

STUDY 2 | The Love of God

It is hard for many to comprehend how God can save them as sinners. As a result most people are running away from God out of fear. This is one way the devil, the enemy of souls, veils the good news of the gospel from men and women. For this reason, it is important for all to realize that the ground of our salvation is God's unconditional love for us, and not our goodness. Jesus Himself declared in that favorite text of the Bible: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The apostle Paul, once a persecutor of the Christian church, made this profound statement to young Timothy: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15).

The reason why we sinners do not need to be afraid of God and can come to Him with full confidence is because God is love. In this study we are going to discover the true love of God that is the ground of our salvation. Once our eyes are opened to this fact, the gospel will become fantastic or incredible good news. Let us see how this is true from the Word of God.

1. Whom does God love?

John 3:16 _____

Note: The world (human race) God so loved is the world that has rebelled against Him. Therefore, we are saved not because we deserve it or because we are good, but because God is love. This is the foundation to a correct understanding of the gospel.

2. After Paul shows us that all are sinners by performance and nature deserving God's wrath, what reason does he give why God redeemed humanity in Christ?

Ephesians 2:4-6 _____

Note: Even though the Bible declares that we are all sinners, it also tells us that God loves us infinitely. That is why God made us alive together with Christ, raised us up together, and made us sit in heavenly places in Him, all because of His unconditional love for mankind.

3. Since we are not saved by works of righteousness or right doing, why did God save us?

Titus 3:3-5 _____

Note: The ground of our salvation is God's love for sinners. Scripture declares that "God is love" (1John 4:8). This love is not just one of God's characteristics but is what He is by very nature and therefore all that He does is in the context of His love.

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4. In the time of Christ what were the people being taught?

Matthew 5:43 _____

Note: The word "neighbor" here refers to fellow Jews and the word "enemy" refers to the Gentiles. Human beings know how to love their own, but it is impossible for us to love our enemies, in and of ourselves.

5. In contrast to this human love, what did Jesus say Christians should do?

Matthew 5:44 _____

Note: It is this kind of love that demonstrates true Christianity to the world. Such love reflects the love God has for sinners. It is the greatest proof of the power of the gospel and the fact that we are followers of Christ (see John 13:34-35).

6. How far reaching is God's love?

Matthew 5:45 _____

Note: God's love extends beyond all barriers. It is the opposite of human love. God even loves and cares for those who are His enemies by supplying all their needs. God's love is unconditional; it does not depend on our goodness. Therefore, in understanding God's love for us we must never attribute our human ideals of love to God. This is where many go wrong.

7. What four conditions were we still in when God demonstrated His love for us and reconciled us to Himself by the death of His Son?

Romans 5:6-10

1. _____

3. _____

2. _____

4. _____

Note: This passage tells us that while we were incapable of saving ourselves, wicked people, still sinners, and even enemies of God, he redeemed us through the death of His Son. Such love is beyond our comprehension, but it is real because God says so and demonstrated it on the cross of Christ.

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8. How many times does the word “love” appear in your Bible, in this passage?

John 21:15-17 _____

Note: Unfortunately, our English Bibles fail to bring out the real significance of this dialogue between Christ and Peter. The reason being that the English language has only one word for love. But in the Greek, the language of the New Testament, the Bible writers had about four words to choose from. In the first two questions, “do you love me,” Jesus used the word “agapao” which is unconditional love. Peter’s answer both times was “phileo” which means human affection, which, incidentally, is unreliable. (Keep in mind, Peter promised he would never deny Jesus.) In his answer, Peter was admitting that he did not have unconditional love towards Christ. In Jesus’ third question, He used the word “phileo” and Peter was “grieved” because this third time, Jesus used the word “phileo” instead of “agapao.” Peter answered by saying in effect, “Yes, Lord you know everything. You know that all I’m capable of is this unreliable human love.” But unlike Peter, Christ’s love for us is unconditional and never fails.

9. What draws us to God?

Jeremiah 31:3 _____

Note: Most people are running away from God because they think He is out to punish them. But the truth is that God loves us and gave us His only Son so that whoever believes in Him should not be lost but have eternal life. This is what draws us to God.

10. What endearing term does God use for His people?

1 John 3:1-2 _____

Note: Not only does God love us unconditionally, but He has given us a new standing before Him. Anyone who is a child of God through faith in Christ need not have a low self esteem. We have become children of the King of kings and this is what gives us hope, security, and a self worth that puts a spring in our step. With heads up, He gives us the ability to face whatever is ahead.

11. On what basis should we rely on God for our salvation?

1 John 4:16 _____

Note: God not only loves us with an everlasting love but He Himself is love. Every other aspect of God’s character, which is His glory, is unconditional love. There are some things we may not understand but everything He does is in the context of “God is love.”

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12. What does perfect love cast out?

1 John 4:17-18 _____

Note: Fear is the result of sin. Because all of us have sinned, we are all victims to the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). Only God's redeeming love can cast out this fear.

13. List the ten things that Paul says cannot separate us from the love of God.

Romans 8:35-39:

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Note: Although as Christians we may face many hardships in this world, our joy and our peace come from knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God. God is eternal and therefore His love is everlasting; it is the ground of our salvation. He offers us the free gift of salvation in Christ Jesus purely on the basis of His unconditional love for us. The only thing that can keep us from experiencing this salvation is our own rejection of His saving grace. May this never be true of you.

How God's Love Was Perverted

In order to fully appreciate the good news of the gospel, it is important to be familiar with how Satan has perverted God's love, in order to pervert the gospel. Here is a brief history of what happened. The Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written, had four words for love. They were eros, storge, phileo, and agape. Of these four words, eros was considered to be the highest form of love. As Plato described it, eros was man seeking after God. It was the basis of all pagan religions.

The New Testament writers NEVER used this word, eros. This was unacceptable to some of the Church Fathers, who became the leaders of the Christian church after the apostles died. Some of these Church Fathers, who were all of Greek origin, wanted to substitute eros for the word agape, the key word used in the New Testament to define God's self-emptying and unconditional love. This started the great battle in Church history between eros and agape.

It was Augustine, the great Church Father of the 4th century, who settled the issue. By using Greek logic, Augustine synthesized the concept of eros with the concept of agape and produced a new concept of love which he named caritas from which we get our English word charity. This new concept of love was accepted by the Christian Church and, as a result, caritas became the dominant word defining God's love during the dark ages of Church history. Thus, by modifying the true meaning of God's love, Satan managed to pervert the pure gospel from being "good news" to "good advice" — "I must do my best and God will make up the difference." Below is an outline showing the contrast of man's eros love to God's agape love and how caritas perverted the gospel:

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HUMAN EROS LOVE IS:	GOD'S AGAPE LOVE IS:
A. CONDITIONAL Depends on beauty or goodness and therefore needs arousing. When this love is attributed to God it perverts the gospel into conditional good news or good advice: Matt. 19:16-27; John 9:14-31	A. UNCONDITIONAL Is spontaneous, uncaused, and independent of our goodness. This is why God redeemed us: Rom. 5:6-10; Eph.2:1-6,8,9; Titus 3:3-5
B. CHANGEABLE Fluctuates and is unreliable: Luke 22:31-34 (Divorce rate in U.S.)	B. CHANGELESS Everlasting and never fails: Jer. 31:3; 1 Cor. 13:8; Jn. 13:1; Rom. 8:35-39
C. SELF-SEEKING (<i>U-turn agape</i>) Egocentric; therefore always ascending, socially, politically, academically, economically, and even religiously: Isa. 53:6; Phil. 2:21. (Satan is the originator of this self principle and infected man with it at the Fall.) Ezk. 28:14,15; Isa. 14:12-14	C. SELF-EMPTYING (<i>agape</i>) Selfless; therefore will step down for the benefit of others: 1 Cor. 13:5; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-8

Agape and The Great Controversy in Church History

The battle between Agape and Eros love resulted in Caritas love. These 3 loves have produced the 3 gospels comprising today's world religions:

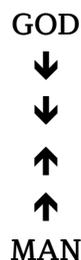
The Eros Gospel

(Salvation by Works)



The Caritas Gospel

(Salvation by Faith Plus Works)



The Agape Gospel

(Salvation by Grace Alone)

