

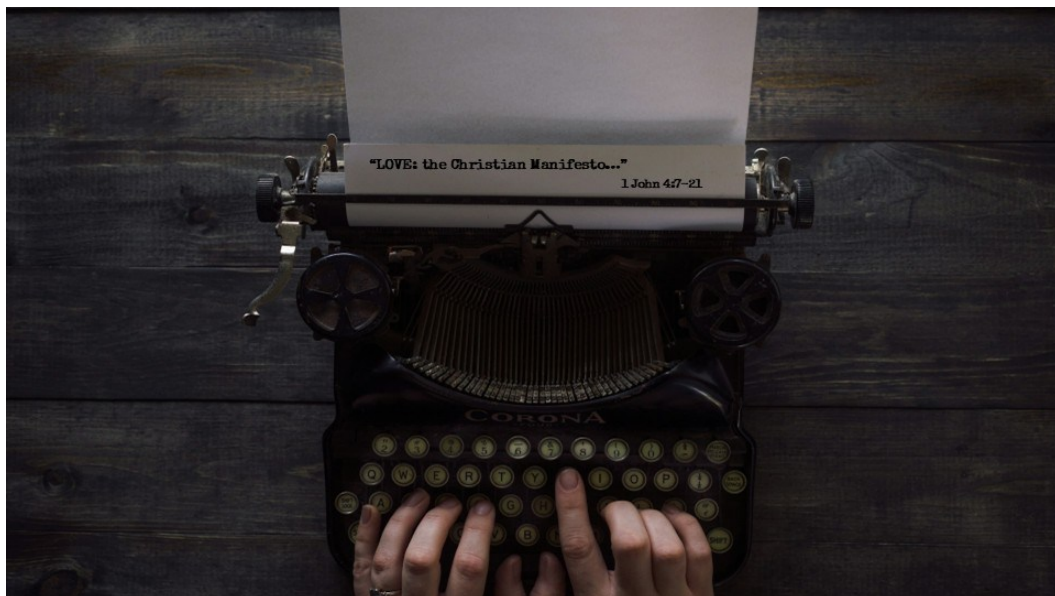
“LOVE: the Christian Manifesto”

- 1 John 4:7-21

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
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7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He

who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son [as] Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God [must] love his brother also.



The apostle John has been pounding home the principle of love throughout this letter. That principle would serve as his definitive “line in the sand” when it came to authentic faith...the “manifesto” of the true follower of Christ. Loving God and loving the brethren would encompass John’s legacy and frame our very understanding of Christianity lived out.

As John moves to revisit this issue, perhaps it would be a good time to ‘push pause’ and ask a couple of clarifying questions. Because frankly, if the greater church today really understood just what this letter is saying, one would expect some rather seismic activity in our fellowships, and even our individual lives, but we don’t really see that in our day. Often, we will personally, *albeit quietly*, discount John’s letter, as well as his message, or, as is often the case in Christianity, we simply don’t receive it as addressing us personally. And then there is even a third possibility, wherein we may just not know what this love really is. But few of us are willing to even consider that possibility, let alone admit it as factual! So let us so consider the question: what IS John talking about when he says ‘love’?

-Eros Love-

The Bible uses several words and presents several ideals that, in English, are invariably interpreted as ‘love.’ One is Eros Love. Eros is a Greek term that actually means ‘desire and longing,’ and appears in Greek mythology as the Greek god of love. Eros is most often referred to as erotic love, or sexual love, and such is therefore commonly based on people’s physical traits and on emotional passions, and, *let's admit it*, often shallow connections.

Our world uses the term here, “making love,” which ironically could not be further from the truth when outside of marriage and outside of God. At the risk of sexual stereotype, I think that for a man in that realm, the word “lust” better fits the bill, and ladies you have been conned into believing that you will never find a man unless you offer yourself up like a side of beef. It has always been my belief that giving yourself in such a manner takes something that is so very precious and sells it

for nickels on the dollar. Such action is second only to the giving of your very soul. For God's sake, act like it. God gave us this great gift, make it count. And don't tell me "yes, but we are going to get married." Maybe so, but you marry without God's blessing...you go into that alone. You cannot thumb your nose at God's emphatic and wonderful design, and still expect His blessing. It doesn't work that way. His hands are off of you now.

The truth is, unless 'Eros' is redeemed by the Lord's presence, we eventually find that it has no real long-term redeeming aspects because it ends up being solely possessive and selfish. It becomes about me conquering and controlling another for my own personal pleasure and experience. That's why we hear the phrase used so often: "we fell out of love." Eros is apparently a love you "fall into" and therefore "fall out of," certainly not something one walks into with clear direction and purpose!

It seems that all the traits of eros are selfish. Eros is always in a hurry. Eros *needs* no counsel and *takes* no counsel, because it is about only me! And I think I know me! Marriages that are founded upon eros will either end apart one day or *end altogether*. But "end" they do, even if they continue to share the same house. They end when I no longer feel, enjoy, or receive what I think I ought to feel, enjoy and receive. Eros relationships are built on the "me-aspect," not the Father-style, other-centered aspects that we are called to in a faith-based marriage. In Eros, we think as long as we get sex and give sex, we will be happy and fulfilled. But I'm sorry, you are going to be terribly disappointed. Of course you also will be a very poor witness to the world...a world who is watching you...the "claiming Christian," to see if you do things any differently than they do.

Indeed, we must understand that God *did* create physical attraction between a man and a woman, (thank you God) but He never intended for it to be selfish. He created both the desire and longing that make up sexual love, and yes they are crucial in any great marriage. However, this kind of love was meant to be preserved between a married man and woman, and anywhere off that "island" loses God's blessing. But know this: indeed we as true Believers seek the high road on sexual purity, but unless there is a higher bar across the board...the higher level of faithful God-centered attributes in one's marriage...then when that marriage union participates on any level with Eros, even healthy participation, then Eros itself will ultimately be less satisfying and more apt to eventually ring empty. Because without a relationship being centered on the aspects that God brings to marriage, it inevitably goes back to self-centered self-benefit.

Phileo Love

Phileo is the unique kind of love that you have for a friend. It encompasses the loving of one another like you would your brother or sister. It is a "brotherly love" like found in the name of "philadelphia" ...the "city of brotherly love." This is not an acquaintance relationship or interaction, but rather something between two people who are really close and dear to each other. It encompasses their shared experiences, and practically speaking, is be the kind of love that church community people practice towards one another. Although phileo love is great in a relational dynamic, it is in fact, *sadly*, also often unreliable. For Phileo can fail to encompass other aspects that are mandatory in community. Like a recipe, these other attributes must be present in order for Phileo love to be authentic. Things like loyalty, faithfulness, endurance, and consistency, all traits that do not come naturally to us. We have all experienced, at some point in our lives, how this kind of 'love' can sour at times, because it too, is so often based on emotions and the self, just like eros is. For the vast majority of the population...and yes, even that of Christendom, these two 'types of love' will be the only ones they will ever know or experience. Anything beyond these shallow experiences will forever lay out of their reach because the Spirit of God is never in their hands...

This is one of the reasons why those outside the church just don't 'get' Christians, and moreover why those even within the physical parameters of the church that are not saved can so easily 'flip' and depart, and will even throw those under the bus that they once expressed great affection for. They know no other love, thus they are incapable of expressing any other love.

Then there is...

Agape Love

This is the love that John speaks of when he says in this chapter that (verse 7-8) "...**everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, (but) He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**" Agape love is a divine love which represents the grand bond between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ... between truly redeemed people and their Redeemer...and between those same folks and the other brothers and sisters in Christ. It should even be reflected...or at

least *attempted*, toward humanity at large! It is the love that God commanded all those who claim redemption to have for everyone else whether the 'everyone else' is a believer or not. All of this because agape is "God love." It is the love that God loves with. If truly reborn, that same God lives in us and possesses us, therefore we have within us that agape love and the wherewithal to express it!

Agape love is not determined by feelings, but is manifested via a set of behaviors and actions. It is an action love, as much as is all of Christianity. When honestly embraced, it is an action lifestyle. Those outside of true redemption know only...*at best*, Eros and Phileo... with all the shortcomings those innately possess. Moreover, in such folks, their faith as well as their "love manifest" is ultimately controlled, determined, and expressed by emotion: fickle, erratic, nebulous, fluid, and selfish emotions.

With agape, you do not have to actually feel it for you to give it. It therefore supersedes all those specifically human interactive "loves" that are invariably only able to "respond." Agape moves first and frankly often moves independently of anyone else or any other feedback, thus it continues faithful no matter what response to it is given. But once again, outside of the realm of Christ, how we feel tends to determine how we act toward one another. But such is not so with agape love, and therefore not with true Christianity in general. According to John, without this love you simply do not know Jesus and are not one of God's kids. If you really *do* know God, you know this love! It's the smoking gun...the hard evidence, the "confirmation" that one is genuinely redeemed. It is the essential salvation manifest of our God. When God lives in us through the indwelling Holy Spirit, then the attributes of that God begin to become our attributes. Agape love and true Christianity are mutually determining, and their absence...either one, mutually invalidates. They are inexplicably and undeniably connected.

So while we are quick to say "Why yes! I love people!", please note that the way it reads is "He who does not *agape* does not know God, for God is agape..." Well, what is this special love? What are the 'ingredients' of this 'agape love?' 1 Corinthians 13, famously given the title of the 'love chapter,' says the following:

Agape is patient and kind. Agape is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. Agape does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Agape never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (1 Cor 13:4-7NLT) Is that the "love" you were saying you possess?

Agape love is the love of God expressed through the lives of those who possess Him. So what does it look like when expressed by God? If this is the essential manifest of our Creator in our daily lives, what does it look like when He expresses it? In that chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that "Agape does not rejoice about injustice, but rejoices whenever the truth wins out." (1 Corinthians 13:6). Thus we can take from this teaching that Agape love is inerrantly possessing the truth, no matter the emotional response to such. Sometimes such feels good and sometimes it really doesn't. But our response to such changes nothing.

Now I'm not talking about overt blunt smack-downs or stark, cruel, and insulting "truth-telling." I'm talking about a loving truth that is gentle, caring and yet unwavering. But according to scripture, there cannot be true agape love without there being real truth. Such seems to be a positive thing and innately a 'no-brainer.' And yet, as Jack Nickelson said in "A Few Good Men"... "The truth? You can't handle the truth!" Indeed! So often, we can't. This is one of the main reasons why, for many, agape is so often unpalatable. Thus Fleetwood Mac sang those lyrics into history, "tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies."

God's agape love...again, His very characteristic and attributes, encompass *great* patience but not *limitless* patience. Eventually and inevitably, His agape takes on the added attribute of discipline. Hebrews 12 reminds us that "... *our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening — it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.*" (Heb 12:10-11)

Elsewhere we are told "*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.*" (Proverbs 12:1 ESV), "*Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.*" (Proverbs 13:24 ESV), and "*My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*" (Proverbs 3:11-12 ESV) Thus we can acknowledge that this God love...this 'agape,' at some point will incorporate this aspect of discipline. Which is why so many ...and so often... will reject this kind of love, for we tend to immediately and universally reject any and all discipline.

Hebrews 10:23-25, (literal translation), says "*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider one another how to stir up to love and good deeds, . . . encouraging one another.*" The aim of our "considering one another" and "encouraging one another" is that we stir up love. When we mix our "confession of our hope" with insight into "each other," we then "stir each other to love." Our Christian interaction must possess an active pursuit to "stir" each other in this manner, all with an aim to love and to encourage love in others.

Nothing about this kind of loving is easy, and often it is anything **but** pleasant to the flesh. Verse 7 says that "everyone who 'agapes' is born of God and knows God." So when agape is expressed, one can be sure God is present, because we cannot manifest this trait and practice without God being in the middle of it. This love does not come natural in us. Thus, if we are children of God, we have it and practice it, and if we have it and practice it, ***we have God.***

I would think then that if I were looking for a faith community to be a part of, this would be the singular trait I would seek. A lot of other things can be found wanting and can be overlooked, but not this one. It is the ultimate proof that God is in the midst of that fellowship. And ironically, it is also the one thing that will rule **out** such a fellowship for many, because again, such a fellowship is naturally *not* emotionally motivated or "me-centered" . . .so we keep 'shopping' until we find a church that delivers those things to me.

Verses 16-17 speaks directly and solely to us that are His children saying "*...we have known (experienced) and believed (persuaded, committed) the love that God has for us. God is (agape) love, and he who abides in (agape) love abides in God, and God in him. (Agape) Love has been perfected among us in this (for this reason): that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.*"

As He is, **so are we in this world.** Are we?

Verses 20-21 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: ***that he who agapes God must agape his brother also.***"