

Love – Read 1 John 4.7-21

In English the word 'love' is used in many ways. The Greek of the New Testament - the international language of Jesus' day - has many words:

- *eros* is sexual love,
- *philia* is the affection of friends – philadelphia is love of brothers and sisters, philanthropia is kindness, courtesy, touches of care for others
- *storge* is family affection
- *agape* (pronounced aggapay) is used in the New Testament to speak of love which is a free gift: it is the attitude of God toward His Son (John 17.26), towards us whom He has made (John 3.16) and towards those who belong to His Son (John 14.21).

God's Love is Different From Ours: Its ground is in Him and not in us. We love a limited number of people: God so loved the world (Jn. 3.16). We love those who love us: but "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us" (1 Jn. 4.10). We love those who are lovable but "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom.5.8).

God is Love: It expresses the central nature of God (1 John 4.8). The ground of God's love is altogether in Himself. He is love. Love flows out from Him as a free gift (1 Jn.4.10). God is eternally Love in Himself and independently of His love for us. In revealing His love to us in His Son He has given us a glimpse into His very Being.

We are Called to Love God: When asked what is the first and greatest command, (Luke 10) Jesus said "You shall love the Lord your God with heart, soul, mind and strength".

We are Called to Love our Fellow Christians: Paul said that without love we are nothing (1 Cor. 13) and the aged John's plea to all Christians was "Little children love one another" (Jn. 13.34-5; 1 Jn.3.11 & 4.7; 2 Jn.5-6).

We are Called to Live a Life of Love: The power to do so is God's gift by His Spirit within (Eph. 3.16-19., Rom. 5.5., 8.37-39). He is the heart of our loving others (1 Jn. 4.9-10). Our part is to abide in Him (Jn. 15.1-9), to live in His grace and truth (1 Jn. 1.7) and to keep ourselves in the Love of God (Jude 20-21)

Such love can be costly – it cannot be just for Sundays or special times or special people. It is a whole life or it is nothing. It is possible only by His Spirit within.

Questions for discussion:

1. "They will know we are Christians by our love". Do the people who live around our church building, those we work with, the people we mix with every day, really feel that?
2. How practical is our love for one another in our church fellowship? In the early church they freely shared what they had:"there shall be no poor among you" (Acts 2.44-45., 5.32-35). What ought we to do about this today?
3. In what ways should we express our love for God?
4. How do sinful people feel about our attitude towards them? Do they feel we care about them or (in the spirit of the Pharisees) simply reject them?
5. People today are "lovers of selves rather than lovers of God". Do you agree? What would really make them be or want to be different?
6. Think of as many ways and instances as you can in which the word "love" is used today and what people really mean by it.