

GOD!

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-21

INTRO: The Scripture we had read for us this morning is 1 John 4:7-21. In this passage the word love in various forms occurs 29 times in 15 verses! We could have read 1 Corinthians 13 as well. By the time this message is over you may want to read those passages again and look at them in an entirely different light. As a matter of fact, you may look at the word 'love' with an entirely new possibility of meaning, or you might say, "This seems so far off, I will have to think or study this myself."

Since the days of D.L. Moody, the message of the Church has largely been love, and I have said that we have OD'ed on the message of love. When the song writer wrote the song, "The Love of God", He certainly did not overdo it. Paul says in Ephesians 3:19 that love surpasses knowledge. It is not our stress on the greatness of God's love that is the problem. The problem is our understanding of what true biblical agapee love is. I want to address that in this message. And if you say after this message, "I am going to check this out myself" I say, "Praise the Lord." And if you find discrepancies or additions, I would appreciate hearing those.

When I began to prepare this message I said, "Lord, this time I need Your touch more than in any other message I've done in this series this far!" I read Tozer's chapter on the love of God and he began like this: "The love of God is the hardest of all His attributes to speak about. You may not understand God's love for us. I don't know that I do myself. We are trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. It is like trying to take the ocean in your arms, or embrace the atmosphere, or rise to the stars. No one can do it, so I suppose I must do the best I can and trust the Holy Spirit to make up for human lack."

What is true biblical love? What does the Bible mean when it says that God is love? Well, let us tackle a most difficult subject.

7. Love

We come to the very hardest of all tasks I have tackled and that is defining 'love' from a biblical perspective, especially as found in John

3:16, "For God so loved the world..." But I think that one of the reasons that it is so hard to define love is that our English word 'love' is so broad that it covers a wide range of relationships or attachments. So in defining this word, we come to a word that has more than one definition crammed into one.

If I were to define our English word 'love' in its broadest range of meanings, I would define it as an attraction or attachment to someone or something.

In the Greek language there were four words which we translate by the one word love. These are *agapee*, *philia*, *eros*, and *storgee*. With these words, various relationships could be described by separate words, but in English we are restricted to one. In my way of thinking, the basic ingredient in all the words translated love is an attraction or an attachment. But this attachment or attraction is based on different things depending on which is meant. In English one has to determine that from the context. In the Greek language they had different words for these.

Eros denotes the physical attachment or attraction between man and woman and is based on the sex drive. *Storgee* love is that natural attachment between family members and is based on loyalty. *Philia* describes the attachment of friends and is based on the emotions. *Agapee* describes an rational or intellectual attachment based on truth.

Agapee love is the attraction (or attachment) to someone or something grounded in knowledge (Phil. 1:9), information that causes one to seek the welfare of that person, or possession of that thing which one is attracted to. *Agapee* love can be commanded because it is not based on our ever changing emotions.

Let me show you the use of two of these Greek words we translate love in the NT. Let us turn to John 21 (read 15-17). Most of you will have heard

of these two words for love used in this passage. In verse 21 Jesus said, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" The word 'love' is agape. And Peter answered in verse 15, "Yes, Lord: You know that I love You." The word Peter used is 'philia', not agape.

Then Jesus said in verse 16, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Again the word is agapee, not philia as Peter had said. And Peter answered, "Yes Lord, You know that I love You." Peter again used the word 'philia'. Then Jesus said a third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" This time Jesus used the word 'philia'. And Peter was grieved and said, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." And for the third time Peter used the word 'philia'.

Now the question is, why did Jesus use the word 'agapee' twice and why did Peter not use it at all. "Well", someone might say, "these are simply synonyms." The answer then is that there is no reason for the use of two different words because they mean basically the same thing. I find Scripture too careful with words to easily think that.

F.F. Bruce, speaking of Bishop Trench's view, says, "According to Trench Peter finds the word on his Lord's lips (agapao) 'far too cold' at a time when 'all the pulses in the heart of the now penitent Apostle are beating with a passionate affection towards Him. He himself uses a word (phileo) which more adequately conveys the warmth of that affection, and triumphs when on the third occasion the Lord consents to use that word."

To say that agapee love is a rational love and not based on the feelings makes it a cold word compared to phileo. However, a love based on reason is not subject to the fickleness of feelings and thus much more trustworthy. When the Bible says, "For God so loved the world..." it uses the word agapee.

Now are there any writers who support the view that agapee is rational, based in the heart or

mind, not the emotions? Well, first of all we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart or mind, not our emotions. Furthermore, Bishop Trench, who has done very careful work in distinguishing the meanings of synonyms says of agapee that it, "expresses a more reasoning attachment of choice and selection from a seeing in the object upon whom it is bestowed that which is worthy of regard; or else from a sense that such is due toward the person so regarded, as being a benefactor, or the like; while the second [phileo], without being necessarily an unreasoning attachment, does yet give less account of itself to itself; is more instinctive, is more of the feelings or natural affections, implies more passion..." (pg. 42).

Let me quote one more writer, Stephen F. Winward, who writes in his book, *Fruit of the Spirit*, "In the Old Testament, the word translated heart is used more frequently of the will than of the emotions. It is the seat of volition. So to love with the heart is to will the good of the person loved. Love is goodwill and active benevolence. Love is a disposition, a settled will to seek and promote the good and well-being of others. Here the key words are will and action. Love wills the good of the other person and goes into action to ensure it. That's why love can be commanded. If love were only or mainly an emotion, it would be futile to require it of us. For we can neither produce nor change our inclinations, likings, and affections to order."

What he is saying is that agapee love is not basically a feeling. It is the will to seek the good of others. If it were a feeling it could not be commanded. For example, you have a bad day and your feelings are down. Would it not be nice to be able to command your feelings to get up, and up they come? But that simply does not work. We sometimes think of depressed people that they should just get their act together. But when one becomes depressed, he finds it is not so simple. So I maintain that true love, rather than being grounded in feelings is grounded in knowledge,

and seeks another's well-being based on that knowledge.

Let me speak of one other matter addressed by Stephen Winward on love. He says that love is not altogether without emotion and emotion should not be entirely removed from it but then he writes, "Since loving has to do primarily with the mind and the will, and liking has to do with attraction, inclination and feeling, it is possible to love people without liking them. It's fortunate that we can and necessary that we should. No man should wait until he feels like it before putting his love into words and deeds. He is under obligation to go and help those in sorrow or need, even if he feels no pity, compassion or concern. Still less must a man confine his caring to those for whom he has a liking. We can love those we dislike and care even for our enemies. Jesus commands this and shows how it is possible by using other action words which draw out the meaning of the verb to love. 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you (Lk. 6:27-28)."

As I was thinking and rethinking I thought of what they said about Jesus when He wept after He heard that Lazarus died. And those who stood by said, "Behold, how He loved him!" And I wondered which word for 'love' would be used in this passage. What word would you guess is used in that passage? If you guessed 'agapee' love, you guessed wrong. It is 'phileo' love.

[[Quite often on weddings, 1 Corinthians 13 is used and it is used to speak of love in marriage. But the love in 1 Corinthians 13 is neither storgee, eros or philia. It is agapee love. It is not the emotional love we associate in our culture with love. That does not mean it is not an appropriate passage for weddings but it speaks of a different love than what we usually have in mind in marriage.

The helpful thing of 1 Corinthians 13 is that, though it does not define agapee love, it shows

us how it acts. Agapee love suffers long. It does not envy. It does not parade itself. It is not proud. It does not behave rudely. It does not seek its own. It is not easily provoked. It thinks no evil. It does not rejoice in iniquity. It rejoices in the truth. It bears all things. It believes all things. It hopes all things and it endures all things.

It may come as a surprise to you that nowhere in the NT is a wife instructed to love her husband with agapee love. That may be disappointing to some. So you may say, "Well, Titus 2:3-4 says that older women are to admonish the younger to love their husbands." That is true. But the word is not agapee. It is philandros. Literally it would be 'husband-lovers'. And the love part of the word is philia love, not agapee.

However, Ephesians 5:25 says husbands are to agapee love their wives as Christ loved (agapee) His Church. You see, a godly husband's love is not based on his feelings so much as it is based on biblical truth. He may not feel like doing the things truth says need doing, but agapee love will do it anyway.]]

Now why did I give such a long explanation of agapee love? Because I think when we read the words, "For God so loved the world..." or the passage we had read for us this morning, we may have in our minds a different idea of love than that presented or intended in the Word of God. I remind us that the Bible does not say, "For God so loved (phileo) the world..." It is agapee love. In the passage we had read this morning, 1 John 4:7-21 the word agapee love occurs in various forms 29 times. Never once does phileo love occur in that passage. To properly interpret God's Word, we must get into our mind what God had in His when He inspired these words.

So what does it mean that God so loved the world? Well, let me first say what it does not mean. It does not mean that He has such strong, desirable, pleasant feelings or emotions for man, that He was willing to give up His only Son on their

behalf. But it does mean that He sought and willed the well-being of mankind to such an extent that He was willing to Give His Son to achieve that. The truth of the matter is that He created us and He created us for His glory. If He let all mankind go to hell after man sinned, He would never be able to achieve that for which He made man. Furthermore, it would be horrible for all of mankind. It would not be agapee love if there was something He was able to do about it, and He did not do it. But there was something He could do, and the price we know, and that He did it we know. That is agapee.

Philippians 2:4 says, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." And how is that done? Well, verses 5-8 tell us and it begins like this: Let this mind (this kind of thinking) be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Then it goes on to show the thinking of Jesus and how He was willing to pay the ultimate price for our benefit, our interests. God sent His Son into the world to die on our behalf, not only for His own interests but ours also.

So, with that understanding, let me give you another picture. We turn to the Psalms (read Psalm 7:11). It says, "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day." Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoting another writer says of the words, "...God is angry with the wicked every day", "The original expression here is very forcible. The true idea of it appears to be, to *froth* or *foam at the mouth* with indignation." He also says, "He not only detests sin, but is angry with those who continue to indulge in it. We have no insensible and stolid God to deal with; he can be angry, nay, he is angry today and every day with you, ye ungodly and impenitent sinners. The best day that ever dawns on a sinner brings a curse with it. Sinners may have many feast days, but no safe days. From the beginning of the year even to its ending, there is not an hour in which God's oven is not hot, and burning in readiness for the wicked, who shall be as stubble" (Treasury of David).

Turn with me to another passage, John 3:36. It says, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Now the word translated 'wrath' here is the strongest word for anger and it is present tense. So how do we reconcile the teaching of Scripture that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, with the words that He is angry with the wicked every day and His wrath abides on the unbeliever?

How can God love man to such an extent when man is sinful and He is extremely angry with them? It is the fact that God seeks man's good, even while man is His enemy. Let Romans 5:8 come now with new force: "But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Then consider verse 10, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled..." You see, God loved us when we were yet enemies and He was still angry with us. That is, He did that which was not only in His own interest, but also in our interest, and salvation from sin is man's greatest need.

In the last message we asked, "How can a wise God allow so much pain and suffering?" We said that many claim there is no God because a God of love could not allow so much pain and sorrow and suffering. But the facts are that it is a wise God who made everything. Not only is He wise, but He is wise and good and kind and so on.

Now let me raise another question: How could a loving God condemn people to hell for all eternity? Let me read something shocking for you from Tozer. He says, "I believe that in the end of time, when we know as we are known....it will be found that even the damning of a man is an expression of the love of God as certainly as the redeeming of a man" (II:183).

Let me explain that as I see it. We spoke earlier of God's anger and His wrath. It is sin that causes both of those. And in order for sinful

man, who is an enemy of God, to be reconciled to God, God must be propitiated (read Romans 5:21-26). In verse 25 we have the word 'propitiation'. It means to satisfy. God's wrath must be satisfied in order for man to be restored to Him.

When I try to show others how bad sin is, I use an illustration that some of you will have heard several times. I trust you will not find it boring if I use it again because I have not been able to come up with a new one. I say, "How many of you, if you came home after church and found your neighbor's boy had burned your house to the ground would not be upset with your neighbor?" But let us say the boy has a rich uncle and he says, "You can draw up your own blueprint and I will rebuild your house within three months and for the inconvenience of it all I will give you an extra \$100,000.00 and I will see the boy works it off." How many of you would have your anger or 'upsetness' satisfied? Well, most of us say we would be satisfied. We have received far more than we lost.

Then I say, "If that boy came when your family was sleeping in the house, and your family was burned, what price could rich uncle offer that would satisfy you?" And so far everybody has said to me, "There is no price." Such was the dilemma of God when man sinned and the devil thought he had Him. But God found a way. God's anger was satisfied in the price of His only Son's blood on the sinner's behalf.

Let me take you back to Revelation 21 (read 21:1-8). Last Sunday I said we should have stopped reading at verse 7. Now consider for one moment what eternity would be like if God let those of verse 8 into this new city and onto the new earth for all eternity. I ask you, would that be love? It is unthinkable, is it not? And did you know that God never made hell for man? Matthew 25:41 tells us whom He made hell for. He made hell for the devil and his demons. The only reason people go to hell is because they have sold themselves to the devil by sin and have chosen to stay with him rather than receive Christ.

CONCL: So, let me briefly summarize what we have covered. First, I sought to define agapee love. I said that our English word love is far broader than the biblical agapee love. Agapee love is an attraction or attachment to someone or something based on the intellect. It is a reasonable love, not an emotional love.

What does it then mean that, "God so loved the world..."? It means He sought and willed the well-being of mankind to such an extent that He was willing to Give His Son to achieve that.

How can God be angry with the wicked, and still love them? Well, though He is angry with them, He wills and seeks their salvation. When this happens, such a person becomes His child and fulfills that for which He made them. God loves before and after salvation. But after salvation God's anger against that person has been propitiated. He is satisfied and He and that person are no longer enemies. That person has become His child! So we can truly sing:

The love of God is greater far, than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond, the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win:
His erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin.

When years and time shall pass away and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men, who here refuse to pray, on rocks and hills and mountains call,
God's love so sure shall still endure, all measureless and strong:
Redeeming grace to Adam's race – the saints' and angel's song.

Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole tho stretched from sky to sky.

O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forever more endure – The saints and angels' song.