

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, August 17th, 2025
Rev. Gerry Gallant

What is Biblical Love?
Matthew 22:34-40

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

With all our hearts, let us praise the Lord.

With all that we are, we will praise God's holy name!

With all our hearts, let us bless the Lord.

We will never forget how kind God has been.

The Lord forgives our sins, heals our weakness, and gives us life everlasting.

Let us worship God who is merciful and patient, God's love never fails.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

O God, our strength and refuge,

We come together to worship you and praise your loving kindness.

In your presence, we rest from what distracts us,

to focus on your truth and goodness.

You call us to live in relationship with you.

Through the love of Jesus Christ, you repair our lives.

Through the power of your Spirit, you engage us to serve you in the world.

Receive our prayers and our praise this day,

Creator, Christ, and Spirit,

revive our hope and our energy

and make us ready to answer your call. Amen.

Opening Hymns (2):

"As the Deer Pants for the Water"

As the deer pants for the water,

So my soul longs after You.

You alone are my heart's desire

And I long to worship You.

Chorus

You alone are my strength, my shield,
To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.

I want You more than gold or silver,
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
And on You I can rely. (Chorus)

You're my Friend and You are my brother,
Even though You are a King.
I love You more than any other,
So much more than anything. (Chorus)

“O Lord My Rock and My Redeemer”

O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer
Greatest treasure of my longing soul
My God, like You there is no other
True delight is found in You alone.

Your grace, a well too deep to fathom
Your love exceeds the heaven's reach
Your truth, a fount of perfect wisdom
My highest good and my unending need.

O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer
Strong defender of my weary heart
My sword to fight the cruel deceiver
And my shield against his hateful darts.

My song, when enemies surround me
My hope, when tides of sorrow rise
My joy, when trials are abounding
Your faithfulness, my refuge in the night.

O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer
Gracious Savior of my ruined life

My guilt and cross laid on Your shoulders
In my place You suffered bled and died.

You rose, the grave and death are conquered
You broke my bonds of sin and shame
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer
May all my days bring glory to Your Name.

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Matthew 22:34-40

34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Sermon

One of the most controversial subjects in the modern church is the concept of ‘love your neighbor’ and its meaning in the world today.

We live in a world where the concept of love, especially the unconditional love of Jesus Christ has been defined as a love that does not have any boundaries or expectations. We see it expressed on bumper stickers, signs and t-shirts as the expression Love is Love. A motto that is meant to instill in everyone this idea that love regardless of its purpose or intent is the same as that unconditional agape love of God.

That is what many non-Christians and false Christians believe is intended behind the phrase love your neighbor as yourself. This is likely because they have done a quick word search on google or some other browser to find a Bible verse that supports their pre-supposed idea on what Love is.

The question I want to ask you today is, ‘What is Godly love?’ and is that expression ‘Love is Love’ Biblical or could it be an expression of the devil? And in doing so we will get a better idea of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself.

To begin we need to go a little deeper than google and look into the Biblical definition of love.

This first challenge is that in the Bible there is more than one word used to describe love. In English we use love to define any form of caring or passion, however in Biblical Greek there are different words used for different forms of love.

Greek uses the term PHILEO to refer to brotherly love, the love that exists between friends who are close to one another, perhaps at times even closer than siblings.

It uses the term STORGE to refer to the love that parents have for their children, and this is a special form of love, because it will often continue even when the actions of the child make it difficult for others to love them.

Then there is the one that the world we live in is most familiar with EROS, the term used to refer to the love that is shared between a man and a woman in a physical way when they are emotionally attracted to one another. This is the type of love that is most often related to sexual relations and the root of our word erotic.

Finally, we get AGAPE love, the unconditional love of God. This is the love that God has for mankind, and it is distinct from all the other forms of love in that it is truly separated from the behavior of the person being loved. It is a pure love that can only come from God and being in a relationship with God.

AGAPE love, is fully expressed in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is no impure form of AGAPE love because it is a Love that Comes from God. That means that there is no unhealthy or unholy expression of this love.

AGAPE love is experienced and expressed in our love when we are one of God's sheep, when we are listening to his voice, following him and obeying his Word. We see this expressed in the lives of the disciples. Men who followed the Word of God in a world which resisted the truth of the Gospel. Men who spoke the truth of God's Word even when it led to them be ridiculed, persecuted and eventually put to death at the hands of those who opposed what they taught.

This is what Jesus is speaking of when he tells us, **'love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment.'**

So, it is critical that we understand what AGAPE love is before we can even begin to understand what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. God's love is pure and unwavering, and if you can recall what we learned just a few weeks ago in the book of John, God's love for us continues regardless of the situations and circumstances we find ourselves in while we walk on this planet.

However, God's love for us means that he is primarily concerned with our eternal life, not just our walk here on earth, and that means that he will allow us to undergo trials, tribulations and even pain and suffering as he changes us from who we were into who we are called to be in His eternal kingdom.

AGAPE love means loving someone enough to love them as who they are, but not leaving them to be that way, the same way that God loves us.

And it is only once you have an understanding of AGAPE love as the cornerstone of love that you can begin to understand how Christians are called to love their neighbors in this world.

Let's start with PHILEO love. That love that is expressed between brothers and sisters in Christ, the love of fellowship. When you have PHILEO and AGAPE expressed together you get a Biblical love that is supportive of one another, a love that is like iron sharpening iron (Proverb 27:7), a love that spurs one another on to love and do good works (Heb 10:24), a love that encourages one another and builds up one another (1 Thes. 5:11).

In the Bible we see this type of love expressed in the relationship between David and Saul's son Johnathan in the Old Testament.

Johnathan was the heir to the throne, and even though his father Saul attempted many times to kill David because he saw David as a threat to his rulership. Jonathan remained a true friend and brother to him. In fact, in 1 Samuel 18:1 it says, '**18** As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.'

Johnathan loves David as God intended, in 1 Samuel 18:2-4 it tells us that '³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.'

Jonathan's love for his brother was so strong that he willingly gave up his right to the throne and stood against his father.

1 Samuel 23:17

¹⁷ And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this."

This is PHILEO and AGAPE, a pure love that exists where people are willing to do anything for one another, just because they love one another so deeply.

When PHILEO love lacks AGAPE, it changes. The most well-known example of this is in the New Testament in the character of Judas. Even though Judas was one of the twelve and walked, ate, and experienced God every day, he had his own personal and hidden agenda that none of the other disciples were aware of. His mind was on the money, and according to the Scriptures, he even helped himself to it at times. Judas is described in the book of John as 'thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.' (John 12:6)

In the end he decided to betray Jesus to the Jewish authorities for a mere three months wages. Yes, he had a good relationship with Jesus and the disciples while he walked with them, but he did not love them with the AGAPE love of God, his first love was money, and that meant that he could never really have the type of brotherly love that he was meant to have with the other disciples or Jesus. If he had loved God first with all his heart, soul and mind he could never have done what he chose to do.

Brotherly Love without Godly Love serves no purpose in the Kingdom of God.

How about STORGE, that parental love we are all familiar with.

Abraham is perhaps the most wonderful example of STORGE and AGAPE in action. He obediently left his homeland and went wherever God called him to go. He showed his son Issac from his birth onward the importance of obeying the Lord. Issac was given a real-life example of this when he was taken up the mountainside to participate in a sacrifice and an angel of the Lord appeared and provided the perfect sacrifice at the perfect time. Abraham taught Issac more about God in his actions, in his obedience to the Lord, than his words could ever have taught him.

Hannah is another example of STORGE and AGAPE. She asked God for a Son and promised that if he gave her what she asked for that she would give him back to the Lord all the days of his life and that a razor would never be used on his head. She kept her word and gave Samuel into the service of the Lord, and he ended up becoming one of the great prophets of the Scriptures.

STORGE love is expressed when we love God first and show our family that in our words, and deeds, leading them into the Lord by the way that we live.

So, what happens when we have STORGE without AGAPE. The story of Eli who was a priest in the house of the Lord is an example of this form of love. Eli's sons would often eat the sacrificed foods without permission, and they were sexually immoral with the servants at the door of the tabernacle itself.

Eli loved them so, he did not correct their behavior, he would sometimes mildly rebuke them but never punished or corrected them and thus their behavior continued. Finally, God spoke to Eli through another man of God, who told him that God was about to punish his family and gave him the reason for that punishment – Eli honored his family more than he honored God.

God was telling Eli that he was filled with STORGE but lacked AGAPE in his love for his sons.

Eli was given an opportunity to correct his ways by God, but he did not and in the end, God did punish them. In a battle against the Philistines, Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli were slain and upon hearing the news Eli himself collapsed and fell, breaking his own neck and dying.

Merely loving one's children and giving into them and their every demand without training and discipling them, is in effect saying that they are more important than God in our lives and in theirs.

Which brings us to EROS, the love between a man and a woman.

Firstly, we need to understand that this form of love is not evil, it is a gift from God and was meant to be expressed between a husband and wife in a loving monogamous relationship.

However, when this love is not fully understood and expressed as God intended it to be, it will result in an expression of lust and is often excused or explained away by calling it love.

Unlike both PHILEO and AGAPE, when this type of love exists without AGAPE it does not have a lot of focus on the person who is being loved, instead it tends to focus on the one who is doing the loving and therefore when it is left to itself without God's influence it can become a very self-serving and selfish form of love.

When EROS is governed by God, meaning it is combined with AGAPE, it makes for a happy marriage. If God is at the center of each of the spouse's lives, they will enjoy EROS as God intended for them to do in their relationship.

Yet when EROS is not governed by God, when it lacks AGAPE, it often results in sexual immorality and promiscuity, often before marriage and even outside of the confines of marriage, both which go against God's holy nature and His design for marriage in the first place. We see this displayed in the hookup culture that exists through apps and the rampant pornography that exists within the world today.

When Eros is expressed within the confines of marriage, we are within the will of God and there is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, it is God who gave us the appearance that we possess that attract one another, it is God that gave us the emotions that we feel for one another. It is only when we deviate from God's plan for the expression of this form of love that we begin to rebel against God, and we will often experience guilt, fear, and shame for our thoughts, words and deeds.

Abraham and Sarah are a wonderful example of a couple that expressed EROS and AGAPE love at work in their marriage, and because of this they often experienced God's AGAPE love at work in their lives. Over and over when they did not place God first in their marriage troubles appear and they are forced to face the consequences of those choices in their lives. Yet when they obey God, they are blessed.

Perhaps the best example of EROS without AGAPE is the relationship between David and Bathsheba. David deviated from the understand of marriage that God had given his people and violated another man's marriage when he laid with Bathsheba. In his attempt to cover up his sin and erase his guilt, fear, and shame, he tried to convince Uriah, her husband, that the child was his and when that failed, he plotted the murder of Uriah. In the end even though David

recognized his sin and repented of it, he had to bear the wrath of God, who took away the life of the child born of adultery to Bathsheba.

Another example of EROS, perhaps a more worldly one, would be the story of Amnon, David's son, who fell in love with his half-sister Tamar. He claimed to love her, but the truth is that he lusted after her and eventually gave into his lusts and raped her. Once he had his lust for her satisfied, he began to hate her more than he had ever claimed to love her. This is often the result of EROS without AGAPE, a lust that is purely focused on self-satisfaction and the pleasures of sin. This is why pornography and hook up culture is so prevalent in the world today, our culture has embraced the idea of EROS and rejected the idea of AGAPE.

God teaches that EROS is to be confined to marriage alone or it will result in sexual immorality, adultery and a cascade of sin that comes as people attempt to cover up the shame, fear, and guilt of their actions.

Any form of love without AGAPE first, without the love of God first, can easily become corrupted by the ways of this world and turn into something that is sinful and offends God.

The love of God is meant to come first in our lives, the understanding that God loves us just the way we are, but he also loves us enough to not leave us that way, or we would never be able to enter his eternal kingdom. This is why we are baptized by the Holy Spirit, reborn, renews and changed, so that a loving God can remove those things that exist in our life that cause us to live separated from His love.

AGAPE love is unconditional, and because of that it changes us from who we were into who we are called to be.

The Scripture today said:

Matthew 22:37-40

37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

And it is only when you obey that first commandment that you can begin to live out the second in your life. Loving your neighbor like yourself means loving them enough to love them wherever they are in their walk with God right now but also loving them enough to not leave them there. It means loving them enough to tell them the truth of what the Gospel says, even if it hurts them, even if it offends them, even if they hate you for telling them, because you are more concerned about their eternal salvation than their enjoyment of their life here on earth.

So, ask yourself, is 'Love is Love' a Biblical expression or a deception of the Devil in this dark and fallen world.

Let us pray,

Perfect Love

Grant me, even me, my dearest Lord,
to know you, and love you, and rejoice in you.
And, if I cannot do these perfectly in this life,
let me at least advance to higher degrees every day,
until I can come to do them in perfection.
Let the knowledge of you increase in me here,
that it may be full hereafter.
Let the love of you grow every day more and more here,
that it may be perfect hereafter;
that my joy may be full in you.
I know, O God, that you are a God of truth,
O make good your gracious promises to me,
that my joy may be full;
to your honor and glory,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Source: Augustine of Hippo, Fourth Century

Baptisms

Explanation

Baptism is a gift from God.
With visible signs and words of promise,
God moves toward us
to claim us as children of the new covenant
and members of the household of God.

In baptism, God acts to unite us to Christ,
to deliver us from the power of sin and death,
and call us into a new life of growth and service.

In the sacrament of baptism
the church recognizes God's covenant of grace.
We receive God's gift with reverent joy
and respond in faith and obedience.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus gave his disciples and all of the faithful the great commission:

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"

Remember the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:38-39

38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Presentation

Who comes to receive the gift of baptism?

Renunciation and Affirmation

People wanting to be baptized or rededicated

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God
who has been faithful to us in all generations,
do you turn away from sin,
renounce all evil powers in the world
which rebel against God
or oppose God's rule of justice and love?

I renounce them.

Do you renounce the ways of sin which separate you from the love of God?

I renounce them.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ,
accepting him as Lord and Savior,

trusting in his grace and love?

I do.

Do you desire, in dependence on the Holy Spirit,
to mature as a Christian in the church,
to seek the guidance of Christ as you listen for his Word,
to celebrate his death and life at the table he provides,
and to engage in his mission to the world?

I do.

Gathered Witnesses

Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ,
promise to guide and nurture _____, _____,
by word and deed,
with love and in prayer,
encouraging him/her (them) to follow the way of Christ
and to be (a) faithful member(s) of his church?

We do.

Thanksgiving

We give you thanks, O gracious God,
for the gift of your Spirit and the sign of water.
In the beginning,
when your Spirit moved over the waters,
you gave order and life to your planet earth.

By the waters of the flood you cleansed the world,
and established with Noah and his family
a new beginning for all people.

In the time of Moses, you led your people
out of slavery through the waters of the sea,
making covenant with them in a new land.

In the fullness of time you sent Jesus Christ,
who was formed in the water of a woman's womb.

In the water of Jordan,
Jesus was baptized and anointed by your Holy Spirit.

In his ministry to the world,
 Jesus offered living water to the woman of Samaria,
 washed the feet of his disciples,
 and sent them forth to baptize all nations by water and the Spirit.

And now, with your people of all times and places,
 we wait with eager longing
 as we look for the city of God,
 from which will flow the river of life
 for the healing of the nations

The Act of Baptism

_____ is baptized,
 In the name of the Father
 And of the Son,
 And of the Holy Spirit.

May the spirit of God dwell in you
 And uphold you, now and forever. **Amen.**

Declaration and Welcome

_____, _____, _____,
 you are now received by Christ's appointment
 into the holy, catholic church.
 Through baptism, God has made you
 members of the household of God
 to share with Christ in the priesthood of all believers.
 Remember your baptism and give thanks.
 Be one with us in the church.

May The Lord bless you and keep you.
 The Lord be kind and gracious to you.
 The Lord look upon you with favor
 and give you peace. Amen.

Let's us welcome are new brother and sisters in Christ
 And embrace those who have chosen to rededicate themselves to
 God this day

Closing Hymn: “Holy, Holy, Holy”

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
 Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
 Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee,
 Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea.
 Cherubim and seraphim, falling down before thee,
 Who was and is and evermore shall be.

Holy, Holy, Holy! though the darkness hide thee,
 Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
 Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
 Perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.

Closing Prayer

We praise you this day, O Lord,
 for the gift of water.
 Water quenches. Water washes.
 Water gives life.

We praise you this day, O Lord,
 for your power over water,
 for separating the water to create dry ground,
 for saving Noah while the flood destroyed evil,
 for leading your people through the parted waters of the Red Sea,
 for giving us the living water, Christ, whom you claimed as your Son at his baptism.

We praise you this day, O Lord,
 for the gift of baptism,
 a sign of our union with Jesus' death and resurrection,
 a sign of the washing away of our sins.

We praise you this day, O Lord,
 for your promises made visible in baptism,
 your covenant seal, placed upon us,
 given as a sign of our new life in you.

We praise you this day, O Lord,
 that through the gift of your Son,

we have been adopted as your covenant children,
part of the family of God.

We praise you this day, O Lord,
for the gift of adoption,
for the grafting together
that formed this new family.

Help us remember our baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection.
Help us remember our adoption as your children.
Help us remember our brothers and sisters in Christ,
brought together from around the world in your covenant love.

We praise you, great God, that in Christ there our identity is no longer divided between Jew or Gentile, nor slave or free, nor male or female, but instead defined in our unity in our obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

Benediction/Blessing

Grant us, Lord God,
the vision of your kingdom,
forgiveness and new life,
and the stirring of your Spirit,
so that we may share your vision,
proclaim your love,
and change this world
in the name of Christ. **Amen.**