

GOD INFUSE

When I was last in Germany, a native German came up to me, right after I had crossed a street, and he spoke to me in English.

As he approached me, he said, "Did you not see that the do not walk light was on?"

Before answering his question, I asked, "How did you know I spoke English?"

He tersely replied, "Because you didn't obey the "Do not walk sign."

He was not suggesting that I couldn't read German.... because the sign was a symbol, not in words.

He continued to scold me by adding, "What if children had been watching? What sort of example would you be teaching them?"

Being a polite visitor I answered, "You're very right; I'm sorry. I won't do it again." Satisfied, he quickly turned and walked away without saying another word.

As he left, I thought to myself, "Where I'm from we teach our children to look both ways before crossing and not trust a sign."

The main point is that he knew who I was based on my actions.

My daughter who lives in New York City told me that tourists are easy to identify because they often look up at the tall buildings, look people in the eyes as they walk along and sometimes smile at strangers.

True-New Yorkers manoeuvre through the streets and subways as if no one else is present.

Actions speak very loudly. Actions are very revealing.

Earlier, we sang the hopeful song, "They'll know we are Christians by our love." Hopeful,..... because it should be true....., yet rarely is true.

The key element / the core / the very essence of our religion—Love— has, for the most part, been replaced with dogma, rules and behavioural expectations that brings harsh judgment to those who do not conform to the Christian culture.

In the name of Christ, we've berated and excluded people who didn't meet the church's standards. Christians have supported militaristic leaders and national policies that are selfish, hurtful and destructive.

And, the church's historic involvement in purges, inquisitions, the crusades and persecution does not help our image either.

Yet, we claim to be a religion based on love. ?????

Somehow..... we've become disconnected to what our faith is all about / what life as God intended is all about.

Somehow we have managed to affirm the Gospel message of love without believing it / without being the message.

So,..... let's have a refresher course; let's examine the 1st John passage.

This text along with 1st Corinthians 13 is the greatest dissertation on Christian love in the Bible; therefore, it's worth analysing.

However, before we begin, we must understand Agape Love.

The Greek language has 4 root words for love, and they are:

Storge is affection or fondness.

Philia means friendship and loyalty, and sometimes is called brotherly/sisterly love.

Eros is passionate, romantic love... with the flavour of desire.

All are conditional—they are usually mutual, seeking something in return.

The fourth is Agape love.

Agape love is unselfish love, and it is more than just an emotional feeling. Agape love includes the will and the mind, and it is a verb.

Agape love is action / intentional and thinking love..... Love that asks nothing in return. It is a giving love that seeks wholeness and wellbeing.

Agape love is also divine love.

Agape was rarely used in secular Greek literature before the time of Christ. Paul was the first NT writer to use it, and Agape is only used in reference to Christian or Divine love.

The King James translators didn't know how to present it, so they called it "charity."

In our 1st John passage Agape is used 33 times.

You may want to follow along with your Bible or use the bulletin.

The text begins with the passive verb form of agape – agapetos – meaning people of love/ who are love.

John then states the two options of existence: people who know God and do love..... and those who do not do love, and thus do not know God.

That is pretty simple, clear and straight forward.

Those who do not live / do not love do not know God they are disconnected from God. And, keep in mind Agape love is a verb.

It's not a word in a song or a gold trophy we hold onto.

It is essential to note and remember the following:

God is love. John states this again in verse 16.

God is love.

This is a definition for God, and recall that Agape love includes the mind and the will..... doing intentional action.

Our God of love is not just a universal energy force. God has the aspect of personhood – of character—of thoughts and hopes..... in action.

And, verse 9 presents the greatest example / the greatest action—God sending God’s son into the world, and as John 3:16 states, “for the world.”

God infused self, at great risk,.... into the world for the world so that we could learn / better understand Agape love.

Jesus is Agape love in the flesh..... proving it is possible to truly live as God wills for all to live.

We all know this, right? Let’s continue anyways.

Verse 10 is poorly translated in the NRSV... the version we use.
The editors apparently allowed their opinion to get the best of them.

The NRSV has it “..his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”
“Atoning” and “Sacrifice” are not in the Greek sources. There is one Greek word and it is “hilasmon”, and it means to cover over. It does NOT imply the sense of payment or appeasement to an angry God.

Some translations use the word expiation, yet a clear understanding is that Jesus / accepting the way of Jesus washes away evil with love.

This makes since... because if God is love, then how could unselfish love demand a payment. Grace is a beautiful display of love, and that is what God poured out for the world through Jesus – Grace. Sin / evil drown when love is poured in.

Moreover, not only did God give us Jesus, but we are also given God’s Spirit – which is love.

The passage continues by expressing how we abide in God / love and how God / love abides in us....., and remember this love is not a simple emotion. It is cognitive choice in action.

Also, note verse 18 which proclaims, “there is no fear in love.”

In fact, love removes / “casts out” fear.

Fear connects to punishment and judgment, and love does not punish, nor does it judge.

If our actions instill fear..... then something is missing – love.

If we have fear, then something is missing.....Love.

And, keep in mind, God is love.

Of course, the practical theologian and those who appreciate brute force will ask, “What about the day of reckoning / the final judgment?”

???

Perhaps, a life without love / without God is a life of fear, punishment and judgment. Therefore, those who chose not to be in agape love / to live love... have, by default,.... condemned themselves.

Without love / without God is fear and punishment. It is obvious.

God is love. God saves. God creates. God does NOT destroy.

And, the passage ends with the strong reminder that Love is not just a word or an ideal, but it is action.

If we claim to possess love, yet do not live in love and do love, then we are terribly wrong and not in a right relationship with God or the world.

Therefore,can we put God on the back burning, and still claim to be a Christian?

Can we go to war or hurt the weak and powerless, and still be in God's favour?

Can we be greedy and selfish, and assert we are people of love?

Can we limit agape love to those we like and not treat the environment with love,.... and also receive God's love?

Can we ignore love / ignore God, even for a day, and assume we're in the Divine club with all the perks included?

Can we adhere to the rules and expectations of the church culture, and believe all is well with our soul, without pouring out agape love to the whole world?

Can we exclude and condemn others because they are breaking the rules / because we believe they are living in sin? Can we judge and still claim God's umbrella of benevolent love?

How far can we be from God's love and still be in God's love?

How far can we be from God's love and still be in God's love?

How removed can we be from living love and still hope to be loved?

I don't know the answers to those questions.

However, I do know that a person who ignores or abuses his or her partner, and then waves a marriage certificate in her or his face, demanding affection and action.... won't get much love,...if any.

God is love, and as we know,... God is very patient and gracious.

However, leaning on those divine traits is completely missing the point. and missing out on life.

We know that God is love, God offers / invites us to live in love – to be love. However, this way of being and living is not basking under a powerful ruler who guards and protects us and gives as we demand?

That way of thinking is not doing love / not being in love.

To best understand how love plays out in the world, we can look at the life and message of Jesus.

Following Christ is doing agape love / being with God / with love.

Jesus taught us to love our enemies, to treat others with love and compassion.... to do justice and to be gracious.

Love does not judge. Love defends and empowers the poor and weak.
Love confronts and exposes the lies and the selfish, loveless actions.

Love pour out. Love gives in order to build up / in order to bring wholeness and oneness with God...
with love?

We know all this. Most of us have been taught this since our first Sunday School class, yet..... we seem to be having trouble connecting the dots / of applying this concept in our lives.
Therefore, we sense the breakdown. We feel a disconnect with God. We have fear, and we are struggling.

Let me put it another way.
Would we go for a long walk without a coat when it is -40 outside.

Would we drive a tractor back and forth across a field without planting seeds, and expect harvest?

Would we drive a vehicle without wearing a seat belt?
.....well,..... some of us may,..... but it would be risky.

Would we go scuba diving without an oxygen tank?
Of course not to all of the above.
Yet, most of our decisions and actions leave out love.

We can not assume.... that love is like fairy dust—it just appears and covers things. And, we can't assume that love just happens because we claim to be a Christian.

We must remember that God is agape love..... a love that involves the mind and the will.

Therefore, doing agape love is being intentional.

Living / being agape Love is a constant and daily choice, and when we do love we are inviting God into the moment / the event.
God is love.

If we do NOT choose to live love / pour in agape love to our daily actions, then we are declaring to God, "Stay at home; I don't need you."

When we judge; when we are greedy or anytime we act without inserting love, then we are living on our own and pushing God to the outside of our lives.
Living with / in love, in other words,.... living close to God as Jesus did, is choosing to infuse love in all aspects of our lives.

Loving our enemies brings God into the picture.

Hardships and difficult events can tilt upside down by thinking / finding a way to insert love into the moment.

Pour love into the ugly is inviting God to be present.

This appeals to our work, our relationships, our politics, and to ourselves.

When we don't love ourselves, then we don't eat right, we don't get enough sleep, we don't care for ourselves, and we abuse ourselves, and in reality, we're removing love from our being,... and so it is no wonder then that we struggle to be loving / to bask in the love of God when our choices push God to the perimeter.

I thought a lot about this, during this past week.

There were some situations that I didn't like or want to do, and so I used my mind... for a change, because thinking is an aspect of agape love.

I thought,... how can I pour love into this moment?

Even thinking that way....seemed to invite God in.....

And soon, I began to contemplate the delight of being healthy, of having choices.... of seeing and hearing the birds in the air as I engaged in the undesirable activity.

Love has a way of changing things. What was all dark and dreary became less so.

Love is very powerful.

God is love.

And in confession, I thought I was pretty smart when it comes to theology, yet..... on too many occasions, I was relying on my own abilities, and not seeking to pour love into the moment, and then being frustrated with the results and wondering why things didn't go better.

God is love.....

And, God is with us and we are with God when we do love / when we chose to put love into each minute we live.

Will **everything** be wonderful and perfect if we put love into each decision?

Not likely, but I'd rather be IN love than all alone.