Love Is . . . Agape

Why Does God Love Us?
This question is among the most profound questions ever asked. And no human would ever be able to answer it sufficiently. One thing is certain, however. God does not love us because we are lovable or because we deserve His love. If anything, the opposite is true. The state of mankind since the fall is one of rebellion and disobedience. Jeremiah 17:9 describes man’s inner condition: “The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it?” Our innermost beings are so corrupted by sin that even we don’t realize the extent to which sin has tainted us. In our natural state, we do not seek God; we do not love God; we do not desire God. Romans 3:10-12 clearly presents the state of the natural, unregenerate person: “There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.” How then is it possible for a holy, righteous, and perfect God to love such creatures? To understand this we must understand something of the nature and character of God.

First John 4:8 and 16 tell us that “God is love.” Never was a more important declaration made than this; never was more meaning crowded into a few words than in this short sentence — God is love. This is a profound statement. God doesn’t just love; He is love. His nature and essence are love. Love permeates His very being and infuses all His other attributes, even His wrath and anger. Because God’s very nature is love, He must demonstrate love, just as He must demonstrate all His attributes because doing so glorifies Him. Glorifying God is the highest, the best, and the most noble of all acts, so, naturally, glorifying
Himself is what He must do, because He is the highest and the best, and He deserves all glory.

Since it is God's essential nature to love, He demonstrates His love by lavishing it on undeserving people who are in rebellion against Him. God's love, is not a sappy, sentimental, romantic feeling. Rather, it is agape love, the love of self-sacrifice. He demonstrates this sacrificial love by sending His Son to the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, by drawing us to Himself, by forgiving us of our rebellion against Him, and by sending His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, thereby enabling us to love as He loves. He did this in spite of the fact that we did not deserve it. "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God's love is personal. He knows each of us individually and loves us personally. His is a mighty love that has no beginning and no end. It is this experiencing of God’s love that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Why does God love us? It is because of who He is: "God is love."

C.S. Lewis called God’s Love a "gift". God's Love is a gift because there are "no strings attached" to it. There are no conditions to fill, nothing to earn, nothing to do & nothing to be. Agape Love just loves unconditionally, spontaneously and continually.

Let me share a story: Many years ago, there was a nine-year-old girl flying with her parents from England to the United States to have a kidney transplant. The child's condition was very precarious, so the operation was essential. The cost of the procedure was going to be $30,000. The parents had done all they could in Britain to raise the huge sum of money. However, they had only managed to raise $7,000, far short of the total needed. But they made the trip anyway, hoping for
a miracle. And, they certainly found one!

When some of the passengers aboard that jetliner heard about the little girl's plight, they spread the word. People all over that plane began to personally involve themselves in this little girl's life. Unconditionally they began to give of themselves. Some men gave their expensive gold watches and whatever cash they had. One man wrote a check for $10,000. Ladies gave their fur coats, their jewelry and any other valuables they had.

The precious people aboard that 747 jetliner raised an amazing $23,000 towards the little girl's operation. That, plus the $7,000 that the family had raised on their own, made the exact amount needed.

The beautiful thing about this story is that the little girl's nationality, her religion or her social status had nothing at all to do with the decision those people made on that plane to love her unconditionally. They just gave of themselves—all they had to give—"with no strings attached."

When I think of this story, I think of Agape Love . . . it's an unconditional giving of oneself for another. It's a one-sided love, because it doesn't have to be returned in order to be kept alive. In other words, it's not, "I will love you, if you love me." Instead, it's, "I will love you, no matter what." This kind of love not only frees the one loving from expectations and presumptions, but it also frees the one being loved to respond from his/her heart. In other words, Agape Love lets us be who we truly are.

Agape Love is a gift that gives itself to the poor and the rich, to the needy and the full, to the ugly and the beautiful, to the broken and the whole. In other words, Agape Love is for everyone.
The whole Bible is summed up in this one word, Agape. The Bible defines it like this: “Agape is patient and kind, never jealous, envious, boastful or proud, never selfish or rude. It doesn't demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It doesn't hold grudges and will never even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices when truth wins out. If you love someone with Agape Love, you will be loyal to them no matter what the cost. You will always believe in them, always expect the best of them and always defend them. Agape love never fails... but these three remain, Faith, Hope and Agape... but the greatest of these is Agape.” (paraphrase of 1 Cor. 13:4-10.)

God’s Love is a gift “with no strings attached” from the Person who created us, who loves us and who desires for us to have abundant life. And, you know what? That Love already has our name on it...Isaiah 49:16, “I have inscribed you upon the palms of My hands.” That Love is free for the asking. All we must do is reach up and grab hold of it. God will do the rest.

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A perfect example: In the mid 1930s, a dear, sweet German (Protestant) pastor was abducted from his church. He was suspected of harboring, abetting and aiding Jews. He was immediately taken to prison and put in a five-foot cell. There was no hearing, no trial—not even time to let his family know what had happened to him. For weeks, this gentle pastor asked the prison guard outside of his cell door if he could use the pay phone at the end of the hall to call his wife and family and, at least, let them know he was alive. The guard, however, was a contemptible man who hated anyone and everyone that had to do with Jewry. He not only wouldn't let the pastor use the phone, he determined in his heart to make
this man's life as miserable as possible.

This guard purposefully skipped the pastor's cell when meals were handed out; he made the pastor go weeks without a shower; he kept lights burning in the pastor's room so he couldn't sleep; he blasted his short wave radio hoping the intolerable noise would finally break the pastor; he used filthy language; he pushed him; he shoved him; and, when he could, he arranged for the pastor to have the most difficult job in the labor gang.

The pastor, on the other hand, prayed continually not to let hate consume him. He prayed instead to be able to love this guard with God's Love. As the months went by, whenever he could, the pastor would smile at the guard; he would thank him when his meals did come; when the guard was near his cell, the pastor would tell him about his own wife and his own children; he even questioned the guard about his family and about his goals, ideas and visions; and, one time, for a quick moment, he had a chance to tell the guard about Agape Love. The guard never answered a word, but obviously, he heard it all.

After months and months of unconditionally loving this sadistic guard, God's love finally broke through. One night, as the pastor was again quietly talking, the guard cracked a smile for the first time; the next day, instead of the pastor's cell being skipped for lunch, the pastor got two meals; the following evening, he was allowed, not only to go to the showers, but to stay as long as he wanted; the lights began going off at night in his cell and the radio noise ceased. Finally, one afternoon, the guard came into the pastor's cell, asked him for his home phone number, and the guard personally made the "long awaited" call to the pastor's family.
A few months later the pastor was released.

God's Love is a supernatural Love that is poured into our hearts the moment we invite Jesus into our lives. It's God Himself who comes into our hearts at that moment, and He is that Love!

One of the reasons so many of us have had problems finding real Love is that we have been looking in all the wrong places for it. Rather than looking to the Author of real Love, we have been looking horizontally to our spouses, our families, our friends and our relatives to meet our need for love. And, they simply are not able to do so.

God's Love can't be found in a church building, in a religion, or in different philosophies. Real Love can only be found in a Person, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the embodiment of Agape, a love from the Father to us. And He initiates and maintains that love relationship, with us.

It's difficult for us to even fathom a Love like this, let alone produce it in our own strength. And the reason is, this kind of Love is supernatural. It originates in the heart of God & just keeps on coming no matter what the one being loved does or doesn't do. This kind of Love never stops flowing. In other words, there aren't conditions/stipulations which would cause agape love to end.

1 John 4:7-8 says, "Beloved, let us love one another; for Love is of God, and everyone that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God; for God is Love(Agape)".

This is what makes Christianity so totally different from all other religions in
the world. Christianity is the only religion where God Himself (who is Agape Love) comes to dwell within each of our hearts.

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There's a precious story that exemplifies this: Art Katz, a brilliant Jewish philosopher, was a teacher at the Univ. of California at Berkeley. After years of seeking truth, he decided to travel around the world in search of the real God. As he traveled, he took time to painstakingly explore all the religions that he encountered.

One day, while riding a train to Frankfurt, Germany, Art happened to sit next to a young Christian girl who had only a few days previously become a believer. They began to talk about God. A few minutes into the conversation, Art sarcastically turned to the girl and asked, "What makes you think your Jesus is any different from all the other religions of the world?" The young girl paused a moment and then lovingly looked Art straight in the eye and said, "Because Jesus is God. He is Love and He lives in my heart."

Well, this was not at all the response that Art had expected. In fact, it caught him totally off guard. He never saw that girl again, but for months he could not get her simple answer out of his head. Over and over those words echoed in his mind, "Because Jesus is God, He is Love and He lives in my heart." Whoever heard of a religion like that, Art thought.

Finally, at the end of his trip, Art found himself in Jerusalem, his homeland. He befriended a man there who had been a Jew, but had found Jesus to be the true Messiah. After a series of lengthy conversations with his friend and some "God-orchestrated" circumstances, Art finally found what he was looking for. And
the God of the universe, who is Agape Love (just as that young Christian girl on the train had said) came to dwell at the core of his being.

Why Is God's Love so Important?

Receiving and passing on the gift of Love is the whole meaning and purpose of our lives. It's essential! We were not created simply to be happy & contented within ourselves, we were designed to be open and cleansed vessels, not only receiving God's Love for ourselves, but also passing it on to others. Without learning "how" to do this, our lives will always be empty and meaningless, no matter what we do or how we try to fill them.

As 1 Corinthians 13:2 says, "[If] I have not God's Love, I am nothing."

As an example: Many years ago, there was a newspaper article that told the story of a very famous and wealthy industrialist. Throughout his whole life, this man thought love and love relationships were a nuisance and just "in the way" of what was really important-success and financial independence. Thus, he set out to make a name for himself, to amass a fortune and to achieve the power and recognition that comes with these things. And, He did all three.

But in the process of spending his life on his own goals and his own ambitions, he missed the real meaning and purpose of his life, which is to love and be loved. In the end, when this millionaire was too old and too feeble to work any longer, he sat night after night, alone and lonely, in his huge, empty mansion, filled with priceless-and yet worthless-possessions. His name -- Howard Hughes.

God made us and only He knows what it will take to satisfy our needs. Therefore, if we don't learn to love and be loved in the way we were created to from the
very beginning, we really will have wasted our lives, no matter how much success and financial independence we have!

God's Love is a Love that we desperately must have in order to survive at all. Agape is the only Love that can make us whole, meet our needs and give our lives the meaning and purpose that we are all seeking. In other words, it's the "glue" that ties everything together and makes everything possible. Without it, truly we are nothing!

What is Agape Love? Agape Love is Unconditional, changeless and selfless. Agape Love is the love of God and Christ for humankind. It doesn't make any difference how far you try to run from it. God loves you. His eye is on you. He sees you. God loves you, and John 3:16 reminds us that God sent His Son from heaven to this earth for you. Jesus Christ came to this earth to take your sins upon a cross.

God has a plan for your life. He tells us this in Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord. “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope & a future.” God created you in His image, and you are important to Him...remember, “He knows the very number of hairs upon your head.” — Luke 12:7.

Let us Pray: God, our Father, may we love You in all things and above all things. May we reach the joy which You have prepared for us in Heaven. Nothing is good that is against Your Will, and all that is good comes from Your Hand. Place in our hearts a desire to please You, and fill our minds with thoughts of Your Love, so that we may grow in Your wisdom and enjoy Your Agape Love, now and forever.