurts. But the Bible says it and that's enough because the Bible (God's Word) has proven itself to be true and if it's not true that God is love then none of it can be believed. So, make the choice right now to believe.

See, that's what agape love is all about. It is about making the choice. That's what separates it from all other kinds of love. I love peanut butter because it tastes good. You love the Cowboys when they play well. We love some songs because they make us feel good. With most things I love it is because of the way they make me feel. That's not agape love. God showed us agape love even before we showed Him love. It was not because we made Him feel good. **Romans 5:8** says, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* That's agape love. That's what it's talking about in **verse 10**. God made the choice to love us even before He would ever get anything good out of it. Jesus made the choice to die for the sins of the very men who drove the nails into His hands. Agape love doesn't just feel. Agape love is love in action performed by the will of the one showing it.

**First Corinthians 13** is called the Love Chapter in the Bible. You hear it read at almost every wedding, and you should because it is talking about agape love. It says, *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."* You can easily substitute the name of Jesus for the word love there. Jesus is patient, kind, etc. The question is: can you insert your name? I'll tell you, nobody is naturally all those things. You have to make the choice to be those things. You make the choice to be patient. You make the choice to be kind. You make the choice and you continue to make the choice even when it costs you everything because agape love – while it comes from God and is shown by God - is only completed in us.

See that in **verse 12**? This message is not to encourage you to try harder to love people unconditionally. Nobody can do that on their own for any length of time but God is love and love will manifest itself in His children. As believers we will make the choice to love people unconditionally and sacrificially. As a church we will make the choice to sacrifice for others' sakes so that God will be attractive to them through us and so that they will see who God really is and want to become disciples as well.

**D.L. Moody** used to tell the story about a little boy who attended a Sunday school at a local church. When his parents moved to another part of the city the little fellow still attended the same Sunday school, although it meant a long, tiresome walk each way. A friend asked him why he went so far and told him that there were plenty of others just as good nearer his home. *"They may be as good for others, but not for me,"* was his reply. *"Why not?"* she asked. ***"Because they love a fellow over there,"*** he replied. They agape over there. What good is it to the community of Chico if we know that love comes from God and is shown to us by God if that love is not completed in us? If the people we have been called to minister to – the poor, addicted and incarcerated – can't get sacrificial love from our church then where are they going to turn and who will show them how attractive God really is?

This is actually one of the reasons why I love this church and what separates us from other, usually much bigger churches. This church has proven over and over again that we choose to love people even when we know we will never be repaid or maybe not even loved in return and I believe that is why God has called us to the poor, addicted and incarcerated and also why we are still such a small church – because agape love is hard to do. It can only be done by having a life-changing relationship with God through His Son Jesus. Notice I didn't say that it can only be done through membership in this church. There are lots of churches with more members but lots of those members are not continuing to make the choice to love others sacrificially and what that tells me is that those members either don't know God or their relationship with Him is blocked by sin in their lives.

How about you? Is agape love being continually shown in your life? It comes from God and is shown by God and it will be completed in your life if you have asked God to be Lord of your life and to forgive you of your sins. Do that today and know that whatever happens that God loves you because God is love.