

# God is love

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God is love. In His interactions with us He always demonstrates the qualities of love. He can't help but do this because He is love.

*God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* 1 John 4:8-10,

*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in Him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment, because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.* 1 John 4:16-18.

Many Christians have perverted views of God's nature. e.g. that He is harsh, judgmental, vengeful, impatient, angry, condemning, or disinterested. This view is often founded in attributes from the Old Testament. Especially strong is the view that God is kind to those who are good and vengeful towards those who are bad. This results in a continuing struggle for many of us to try to win God's love and favour by being good, and wondering what we have done wrong when things go badly.

But God is fully, completely and totally love in His very nature and this is expressed in all of His actions towards all people. We were able to see this in Jesus Christ and once we have met Jesus we read the Old Testament in a whole new way! We see a loving God who is continually working for the good of His people, and countless evidences of God's love in action. Yes, we see God's anger at sin, but we see it in a new light. God allows people to experience the consequences of their sin, not because He doesn't love them, but so they can see its horrible effects and turn from sin back to Him. God's wrath at sin was not a rejection of sinful people; rather it was a reflection of His great desire that we would turn from sin and embrace righteousness.

So it is a valid question to ask: "Has God changed"? Is the God of love in the New Testament the same as the God we read about in the Old Testament? He Himself has said *I the Lord do not change.* Malachi 3:6.

God has not changed but our perception of Him certainly has changed. That's because before Jesus came we only had our own human frame of reference to understand God. We could only interpret God's actions according to our own limited understanding. His actions against sin, for example, seemed to show He didn't care for people, and His attempts to teach people to trust Him seemed to show that He was vengeful and harsh in His character. But Jesus changed all that! Jesus fully reflected God in a way that we could all understand so we now have a whole new revelation of God's nature in Jesus Christ. *We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John 1:14.

Jesus has shown us God's heart; His nature. And it is love!

The attributes of genuine agapê love are described in 1 Corinthians 13. As we explore each of these attributes we will see that they are all fully expressed in the nature and actions of our God and in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*

1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

**God is patient.**

God understands us and is patient with us as we grow in Christ. He sees and knows our struggles and has committed to loving us for eternity – no matter how slowly we grow or how often we fall. When we sin He doesn't condemn us; rather He patiently helps us repent and come back into fellowship with Him. Because He knows what we will be like at the end He is patient with us as we go through our life journey.

**God is kind.**

God deals with us in a kind way. In His interactions with us He is not negative, manipulative or nasty. He always treats us with respect and concern, working to bring about what is best for us. We are used to human "acts of kindness" where there is subtle manipulation or some expectation that something must be given in return. But God is not like that. He works in our hearts in a positive, gentle, loving way to bring about His purpose, which is always for our good.

**God does not envy.**

God wants to have a love relationship with us, but He also wants us to be loving people. When we love Him He is not envious or jealous when we also love others or love ourselves. Rather than seeing our love as being competitive (so we must love Him more), He rejoices when we love and are loved. He is not insecure or possessive about His love relationship with us. He loves it when we love Him, but He also loves it when the love He has placed within us is shared with others.

**God does not boast.**

God does not need to boast, or exaggerate the truth. He *is* truth so when He interacts with us He does so out of a foundation of reality and truthfulness. Whenever someone boasts they create something that is not real and this often makes others feel inferior and alienated. But God knows us as we are in Christ, and is secure in this relationship with us. Because the relationship is real and personal we can be assured God reveals Himself to us in an honest way.

**God is not proud.**

Those who are proud end up isolated and remote, requiring commitment, accountability and obedience. But God doesn't proudly demand our worship. He doesn't say 'Worship me or else!' God is love and created us so that His love could find an expression. He gave us free wills so that we could reciprocate this love and when we do He really enjoys it! When He loves us He shows humility, sensitivity and emotion. God proved His love and His humility when He became a man, just like us, in the Lord Jesus Christ. He enjoys being with us, helping us and meeting our needs.

**God is not rude.**

Those who are strong and powerful often use rudeness to reinforce their position. God is strong and powerful but He is never rude, abusive or overbearing. When He speaks to us He uses a gentle loving voice to speak the truth in love, in a way that is totally focused on our good. He doesn't make outrageous demands presented in a harsh, callous 'do what I say or else' style. In guiding us, teaching us and even convicting us, He reveals His will, and lets us know how this will be for our good. He uses a firm, gentle, and respectful tone and we learn to recognise that His 'still, small voice' is enveloped with love!

**God is not self-seeking.**

Agapê love is giving and not at all selfish. Because God is love He is the ultimate expression of agapê love. His focus is not on receiving love but on giving it. That's why He doesn't want (or demand) any religious observance of us (like disciplining ourselves to pray, or giving because we feel an obligation). Also, when we sin He doesn't get offended by what the sin does to Him; He is concerned for what it does to us! He wants the best for us and continually gives gifts that help us to be effective in our lives. Because God is not self-seeking He doesn't need us to love Him, but He sure enjoys it when we do!

**God is not easily angered.**

God is not a 'control freak' demanding obedience of us and then getting angry when we don't comply with His wishes. He doesn't get provoked by our actions so it is not necessary for us to try to manipulate His behaviour

e.g. by pleading, 'claiming', shouting or bargaining. His love for us remains steadfast and sure, regardless of how we behave. That doesn't mean God condones our sin or is not grieved by it, and it certainly won't stop us experiencing the consequences of sin. But God will never turn His face away from us. His emotions toward us are stable because they are founded on His love for us. And He continually works in our lives to bring about righteousness, because that is what is best for us.

### **God keeps no record of wrongs.**

God doesn't keep a record of our sins. Once He forgives our sins they are completely forgotten and He will never hold them over us or bring them up to condemn or accuse us. This means we don't need to be sin-focused by keeping our own record of the sins we have committed and use this to condemn or accuse ourselves (and it certainly means we shouldn't keep a record of the sins of others). God doesn't keep a record of our sins because He loves us and doesn't want us to live in shame, guilt or condemnation. He doesn't define our future by our past. He doesn't bless us because we are good or punish us when we are bad. He just loves us!

### **God does not delight in evil.**

God is often credited with evil. e.g. vengeance, punishment, torture, causing calamities like earthquakes, accidents and natural disasters. Some even believe that God does nasty things to us to get our attention! But God is not evil and "in Him is no darkness at all". He doesn't need threats or fear tactics to scare us into His kingdom, because love is enough! God doesn't bring evil upon us; it is a consequence of living in a world that has rejected God's ways. When we experience awful things in our lives we often find that is when God's love is the most real and comforting. His perfect love casts out our fears.

### **God rejoices in the truth.**

God rejoices in truth because He is truth. He knows us through and through and always deals with us from a perspective of authenticity and truth. He doesn't promise that we will have instant health and prosperity when we turn to Him, or that we will be free from difficulties in our lives. Rather He recognises that the realities of living in a fallen world and helps us live in and through them. He especially rejoices in the truth of what we are in Christ: righteous, whole, loved and free (which is quite different to how we often see ourselves!). He sees us from an eternal perspective and delights in the truth of who we are in Christ Jesus, and what we are becoming.

### **God always protects.**

Many Christians expect God to protect them because they have 'claimed' promises, asked for protection or have obeyed God in some way. In doing this they expect God's blessing in return. When something goes wrong they often feel God is judging them by removing His protection from them because they have sinned. But protection is not something that God uses to manipulate or control us. God protects us because He loves us, not because we have done something to 'earn' His protection. We live in a fallen world and bad things happen to good and bad people alike. God's protection is demonstrated by being with us in all circumstances – the good and the bad. He shows His love by always supporting, encouraging, comforting, and upholding us – especially in times of adversity. And most of us recognise that it is in the hard times that we have grown and learnt the most.

### **God always trusts.**

From our point of view trust is something that has to be earned. If trust is broken it is lost and must be slowly regained. This means that our relationships are always somewhat strained as we never know whether we or others or we will break trust (and we often include God in this). There is always an element of fear. But God always trusts. He sees us from an eternal perspective and won't give up on us, even if we 'backslide'. We can always approach Him with confidence, boldness and openness because He genuinely wants the best for us. He sees what we will be and loves us today, just as we are. His trust is based on this love, not on whether we act or don't act in a particular way. Knowing this enables us to respond to God in an open, honest, trusting way and our relationship prospers. God's love for us is not conditional.

### **God always hopes.**

God doesn't get disappointed with us. That's because He always has hope for us which is based on a long-term understanding of our life journey, not just on what is happening to us at present. His hope is based on truths about us that are absolute and eternal: truths based on our position in Christ, not on changeable feelings or circumstances. God sees us as we are in Christ and as we will be when we are fully matured in Him. These truths give Him hope! He does not fear what we might do or what might happen to us because His love for us is unchanging, and 'perfect love casts out fear'.

### **God always perseveres.**

God's love for us can be severely tested, especially when we sin. But He doesn't turn His love for us on and off in any circumstances. He perseveres. He is with us and for us always. Many Christians feel God has abandoned them when they go through difficult times. This is because human love often goes away when it is tested (and we sometimes resort to "tough love" in an attempt to get it back!). But God's love is not like that. It is constant, unshakeable, enduring, unchanging, and eternal. Nothing can separate us from His love. God perseveres in His love towards us because it is based on His nature. He can't turn on or turn off love because He is love. He loves us now and will love us for all eternity.

### **God never fails.**

Love never fails. That's because love is always patient and kind; does not envy; does not boast; is not proud, rude or self-seeking; is not easily angered; keeps no record of wrongs; does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth; always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. These qualities result in failure not being an option in any situation. Love triumphs; love casts out fear; love overcomes. God is love in His essential nature so He *is* each of these qualities of love, and in His actions and attitudes He always demonstrates them fully. As a result He never fails. (Not that He could fail anyway, because He is God!).

## **The way of agapê love**

*Agapê means love, affection, good will, benevolence.*

In the ancient Greek world the word agapê was used very rarely, yet in the New Testament it is the most commonly used word for love. That's because God's love is agapê love. It is selfless, giving, sacrificial love, totally focused on the good of the one who is loved, and not seeking anything in return. It is an attitude, a choice, an exercise of the will that the highest good of another might be brought to pass.

Agapê love was supremely demonstrated when God sent His Son Jesus to be our Saviour:

- Agapê love involves action - *God so loved the world that He gave*
- Agapê love is sacrificial - *God gave His one and only Son*
- Agapê love knows and meets the needs of others – *that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

In this study we have explored many different aspects of agapê love and seen how they are all an essential part of God's nature and how they are behind all of His actions towards us.

As human beings we may or may not try to love in this way. When we do love our "love" is often flawed because it is mixed with selfishness. (All of the qualities of love can easily be put on or faked).

But Jesus said we are to consistently demonstrate this kind of love!

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34,35.*

Jesus has shown that it is possible to live in the way of agapê love. He loves us, and now He calls us to go and love others in the same way!

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*

1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

## Discussion questions

What is your definition of love?

How is your understanding of love influenced by God, the Old Testament, the New Testament, Jesus, your past experiences, others, teaching you have received, and church programmes?

Contrast how God reveals Himself in the Old Testament with how He is revealed in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Has God changed or has our perception of Him changed?

What did Jesus teach us about love? How does this relate to God's actions in the Old Testament?

What does "God is love" mean to you?

In this study we have applied the qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 to God because "God is love". Is it valid to do this?

Many Christians have warped views of God, of the way He expresses His love, and of the ways we can respond to His love. Try to identify some of these as they relate to each of the qualities mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13. e.g. God always protects yet we often ask Him for protection!

In this study we have seen that God is love in His nature and that this love is expressed at all times in His actions. What have you learnt from this about God, about yourself, about the way you express love, and about how much God loves you? How will this affect the way you live in future?



### More Bible studies about love

For a more in-depth study of love see "Love" and "Loving God, loving others and loving yourself" at <http://rosscallaghan.yolasite.com>