

## Searching the Scriptures / 27 / God Is Love / Part 2

The biblical phrase “*God is love*” is widely quoted in our day and is found in 1 John 4:8 and other places. This verse contains the familiar Greek word, agape, for “*love which is undeserved*”. In our time together we want to explore the phrase, “*God is love*”, and its usage in the Bible in three ways:

1. Love as an Attribute of God
2. The Definition of Love
3. Love as Demonstrated by God

### Love as an Attribute of God

Let’s begin by looking at why the Bible claims that God is love. In essence, God is defining love by His very character. And what is the character of the Lord Jesus Christ? We get a glimpse in 1 Cor 13:4, “*Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up...*”

Let’s take a closer look at this verse to see what God might want us to consider. Here we are reminded that the Lord Jesus is patient; He is kind, He is not boastful; He is not prideful. We learn that “*charity*”, the Old English word for love, is longsuffering, or patient. Two verses in particular illustrate this: Speaking of Abraham, God says in Heb 6:15, “*And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*” And in 2 Pet 3:9 God states, “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*”

Both of these verses illustrate one of the chief characteristics of love – patience. Another quality is kindness, as it is exemplified in Eph 4:32, “*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.*” The Greek words for “*vaunteth not*” in 1 Cor 13:4 are only used once in this verse in the New Testament, but the similar idea of “*not puffed up*” is also used in 1 Cor 8:1b, for example: “*... Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth [builds up].*”

### The Definition of Love

God carefully defines what love is in John 15:13, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” Without looking at every other related verse in the Bible one might come to the erroneous conclusion that sacrificing one’s physical life for someone else is the greatest act of love. While this is certainly true on the physical level, it does not take into consideration the spiritual ramifications of this important verse. The following verses will help us to see the spiritual, or Gospel, message that is embedded in John 15:13.

John 10:11 declares, “*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*” The same Greek word for “*lay down*” in John 15:13 is here rendered “*giveth*” and again as “*lay down*” in John 10:15 as follows: “*As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.*”

John 10:17-18 adds, Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Please note very carefully here that Jesus is asserting that this power to lay down His life and take it again is a commandment that He has received from God the Father. The reason this statement is so significant is that throughout the Bible God closely associates love with obeying the commandments, as we can see from John 14:15, *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”*

### **Love as Demonstrated by God**

Lastly, God demonstrates the fact that He is love through His salvation program. We see this very dramatically in the book of Genesis, when we find God Himself shedding the blood of an animal, and then covering Adam and Eve with those bloody skins without saying anything to them about the futility of the fig leaves they were wearing. Those skins pictured the righteousness of Christ, which is the only adequate covering for any person’s sin.

In principle, God’s love for His elect began before the foundation of the world. Those who are the recipients of God’s gift of salvation were in total rebellion against God before He saved them. The Bible says that true believers were *“dead in trespasses and sins”* and were *“children of wrath”* (Eph 2:1-3). Yet Rom 5:8 makes this wonderful statement, *“But God commendeth [exhibits] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

There is also another aspect of God’s love as found in Rom 13:10, *“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”* In other words, the Lord Jesus has not only forgiven the sins of every child of God by suffering the equivalent of an eternity in Hell on their behalf, but He has also fulfilled the righteousness of the law for them, by perfectly obeying the Bible in thought, word, and deed. Here again we are specifically reminded that if we love ourselves and our neighbor, we want only the highest good for them.

May God help us understand His incomparable love; and if we do not know the love of God, could it be that He would have mercy upon us as we read in 1 John 4:10, *“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*