

**1<sup>st</sup> John 4:7-12**

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us (NRSV).

I chose the title “God is Love” but more fitting may be “Love is God and God is Love.” John’s first letter in the Bible places strong emphasis on love. However, it is not as a commandment, as of forced compliance, it is a response to God’s love. It is not one way or lopsided love but a love of reciprocation. John’s theological doctrine is that God is love. God’s love is the basis of salvation. God’s love gives us Jesus, sacrifices for us, and dies for us. God, out of love for us, adopts us as God’s own children. It is very important to understand this. God does not just create us and like us, God loves us enough to adopt us. Love is the divine characteristic that we must all embrace.

Care for others is either there or it is not. We do not reflect on who we should or should not care about. We are to love one another because love is a divine characteristic of God. You are created in God’s likeness and God is love. Therefore your likeness to God means that you are a creation of love. Those that do not have love for others are separated from God. They do not know God because God is love. You have to love to be loved. God loves us to the greatest degree – the sacrifice of God’s own Son. Since God loves us this much, and everybody else this much, we also ought to love one another. Since love can’t be forced, it cannot be commanded. Love is desired and has its own pleasant and natural pull.

It is a matter of connection. God loves us and we love God. We love what God loves. God lives in us. God puts the Holy Spirit in us. The children of God live in response to the intimate relationship with God. Love is a major characteristic of the Christian community. Love is the ethic that demonstrates fellowship with God. Love is a divine characteristic. The very best evidence of this is the giving of the Son. We live in community in fullness of God’s love. We experience God’s love and it makes us very happy. We are in communion with God when we are in communion with others. Showing loving kindness is a necessary characteristic.

For John the ultimate reality is that love is God and God is love. John’s insight into this loving characteristic is that God’s essential nature is love. God’s activity is loving activity. God creates out of love. God rules out of love. God judges through the lenses of love. God gives out of love and it is manifested among us. God loves us with oneness, completeness, and unity for eternity so that we might live with God as like beings with matching attitudes forever. God is not looking for our best behavior or our best moral code; God is looking for loving unity, a pledge of marriage where you love me and I love you. We pledge devotion and loyalty to each other. That is a love relationship. God wants us together with God in unison for eternity. Understand this, God desires to be in a loving family relationship with us forever. God gives us the gift of eternal life as a love gift. In essence God not only loves us now, but God pledges to love us forever. This

is not because we loved God, this is because God loves us so much that God went to the ultimate sacrifice as proof of love is found in the value of the gift. Jesus is God's love, God's nature, and real. The highest knowledge of God is not found in intellectual pursuit, or scientific research, or historical research, or intelligence, or energy devoted to a cause. The highest understanding of God is in knowing God's love, as intimate, fellowship, and adoration. The essence of Christian love is given to the unlovable, mean, selfish, and hostile elements of the world.

I came across a story of an American journalist in Europe during one of the many wars that watched a nurse clean gangrenous sores of a wounded soldier in a hospital. He said "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." The nurse quickly responded "Neither would I." The love of God, as revealed through Christ, inspires us to bring God's love to the world in the gravest of need. This love is called Agape. It is the highest form of love. It embraces sacrificial love regardless of circumstance. This Agape way of love is not found in history, it is brought to us by Jesus. Agape love emulates God and is perfected in us through our relationships.

John's main purpose of teaching the love based doctrine is that it addresses the contradiction of saying one loves God but not showing love for others. The motive is mutual love. When we embrace the knowledge of what God has done for us – the sharing of divine life – demonstrates to us that God is love and love is of God. Love is not just an attribute; love defines God's nature. We are to imitate the love of Christ and respond to love with our gratitude. God's love is perfected in us. When it is brought into actuality, the highest concept that humans can grasp is the love of God and the divine desire to love and care about others.