


A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM



A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's trunk is massive and textured, with roots spreading out across the ground and over the stone structures. The background shows more stone ruins and lush green foliage. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

THE FRUIT OF
THE RIGHTEOUS IS A
TREE OF LIFE,
AND HE WHO IS WISE
WINS SOULS.

PROVERBS 11:30 NASB

**PRINCIPLES
FOR
BIBLICAL
EVANGELISM
FOUND IN
JOHN 4, “THE
WOMAN AT
THE WELL.”**

TAKE

- TAKE THE INITIATIVE! JN. 4:6-9

OFFER

- OFFER GOD’S MERCY! JN. 4:10-14

IDENTIFY

- IDENTIFY SPIRITUAL NEEDS! JN. 4:9-10

CONFRONT

- CONFRONT SIN JN! 4:16-18

REJECT

- REJECT FALSE WORSHIP! JN. 4:19-24

REVEAL

- REVEAL CHRIST! JN. 4:25-26

THE MARK OF TRUE BELIEF

- **SIXTY-FIVE PERCENT** of Americans readily identify themselves as **Christians**. But it's a statistic that completely fails to square with reality. No one would argue that Christian **ethics** and **morality** dominate a culture decaying under the weight of rampant sin.
- The actual number of Christians in this country is obviously less than the polling suggests. But how much less? What better indicator is there of authentic Christian faith than **verbal profession**?

- The **APOSTLE JOHN** offers several *litmus tests* in his first epistle. Of those, perhaps his most critical barometer of **authentic Christian faith** is found in chapter four. When he says that **“love is from God”** (1 John 4:7), he is pointing out that **God** is the *origin* of all *true love*. **LOVE** is therefore the *best evidence* that a person truly knows God: **“Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God”** (1 John 4:7–8). In other words, **LOVE IS THE PROOF OF A REGENERATE HEART. ONLY TRUE CHRISTIANS ARE CAPABLE OF GENUINE LOVE.**

- Clearly, the kind of love the *apostle* is speaking of is a higher, purer form of love than we commonly know from human experience. The love of which he speaks does not flow naturally from the human heart. It is not a **CARNAL LOVE**, a **ROMANTIC LOVE**, or even a **FAMILIAL LOVE**. It is a **SUPERNATURAL LOVE** that is peculiar to those who know God. **IT IS GODLY LOVE.**

- In fact, the apostle employed a Greek word for “*love*” that was highly unusual in first-century culture. The word was **AGAPĒ**, not a common word until the New Testament made it so. When a typical first-century pagan thought of love, *agapē* was not the word that would have come to mind. In fact, there were **two** other common Greek words for love: **PHILEŌ**, to describe *brotherly love*, and **EROS**, to describe everything from *romantic love* to *sexual passion*.

- **PHILEŌ** is occasionally used as a synonym for *agapē*, but generally the word *agapē* is used as a more refined and elevated term. In the sense that **JOHN** uses it here, **AGAPĒ IS UNIQUE TO GOD**. He is the sole source of it.

- **Love for one's family, romantic love, and the love of good friends** all fall into the category of what Scripture calls **“NATURAL AFFECTION”** (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3, KJV). Even these expressions of **“natural affection,”** or **human love,** can be marvelously rich. They fill life with color and joy.
- They are, however, merely **pale reflections** of the image of God in His creatures. **His love is perfect love.** It is that **pure, holy, godly love** which can be known only by those **WHO ARE BORN OF HIM.** It is the same unfathomable love that moved God to send **“His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him”** (1 John 4:9).

- **DONALD W. BURDICK** gives *three characteristics* of this **godly sort of love**:
 1. IT IS **SPONTANEOUS**. There was nothing of value in the persons loved that called forth such sacrificial love. God of His own free will set His love on us in spite of our enmity and sin. [**AGAPĒ**] is love that is initiated *by the lover* because he wills to love, not because of the value or lovableness of the person loved.
 2. IT IS **SELF-GIVING**. [**AGAPĒ**] is not interested in what it can gain, but in what it can give. It is not bent on satisfying the lover, but on helping the one loved whatever the cost.
 3. IT IS **ACTIVE**. [**AGAPĒ**] is not mere sentiment cherished in the heart. Nor is it mere words however eloquent. It does involve feeling and may express itself in words, but it is primarily an *attitude* toward another that moves the will to act in helping to meet the need of the one loved.


- ALL **TRUE BELIEVERS** HAVE THIS **LOVE**, AND ALL WHO HAVE IT ARE **TRUE BELIEVERS**.
- This kind of love cannot be conjured up by the human will. It is wrought in the hearts of believers **BY GOD HIMSELF**. *“We love, because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). Love for God and love for fellow believers is an inevitable result of **THE NEW BIRTH**, by which we *“become partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Pet. 1:4). Just as it is God’s nature to love, love is characteristic of His true children. *“The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us”* (Rom. 5:5).
- **GODLY LOVE**, THEREFORE, IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TESTS OF THE REALITY OF ONE’S FAITH.

THE ULTIMATE *DEMONSTRATION* OF GOD'S LOVE

- ***GOD'S LOVE FOR SINNERS*** is a well-documented historical fact. Its verification doesn't hinge on the consensus of theologians, nor does its validation rest on something we feel. The ***APOSTLE JOHN*** points us to ***THE CROSS*** as the consummate and undeniable proof of divine love: ***"God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him"*** (1 John 4:8–9).
- We would not be doing justice to this verse if we limited our discussion of ***DIVINE LOVE*** to abstract terms. It is ***DYNAMIC, ACTIVE, VIBRANT,*** and ***POWERFUL***. God has ***"MANIFESTED"*** His love, displaying it in a particular act that can be examined objectively.

- In other words, Scripture does not merely say “*God is love*” and leave it to the individual to interpret subjectively what that means. There is a very important **DOCTRINAL CONTEXT** in which the love of God is *explained* and *illustrated*. To affirm that God is love while denying the doctrine underlying and defining that truth is to render the truth itself meaningless.
- But that is precisely what many have done. For example, our adversaries, the *theological liberals*, are very keen to affirm that God is love; yet they often flatly deny the **significance of Christ’s substitutionary atonement**. They suggest that because God is love, Christ did not actually *need to die as a substitutionary sacrifice* to turn away the **DIVINE WRATH** from **SINNERS**.

- They portray God as easy to mollify, and they characterize the death of Christ as an act of martyrdom or a moral example for believers—**denying** that it was **GOD’S OWN WRATH THAT NEEDED TO BE PROPITIATED THROUGH A BLOOD SACRIFICE AND DENYING THAT HE PURPOSELY GAVE HIS SON IN ORDER TO MAKE SUCH AN ATONEMENT**. Thus, they reject the consummate manifestation of God’s love, even while attempting to make divine love the centerpiece of their system.
- I commonly encounter people who think that because God is love, **theology** doesn’t really matter. Here’s a common question posed by the **liberals**, **“Do you really think God is concerned about all the points of doctrine that divide us, Christians? How much better it would be if we forgot our doctrinal differences and just showed the world the love of God!”**



- But that position is untenable, because *many who call themselves Christians are deceivers*. For that reason, the **APOSTLE JOHN** began the *fourth chapter* of his first epistle with these words: *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”* (1 John 4:1).

- And since an important **BODY OF DOCTRINE** underlies what Scripture teaches about divine love, it is a fallacy to think of divine love and sound theology as in any way *opposed* to each other.



- **MARTYN LLOYD-JONES** wrote about this very thing:
- The great tendency in this present [twentieth] century has been to put up as antitheses the idea of God as a God of love on the one side, and theology or dogma or doctrine on the other. Now the average person has generally taken up such a position as follows: “You know, I am not interested in your doctrine. Surely the great mistake the church has made throughout the centuries is all this talk about dogma, all this doctrine of sin, and the doctrine of the Atonement, and this idea of justification and sanctification. Of course, there are some people who may be interested in that kind of thing; they may enjoy reading and arguing about it, but as for myself,” says this man, “there does not seem to be any truth in it; **all I say is that God is love.**” **So, he puts up this idea of God as love over and against all these doctrines which the church has taught throughout the centuries.**

- Such thinking has been the predominant mood both in popular thinking and in much of organized religion for the last hundred years. That mindset in many ways has become the hallmark of the visible church in the twenty-first century.
- **LLOYD-JONES** points out that according to (1 John 4:9–10), ***“people who thus put up as opposites the idea of God as love and these basic, fundamental doctrines can, in the last analysis, KNOW NOTHING WHATSOEVER ABOUT THE LOVE OF GOD”***
- Indeed, looking at these verses again, we discover that the apostle explains the love of God in terms of **SACRIFICE, ATONEMENT FOR SIN, and PROPITIATION!**

- ***“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”*** (1 John 4:10). That word speaks of a sacrifice designed to turn away the wrath of an offended deity. What the apostle is saying is that **GOD GAVE HIS SON AS AN OFFERING FOR SIN, TO SATISFY HIS OWN WRATH AND JUSTICE IN THE SALVATION OF SINNERS.**
- This is the very heart of the gospel. The **“GOOD NEWS”** is not that God is willing to overlook sin and forgive sinners. That would compromise God’s **holiness**. That would leave **justice** unfulfilled. That would trample on true **righteousness**. Furthermore, that would **NOT BE LOVE** on God’s part, but **apathy**.
- The **REAL** good news is that **GOD HIMSELF, THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF HIS SON, PAID THE PRICE OF SIN. HE TOOK THE INITIATIVE (“not that we loved God, but that He loved us”).**

- **GOD** was not responding to anything in sinners that made them worthy of His grace. On the contrary, His love was altogether undeserved by sinful humanity. The sinners for whom Christ died were worthy of nothing but His wrath. As **PAUL** wrote, *“Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom. 5:6–8).

- **BECAUSE GOD IS RIGHTEOUS**, He must punish sin; He cannot simply absolve guilt and leave justice unsatisfied. **BUT THE DEATH OF CHRIST TOTALLY SATISFIED GOD’S JUSTICE, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HIS HOLY HATRED OF SIN.**

- Some people recoil at the thought of an *innocent victim* making atonement for *guilty sinners*. They like the idea that people should pay for their own sins. But take away this *doctrine of substitutionary atonement*, and you have no gospel at all. **IF THE DEATH OF CHRIST WAS ANYTHING LESS THAN A GUILT OFFERING FOR SINNERS, NO ONE COULD EVER BE SAVED.**
- But in Christ's death on the cross, there is the **highest possible expression of divine love**. He, who *is* love, sent His precious Son to die as an atonement for sin. If your sense of fair play is outraged by that—good! It ought to be shocking. It ought to be astonishing. It ought to stagger you. Think it through, and you'll begin to get a picture of the enormity of ***THE PRICE GOD PAID TO MANIFEST HIS LOVE.***
- The cross of Christ also gives the most complete and accurate perspective on the **BALANCE BETWEEN GOD'S LOVE AND HIS WRATH.**

- ***AT THE CROSS HIS LOVE IS SHOWN TO SINFUL HUMANITY***—fallen creatures who have no rightful claim on His *goodness*, His *mercy*, or His *love*. And ***HIS WRATH*** is poured out on ***HIS BELOVED SON***, who had done *nothing* worthy of any kind of punishment.
- **IF YOU'RE NOT *AWESTRUCK* BY THAT, THEN YOU **DON'T YET UNDERSTAND IT.****
- If you do catch a glimpse of this truth, however, your thoughts of God as a loving Father will take on a whole new depth and richness. ***“GOD IS LOVE”***—and He demonstrated His love for us in that while we were sinners in rebellion against Him, He gave His only Son to die on our behalf—and so that we might live through Him (**Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9–10**). That is the very heart of the gospel, and it holds forth the only hope to those in bondage to their sin: ***“BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS, AND YOU WILL BE SAVED”*** (Acts 16:31).