

God's promises still stand because His character does not change. That's why the center of the gospel is love—unending, self-giving, initiating love. God's motivation for sending Jesus wasn't sentiment but agape, the kind of love that moves toward us at great cost to Himself (John 3:16). 1 John 4 tells us that love originates in God, is revealed in Christ's atoning work, and is perfected in us as we receive and live it. Perfect love drives out fear because it removes punishment; we become people who are no longer avoiding judgment but abiding in a Person who has already borne it.

To grasp this, we need to define love the way Scripture does. The Bible speaks of *phileo* (friendship), *storge* (family), *eros* (romantic), and *agape* (selfless, sacrificial). In Peter's restoration, Jesus kept inviting him into agape, and when Peter could only honestly offer *phileo*, Jesus met him there and still commissioned him. That's the way agape operates—honest, costly, persistent, and for the other's good. It isn't a feeling; the cross proves that. It is action for another's benefit despite personal cost.

This love is undeserved and unearnable. God moved toward us “while we were still sinners,” not after we cleaned up. Love like this forgives, cleanses, and removes stain as far as east is from west. And this love invites us to remain—Jesus said, “Remain in my love.” How? By keeping His commands, not as merit but as alignment. Obedience isn't paying God back; it's staying under the waterfall of His presence and joy.

From that place, we love others freely. Our credibility in a cynical world is not our arguments but our agape—costly kindness, patient truth-telling, enemy-love that resembles Jesus. When we struggle to love, the solution isn't trying harder; it's returning to the Source. Paul prayed we would “know” (*ginosko*) Christ's love—not just know about it (*oida*), but experience it so deeply that it fills us to God's fullness. People changed by that kind of love naturally become conduits of it. That's what makes Jesus believable to our neighbors, families, and even our enemies.

Key Takeaways

1. Agape chooses sacrifice over feelings

Agape is not mood-driven; it is cross-shaped. Jesus didn't feel like going to Calvary—He chose it for our good. Real love moves toward another's benefit even when it costs time, comfort, reputation, or control. That's the love the Spirit forms in us. [50:01]

2. Remain in love through obedience

Jesus ties abiding in His love to keeping His commands. Obedience is not earning; it's agreeing with reality—staying where love actually lives. When we walk in step with Him, fear shrinks and joy grows because we're aligned with His heart. [59:38]

3. Move from *oida* to *ginosko*

It's possible to know facts about God's love without being shaped by it. Experiential knowing—*ginosko*—comes as we trust, surrender, and receive. When love moves from data to encounter, it reshapes what we want, how we forgive, and whom we serve. [68:01]

4. Let love become your witness

Jesus said the world would recognize His disciples by their love. Agape in public—patient presence, truthful mercy, enemy-love—disrupts our cultural scorekeeping. It's not weakness; it's cruciform strength that makes Jesus plausible to those watching. [65:14]

5. You cannot earn God's love

God moved toward us when we were powerless and undeserving. That frees us from performing for worth and releases us to repent without terror. The cross settles the question of whether we're wanted; now we live from acceptance, not for it. [53:20]

Bible reading

- 1 John 4:7–21

Observation Questions

In 1 John 4:7–12, where does love come from, and how did God show it among us?

In 1 John 4:17–19, what changes about fear and the day of judgment for those who are “in” God's love?

In the restoration moment with Peter, what two different words for love are used, and what shift happens in the third question? [48:45]

What does Jesus connect to “remaining in His love” in John 15:9–11, and what result does He promise? [59:38]

Interpretation Questions

“Agape love is not a feeling; it is selfless, unconditional, sacrificial” ([50:01]). If love is defined this way, how does that change what counts as real love in daily choices (time, comfort, reputation, control)?

“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love” ([59:38]). How does obedience function as alignment with love rather than earning love?

“Perfect love drives out fear... because fear has to do with punishment” (1 John 4:18). What picture of God is needed for fear to shrink, and how does the cross remove the fear of punishment?

Moving from knowing about love (oida) to knowing by experience (ginosko) ([01:08:01]): What helps a person shift from information to encounter so that love actually reshapes desires and habits?

Application Questions

Where is fear of failure, shame, or fear of punishment shaping decisions right now? What would it look like this week to bring that specific fear into the light of “perfect love drives out fear”?

Share one step you will take. [41:14]

Think of one person who is hard for you to love (maybe even an “enemy”). What is one costly, concrete act of agape you can do for their good this week—serving, listening, telling the truth with patience, or meeting a real need? “By this everyone will know you are my disciples.”

[01:05:14]

Be honest about capacity: if Jesus asked, “Do you love (agape) me?” Would you answer with agape or phileo right now? What is one honest next step Jesus might be inviting you into today? [49:14]

In what area have you stepped outside the “umbrella” of remaining in God’s love? Like the prodigal, what concrete return looks like for you this week—confession, making a call, changing a habit, reordering your week? [01:01:00]

Pick one clear command of Jesus to practice this week (forgive, reconcile, give, serve, tell the truth in love). How will you live it out as a way to remain in His love and receive His joy? Who can check in with you about this? [59:38]

Where are you trying to earn God’s love or prove your worth? How will you practice receiving the truth that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” and live from acceptance, not for it? [53:20]

Plan one public act of love as witness this week: help a stranger, cover a cost, invite someone to a gathering, or show kindness to a co-worker who mistreats you. What will you do, when will you do it, and how can the group pray for you? [01:20:16]