

1 John 4:10 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins:

Greek - en touto estin (3SPAI) e agaphe ouch hoti hemeis egaphekamen (1PRAI) ton theon all hoti autos egaphesen (3SAAI) hemas kai apesteilen (3SAAI) ton huion autou hilasmon peri ton hamartion hemon

Amplified - In this is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins.

Wuest - In this is the love, not that we have loved God with the present result that we possess love (for Him), but that He Himself loved us, and sent off His Son, a satisfaction concerning our sins.

NLT - This is real love-- not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

- **In this:** 1Jn 4:8,9 3:1
- **not:** 1Jn 4:19 Deut 7:7,8 John 15:16 Ro 5:8-10 8:29,30 2Co 5:19-21 Eph 2:4,5 Titus 3:3-5
- **sent:** 1Jn 2:2 Da 9:24 Ro 3:25,26 1Pe 2:24 3:18
- [1 John 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S LOVE IN THE ATONEMENT

In this is love (One might translate it "in this way is seen true love") - **Where?** John again is looking forward in the passage. Literally it reads "in this is **the** love," the definite article ("**the**") appears before the word "**love**," (in the original Greek text) which defines this as not just any kind of love, but that particular love (**agape**) that flows from God as the Source.

Not that we loved God - John uses the negative "**ou**" signifying that before we were born again, we **absolutely** did not love God. In fact Ro 5:10- **note** says "we were (God's) enemies." Fallen mankind does not "naturally" love God, contrary to popular opinion! It follows that natural men (those still dead in their trespasses and sins - Eph 2:1-**note**) absolutely cannot express the quality of love (supernatural) about which John writes.

It is possible that the those with the spirit of anti-Christ were making the claim with their "lips" that they love God, but their "life" proved their words to be a lie.

Cole on the phrase **not that we loved God** - So that we don't get our focus on ourselves, or get puffed up with pride over how loving we are, John directs us back to God's love as seen in His sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ([1 John 4:7-11 Why We Must Love](#))

Piper - He is emphasizing that the nature and the origin of love does not lie in our response to God. That is not where love starts. That is not mainly what love is. Love is, and love starts with God. And if anything we feel or do can be called love, it will be because we are connected with God by the new birth.

Spurgeon - In us there was no love; there was a hatred of God and goodness. The enmity was not on God's side toward us; but on our side toward him. "He loved us and sent his son." The gift of Christ; the needful propitiation for our sins, was all of love on God's part. Justice demanded the propitiation, but love applied it. God could not be just if he pardoned sin without atonement; but the greatness of the love is seen in the fact that it moved the Father to give his Son to an ignominious death, that he might pardon sinners and yet be just.

But (term of contrast) should always prompt us to ask What is the author contrasting? - John first makes a negative statement, followed by a positive statement.

Guzik - His love for us initiates our relationship of love with Him, our love only responds to His love for us. We can't love God the way we should unless we are receiving and living in His love.

He loved ([25](#))(**agapao**) us sacrificially even when we did not love Him. Amazing love! Charles Wesley was right to ask "Amazing love how can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Wuest on **He loved** - "**He loved**" is constative **ao**rist, giving a panoramic view of God's love for the human race. God has always loved sinners. "**Sent**" is also **ao**rist, marking the Incarnation as an historic event. God took the initiative in this His great "operation rescue!"

Hiebert adds that "The aorist-tense verb "**loved**" refers to the historical, redemptive work of Christ, regarded as a distinctive landmark." ([The Epistles of John- An Expository Commentary](#)) (See also related journal article - [1 John 4:7-21 - Excellent](#))

He loved us and sent - The "**and**" links the **fact** of God's love with **act** of God's love. Love is a dynamic verb. While we clearly cannot *duplicate* this act, we can *imitate* it by giving our best to those who do not deserve it.

Three times in this section on love John writes that the Father **sent** His Son - that we might live through Him (1Jn 4:9), as the propitiation for our sins (1Jn 4:10), and as the Savior of the world (1Jn 4:14). In horse racing a trifecta is when the bettor wins by selecting the first three finishers of the race in the correct order. That Jesus would achieve all three of the goals for which He was sent was never in doubt, as His cry underscored -- "**It is finished.**" (Jn 19:30) (See discussion of [Tetelestai - It is Finished! Paid in Full!](#))

His Son to be the propitiation - There is no verb "**to be**" so this literally reads "*His Son propitiation.*" In chapter 2 John said of Jesus "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." In other words Jesus was not sent to be just the "*propitiator*," who offered the sacrifice as did the OT priests, but that He Himself BE the actual *propitiation*. In sum, Christ Jesus is both the propitiator and the propitiation for our sin. As Dwight Pentecost said "The death of Jesus Christ did not change the heart of God, as if One who hated us now loves us, rather it opened the floodgate so that the love of God for sinners could be poured out to them through Jesus Christ."

**Babies are born into the world,
but only Jesus was sent into the world!**

Sent (649)(**apostello** from **apo** = off, away from, speaks of separation + **stello** = appoint to a position this sense in the derivative word *apostolos* = emissary) literally means to send forth. "To dispatch someone for the achievement of some objective, send away/out." (BDAG) **Apostello** is in the **perfect tense** signifying the permanent effect of the sending of the Son. The sending of the Son has lasting effect! Indeed, the results of the Father's sending the Son will abide throughout eternity in those who have received the Son as their propitiation and Savior. For example in context the result "that we might live through Him" will be everlasting! Hallelujah!

Vine on **apostello** - lit., "to send forth" (*apo*, "from"), akin to *apostolos*, "an apostle," denotes (a) "to send on service, or with a commission." (1) of persons; Christ, sent by the Father, Matthew 10:40; 15:24; 21:37; Mark 9:37; 12:6; Luke 4:18,43; 9:48; 10:16; John 3:17; 5:36,38; 6:29,57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3,8,18 (1st part), Jn 17:21,23,25; 20:21; Acts 3:20 (future); 3:26; 1 John 4:9,10,14; the Holy Spirit, Luke 24:49 (in some texts; see No. 3); 1 Peter 1:12; Revelation 5:6; Moses, Acts 7:35; John the Baptist, John 1:6; 3:28; disciples and apostles, e.g., Matthew 10:16; Mark 11:1; Luke 22:8; John 4:38; 17:18 (2nd part); Acts 26:17; servants, e.g., Matthew 21:34; Luke 20:10; officers and officials, Mark 6:27; John 7:32; Acts 16:35; messengers, e.g., Acts 10:8,17,20; 15:27; evangelists, Romans 10:15; angels, e.g., Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27; Luke 1:19,26; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 1:1; 22:6; demons, Mark 5:10; (2) of things, e.g., Matthew 21:3; Mark 4:29, RV, marg., "sendeth forth," text, "putteth forth" (AV, "... in"); Acts 10:36; 11:30; 28:28; (b) "to send away, dismiss," e.g., Mark 8:26; 12:3; Luke 4:18, "to set (at liberty)." ([Send - Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words](#))

Spurgeon - By nature, we had no love to God; we were his enemies. We loved sin, and we had ruined ourselves by it; but God took out of his own bosom the only Son he had, that he might make reconciliation for us, and put away our sin. "Herein is love," says the apostle, as though you could find it nowhere else as it is here. Here is the height and depth of love immeasurable; here is love summed up, here is love's climax: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Harry Ironside - On the Cross the Son of God took our place in judgment. It was not merely the sufferings that men heaped on Jesus that settled the sin-question, but there as he hung upon the cross and supernatural darkness covered the scene, we read that Jehovah made "his soul an offering (a guilt offering) for sin" (Isaiah 53:10). In those hours of darkness God was dealing with His Son in judgment. There He bore in His inmost soul the punishment that you and I would have to bear ourselves for all eternity if left without a Savior. There He became the **propitiation** and expiation for our sins. It is at the Cross that we see the fullest extent of God's **love**. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1John 4:10). This indeed is **love**. We hated Him, we loved our own way, we wanted to take our own course, and we did not want to be submissive to His will. But He loved us and looked upon us in grace. He yearned to have us with Him in glory, free from every stain of sin. And because there was no other way whereby we could be justified (declared righteous), He sent His Son to become the **propitiation** for our sins. **Don't talk about believing God is love if you won't accept the gift of His love, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Christ alone we have life and propitiation.** "There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), but the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ([1 John 4 Commentary - Ironside's Notes on Selected Books](#))

Barclay on propitiation - Jesus is the Restorer of the lost relationship with God. God sent Him to be the atoning sacrifice for sin (1Jn 4:10). We do not move in a world of thought in which animal sacrifice is a reality. But we can fully understand what sacrifice meant. When a man sinned, his relationship with God was broken; and sacrifice was an expression of penitence, designed to restore the lost relationship (**Ed**: But see caveat - Heb 9:22-**note**, Heb 10:4-**note**). Jesus, by His life and death, made it possible for man to enter into a new relationship of peace and friendship with God. He bridged the awful gulf between man and God.(1 John 4 Commentary - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible)

Harry Ironside - It is God who came out to us. We did not seek after Him. We did not love God, and our hearts were filled with hatred for Him. But He met our every need. You see, because we were dead we needed life and God sent Christ that we might live through Him. Because we were lost and guilty sinners it was necessary that a propitiation be made for sin, and God sent His Son to effect that propitiation. ([1 John 4 Commentary - Ironside's Notes on Selected Books](#))

The Son of God was sent to be the Son of Man that He might die for man. His death was not an accident but an appointment! (Acts 2:23, Acts 4:28, Messianic prophecy in Acts 3:18, 2Ti 1:9NIV-**note**) (See related resource: **Messianic Prophecies**)

The propitiation ("Satisfaction") ([2434](#)) (**hilasmos [see in depth discussion]** akin to **hileōs** = merciful, propitious) in the NT (only here and 1Jn 2:2- **note**) refers to a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God and thereby makes God propitious (favorably inclined or disposed, disposed to be gracious and/or merciful, ready to forgive) toward us. It is important to make the distinction that propitiation does not mean we must do something to appease God or to placate His anger, but that it refers to something He does to make it possible for men to be forgiven! Glory, Hallelujah!

Wiersbe explains that "'**God is light,**' and therefore He must uphold His holy Law. '**God is love,**' and therefore He wants to forgive and save sinners. How can God forgive sinners and still be consistent with His holy nature? The answer is the cross. There Jesus Christ bore the punishment for sin and met the just demands of the holy Law. But there, also, God reveals His love and makes it possible for men to be saved by faith." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

NET Note on **hilasmos** says "inherent in the meaning of the word translated atoning sacrifice (hilasmos) is the idea of turning away the divine wrath, so that "propitiation" is the closest English equivalent. God's love for us is expressed in his sending his Son to be the propitiation (the propitiatory sacrifice) for our sins on the cross... The contemporary English "atoning sacrifice" communicates this idea more effectively."

MacArthur - Hebrews 9:5-**note** translates a form of this word (**hilasmos**) as "the mercy seat." ((**hilasterion or hilasterios**) Christ lit. became our mercy seat like the one in the Most Holy Place, where the high priest splattered the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15-**note**). Christ did this when His blood, spilled on behalf of others, satisfied the demands of God's holy justice and wrath against sin. (Ibid)

The **Septuagint (Lxx)**, the Greek text of the Hebrew OT, uses **hilasmos** in Leviticus 25:9 of the Day of Atonement - 'You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day (yom) of **atonement** (Hebrew = **kippur** [Yom Kippur - 10th day of 7th month, Tishri]; Lxx = **hilasmos**) you shall sound a horn all through your land."

Wuest - The English word "**propitiate**" means "to appease and render favorable." That was the pagan meaning of the Greek word. The pagan worshipper brought gifts to his god to *appease* the god's wrath and make him *favorable* in his attitude towards him. But the God of Christianity needs no gifts to appease His wrath and make Him favorable towards the human race. Divine love springs spontaneously from His heart. His wrath against sin cannot be placated by good works. Only the infliction of the penalty of sin, death, will satisfy the just demands of His holy law which the human race violated, maintain His government, and provide the proper basis for His bestowal of mercy, namely, divine justice satisfied. **Hilasmos** is that sacrifice which fully satisfies the demands of the broken law. It was our Lord's death on Calvary's Cross. Thus does this pagan word accrue to itself a new meaning as it enters the doctrinal atmosphere of the New Testament.

ESV Study Bible says **Hilasmos** "here means 'a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and turns it to favor" which is "also the meaning of the English word propitiation."

Steven Cole - "**Propitiation**" means to satisfy God's justice and wrath toward our sin. His love didn't just brush aside our sin, because His holiness and justice would have been compromised. Rather, His love moved God to send His own Son, who bore the penalty that we rightly deserved. The initiative was totally with God! He didn't wait until we showed some promise of changing or until we cried out for help. Rather, as Paul put it (Ro 5:8), "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." ([1 John 4:7-11 Why We Must Love](#))

See articles on Propitiation

- [What is propitiation?](#)
- [What is the mercy seat?](#)
- [Why would the aroma of a sacrifice be important to God?](#)
- [Propitiation - Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible](#)
- [tPropitiation - Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testamen](#)
- [Propitiation \(2\) - Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testament](#)
- [Propitiation - Watson's Biblical & Theological Dictionary](#)
- [Propitiation - Bridgeway Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Propitiation - Charles Buck Theological Dictionary](#)
- [Propitiation - Easton's Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Propitiation - Fausset's Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Propitiation - The Hawker's Poor Man's Concordance And Dictionary](#)
- [Propitiation - CARM Theological Dictionary](#)
- [Expiation, Propitiation - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Propitiation - See Atonement - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)

Related Word Studies:

Mercy Seat, Propitiation (2435) hilasterion

Make propitiation (be merciful) (2433) hilaskomai

Boice - If God had merely sent Jesus to teach us about Himself, that would have been wonderful enough. It would have been far more than we deserved. If God had sent Jesus simply to be our example, that would have been good too and would have had some value ... But the wonderful thing is that God did not stop with these but rather sent His Son, not merely to teach or to be our example, but to die the death of a felon, that He might save us from sin.

For our sins - "**Our**" is genitive indicating a personal possessive pronoun. Jesus personally died for our personal sins, each and every one we personally committed! That is love "that will not let me go." (Matheson)

Sins (266)(hamartia) literally conveys the idea of missing the mark as when hunting with a bow and arrow (in Homer some hundred times of a warrior hurling his spear but missing his foe). Later hamartia came to mean missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. Hamartia in the Bible signifies a departure from God's holy, perfect standard of

what is right in word or deed (righteous). It pictures the idea of missing His appointed goal (His will) which results in a deviation from what is pleasing to Him. In short, sin is conceived as a missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is the Triune God Himself. As **Martin Luther** put it "Sin is essentially a departure from God."

Spurgeon - Who among us would think of giving up his son to die for his enemy, for one who never did him a service, but treated him ungratefully, repulsed a thousand overtures of tenderness, and went on perversely hardening his neck? No man could do it.

TGIF (Read: Romans 5:6-21) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. —1 John 4:10 - We hear it often: "**TGIF**" (Thank God it's Friday!). Although many people use this phrase carelessly, without reverence for their Creator, they're grateful because Friday marks the end of the workweek. It opens the door to 2 days when they can relax and just do their own thing.

On this Good Friday, millions of Christians around the world are especially thankful because it reminds them of what God accomplished through His Son nearly 2,000 years ago.

But why do we call this day good? Was not this one of the blackest days in history? God's sinless Son, who went about doing good, healing the sick, and bringing hope to sin-ruined lives, was nailed to a shameful cross by self-righteous religious leaders. That's evil at its worst. That sounds more like God's day of defeat. Where is the good in that?

Paul gave us the answer. On this day centuries ago, God demonstrated "His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5:8). Such love is too profound for a genius to fully grasp, yet so simple that a child can accept it. And this love is experienced by all who repent of their sins and receive Christ by faith.

TGIF—Thank God it's Good Friday! - D J De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

—Watts

Christ endured the darkness so that we can enjoy the light.

What's Love? (Read: Psalm 103:1-14) - When asked "What's love?" children have some great answers. Noelle, age 7, said, "Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day." Rebecca, who is 8, answered, "Since my grandmother got arthritis, she can't bend over and polish her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even after his hands got arthritis too. That's love." Jessica, also 8, concluded,

“You really shouldn’t say ‘I love you’ unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.”

Sometimes we need reminding that God loves us. We focus on the difficulties of life and wonder, Where’s the love? But if we pause and consider all that God has done for us, we remember how much we are loved by God, who is love (1 John 4:8-10).

Psalm 103 lists the “benefits” God showers on us in love: He forgives our sin (Ps 103:3), satisfies us with good things (Ps 103:5), and executes righteousness and justice (Ps 103:6). He is slow to anger and abounds in mercy (Ps 103:8). He doesn’t deal with us as our sins deserve (Ps 103:10) and has removed our sin as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12). He has not forgotten us!

What’s love? God is love, and He’s pouring out that love on you and me. - Anne Cetas ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Our God is God—
His truth, His love remains each day the same,
He’s faithful to His matchless name,
For God is God—He does not change.
—D. DeHaan

The death of Christ is the measure of God’s love for you.

Love Undeserved - Years ago in North Carolina, Judge Clara Warren served in the juvenile court system. She was known for her strict interpretation of the law, but also for her love and compassion.

One day Judge Warren took reporter Phyllis Hobe on a tour of a correctional facility. Hobe was surprised by the judge’s sincere concern for many of the inmates. She was helping them to get into schools and find jobs when they were released. She even continued to care for them if they were readmitted. “How can you keep on loving them?” the reporter asked. “They don’t seem to appreciate all you’ve done for them.” The judge explained that she didn’t love them because she wanted to receive their thanks. She simply loved them, expecting nothing in return.

Isn’t that how God loves us? The Bible tells us that He loved the world so much that He gave His Son to die for us (John 3:16; Ro 5:8). Though sinful and ungrateful, every man, woman, and child is the object of His love. Yes, He longs for our loving obedience. But when that doesn’t happen, He continues to love us no matter how unlovable we are.

Dear Father, enable us to love others the way that You love us. —Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

—Matheson

Nothing is more powerful than God's love.

No Greater Love —1 John 4:10 - On our family-room wall, in a small shadowbox, hangs a “treasure” that belongs to my wife Carolyn. Oh, we have things more intrinsically valuable on the walls of our home —a handmade quilt from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Kentucky, antique mirrors, oil paintings, and a magnificent dulcimer from an artisan in the back-country of Idaho.

Carolyn’s treasure, though, is far more valuable to her than any other possession, for it contains a gift from our granddaughter Julia. It was a present to her “Nana” on Valentine’s Day several years ago when Julia was only 6 years old — a small, red, clay heart. Inscribed on it in childish scrawl are the words “ I Luv U.”

The little heart is crudely made, ragged on the edges, and bears a number of thumbprints and smudges, but Carolyn has enshrined it in a frame made especially for that heart. Each day it reminds her of Julia’s love.

Is God’s love more valuable to you than silver or gold or any other possession? He“ sent His only begotten Son into the world, that [you] might live through Him”(1 John 4:9). He did that because He loves you, not because you loved Him. And because of His love, one day you will be with Him in heaven. There is no greater love! By David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Love sent my Savior to die in my stead,
Why should He love me so?
Meekly to Calvary’s cross He was led,
Why should He love me so?

—Harkness

God’s eternal love is the source of our eternal life.

Where Love Comes From - I have loved you with an everlasting love; ... with lovingkindness I have drawn you. —Jeremiah 31:3 - What happened between my husband and a dog named Maggie was not love at first sight. In fact, their first meeting was more like a war dance. When Jay came home from work, Maggie stopped him at the back door

and growled at him as if he were an intruder. Then Jay growled, wanting to know why a strange dog was in his home. I explained why I rescued her from the kennel, but he was unmoved.

But soon Maggie began welcoming Jay home in the evening with a wildly excited dance routine. With all 20 toenails tapping on the tile she would wag her tail and wiggle to tell him that his arrival was the highlight of her day. Within a week, her enthusiastic welcome had won his heart.

Maggie's method of winning Jay's affection reminded me of what the prophet Jeremiah and the apostle John wrote. God's love for us, they said, draws us into a loving relationship with Him (Jeremiah 31:3; 1John 4:7-8,19).

When I think about God enjoying my presence as much as Maggie enjoys Jay's, I am eager to spend time with Him. I realize that God loves me far more than Maggie loves Jay, and my heart fills up with love for Him. And then my heart overflows with love for others, for the power of God's love empowers me to love even those who don't love me. — By Julie Ackerman Link ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know—
Spirit, breathing from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so!
—Robinson

We love because God first loved us.