

(1Jo 4:7-12 NIV) “7 ¶ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 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. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

There are many definition and quotations about love.

People have many saying about love. Who doesn't desire to love and be loved? It is a part of our human psyche, something that is wired into us. Human beings have grappled with the concept of love ever since we fell out a loving relationship with God. Ever since the fall of man which began when Adam and Eve became estranged from God by choosing to reject him, man has looked to himself for this answer to love. Judging by the many conflicts, hurts, disappointments that we are to one another, we have difficulty coming to peace with the notion of love. We seek it, we search for it and it seems to be so elusive in so many ways. We always wonder if we are loved, what we can to do be loved, if we are loving, etc.... Too often in our relationship with God, we wonder if He loves us or if He even cares? We wonder if we love Him enough?

The following are a few musings and ponderings about love.

The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread. ~Mother Teresa

Gravitation is not responsible for people falling in love. ~Albert Einstein

There is no surprise more magical than the surprise of being loved. It is God's finger on man's shoulder. ~Charles Morgan

You have to walk carefully in the beginning of love; the running across fields into your lover's arms can only come later when you're sure they won't laugh if you trip. ~Jonathan Carroll, "Outside the Dog Museum"

Ah me! love can not be cured by herbs. ~Ovid

Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence. ~Eric Fromm

Love has no desire but to fulfill itself. To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night. To wake at dawn with a winged heart and give thanks for another day of loving. ~Kahlil Gibran

Life has taught us that love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction. ~Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, 1939, translated from French by Lewis Galantière

Do I love you because you're beautiful,

Or are you beautiful because I love you?

~Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Cinderella*

Forget love - I'd rather fall in chocolate! ~Sandra J. Dykes

Hate leaves ugly scars, love leaves beautiful ones. ~Mignon McLaughlin, *The Second Neurotic's*

Notebook, 1966 (from <http://www.quotegarden.com/love.html>)

We want to be loved even from a very young age. Not too long ago, a little boy under the age of 5 said, and I will paraphrase: “My grandfather doesn’t love me”. Why? Because he doesn’t visit me anymore”.

How do we know that God loves us?

There are no questions, we want to be loved. Love gives us security, gives us hope, and gives us a spring in our step.

We need to remember that God was love before there was anything outside of Himself to love. There was a time where there was nothing except God. He has existed from all eternity. How can God be love? When we understand that God is one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – one triune God then we begin to grasp that God has perfect love within Himself – the Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit perfectly, *the Son loves the Father and the Holy Spirit perfectly* and the Holy Spirit loves the Father and the Son perfectly. He is other affirming, communal if you will, self-sacrificing, etc... God has lives in perfect harmony, unity and joy from all eternity. This is who He is! He is love!

God defines love and shows us love in real actions and in real time!

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1Jo 4:10 NIV)

What does this mean?

God sending his Son as an atoning sacrifice is more than an act of love, it is love itself!

We are able to love one another as we are created in God’s image and do reflect His love. We are not able to love as God loves because He is love, He is God. We are not able to love on our own.

What is an atoning sacrifice or as the KJV says “to be the propitiation for our sins”?

It simply means *“a sacrifice offered to God in place of people who are guilty of sin. The idea is that the sin of the guilty people is transferred somehow to this sacrifice, and the sacrifice (usually an animal) is killed in place of the people who deserve to die. God's wrath toward the people's sin is poured out on the sin-bearing sacrifice, which dies under that wrath in place of the guilty people.”* (Life in the Trinity, David Fairbairn, p. 160).

We see the atoning sacrifice in the page of the Old Testament. These sacrifices were a shadow of what was to come. They pointed to the reality of Jesus Christ, of what He would do for us.

In the Old Testament there was a special day devoted to atonement. It is found in Leviticus 16 and was celebrated on the Day of Atonement each year. The Jews still celebrate this day every year calling it Yom Kippur.

Let's look briefly at what we find in that chapter:

1. **“The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.” (Le 16:2 NIV)** The high priest was the only one who could enter the Most Holy Place and he could only do it once a year.
2. **(Le 16:11-13 NIV) “11 "Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. 12 He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. 13 He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die.”** The high priest had to offer a sacrifice for himself and his household. When going behind the curtain, he had to hide himself behind the incense to conceal the atonement cover or he would die.
3. **(Le 16:9-10 NIV) “9 Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. 10 But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.”** The high priest had to kill one goat as a sacrifice for the people. He was to let the live goat go in a solitary place carrying all the sins of the people. **(Le 16:21-22 NIV) “21 He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. 22 The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.”**
4. The high priest had to repeat this sacrifice every year. As the apostle Paul pointed out, these sacrifices pointed to the reality of Jesus Christ. **(Ro 3:25-26 NIV) “25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”**

As we read 1 John 4, with the Old Testament background we can better understand 1 John 4:10: **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1Jo 4:10 NIV)**

God, who is holy and just, reacted to Adam and Eve's disobedience and to humanity's disobedience with wrath. Our sins have alienated us from God. God cannot approve of our sins and he opposed it with wrath. In other words, God reacted to our disobedience with wrath. That is why Paul wrote in Ephesians that we were children of wrath. **"All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else."** (Eph 2:3 NRSV)

As we read this, God obviously loves people, He loves His creation but He did not love and does not love the estrangement, the separation, the hostility that we naturally have towards Him. Understanding that atonement is *a sacrifice offered to God in place of people who are guilty of sin*, we can understand that Jesus, being the atoning sacrifice, took this wrath upon Himself. **As we think about this, we must realize that Jesus is God.**

Jesus took this wrath in our place so that our relationship with God could be restored. The blood of animals could not take away our sins but the perfect sacrifice and the shedding of blood of Jesus could and did.

We must realize that that we were not only children of wrath but that we were also dead. (Eph 2:1-3 NIV) **"1 ¶ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."**

When we realize that we were dead in our sins, it means that we were totally incapacitated to restore ourselves to God. Dead people cannot be restored to life on their own. It is very clear that we became corruptible or perishable after the fall of Adam and Eve. **"in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."** (1Co 15:52 NIV)

We need to realize that only God can change this. We have to rely on Christ to make us alive! The early church fathers understood this well.

Athanasius on the Necessity of Christ's Death (ca. 315):

If, therefore, there had been only sin and not its consequence of corruption, repentance would have been very well. But if, since transgression had overtaken them, men were now prisoners to natural corruption, and they had been deprived of the grace of being in the image, what else should have happened? Or who was needed for such grace and recalling except the Word of God, who also in the beginning had created the universe from nothing? ... For since he is the Word of the Father and above everyone, consequently he alone was both able to recreate the universe and be worthy to suffer for all and to be an

advocate on behalf of all before the Father. (Life in the Trinity – Donald Fairbairn p. 164)

(Col 2:13-15 NIV) “13 ¶ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

When did Christ deal with our deadness? When did He make us alive? When were all our sins forgiven?

It is when Christ died! Our death was linked with sin and somehow with the devil. He conquered death; He conquered the devil and he freed us from all the consequences of sin!

This connection between Satan and our deadness is made clear in Hebrews.

(Heb 2:14-17 NIV) “14 ¶ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. 17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

Here is what Cyril of Alexandria wrote in 425

Cyril of Alexandria on the Sufferings of Christ (ca. 425):

He was scourged unjustly, that he might deliver us from merited chastisement; he was buffeted and smitten that we might buffet Satan, who had buffeted us, and that we might escape from the sin that cleaves to us through the original transgression. For if we think aright, we shall believe that all Christ's sufferings were for us and on our behalf and have power to release and deliver us from all those calamities we have deserved for our revolt from God. For as Christ, who knew not death, when he gave up his own body for our salvation, was able to loose the bonds of death for all mankind, for he, being One, died for all. Com. In., bk. 12, intro. (Randell, 606) (idem p. 166) (underline – mine)

The early church fathers had a wonderful grasp of the grandeur of Christ’s death. We have been totally delivered from all the consequences of our revolt from God! That means our guilt, our estrangement, our bondage to the devil and death is no more! How wonderful that is! I hope we understand the greatness of what Christ did on our behalf in becoming a man.

We need to understand that it was God the Son who died on the cross, the Eternal Son of God who had made Himself man and who is still man!

The wonderful news is that of love of the Father and of the Son for us **(1Jo 4:10 NIV)** **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”**

We did not love God. Humanity did not love God. God never stopped loving His creation. He never stopped loving humanity. The proof: God the Son died for us!!! The Creator and Sustainer of the universe died for us!

Christ died for the ungodly and when He died, we died! **(Ro 6:8 NIV)** **“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”**

We all died with Christ! We died to sin and our destiny, God’s plan is that we would no longer live in sin but live in Him. **“By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Ro 6:2 NIV)**

Christ took upon Himself all our sins and our alienations. When we begin to understand this, we will want to live for Christ, we will want to live for the Father. We will no longer fear Him! Why should we? There is absolutely no reason to.

Christ’s sacrifice satisfied everything. Coming as a man, the perfect man, God in the flesh, He totally liberated us. This is the objective reality. He submitted totally to the will of His Father for us all! Do we understand? Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to shine light into our eyes, let’s ask Jesus who is the Light of the world, to enlighten us our eyes so that we can see how much God loves us! Let’s ask God to remove our distorted vision of Him and of one another!

Christ’s own humanity represented all of our individual humanity. He took our humanity in Himself. He severed the connection we had with the first Adam and connected us to Himself, the second Adam! What incredible news! This is what the apostle Paul understood in 1 Cor 15 and that is what the early church fathers understood also!

Again, Cyril of Alexandria in 438

Cyril of Alexandria on the Relation Between Christ, Believers and the Father (ca. 438):

The Son came, or rather was made man, in order to reconstitute our condition within himself; first of all in his own holy, wonderful, and truly amazing birth and life. This was why he himself became the first one to be born of the Holy Spirit (I mean of course after the flesh) so that he could trace a path for grace to come to us. He wanted us to have this intellectual regeneration and spiritual assimilation to himself, who is the true

and natural Son, so that we too might be able to call God our Father, and so remain free of corruption as no longer owning our first father, that is Adam, in whom we were corrupted. *Christ Is One* (McGuckin, 62) (idem p. 168 underline mine)

Christ took the entire penalty and the consequences of our sins and He undid our death! Christ rewrote history. All of you who are aware of computer know that we can overwrite documents. This is what Jesus did. **“20 ¶ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”** (1Co 15:20-22 NIV)

God is love and He has created us free moral agents. He has created us with the freedom to accept Him, who is love, and to believe in Him to participate in Christ and through Christ by the Holy Spirit in the wonderful eternal relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as His adopted sons and daughters! Come to me, Jesus says. Trust me! In other words, have a relationship with me! Trust that I am the Life, the Truth and the Way! You have life in Me! I am the Bread of life! Accept it!

This is the wonderful news we can share! There is no better!

Remember **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** (1Jo 4:10 NIV)