**God is Love**

I want to continue today to look at the attributes of God. I want to look at God is love.

Love is such a devalued word today. We have one word for loving ice cream, our spouse, our car, our children, our God. We can fall into love, and we can fall out of love. We use the word ‘love’ instead of the word ‘like’. We use the word “love” when we mean “lust”.

But in the Greek in which the NT was written, there are eight words for love, and they all mean something different.

Eros: is physical love or sexual desire. It is the type of love that involves passion, lust, and/or romance.

Philia: is affectionate love. It is the type of love that involves friendship.

Storge: is familial love. It is the natural love that family members have for one another.

Philautia: is self-love. It refers to how we view ourselves and how we feel about our own body and mind.

Ludus: is playful, noncommittal love. It covers things like flirting, seduction, and casual sex.

Pragma: is practical love. It is love based on duty, obligation, or logic.

Mania: is obsessive love. It is the kind of “love” that a stalker feels toward the object of their attention.

Agape: is often defined as unconditional, sacrificial love. Divine love

It is this last love I want to speak of today.

I want to continue to highlight the God of whom we serve, and I want to speak on the passage from 1 John 4:8 - God is love.

What kind of love?

Agape love. This is the type of love the Bible speaks about the most. The New Testament references agape over 200 times.

Agape is a love lavished on others without a thought whether they are worthy or not. It proceeds from the nature of the lover, not from any attractiveness in the beloved. (Leon Morris) [[1]](#footnote-2)

In all the passages I am going to refer to today, when you hear the word love, know that it is the Greek word agape.

1 Corinthians 13:4ff is recited often in wedding ceremonies so we could assume it relates to romantic love, but it doesn’t. It refers to agape love.

*4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonour 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. 8 Love never fails.*

Because we are told that God is agape love, change the ‘love’ word in this Scripture to the word ‘God’ and see the attributes of God.

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The world itself was created because of God's love, because he loves.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Because of his love, he created us in the first place. That is the basis of the doctrine of creation. And because of his love he restored us to himself. That's the basis for the doctrine of redemption.[[3]](#footnote-4)

So often we tend to think of the love of God just as we tend to think of hope or faith- in abstract, theoretical terms. We approach love as though it were an energy or a mood, a sentiment or a cosmic vibration. Or we try to define New Testament love academically, philosophically, theoretically. To do so is to misjudge from the outset the fundamental nature of that love. The love of God is the most personal event in all history. Because of that amazing love, God became a person. God's love is intensely personal. It comes to us in the form of the person of Jesus Christ.[[4]](#footnote-5)

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

1 John 4:10 *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

Jesus Christ is the love of God breaking through and finding us.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Romans 5: 8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Again, as usual in this series, I look for an application of this divine attribute in our own lives today as followers of Jesus.

Let us go back to the passage of John 4:8 about God being love, and read the verses around that verse:

7ff *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have 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 ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

Agape love does not come naturally to us in our sinful state. However, it does come naturally to God and is an integral part of Him. By drawing closer to Him and experiencing His love, we can begin to understand what this real love means. Only through Him can we show and experience agape love.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Watch this testimony from Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch survivor of the Holocaust:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz9xgsDyB88

No matter how active our Christian faith, we do not serve God’s best purposes if love does not motivate what we do.[[7]](#footnote-8)

As the Easter and ANZAC Day celebrations recede from our memories for another year, consider the relevance to us arising from those celebrations

1 John 3:16 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.*

Consider this from the Otago Daily Times in 2023:

On August 18, 2022, Jonty Douglas, a 26-year-old apprentice builder was helping a workmate move a couch and came across another man, a stranger Jason Timoti and his partner having a disagreement in the next driveway. Douglas and his mate tried to defuse the situation, yelling to Timoti: ‘Come on bro, chill out. Just leave her alone bro. Come and have a smoke with us bro.” Timoti disappeared into his house and grabbed a knife whilst Douglas and his mate went back to moving the couch. Timoti attacked Douglas in the driveway, and they scuffled. Douglas’ mate came and overpowered Timoti as Douglas stumbled a few metres then collapsed and died from one fatal stab wound.

Patreece Douglas, his sister and a mum of four, said her Christian faith has helped her mum through the tragedies. “In my heart, I know that if I don’t forgive him for what he has done, I will be a bitter and angry person and that’s not the type of people we are. We carry the hurt, and I miss my baby brother. “I don’t think Timoti cares if I forgive him or not, but he has a mum, he’s someone’s son, he has kids. How will they feel knowing their dad is a killer. I pray for them.”[[8]](#footnote-9)

John 15: *13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*

This from the NZ Herald: "In September 2008 New Zealanders were shocked by the killing of a man who stepped in to help a woman in danger in central Auckland. Austin Hemmings, 44, was fatally stabbed when he intervened in a confrontation as he left work. The good Samaritan was simply trying to help a woman who was in clear distress and who had called out for help after a man confronted her and threatened her. Pauesi Leofa Brown stabbed Hemmings in the chest and the father-of-three died soon after. Brown was later sentenced to life in prison for Hemmings' murder.[[9]](#footnote-10)

Hemmings actions demonstrated agape love.

But it is not only in the ultimate sacrifice of giving our bodies for the protection of others that this demonstration of agape love applies to.

John 13: 34-35 *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

We must live our faith by our actions of loving others. In the 2 cases I have mentioned earlier, neither of the good samaritans knew their murderers nor the ones being assaulted that caused them to intervene, but they did intervene.

These cases are unlike the case of Kitty Genovese who was a New York bartender whose murder became infamous when it was reported that numerous bystanders failed to call for help while witnessing her death.

In the early morning hours of March 13, 1964, a 28-year-old woman named Kitty Genovese was murdered in New York City. Two weeks after Kitty Genovese’s murder, The New York Times wrote a scathing article describing her death and the inaction of her neighbours. The article itself stated that “For more than half an hour 38 respectable, law‐abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens… Not one person telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called after the woman was dead.” A man who did call the police, the article said, dithered as he listened to Genovese cry and scream. “I didn’t want to get involved,” the unnamed witness told reporters.[[10]](#footnote-11)

From Corrie ten Boom, Austin Hemmings and Jonty Douglas, we learn that love must be actioned. Theoretical love remains an academic exercise without the hands and feet attached. I do not know whether Austin Hemmings had a faith in God but I know the other 2 did, but even his actions of love come from a Christian understanding of right and wrong and standing up for the oppressed and victimised.

Eugene Petersen, author of the Message Bible paraphrase writes ‘No matter how right we are in what we believe about God, no matter how accurately we phrase our belief or how magnificently and persuasively we preach or write or declare it, if love does not shape the way we speak and act, we falsify the creed, we confess a lie. Believing without loving is what gives religion a bad name. Believing without loving destroys lives. Believing without loving turns the best of creeds into a weapon of oppression.[[11]](#footnote-12)

It would appear that I am saying loving in an agape way means we risk death but that is the extreme end of sacrificial love to which God went.

Jesus speaks of love consisting of other actions as well.

In Matthew 5, Jesus says this: 38 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.*

43 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ 44 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, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

These highlighted activities are costly – they will cost us something – time, mana, possessions – but we are called to love excessively, to love abundantly, not just with words, but with our actions.2

Why? Because God is love and if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1. Murray Robertson *the meaning of worship* 60 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Earl Palmer Love has its reasons: an inquiry into New Testament love 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Palmer 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Palmer 70 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Palmer 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-does-agape-love-really-mean-in-the-bible.html [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Marva Dawn Joy in our Weakness: 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. https://www.odt.co.nz/news/national/tragic-aftermath-killing-good-samaritan [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. https://natlib.govt.nz/records/49639060 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. https://allthatsinteresting.com/kitty-genovese [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Eugene Petersen Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places. 261 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)