

# 1 John 4:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

We love him, because he first loved us.

## Analysis

---

**We love him, because he first loved us.** This brief verse encapsulates the gospel's order and logic. Some manuscripts read "We love" without "him," suggesting either that we love God or that we love generally (including God and others). Either reading preserves the essential truth: our capacity to love derives entirely from God's prior love for us. The pronoun "he" (autos) is emphatic—He, God Himself, took the initiative.

"First loved us" (prōtos ēgapēsen hēmas) establishes temporal and logical priority. Before creation, before our existence, before any merit or response from us, God loved. His love isn't reactive to our lovability but flows from His nature ("God is love," verse 8). This love manifested historically in sending Christ (verse 10) and personally in our regeneration and adoption (3:1). We were enemies, yet He loved us (Romans 5:8-10).

The causal "because" (hoti) establishes that God's prior love is both the chronological beginning and the enabling cause of our love. We don't naturally love God—sin makes us His enemies. Only His prevenient love, working through the gospel and the Spirit's regeneration, enables us to love Him. This eliminates boasting: even our love for God is His gift. Yet it also provides assurance: if God's love initiated relationship, our weak, fluctuating love doesn't sustain it. He who began the good work will complete it (Philippians 1:6).

## Historical Context

---

This verse counters both ancient and modern distortions of salvation. Pelagius taught that humans initiate salvation by choosing God through free will, with God's grace assisting. The Council of Carthage (418 AD) condemned this, affirming that God's grace precedes and enables human response. Augustine's theology of grace, developed partly in response to Pelagius, emphasized that salvation begins with God's electing love, not human decision.

The phrase refutes works-righteousness in any form. Medieval Catholicism sometimes suggested humans must begin the process by seeking God, who then responds with grace. The Reformers (Luther, Calvin) insisted on sola gratia—grace alone from first to last. God's love initiates, sustains, and completes salvation. Human response is real but entirely enabled by God's prior work.

For John's original readers facing Gnostic elitism, this was liberating. The Gnostics claimed spiritual status through superior knowledge or mystical experience—essentially self-initiated enlightenment. John demolishes this: all true knowledge of God and love for God originates with God's prior love for us. This levels all believers—none can boast of greater spiritual achievement. All alike are recipients of undeserved divine love.

## Related Passages

---

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

---

1. How does meditating on God's first love provide security when our feelings toward Him fluctuate?

2. In what ways do we subtly reverse the order, acting as if God responds to our initiative?
3. How should God's initiating love shape our evangelism and view of salvation?

## Interlinear Text

---

ἡμεῖς ἠγάπησεν αὐτὸς ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν  
**We** **love** **he** **because** **he** **first** **love**  
G2249 G25 G846 G3754 G846 G4413 G25

ἡμᾶς  
**us**  
G2248

## Additional Cross-References

---

**1 John 4:10** (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.

**John 15:16** (Parallel theme): Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

**John 3:16** (Love): For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

**Luke 7:47** (Love): Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

**Galatians 5:22** (Love): But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,