

Text: 1 John 4.7-21
St Stephen's

Jan 4th, 2009
Sun

Agape Love in the Home

I love popovers... I love America, I love bike rides and coffee and woodworking and the Bible and hamburgers. I love the church. I love my country. I love my wife and my children and my little grandboy. Everyone loves chocolate! **Love is a big word... and everyone is looking for it.** Today we want to talk about finding it.

We are starting this year out with a new message series called '**Family Matters**' – what happens when God steps into your family – or into a church family.

Today we are looking at 1 John 4. Here John talks about a new kind of love that the world needs a lot more of. It's not **sexual** love, or **brotherly** love or **self** love that he is talking about here; we know all about those. But something **new**.

It was a kind of love so new that the writers of the NT had to find **a new word** for it. The word here for love is "**Agape**". In our **chapter** today, the word appears **29X**. This chapter is the **premier chapter on love** in the bible. If you want to be a great lover, here is your chapter.

'**Agape**' means "**gift love**", "grace love' –undeserved, unearned, freely given love.

This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

1 Jn 4:10 (NLT)

John is saying that we get so confused about love, that God had to step in show us what **true love** really is. True love comes from God. And it entered the world full force when Jesus was born ('He sent his Son') and had its **high point** at a very **special place** – at his death.

Do you want to see love? Spend some time at the **manger**. And then spend some more time at the **cross**. God's gift love is on full display

in Jesus birth and life and death... Coming, emptying himself, Living, healing, serving, washing, Dying, forgiving, bearing the cost, renewing, rising...

It is hard to argue with what John says at that point...

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 Jn 4:11 (RSV)

God asks us to **agape each other**. In the same way He has loved us. To 'gift love each other'. undeserved, unearned, unconditional.

Here is how many of us have pledged it to each other: *"For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health till death do you part"*.

I want to **say two things** about this love and having it in your family...

Criticism Kills Love

Criticism is the headline of a cluster of words: Lectures. Nagging. Provoking. Anger. Withdrawing. Manipulating. Attacking. Control. Judgment. These things kill love, and they destroy families.

When criticism grows in a family, or a church family, people scatter... Did you ever notice that? Kids run away. Couples split up. No one wants to hang around.

Think of kids who **won't speak** to their parents. Or spouses who won't speak to each other. Behind this you always find criticism.

People never hang around someone who is just intent on 'straightening them out'. No one ever says, "I was criticized mercilessly by my Dad, and I just love him to death."

Marriages breakup because of this issue.

"We drifted apart."

"I could never get his attention (job; hobby)"

"She just couldn't love me for who I was."

"He was always hiding behind a newspaper".

"She was always angry."

The truth behind the truth is one of the two (or two of the two) felt **judged**.

We think that love and character and goodness in family life will be **birthed by a lecture**. So, we tell people what they are not doing and think they will now do what I think they should do. We think 'confront them'. We think that 'laying down the law', criticism, nagging will make people better. It never does. It actually makes them worse. Because it **produces rebellion**. Everytime. And then you have to deal with the problem and the rebellion!

Just tell your **teenager** to do something that they don't want to do. What happens? 100% of the time? Try it on your spouse, and see if it is any different!

Love Grows Love

"Gift love", unearned, undeserved, love - that stoops and serves and empties itself for the sake of the beloved actually changes people. Makes them better. Love someone "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health till death do you part" and **they will blossom**. Flourish. Become the person you had always hoped they would be.

if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.
1 John 4:12 (ESV)

Who have been **the people who have had a real effect on your life?** Hasn't it been the people who graced you? A friend. A coach. A teacher. Didn't you have a moment like that in school, when someone saw something in you no one else had ever believed you could be... A co-worker. A mate.

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. 1 Jn 4:7

Look at the word, '**beloved**'. The word is literally "agape'd ones". That is what God calls you. In a fallen world, **names stick**. They **define** our

interior architecture. They **shape** our thoughts. They can **wound** your souls. I can't tell you how many times in pastoral care we dig down into someone's life to discover them living out of an **ancient criticism** someone has placed on them: 'loser', 'failure', 'ugly', and the name still eats away at them decades later.

When you come to Christ **God gives you a new name**. He calls you **'beloved'**. My son. My daughter.

One of **my favorite stories** is about a Dad who took his 2 year old daughter out for breakfast one weekend for a 'first date'. She had never been out with her Dad like this before. They had just gotten their pancakes and Dad decided it would be a good time to tell his little girl how much he appreciated her.

'Jenny', he said, 'I want you to know how much I love you, and how special you are to Mm and me. We prayed for you for years, and when you came it was the most special day of our lives. And now that you are growing up to be such a wonderful girl, we couldn't be more proud of you.'

Once he said this, he stopped talking and reached over for his fork to begin eating, but he never got the fork to his mouth. His daughter reached out her little hand and laid it on her father's hand. His eyes went to hers, and in a soft, pleading voice, she said, "Longer, Daddy, longer".

He put his fork down and proceeded to tell her some more reasons and ways they loved and appreciated her, and then reached for his fork again. But again, and another time after that, she reached out her hand and said, "Longer, Daddy, longer".

That Dad never did get much to eat that morning, but what he gave his daughter, sunk deeply into her little heart. A few days later, she ran up to her mother and said, 'I'm a really special daughter, Mommy. Daddy told me so.'

I love the story because you and I know the thirst on that little girl's heart. Just two years old, growing up in perhaps the best of families, she has a heart that is dying to hear her new name, 'Beloved'.

She will need to hear it again and again, don't we?

What grows a family – every kind of family - is love that is **quick to forgive**, eager to serve, ready to go the extra mile. That **believes beyond what it sees, loves beyond its ability to love**. Grace love.

Let me make a comment on **two special issues** here that have to do with this **loves beyond our ability to love** issue.

The **first** is the issue of **correction** in family life.

I am not saying that you can raise healthy children or build a healthy marriage without tackling tough issues, without giving **godly direction** to your family. But I am saying that it is essential how you bring direction into your family. **Agape it**. Long before and long after, agape it. Maybe this is a better way to say it.

Before you bring correction to your spouse or your child, spend some time in front of the cross. **Stop, look and listen**. Look long and hard at Jesus. And then look long and hard at the problem, and the people. And don't miss yourself. **Stop, look and listen**. And then, when it is time, bring correction. You will find your words are much different. Carry much more redemption and hope and love. And bring different results. **Stop at the cross, and look and listen**.

The **second** is when someone is **just plain unlovable**. And **your own love fails**. You can't say, 'beloved'. You have no agape to give. You've been hurt and your dreams have been crushed, and people are deeply broken. Forgiveness is a long way away.

The rule on lost love is to **go back to where you found it** in the first

place, and see if you can't find it again. **Stop at the cross, and look and listen.** Look long and hard at Jesus. And then look long and hard at the problem, and the people. And **don't miss yourself.**

I pray at moments like that, 'Here I am again, Lord. And I've made a mess of it again. I don't have any more to give. Could you wash me again, forgive me again, fill me again? Would you give me your kind of love for this family of mine? Don't leave me like I am Lord. Give me this new kind of love...

And he will. "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health – and death will not part you".