

What is God like 4 - A God of Love

Reading: John 14:8-9 “...he who has seen Me (Jesus) has seen the Father....”

Introduction:

This is the fourth and final lesson in this series on “What is God like”¹, where we have been looking at the characteristics and attributes of Jesus as a means of understanding the nature of God (the Father).

This week we will be looking at God’s love through the example of Jesus.

LESSON

1) What is meant by the word “love”?

a) The Greek words for “love”

What does the word “love” mean? We hear it used virtually every day, but different people use the word in different ways. Some people use it in reference to the sexual act of “making love”. Others use it to mean a warm and friendly relationship between people. And for others, it can mean making sacrifices in order to benefit others.

Therefore, we need to start this lesson by clarifying what we mean by the word “love”.

There are at least four different words in the Greek language for the English word “love”²;

- EROS - the sexual or romantic love.
- PHILEO - a brotherly love toward someone we really like. This is the type of love mentioned in;
 - **Hebrews 13:1** “...let brotherly love continue....”
 - **1 Peter 1:22a** “...in sincere love of the brethren....”
 - **1 Peter 3:8** “...love as brothers....”
- AGAPE - the deepest love; it means doing good things for another person. This is found in passages such as;
 - **Romans 5:8** “..God demonstrates His own love towards us...”
 - **1 Corinthians 13:1-8** “...love is.....love is not....”
 - **James 2:8** “...you shall love your neighbour as yourself....”
- STORGAY - the natural love of one's relatives. It is a relatively unknown word that is only used twice in the scriptures, **Romans 1:31** and **2 Timothy 3:3**, and only as a compound word, used in the negative sense – “unloving”, “without natural affection” (depending on Bible version).

The word “eros” is not mentioned in the scriptures, and the only reference to “storgay” is in the context of being “un-loving” (something that is not attributed to Jesus).

¹ The first lesson looked at the power of God over both the physical and the spiritual worlds. The second lesson looked at some of the emotions displayed by God. The third lesson looked at God’s knowledge.

² <http://www.biblestudy.org/theplainertruth/what-is-love.html> as at 11-April-2013

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There are examples of Jesus showing “*phileo*” love, such as the time when Lazarus died - He was moved with sympathy and love³ towards Mary as she mourned the loss of her brother⁴. But in this lesson, we will focus on the “*agape*” type of love that Jesus showed.

b) “Agape” love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13

In **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**, we read about the characteristics of “*agape*” love;

*“... love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...”*⁵.

Notice that, while this kind of love involves doing those sort of things that most people would see as being “positive” and good things to do, such as being kind, and not puffing oneself up, *etc*, it does also involve doing things that are not so easy to do – such as being long suffering, not seeking our own, enduring all things. Some of these attributes go against the natural desires of the human body, and so self-discipline is required to exercise and grow in this type of love.

When you read the gospels and look at the way that Jesus lived His life, you see these qualities displayed by Him over and over again. We haven’t the time in this lesson to cover all these examples recorded in God’s Word, so we will just look at how Jesus demonstrated these qualities during the events that surrounded his arrest and death on the cross.

2) The love of Jesus

a) “...love does not seek its own....”

Long before Jesus came to this earth, He knew what His mission would be – to seek and save the lost (**Luke 19:10**), and to be the sacrifice for our sins (**Isaiah 53:3-12; Ephesians 1:3-7**). Before He came down, He enjoyed the glories and privileges of Heaven as part of the God-head (**John 1:1-2; Philippians 2:6-7**). But when He was sent by the Father, He obeyed, and came.

In **John 4:34** we read, “*Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work’* “. From a physical perspective, we need food in order to sustain our life. Without it, we would die. But notice how Jesus used the term “*food*” in this verse. He was not talking about physical food, He was talking about what sustained Him in His being here. His whole being was about doing the will of the Father. No other passage of scripture points this out better than when He was praying in the Garden just prior to His arrest. He knew what was coming, so much so that His soul was “...*exceedingly sorrowful...*” and “...*distressed...*” (**Matthew 26:37-38**).

³ “...*He was moved with sympathy and love.*” - **Barnes' Notes on John 11:33**.

⁴ Another “*phileo*” reference is **John 20:2** “... *the other disciple whom Jesus loved*”

⁵ Quoted from the New King James Version Bible.

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He was about to go through a series of sham trials, beatings and an agonising death. He was not forced to do it **John 10:17-18** - the choice was His, and He chose to be “... *obedient unto death, even the death of the cross* ...” (**Philippians 2:8**). Because of that decision; because He “...*did not seek His own...*”, we now have the hope of eternal life (**Titus 3:3-7**).⁶

Point: Because of His love for the Father (**John 14:31**), and His love for us (**Ephesians 5:2**), Jesus did not seek His own will, but obeyed the Father, in spite of the cost.

b) “...*love is kind....*”

There are many example of Jesus’ kindness recorded in the gospels. The following are just two examples – the first happened during His arrest, and the second after He had risen from the dead.

- (i) When Jesus was arrested, a crowd had come out to Him and the disciples by night, armed with swords and clubs (**Matthew 26:47**). This crowd was obviously prepared to harm others is need be. The disciple Peter took a sword and cut off the right ear of one of those in the crowd – the High Priest’s servant, Malchus (**John 18:10**). But although the mob was hostile towards Jesus, He in turn did not wish that anyone be harmed.⁷ And so He restored the servant’s ear so that it was healed (**Luke 22:51**).
- (ii) Prior to His arrest, all of the disciples, particularly Peter, had vehemently told Jesus that they would not deny Him - they would even die with Him if it came to it (**Mark 14:31**). But as we know, as soon as Jesus was arrested, they all “...*forsook Him and fled..*” (**Matthew 26:56b**). During the course of that evening, when “put on the spot”, Peter again “abandoned” his master three times by denying Him (**Mark 14:66-72**).

But Jesus held no malice. After He had risen from the dead, Jesus spoke with Peter on the shores of Galilee. His words to him were not words of anger or of disappointment at Peter’s failings, but words of encouragement and confidence (**John 21:15-18**).

Point: Jesus showed care and kindness towards others, in spite of their failings, and in spite of how He Himself was being treated.

c) “...*love is not provoked, thinks no evil....*”

To say that Jesus was treated in a shameful and cruel manner by the Jews and the Romans would be an understatement. False witnesses were used to try and accuse Jesus of wrongdoing (**Matthew 26:59-61**). The High Priest accused Jesus of blasphemy when He confirmed to him that He was indeed the Son of God (vs.**63-65**). His accusers spate in His face and beat Him (vs.**67**). Pilate condemned Him to death just to satisfy the crowd, even

⁶ While in agony on the cross, Jesus was still mindful of the needs of others. For example, He made sure that someone would take care of His mother (**John 19:26-27**).

⁷ Jesus also asked the crowd to let the disciples leave unharmed (**John 18:8-9**).

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though He knew He was innocent (**Matthew 27:18**; **Mark 15:15**; **John 19:6-16**). The soldiers spat on Him and mocked Him (**Matthew 27:27-30**). He was scourged⁸ (**Mark 15:15**), and then made to carry His own cross part of the way (**John 19:17a**; **Luke 23:26**). And even while He was dying on the cross, the people around Him continued to ridicule and mock Him (**Matthew 27:39-44**).

Yet in spite of all this, including the fact that He could have called on legions of angels to protect Him (**Matthew 26:53**), He was not provoked; He thought no evil; He “...*did not revile in return; He did not threaten...*” (**1 Peter 2:21-23**). Rather, He asked the Father to “.... *forgive them, for they do not know what they do..*” (**Luke 23:34**).

Point: In spite of all the abuse and provocation, Jesus did what He commanded us to do in **Matthew 5:44** – “...*love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you...*” – and put His trust in the Father (**1 Peter 2:23b**).

d) “...*love hopes all things, endures all things....*”

I mentioned in the previous section of this lesson the pain and suffering that Jesus went through at the hands of evil men. It was a constant mix of abuse, humiliation and physical agony, starting from soon after His night-time arrest in the Garden, right through to the afternoon of the following day.

But what kept Jesus going through all of this? How was He able to endure it all? Well, the following two scriptures go a long way in providing some of the answers to these questions;

- (i) **Hebrews 12:2** “ *who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame ...* “.

What was the “*joy set before Him*”? The answer:- the church; the kingdom; His bride. His death would “.. *destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil..*” (**Hebrews 2:14**). Sinners could now have their sins forgiven and be reconciled to God (**Colossians 1:19-22**). Remember, He did not have to die to save Himself, because He had no sins (**Hebrews 4:15b**). He died so that we could have forgiveness. He endured the pain, the shame and the suffering because of His love for us. He did it for our benefit.

- (ii) **1 Peter 2:23b** “..... *but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously..*”.

While this verse is not directly talking about love, it does show the trust that Jesus had in the Father. He put Himself in the hands of the Father (*e.g.* **Luke 23:46**), trusting in His Power, trusting in His Word, and trusting in His Judgement. Jesus knew the Father’s Will (**John 12:49**); He knew that He would be raised on the third Day (**Matthew 16:21**). He knew what would be achieved through His death and resurrection. And

⁸ Scourging involved using a whip similar to a “cat of 9 tails”, which had several bits of metal and bone fixed to the tails so that it ripped the flesh off the person being whipped.
- ref: <http://the-crucifixion.org/scourging.htm> as at 20-April-2013

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so He put that faith and belief into action. He certainly provides an example for us about trusting in God.

Point: Jesus endured the shame of the cross so that the church could be established, and that those who turned to God and obeyed His Word could be added to it (**Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47b; Ephesians 1:3-8**). We did not deserve it; we did not earn it (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). But He did it anyway. He did it out of His love for us (**John 15:13-14; Romans 5:6-8**).

3) The love of God (the Father)

Jesus lived in our environment as a man and faced all the trials and tribulations that we face (**Hebrews 4:15**). And through it all, He showed the qualities of “*agape*” love to its fullest, even under the most difficult of circumstances.

Because Jesus is the “... *express image of His (the Father’s) person* ..” (**Hebrews 1:3a**), the love that Jesus displayed is the same type of love that the Father has. If the Father had come to earth instead of Jesus, then He (the Father) would have shown exactly the same type of love, “...*for God is love.*” (**1 John 4:8**). When you look at God, you see the real meaning of love. As the words of the song⁹ go;

*“..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...”*

In this lesson, we haven’t the time nor the space to go anywhere near giving adequate coverage to the topic of God’s love, but consider these very few basic examples;

- God is “*long suffering*” towards mankind. He doesn’t want anyone to perish, so He patiently gives people the opportunity to repent (**2 Peter 3:9**).
- He shows “*kindness*” to all through His providential care – He sends the sunshine and the rain on the just and the unjust (**Matthew 5:45**). He doesn’t brag about it; He doesn’t boast about it. He just does it.
- He “*did not seek His own*” when he gave up His only son for our benefit (**John 3:16; Romans 5:8**).
- He “*thinks no evil*” – there is no darkness in Him at all (**1 John 1:5**). Rather, all good things come from Him (**James 1:17**).
- He “*bears (covers) all things*” in that when He forgives us our sins, He remembers them no more (**Hebrews 8:12**) – they are no longer counted against us.

In all of these things, we are the ones who are blessed by His love.

Application:

While this lesson is primarily about the love of God, there is a practical application for us in all of this: – we are to display the same kind of love towards others that Jesus showed towards us.

⁹ “Songs of Faith & Praise”, song number 133, “The Love of God”, words by F. M. Lehman.

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“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us....” (Ephesians 5:2).

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you You shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:44-48).

In other words, in our dealings with other people, regardless as to how they treat us, we are to love them and seek their good. When they frustrate us, we are to be patient with them. When they are unkind to us, we are to show kindness to them. We are not to seek our own welfare to the neglect or detriment of others. We are not to think evil towards those who treat us badly, but to look for the good they may have. For these things are the fruit of the spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

When it comes to showing love towards others, Jesus has set us an example. We are now to go and do likewise.