

# 1 John

## Introduction

The Greek language has several descriptive words for love, each with its own powerful connotation. *Philia* is platonic affection and bonding among friends, acquaintances, business partners, comrades, and the like. *Storge* is natural relational love, such as that among family members. *Eros* is passionate, sensual love. *Agape* is the highest form of love, self-sacrificing, altruistic and other-centered.

The love John writes of in his epistle is *agape*. In describing God and his love for the human race—and man’s reciprocal response to God in Christ—John expounds on a love that is out of this world!

## What does love look like?

**Read 1 John 4:7-16a.** Knowing God starts with knowing the essence of God’s nature: God is *agape*. Where do you see evidence that God is *agape*?

What is the ultimate expression of God’s *agape*?

Describe what *agape* in practice looks like in your life:

Can a non-Christian show *agape*? What is the difference between Christian love and the love shown by a non-Christian?

How does the *agape* you and I show to God and to our fellow human beings always fall short of the ideal?

Give examples of apparent self-sacrificing love that isn’t really so self-sacrificing at all.

**Evaluate:** Love is the expression of the divine.

**Evaluate:** The opposite of *agape* is not hatred. It is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Evaluate:** In the climactic scene of the 1951 movie *The African Queen*, as Charlie Allnut (Humphrey Bogart) and Rose Sayer (Katherine Hepburn) are facing almost certain death, the very religious Rose prays, “Judge us not for our weakness, but for our love, and open the doors of heaven for Charlie and me.”

Set verses 10 and 16a side by side. Why is our reliance on God’s love so important?

**Read 1 John 4:16b-21.** Explain the phrase “God is *agape*.” (For cross-reference see **1 Corinthians 13:1-8a, 13.**)

What does it mean to “live in *agape*”?

If we are not to trust in our own doing (or loving), how can our living in *agape* give us confidence on the day of judgment?

Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, explains that the opposite of *philia* is *phobia*. Here John applies the same contrast to *agape*. Explain John's words, "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" (NIV).

Why is John so correct to write, "We love because he first loved us"?

Describe ways that Christians might fail to love our brothers and sisters—and in such failings bring to light our failure to love God.