

God is... Good & Loving
Psalm 45:8-12, 1 John 4:7-16

Well brothers and sisters, its not very often that I retain one of the words from the scripture readings in the original Hebrew and Greek, but that's exactly what I've done this morning.

Instead of translating the Hebrew word "Hesed" and the Greek word "Agape" into "love" as our English bibles do – I've simply left those original words in place. Because... as we learn about the perfections of God that we call "goodness" and "love" this morning, I want to make the point and have us be aware that our English word "love" is so problematic when it comes to speaking about this perfection of God, that its actually better for us to use the original Greek and Hebrew words instead.

I think you understand what I'm talking about right? But I'll give you some illustrations... I might ask you whether or not you like to eat pizza, and you could respond by saying "*Oh yes! I love pizza!*" Or if we are wanting people to support us we'll say "*hey show me some love...*" Or when there is a particularly

pleasant social atmosphere at a party we'll say "*you can feel the love...*"

Now, its also February – or Loveuary as the Hallmark movie channel calls it – and its Valentine's Day weekend and we're celebrating romance we'll say that "*love is in the air!*" And of course, these days, romance is no longer supposed to be restricted between a man and woman, you can love whomever, whatever, how many ever you want – because... #lovewins.

So, you can see how using our English word "love" - with all of its various applications and nuances - is problematic when attempting to describe what 1 John 4:8 means when it says "***God is agape.***" Case in point, you will experience how this is problematic if you were to state that certain behaviors and unbiblical lifestyles are not good, that they are not pleasing to God, you would immediately find yourself being rebuked by someone who would enlighten you that this can't be the case because "***God is love!***"

Whenever this happens to me I usually post one of these memes as a response; *“What is Love?”* and this one from Princess Bride that says *“You keep on using that word... I do not think it means what you think it means!”*

So, brothers and sisters, we have our work cut out for us this morning as we seek to grow in our understanding of God and what it means that He is agape, and also come to realize what applications and nuances we need to avoid reading into this, when we use the word “love” as the English translation.

Now, preaching on these perfections of God on Valentine’s Day week-end was deliberate on my part – but I did not realize it was also going to coincide with Superbowl Sunday. And this is great, because it provides me with a terrific opportunity, not only to talk about love... but also about what it means be good...

I saw an add on Facebook the other day that said *“A friend of mine bought us two tickets for the Super Bowl. They are box seats, and include the roundtrip airfare and hotel*

accommodations. He didn't realize when he bought them that it was on the same day that he promised to take his girlfriend out to the mountains for a romantic Valentines Day trip and so he's no longer able to go... if you're interested and want to go instead of him.... Show up at the Lake Louise Fairmont Hotel, dinner reservation is at 4pm, wear a jacket and tie, and his girlfriend's name is Donna.

So this would not be a **good** boyfriend, because we would say this is not a loving thing to do to someone who is supposed to be a special person in your life and you have a special relationship with. This guy obviously “loves” football more than he loves his girlfriend... and that is not good. The good boyfriend would be giving away that ticket to the Super Bowl and sacrificing something valuable and important to show his girlfriend that she is even more important – because he loves her.

And its necessary to have these kinds of demonstrations of love, because as you ladies know, guys will pay attention to you and say that they love you, but that doesn’t necessarily

mean they are good guys. But when they do something like sacrificing going to the Superbowl to spend a weekend with you, that's something which proves to you – he is a good guy.

He is who he says he is, he keeps his word, he is a person of integrity, what you see is what you get. He is not selfish and you can trust that he is not using you and that he cares for you, he is interested in you, he would protect you, and he wants to be around you and spend time with you. That's a good guy – and in many respects this is also what we mean when we say God is good.

God tells us a lot about Himself in the scripture, right? And God talks a big game about Himself ... as He should, He is God after all – I mean who else can name themselves “I AM who I AM?” And the verses we read from Psalm 145 this morning describe God as gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, rich in lovingkindness. They state that God is good to ALL... that He has compassion on ALL that He has created, they say that God's kingdom has glory and that He has might.

Of course, this echoes how we heard God describe Himself to Moses last week in Ex 34:6-7 which also included forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin... and in previous weeks we've heard the scriptures make other claims about God; Num 23:19 God does not lie, Ps 121:4 God doesn't sleep, Jer 32:27 nothing is too hard for God! And we could go on and on right?

The bible is full of amazing revelations about God and who He is... So, when it says that God is good, like it does in Ps 145:9, Ps 107:1 and Ps 34:8, we can conclude God is a **good** God... in the sense that everything He reveals to us about Himself is 100% true and that He is 100% consistent in who He is and in what He does and in how He relates to us.

God is not boasting about Himself, saying more about who He is than He can deliver. God does not make a good first impression but once you start to get to know Him you discover that He's not really what His online profile suggests... No - God is a **good** God.

And... God is a good God in that He is good at being God. So many verses in the bible speak about how God does a good job at being God over His creation; upholding it, ordering it, maintaining it, providing for it, giving a purpose to it and bringing it towards that final purpose.

Here are just a few examples; Psalm 145:15-16 *“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”*

Acts 14:17 *“He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”*

Isaiah 14:24 *“The LORD Almighty has sworn, “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen.”*

God is good at being God; this is what Deut 32:4 means when it says *“his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A*

faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” God is good because He is good at being God!

Now we run into a little bit of a problem here with God’s goodness, and it’s alluded to in Romans 11:34 when Paul says *“**who** has been God’s counselor?”* Because the truth is brothers and sisters that there is no external standard by which we objectively determine that God is indeed good, both for His character and His competency.

Just as there is no external source from which God knows His knowledge and there is no external source from which God draws His power, there is no external standard to which God must conform in order to be good.

God is self-existing and uncreatedly infinite there is nothing beyond him - and all that we can know and understand as good... thus flows from Him, from within in His very being – He IS goodness in Himself. As 1 John 1:5 says *“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”*

The only means we have of determining that God is good is to accept that He says that He is, and take the goodness we experience in our lives and His creation as confirmation of it.

Thus, as long as things are going well in our lives, as long as things are going well in the world, it would appear to us that God is doing a good job and our experience of His benevolence confirms what He proclaims about Himself in the scripture to be true.

But I hope you can see how this can set us up for some challenges right? Satan certainly does, in Job 1:9-11 the devil challenges God on this matter saying *“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”*

Satan is right – if things start to go wrong in our lives, or maybe we start to notice things going wrong in other people’s

live, or perhaps we study history and we become aware of how much tragedy and suffering have occurred in this world, of all the evil that has taken place, suddenly our experience and observation cannot fully confirm that God is a good God as He says He is.

God’s goodness conflicts with what we are experiencing in life and we can’t reconcile it... and if we do not begin to question God about our troubles, if we do not begin to blame Him and accuse Him of not being good, we will at least voice our doubts *“How can a good God allow evil and suffering to exist?”*

The answer to that question brothers and sisters is simply that in God’s infinite and all-knowing capacity as God, has determined that the way in which He has allowed evil and suffering to afflict His good creation and thus our individual lives... when it is all said and done... is going to bring the absolute most glory and honor to God for how He worked it all out and brought the ultimate good out of evil in the end.

So, the existence of evil, suffering, tragedies and trials in this world and in our lives do not in any way contradict God's goodness in His character or His proficiency of running the world.

They only enhance it because only a truly good God can bring all of this mess to a good end and do it in such a way - that we will praise Him and glorify Him for the rest of eternity for how wise and amazing and awesome it turned out.

So, perhaps its not quite accurate to say there is no standard to determine if God is good... I suppose the standard is all about God's glory and how much God will glorify Himself – that is what determines God's goodness in who He is, and how He is God over His creation.

So, we must trust the scripture's assurance to us that God's glorifying Himself in the end, will be so great and beyond imagining that His current goodness is beyond doubting, and passages such as Romans 8:18 confirm this for us. Paul says “I

*consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the **glory** that will be revealed in us.”*

Isn't that amazing – God's glorifying himself is going to involve us – by revealing His glory in us! For that reason brothers and sisters – there is nothing... nothing... absolutely nothing in this lifetime that can happen to us that can contradict God's goodness. God, is a good God, period!

That's why a few verses later in 8:37-39 Paul boasts “*in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God.... **that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**”*

Brothers and sisters God's goodness is in His character, its in His competency, and its also expressed to us, confirmed to us, proved to us, through His agape – His self-sacrificing unconditional commitment to create and maintain an

undeserved relationship with us no matter what it costs Him – can we call that “love”?? Can we redefine what we mean by love... to mean that??

I hope so... because that is what the scripture is referring to when it says that “*God is love!*” and that is what we have to train our minds to think of when we read our English translations and what we communicate to others when we want to speak of God and His agape, His love.

So, let’s walk through what we read from 1 John 4 this morning to solidify this definition of agape love in our hearts and minds.

Vs 7 -8 “Dear friends, let us agape one another, for agape comes from God. Everyone who agapes has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not agape does not know God, because God is agape.”

So here we see that agape is very important. Its important to correctly know what it is because it comes from God and if it is

not evident in our lives and how we relate to each other – that is an indicator that we do not actually know God... and that is at cross purposes with the whole point of this sermon series where we want to know God better. So, what might this agape be??

Vs 9 -10 “This is how God showed his agape among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is agape: not that we agaped God, but that he agaped us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Ok, so here we start to get some details on agape, God demonstrated it in the action of sending Jesus, the Word of God, to become flesh in this world – and the purpose of sending Jesus is for us to live... which implies that without Jesus we are not living... so agape is not affirmation of us in whatever state we may find ourselves, but a response to a dire need that we have – namely that we are not alive and need a way to live. So that’s how God shows agape to us and its why God shows agape to us – we need a way to live.

The specifics of agape follow. It's a one-way action to start with. There was no action from our part towards God – not surprising because we are dead... not living... and this lack of action on our part is an offense to God and requires something to make up for it... it can't be overlooked it has to be dealt with. And in agape God is willing to deal with it by having Jesus sacrifice himself to atone for it.

Now John is summarizing things here. John is condensing everything that God has been working on since Adam and Eve failed the test in the Garden of Eden and condemned us all to sin and death... He is importing all the details about God's subsequent initiatives to restore and redeem His Covenant with the Creation and all people of the world through Noah, Abraham, Moses & Israel, and King David all the way up to Jesus Christ... that's all in the background here.

And John is also referencing all of the failures and covenant unfaithfulness that God has experienced with His people, all the ways in which they broke His Laws which were supposed to lead to life.. but instead sinned and experienced death.

And He is reminding us of the provisions by which God's people could acknowledge their sin and make atonement for it and receive His forgiveness and be restored by His blessings.

He is wrapping it all up... the entire story of the scripture, AND the backstory of the scripture where God in eternity past has always willingly and without hesitation and with great affection for us and His whole creation, purposed to do this and follow through on it regardless of what it will cost Him to do it... He is packaging ALL of this up in these few verses and saying: *"This! This is Agape! God is Agape!"* Do you see how this works?? Do you understand what John is saying??

That's why its paramount that you know the details of this story brothers and sisters! Have you taken the time to read through and become familiar with what this story is about? I hope you have... I hope you will go and get into that story brothers and sisters.... Like someone gets into the Marvel Movies, I pray that you'll become a bible story-geek!

Because then you'll really get it, you'll really understand how much content and truth and substance and meaning John is packing into in these short verses here when He says "*God is Agape!*"

And then you'll really understand how John is instructing us to relate to each other when He says "*Let us agape one another...*" and equally as important you'll understand what John is not instructing us to do and what we must avoid...

Because Just as John uses "agape" to represent and express all the nuances and details in God's plan of salvation, our society has come to use "love" to primarily represent and express all the nuances and expressions of humanism, where we determine for ourselves that standard by which we will define what is good.

Pizza is tasty and enjoyable and delicious – its good – therefore we "love" it. The affirmation of our peers and friends and neighbors is encouraging – its good – therefore we want to feel "the love." Romance is thrilling and exciting and

fulfilling, so regardless of where you find it, its good and thus #lovewins.

Humanism is all about us and our wants and needs and really all about OUR glory, and "love" is the English word that represents and communicates all of this as we use it in our speech.

So do you see why we have to be careful when we read the English translation of agape in passages like 1 John 4 so that we're not accidentally or intentionally projecting humanism into what John is saying here and thus speaking falsely of God when we say God is love... because that's not actually God, and its certainly not good.

However – there is hope brothers and sisters because the selfless sacrificial aspect of God's agape is not completely lost from our usage of the English word love.

There are glimpses of it in our example of the **good** boyfriend who would sacrifice his Superbowl ticket in order to spend a

romantic weekend with his girlfriend whom he loves... as Eph 5:25 says *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up [sacrificed himself] for her..”*

It can be experienced in a **good** parent’s commitment to do whatever it takes to protect and provide for their child and discipline them... so the child does what is right and good, because the parent loves them. As Hebrews 12:7 says *“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?”*

So we can draw on this, brothers and sisters, as we seek to help people know and understand and most importantly, respond **correctly** to God’s agape – His love...

Because agape is about all of God’s amazing perfections that we’ve been learning about, directed at establishing a relationship with us, that will bring God the most glory possible... and what else could be better for us since goodness itself flows from God.

All this knowing about God and who He is brothers and sisters is so that we can properly respond to Him as He loves us, so that we can be good... as God is good. So how do we respond good, or well to God’s love?

Brothers and sisters if God’s love is characterized by a willingness and commitment to do to whatever it takes to bring us into a relationship that will glorify Himself, then it is appropriate and good.... that we are willing to sacrifice and do whatever it takes to show that God and His glory are the most important aspects to our lives.

So - I pray that as God has been revealing more and more of Himself to you through this sermon series, that each of us – in all of our hearts, minds, and souls - are being drawn deeper into the awesomeness of God, so that we no longer desire our own glory – but we are increasingly captivated by the magnificent glory of Living God – who is good... and loving. Amen.