

Digging Deeper

Love the sinner, hate the sin

One way to reconcile the love of God with His wrath against sin is to say that God loves the sinner but hates the sin. We can see from Romans 5.8 why this makes sense, God loved us whilst we were still sinners. More difficult however is the fact that at the Day of Judgement it is not simply sin but sinners who will be excluded from the Kingdom (1 Cor6.9). Even more difficult is the statement of God (Malachi 1.1-2) summarised by Paul in Romans 9.13 as 'Jacob I have loved (*agapao*), Esau I have hated'. Do you think it is right therefore to say that God loves the sinner but hates the sin?

The Atonement : Behind the translation of 1 John 4.10 is a significant theological issue. Some translations (KJV, ESV, BCP) use the word propitiation, some expiation (RSV) and some hedge their bets (NIV) with 'atoning sacrificed'.

Propitiation represents an objective view of the atonement. Christ's sacrifice turns away from us the penalty for sin, which includes the just wrath of God. So God is propitiated or appeased in some way.

Expiation represents a subjective view. God is the subject, acting through Christ to take away or cover our sin.

The subjective view denies that Christ's death was a propitiation but the objective view allows both - but claims that 1 Jn 4.10 is talking about propitiation.

If the subjective view is right, why did Jesus need to die? Was there really a need of blood for blood?

Is the idea of wrath outdated and a barrier to faith today?

The Trinity in Salvation

Verses 13-15 don't mention love. Pick out from these three verses the role of each of the three persons of the Trinity in our salvation. Why does John write this here? How does it fit in the flow of his argument?

David Phillips, April 2012

The Fruit of the Spirit is love...

Bible Study 1 on Gal 5.22-23



Love is

In Greek the language of the New Testament, there are four main words that can be translated into English as love:

- *Eros* - has the sense of desire and satisfaction but not used in NT.
- *Storge* - close family affection. Not used in the NT but unloving appears as does *philostorgos* meaning brotherly affection.
- *Philia* - the love of close friendship, *philos* means friend. Both are common in the New Testament.

the list of fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22 the word used is **agape**. The matching verb, **agapeo**, is common in Greek and is a general word including the love of close friends, parent and child, husband and wife. The noun *agape* is virtually unknown in non-biblical writing before Christ. It is usually pronounced agga-pay.

Read 1 John 4.7-21.

These verses are packed full of profound statements but we are going to focus on what is said about love.

Count how many times the word 'love' appears in these 15 verses - all of these are from the root *agapeo*.

God is

As we look at each of the fruit we will start by thinking how as fruit of the Spirit, they reveal the character of God. In this study we will look first at the character of God and then at the works of God.

Make a list of the verses that speak specifically about love as the character of God.

What do you think it means to say that God is love? (v8 & 16)

How do you reconcile this statement with others that speak, for example, of God's wrath?

Loved ones

Add to the list you made above the verses that speak specifically about the love of God displayed (love shown in God's works).

In each verse what is said about what God has done? What do these words mean to you as you read them?

Do you find it easy or difficult to understand and accept God's love? Are there things that have happened in your life that make it difficult for you? Do these verse help to understand God's love better?

The group might like to stop at this point and give thanks to God for His love.

According to John which comes first, our love for God, or His love for us?

Do you think some people are unlovable?

Are there some people you find it difficult to love? How should reflecting upon what we have read about God's love for us help?

Are there practical ways in which we can show the love of God to such people?

A command to love

In John's original Greek the opening two words of verse 7 are both forms of the word *agape*. It is difficult to translate into English but is a command meaning something like "loved-ones, love". We are loved, so we should love.

Go through the list of verses you have made above:

In which of these verses does John go on to speak about our response? What does he say we should do?

In each case how does our response relate to God's character or works? What does this mean in real everyday life?

What does the fact that we are commanded to love suggest to you about the true meaning of *agape*?

If you have time look up some of the other commands to love and ask what they mean in practice: Deuteronomy ch 6 v 5, Leviticus ch 19 v 18, John ch 14 v 34, John ch 14 vv 15 & 21.

In verse 7 it says 'everyone who loves has been born of God'. Some would use this to say that if two people love one another then that is of God and should be accepted even if, for example, they are two people in a homosexual relationship, or two people committing adultery. How would you respond? How does true love relate to the commands of God?

Remember that in Galatians 5, before Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit he lists the works of the flesh (v19-21). If we are Christ's we are to crucify the works of the flesh no indulge them (v24).

The fruit of the fruit

Some of these verses also speak about the side-effects or benefits that accompany the fruit of love:

In what sense do you think we come to know God better when we love? (verse 7)

What do you think it means in verse 12 that when we love one another God's love will be made complete in us? Do you feel you are lacking in this? Are there practical things you can do about it?

Read again verses 17 and 18. Do you have confidence as you face the Day of Judgement? Do these two verses suggest that our confidence comes from the extent of our love?

We normally talk about having assurance of salvation because of our conviction that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Because our salvation does not depend upon us we can have confidence as we face the future. Trace the argument John gives from verse 13 to verse 18. In particular what does John say in verse 15 about the need to trust in Jesus and our dependence upon God in verse 16?

The evidence for true faith is the fruit of the Spirit, and the first of fruit is love.

The greatest

We have only focussed on one passage, but one in which love is very much to the fore. If you wish to look up others then two that speak about love and greatness are John ch 15 v 13 & 1 Corinthians ch 13 vv 1-13.