

# (1 John #23) Why Love?

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and exercising agape love, a selfless and deliberate love that is the foundation of Christian love and is essential for living out our faith in a way that is pleasing to God.*

**Duration:** 41:26

**Scripture:** 1 John 4:7

**Topics:** "Love"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker confesses that due to a pastoral situation, he will only be addressing verses seven and eight of 1 John 4. He explains that sometimes certain topics need to be stressed in the pulpit because they have arisen forcefully in pastoral work. The speaker emphasizes the importance of love of a higher order, where believers seek the highest good of others, even if they are mistreated. He contrasts the commotion and turmoil of the world with the peace and love that should reign within the church, stating that evil spirits should be kept outside. The sermon encourages listeners to reflect on their own souls and apply the teachings of God's word to their relationships with others.

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## Transcript

Will you turn with me in your Bibles to 1 John chapter 4, and I would like to read at this point verses 7 and 8 only. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.

Now, our text is part of a paragraph that proceeds from verse 7 there in 1 John 4 to verse 12. And with this paragraph, will you notice that John begins the third round of his three tests of faith and of Christian character, Christian profession. Going back to verse 22 in chapter 3, you will remember that the apostle said that those who have real confidence in the presence of God, the kind of confidence that enables us to ask and receive in prayer, the folk who have that kind of confidence, says John in verse 22, are those who keep his commandments and to do that which is pleasing in his sight.

Look at the verse. Whatsoever we ask we receive of him because, and this is the cause, because we keep his commandments and we do those things that are pleasing in his sight. Now, the next verse, and this is his commandment.

Now, you notice that's in the singular. In verse 22 it's in the plural. In verse 23 John says, really, God's commandments can all be summed up into one.

Even though he goes on to say that there are two parts to that one commandment. So he proceeds in verse 23 to say this. This is his commandment, one, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another.

Now, what John is doing there is saying that, really, these are two halves of the one and the same thing. Paul says the same thing in his epistle to the Romans. He says that faith works by love.

If we have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and through our Lord Jesus Christ have faith in God, the way that works itself out is not just in the words of our lips, but in the love of our hearts let loose and liberated towards God, towards his people, towards the world that God loves. Faith working by love. Two halves of the one great commandment, as John would speak of it here.

Well now, in verses 1 to 6 of chapter 4, John has retraced his steps and he's taken up the first half of that commandment, that we should believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And last Lord's Day morning in my absence Greg Scharf was dealing with that. We don't believe every spirit that is abroad.

There are spirits that deny that Jesus is the Christ. We don't believe them. They come knocking at the door of our hearts and the door of our minds and our intellects.

But we don't receive them in. We don't welcome them because we know that Jesus is the Son of God. We test the spirits, therefore.

With verse 7 going on to verse 12, John takes up the second half of that one commandment referred to at the end of chapter 3, namely the commandment to love one another. And once again, once again, yes, once again, he would have us look into the mirror of God's word and apply this to ourselves and by the grace of God to one another. Now before I come to it, will you please notice the contrast that we have here when we compare what is said in verses 7 to 12 with what is said in verses 1 to 6 of chapter 4. In the world outside of us there is nothing but commotion.

Even in relation to the church of Jesus Christ evil spirits are abroad, harassing, disturbing, challenging. But in the church itself, says John, there should be nothing but peace and love that is reigning. In the area where evil spirits of one kind or another dominate and rule and reign, well, all right, there will be turmoil.

But the church is meant to be so different from the world. The evil spirits are supposed to be kept outside of our hearts and of our lives. Within us what should rule and what should reign is not the spirit of the evil one or his agencies of any kind, but rather the spirit of the living God himself with his fruit, which is love very specially.

Now let me make a confession. I had purpose today to speak about this whole paragraph. But due to a pastoral situation I cannot do that.

I think that we should address ourselves today simply to verses 7 and 8. I'll explain to you why as I go on. Perhaps it is an opportune moment for us to say this here. There may be members in the congregation that wonder from time to time why the man in the pulpit should stress something or other.

You know there are times when a person has to stress something because it has arisen so forcefully in pastoral work. You may not be aware of things, but the word of God has to be related to the exigencies and the need and the particular challenge of the hour. And in some lives there are certain problems that emerge.

Now I shall say more of that as we proceed. Looking at the whole paragraph there are three things that we shall be considering. The first today and the second two on another occasion.

But here they are. In verses 7 and 8, love and the divine paternity. If we love in this way then it proves that we are born of God and we know God.

In verses 9 and 10, love and its perfect expression in history. God sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. And if God did that, says John, we should love one another in that way.

That's the key, that's the standard of our love for one another. And then in verses 11 and 12, love and its contemporary ministry. Love is not just something that we do or express for one another, pause, with no consequence.

On the contrary, there is something that we are meant to do. Here it is. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us and his love is perfected in us, so that men may see him. That's the implication.

In us. Now having said that, will you come back with me to the first of these, which is our territory for this morning. Love proves the divine paternity of his people.

God's fatherhood in relation to his people. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God. And he who loves is born of God and knows God.

And then in the negative, he who does not love does not know God, for God is love. Now again, for convenience sake, we are going to subdivide this into three. There are three main thrusts here.

The first is this. John says, love is from God. Literally what John said is this, love is out of God.

In other words, he is the sole source or origin of what John speaks of as love. It cannot come from any other source whatsoever, so that if we love, we owe it to God. He has given us the capacity, he has given us the grace, he has given us the ability.

But now one has only to make that statement to recognize that it needs qualification. That statement must be qualified or there will be boundless confusion within the church and out of the church. In particular, it needs to be recognized that the apostle is using a word for love which distinguishes it from much else that goes by the same word in English.

John's word here is the familiar word to most of us, agape, and the corresponding noun. Everything that John says here, he is saying about this particular quality of love or kind of love. Not about love in general, but about agape love.

And agape love is a special kind of love. Now some of you may be tempted to ask me this morning, what kind of other love is there then? Why make any fuss about this? Well now, can I explain to you? Within a

few hundred yards of us here in Knox this morning, there is a cult being practiced. Among its tenets there are three, I don't want to go into any other details.

The first tenet to which I want to refer, I'm not suggesting that they come in this order, but the first I want to mention is this, the necessity of the rebirth. And you would all say, as I said the first time I heard it, praise be to God, somebody else preaching the gospel of the New Testament. The necessity of the rebirth.

A second tenet to which I want to refer is this, rebirth comes by love and leads to love. Now if you are discerning, you may want to ask a few questions. Comes by love, what does that mean? But if it leads to love, well all right, we're with it.

But the third tenet really takes us by storm. Love means physical intercourse. And the love that produces rebirth is physical intercourse between people over which the name of Jesus is said and the ensuing experience is that of rebirth.

Now I'm not talking about a dream. I'm not telling you something from a book that's been written by somebody. I'm telling you something that I've encountered here in my office.

And of course it goes like this, you see, they come back to this passage. If God is love, well the only love that some of us know is sex love. And it all arises due to a misunderstanding of the meaning of this word love.

God is love. And the love of God makes us new preachers. And built upon this total misunderstanding of the scriptures, there is this carnal, this desolating attempt to honor the gospel and to proclaim the word.

Now this is one place where we encounter the paucity of the English language. You see, we only have one word, generally speaking, love, and it can mean so many different things. Therefore I want to stay with this this morning, and I want to say, and say it as clearly as I can, and say not because the people concerned may be here this morning, they're not.

But you and I may be the very people who meet them and who can help them. And who knows, some of them may be approaching some of us and trying to make converts of us in due course. Now what we need to know is this, that the Greek world generally used three or four different words for love.

And they all meant something different. When the New Testament came along, it dismissed two of them outright. It took up a third, but it specialized by using this one word, agape, and its verbal form.

Because by love, the Christian church and the Christian gospel has something special in mind, something particular, something of an extraordinary nature. And when we say that God is love, we do not mean to say that God is sex love. We mean something altogether different.

Now I want to look at these words this morning in order to distinguish between things that differ. Now the Greeks had a word which described love between the sexes. That word is the word eros.

We still have in our English language the adjective erotic, or the noun eroticism. And I guess we all know the significance of that. The erotic character is a person who is on fire with sexual passion.

And this is the love that eros represents. Though sometimes it was employed by the Greeks to describe the kind of passion that was inherent in ambition. Because ambition devours a man, you see, just as sex does.

A man who's got ambition can be absolutely eaten up. And so eros was used of that. It was also used of patriotism, the kind of patriotism that we have in the New Testament.

We read of Simon Zelotes, Simon the Zealot. That's the King James Version. This zeal of his for nationalism was something that devoured him.

And in that connection, the word eros was used of nationalism, of patriotism. Even so, its fundamental characteristic is found in relation to sex and its involvement. An old-time writer, Gregory of Nazianzen, explained the meaning of this term early on in history when he said, eros refers to hot and unendurable desire.

The New Testament never uses this word. Now let's get this clear. If you encounter some of the people who are involved in the tenets to which I've referred, you can say to them that the New Testament never, never, never uses this word.

In other words, it looked upon it as so totally contrary to the concept of Christian love that God is and God expresses in Christ and requires of his people. It leaves this word outside in the pagan world and says, no, no, we'll not even refer to it. John's word is agokai, not eros.

Now there was a second Greek word for love which is called storge. Now this word, again, has been employed for a number of different uses, but it is characteristically used to describe the affection of a nation for its rulers, the respect of a nation for its rulers, or sometimes pagan nations' respect for their tutelary god, as in the case of the old Greek states. Various states, various communities had their own tutelary gods, and this was spoken of, this word was used to describe the respect of a worshipper for the pagan god that was thereby worshipped.

But now, having said that, its more regular and common use relates to the affection between parents and children, and vice versa, between children and their parents. Now this, again, is not generally used in the New Testament. The New Testament didn't take this up.

Now I shall explain in a moment why, there's good reason for that. Not that the love between parent and children is evil, but sometimes it can be selfish, very selfish, terribly selfish. So it is only in one place that we have this used in the New Testament, and not by itself, it is joined to another word.

This word, storgain, well now, in Romans chapter 12 and verse 10, Paul uses the word philo, storgain, philo as another word for love. The King James Version translates it like this, it says, be kindly affectioned one to another. Paul never used the word on its own without giving it a qualifying term alongside of it, and the rest of the New Testament has nothing to do with it.

But now there is a third word, a third Greek term for love is commonly used in the New Testament, namely that which is familiar to us as philia. You have it in the lovely name Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. Lovely, what if it lived up to its name, it would be more lovely still.

Philadelphia, lover of the brethren, the city of brotherly love. But you have it in philosophy, a philosopher is a lover of wisdom, philology, a lover of words. What a chasm separates the lover of wisdom from the lover of words.

However, that is beside the point. But philia, philia. Now, whereas eros and storge are not found in the New Testament, except storge qualified, as I've indicated, philia is very, very common in the scriptures.

It has a warmth about it. Now, this is the quality of philia, it has a warmth about it. And it suggests what we would refer to as a genuinely affectionate regard.

Now, if we were being strict in writing and very accurate, you know when you come to the end of a letter, you say with affectionate regard sometimes. I hope we choose our words carefully. If you do write that, well, this would be the word you'd put in in Greek, the word philia.

With affection, there's warmth. I'm not just writing a business letter now, I'm writing to someone that I deeply respect. Strictly speaking, again, it represents what the English word cherish means.

And when you cherish someone, you want that someone near to you. You'd love to hug that person. It's a love that always wants to draw near, not because of any erotic desire as such, but the bond of heart is there.

Sometimes it is used as a love and affection between husband, wife, wife, husband. And very often, sorry, not very often, sometimes it is used of God's love for his people. But this is its distinctive flavor.

Now, that's not the word that John has here. Neither is even that the characteristic word of the New Testament and of the Bible when it speaks of love. John's word is agape.

You may ask me, quite rightly, what then is so distinctive about that? Why leave these other three? Two of them are not brought into the New Testament. Why does the New Testament largely confine itself to this? Well, let's repeat, this is the most common word used in the New Testament for Christian love. And I think that I'm able to cull from a contemporary scholar of considerable repute some words that will help us to understand why.

It is true to say that all the other words had acquired certain flavors which made them unsuitable. Eros had quite definite associations with the lower side of love, the merely physical, the purely sexual. Not that sex is wrong.

God ordained it. God made us male and female in the first place. And he commanded mankind to multiply and to replenish the earth.

It's not that sex is love, but we are a fallen people. And in fallen men and women, sex has gone haywire and the instinct out of control. Eros had quite definite associations then with that particular realm of life.

Therefore, that was disqualified. Starkey was very definitely tied up with family affection. And it never had within it the wits that the conception of Christian love demands.

Christian love requires that you love people outside the family. And therefore, the Bible didn't use this. It said, no, no, it's all right in itself, but it doesn't go far enough, it isn't wide enough, it doesn't embrace mankind, it doesn't embrace the enemy.

Only those within the household, within the family. The great reason why... Oh, before I say that, I was going to forget philia. Philia was a lovely word, but it was definitely a word of warmth.

It could only be properly used of those that are near and dear. And Christianity, again, needed a much more inclusive word than that. And that's why it fastened on this very remarkable word, agape.

And the great reason why Christian thought fastened on this is, quite simply, is just this. Because agape is a kind of love in which the whole man is involved. Not just the emotion, but the mind and the will.

Let me put it to you like this. When we talk about philia, then you may say that you fall into love. I guess there are many people here this morning who would use that language.

We fell in love at such and such a place. And you fall into philia. It's something that happens to you.

Somebody appeared who was the ideal person, as far as you could see, physically and mentally and perhaps spiritually, and you fell in love. Power came over you, and you were swept off your feet. That's philia.

But you never fall into agape. You see that agape is the right thing to do, and you're determined by the grace of God. And, of course, you have to be rightly related with God to see this and to do it.

But by the grace of God, you see that you must love people, irrespective of whether they are related to you within the family, or whether they are lovely, or whether you can say that you cherish them. You must love them. You determine to, you decide to, and you gain a victory in so doing.

In other words, you never fall into agape. You receive the germ of it. You receive the essence of it at the new birth.

And now you are commanded to exercise it, as John calls upon the Christians here, Beloved, he says, let us love one another. It is here. It's been given to us.

It is a deliberate principle of the mind, a deliberate conquest and achievement. It's something that we set out to do. You see, you don't fall in love with your enemy.

You don't like the person that disabuses you. You can't like him. You can't cherish him in the sense of philia.

But nevertheless, the word of God calls upon us to seek the highest and the best for the lowest and the most undeserving, and even the person that slaps us in the cheek for trying to help him or her. As God was slapped in the cheek when he sent his only begotten Son to seek and to save that which was lost. Love may be crucified in loving, but it is told to love and it decides to love.

It's a matter of the mind and of the will. So you see, you and I can't say, well, I don't like so-and-so, so I don't love them. No, no, the Bible leaves us without a crutch to stand on.

It says, if you have the grace of God in your heart, then you have the capacity for agape. And it isn't a matter of sexual love. It isn't a matter of their being within the family.

It isn't any of this kind of thing, nor that they are lovely and lovable. But it is this. God loves them.

God's love is in you. Therefore, practice it by the grace of God. Oh, can I put it to you like this? Agape is always imported into human life.

It's never homegrown. You can't cultivate it. I can't cultivate it.

We can't cultivate it together. It is imported and the sole exporter is God. It is out of God.

For God is agape. Now, the second thing, and I'm nearly through. Such love is an attitude of, an attribute of God's nature.

Agape does not simply come from God. It does come from God. But more than that, God is love.

You can't say God is Eros. You can't say God is Storge, or He would only love the near and dear, love within the deity, within the Trinity. You can't say God is even Philia, or it would simply mean cherish the cherishable.

But God is agape. He looked upon a world of enemies and hostile men and women who didn't want Him and didn't welcome Him when He cared, but He loved. And we read this beautiful word in John, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end.

That's not even Philia. It is agape. Saying that, however, requires that we add immediately that God's nature is not simply love.

And here again, you see, preaching is a very difficult thing. Because if we left it there this morning, we would be really doing despoise to the divine character and the divine nature. God is love, but the same John said God is spirit.

And earlier on in this epistle, he said God is light. And there is at least another one such statement, which we find outside the Johannine writings, which says our God is a consuming fire. So the statement God is love must be taken alongside these other statements.

God is spirit, God is light, God is a consuming fire. When we say that God is spirit, we mean that He is pure spirit, self-conscious, rational, self-determining, never confined within the bounds of space and of time. He is omnipresent, He is everywhere, and He is eternal.

Don't let's go any further into that. But God is spirit. He knows nothing of what it means to be confined as we are confined.

He is pure spirit. As pure spirit He is light. It is His very nature to reveal Himself.

Even when God hides Himself, it is only that He may later reveal Himself. Oh, I know there is a word in the Psalms which, when the psalmist says, thou art a God that hidest thyself. But read the context.

God hides Himself like a father hides himself from a child who is playing hide and seek with him. Why does the father hide himself? It is only in order to be found at the appropriate time. God hides Himself behind sorrow and suffering and tragedy and this and that, only that you may seek Him and then be found of Him and clasp in His arms.

God as light is a self-revealing light. God always wants to make Himself known. He wants to open His mind and open His heart.

This is why He calls you to His word. This is why He calls us to enjoy fellowship with one another. He wants to give Himself.

He wants to reveal Himself. God is a self-revealing God. He wants to share His secrets with us.

God is light, spirit and light. God is also fire, fire which burns the chaff, fire which burns and consumes the scum on the face of the gold in the cauldron, fire which separates the sheep from the goat, fire which says not that defileth shall ever enter the city with the streaks of gold, not that defileth. God is a consuming fire.

If we think of God as love, therefore, we must think of Him no less as light and fire and always a spirit. These are integral to His nature, so that He is all these terms imply all the time. His love never lacks the quality of light or of fire.

God as fire never ceases to be love and light and so forth. God is always light, He is always fire, He is always love and He is always spirit. Agape is not only from God, God is love.

It is His nature. He doesn't decide just to love, but it's part of His nature. That brings me to my last word.

The presence of agape in men and women proves the paternity of God. He is their father, He is our father if we have agape in our hearts. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. The presence of arrows does not prove that God is our Father. It simply means that we are human and fallen.

If we have stargate towards one another, towards our kith and kin and our kind, and we love our nation, it does not prove that we are the children of God. It just proves that we are creatures and human. Nor does it mean that we are the children of God simply because we have fallen in love with an individual or with a group of people because they are, in our estimation, lovely.

What does prove that we are God's children and that we know God, however, is this, that we have that kind of love which shows itself in a determined, dedicated effort to seek the highest good of people we do not naturally like, to whom we naturally owe nothing and from whom we may only receive insults in return. That is, we are children of God when we share his nature so that we can seek the highest good of men who may meet our actions with hostility and abuse and even crucifixion itself. That is agape.

To quote Eric Alexander, who stood in this pulpit at the turn of the year, this love is not just an emotion, he says, a sort of tingling sensation which periodically creeps up the believing spine. The kind of love that John is speaking about is a willful commitment of ourselves to others for Christ's sake or, says he, to use John Stott's memorable phrase, Christian love is not the victim of our emotions but the servant of our will. Moreover, John adds the challenging negative that he who does not thus love does not know God.

Having quoted once from John Stott, can I quote again? For the loveless Christian, that is the Christian who does not show agape love, for the loveless Christian to profess to know God and to have been born of God is like claiming to be intimate with a foreigner whose language we cannot speak or to have been born of parents whom we do not in any way resemble. It is to fail to manifest the nature of him whom we claim as our father to be born of God and our friend to know God. Love is as much a sign of the new birth as is righteousness, but that love is agape.

What is your discovery this morning as you look into your own soul? Some measure of arrows we may all have, and of starkey perhaps, and of philia I trust. I trust that every husband cherishes his wife and every wife her husband, parents their children and children their parents. Something that is warm and beautiful and glowing and God honoring.

But what we have here is love of another order. We may feel it or we may not feel it, but we are determined by the grace of God and for the sake of our Lord that we will seek the highest good of that person even if he smites us on the cheek. However low he has fallen, however far he has gone, for Jesus said we will seek the highest and the best for him or for her.

I'm reminded of the verse of a hymn and with this I conclude. It's Wesley. Thy nature gracious Lord impart.

Come quickly from above. Write thy new name upon my heart. Thy new blessed name of love.

Beloved, and in that word beloved is the notion that we have been loved with a love of agape. Every Christian has. Beloved, we've been loved with agape love by God in Christ.

Therefore let us love one another with agape love even when we don't like what others may do. For love is of God and God is love. And if agape goes on in my life, it means that God is dwelling in me by the spirit.

Brethren and sisters in Christ, let us prove ourselves to the praise of our God and the good of his church and the salvation of the lost. Let us pray. Holy Heavenly Father, who art love beyond our understanding and our wildest imaginings.

This is a well that we can never plumb to the depths. And here there are heights that we can never scale. Oh, that we might in some measure know the length and the breadth and the depth and the height and know the love of Christ, which at the very best we will have to say passes knowledge.

May it find in our own hearts a welling place on earth. That we may manifest it to those around us and express it as thou dost require of us and hast revealed thyself in the life of thine only Son Jesus our Lord. Forgive us our lovelessness.

Clarify our minds. And give us holy convictions and a dedication of soul to fulfill thy will in this life. In loving one another and all whom thou wouldst love through Christ our Savior.

Amen.

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