

Love

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The English word “love” is used in a very wide variety of contexts.

I love my wife, my children, ice cream, holidays, you, Jesus, a TV programme, peace and quiet

In each context the word love has a different meaning.

The Greeks were able to express more clearly the nature of love because they had different words for it. Here are the Greek words used in the New Testament for love:

Verbs

Phileo: to love, approve of, like, treat affectionately or kindly, kiss, welcome, befriend, be fond of. Phileo is affectionate, friendship love and is not at all passionate.

Agapeo: to love, welcome, entertain, be fond of, love dearly, be pleased with, be contented with.

Nouns

Philanthropia: kindness

Philia: friendship

Agapê: brotherly love, affection, good will, benevolence.

Agapê love is the highest of all expressions of love.

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; not seeking anything in return.

The supreme demonstration of *agapê* love was when God sent His Son Jesus to be our Saviour:

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 4:9,10.

Let's look a bit more closely at agapê love

a) Agapê love is giving love. It is sacrificial and unselfish.

Agapê love is not concerned with self: rather it is concerned with others. It is an attitude, a choice, an exercise of the will that the highest good of another might be brought to pass.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16.

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

In 1976, researcher John Lee interviewed many people to find what the word "love" meant to them.

He learned that love means different things to different people and labelled the different kinds of love with Greek words:

Eros love: romantic love with much passion, physical longing, deep intensity, and intimacy.

Ludas love: game-playing love with many playful interactions but little intimacy or intensity.

Storgê love: family and friendship-based love with strong companionship, affection and shared values.

Pragma love: practical love demonstrated in logical, helpful ways.

Mania love: troubled love based on jealousy and dependence. There is great intensity and many psychological symptoms in the relationship.

Agapê love: altruistic love. It is sacrificial and giving, and does not ask anything in return.



God the Father demonstrated agapê love in sending His Son, and Jesus demonstrated agapê love in laying down His life for us.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 1 John 3:16

This sets the benchmark for how we are to love others! It is an incredibly high standard.

b) Agapê love is the nature of God.

God Himself is agapê love, thus in His actions He cannot help but express that love.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:7-8

God cannot do anything else but love because He is love. Behind all of His actions (including creation, salvation, deliverance, judgment, empowerment, sending of the Holy Spirit etc.) is God's love. He wants the best for those He interacts with and acts on their behalf.



c) We can only express agapê love when God's love is in us.

Agapê love is selfless, and is totally focused on what is best for the one who is loved. The opposite of agapê love is selfishness. The basis of sin is selfishness. Only when sin has been cleansed and forgiven can unselfish love begin to be expressed. At salvation the root of selfishness is dealt with (or should be) and the Holy Spirit comes into our lives – enabling us to show agapê love.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each others. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 1 John 3:14

And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us. 1 John 3:23

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because 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. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us. 1 John 4:7-12

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 1 John 4:16

We love because He first loved us. If we say we love God, yet hate a brother or sister, we are liars. For if we do not love a fellow believer whom we have seen, we cannot love God, whom we have not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love one another. 1 John 4:19-21

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves His child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep His commands. And His commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John 5:1-5

d) Agapê love involves our whole personality.

Agapê love involves all aspects of our lives and personalities: our wills, our decisions, our emotions; our thoughts; our choices; our desires; It is not just an emotional thing. (That's why Jesus could command us to love others. It would be impossible to require us to love our enemies in the same way as someone we had "fallen in love" with, but it is realistic to say "You must be like God, never wishing anything but good for others". Always try to look at everyone in the same way that God looks at them: with the eyes of loving goodwill. Agapê love is practical. It is not sloppy sentimentalism!



Aspects of agapê love from the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount contains much of Jesus' teaching on practical living so it is very much concerned with agapê love.

- **We will be blessed if we show agapê love to others**

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Matthew 5:7.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9.*

- **Agapê love is expressed in good works**

Good works are an expression of our love for God, because through them He is glorified. They are also an expression of our love for others because it shows that we are concerned for them, and want their highest good. We are not just talking about loving them; we are showing we love them through our actions.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James 2:26

- **Agapê love is concerned with inner motives.** It is observed through outward actions, but these spring from inner motives. If either are not right there must be a seeking of forgiveness and reconciliation. True agapê love begins with a loving motive and results in a loving action.

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Matthew 5:21, 22.

- **Agapê love encompasses everyone.** Agapê love is not cliquy or intolerant. We are even to love our enemies!

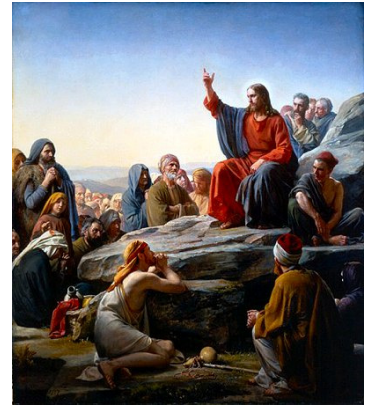
You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43-48.

- **Agapê love is not exhibitionist.** It recognizes when someone has a need and provides help without drawing attention to the helper.

Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:1-4.

- **Agapê love is not judgmental.** It takes great love to accept others how they are and not to seek to make them conform to our ideas!

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye. Matthew 7:1-5.



- **Agapê love is wise.** It makes decisions based on wise choices.

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. Matthew 7:6

- **Agapê love is selfless.** It is fully concerned for the good of others.

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12

This verse has been called the Royal Law. It shows how we can determine whether or not an action is based on agapê love. We all know what we would like others to do for us. To find whether any given action is loving we can always ask "Would I like this to be done to me"?

The love chapter – 1 Corinthians Chapter 13

¹ *If I speak in human or angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body [to hardship] that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

⁴ *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

⁸ *Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

¹³ *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

This wonderful Chapter is part of Paul's explanation of how spiritual gifts should be exercised in the Church. It is a lot more than that, though, because it gives us a detailed look at the qualities of agapê love.



v1-3 Paul explains that exercising of spiritual gifts (including tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge, and faith) is meaningless and ineffective unless it is done in love.

v4-7 Paul describes the qualities of agapê love. It is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, does not dishonor others, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil, rejoices in the truth, protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres.

v8-12 Spiritual gifts like tongues, prophecy and the word of knowledge are imperfect and will pass away when Jesus comes again. In the meantime we are immature and only know God in part. When He comes we will know Him fully. But love is not like that. Genuine agapê love is not immature or imperfect. It never fails.

v13 Only three things last forever: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The personal value of expressing agapê love

If we show agapê love we receive many benefits.

- **If we love we are much more likely to be loved in return.** That is what has happened in our relationship with God.

We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19.

- **If we love we will be much more pleasant people.** We become much more attractive to others in many ways: in our words; actions; behaviours; attitudes, and even our appearance. We will also be more healthy and confident. This is one of the reasons why the Bible so often exhorts us to think

loving thoughts and carry out loving actions. Good relationships; a positive, outward-looking and caring attitude; a servant heart. This is what makes a beautiful person.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Philippians 4:8

- **The more we love the better we will be as examples to others of what genuine Christianity is like.** When we express love we show more of the *aroma of Christ* to those around us and we are better witnesses for Him.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God. 2 Corinthians 2:14-17.

- **If we are motivated by love we will demonstrate more of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.** God, the Holy Spirit, is love, and we will shine out of us with His fruits.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-25

- **If we are motivated by love we will not be hurt easily.** Agapê love will turn any action so that it sees only the best from that action. This means we will be a lot less likely to feel hurt in any situation. (A feeling of hurt often comes when we consider we have rights and that our rights have not been met. But legally a Christian has no rights. When we gave our lives to Christ and asked Him to be Lord we surrendered all rights to run our own life). So anything that happens must be considered to have been sent from God, by His grace. When something occurs which is “bad” for us can:
 - Accept that it is bad, rebel against God and allow bitterness and resentment to enter our life against the source of our hurt. (This damages and hurts both them and us leading to “huffs”, broken relationships, fights and even illness). The only way out is to confess this as sin, and seek forgiveness from God and the one who hurt you.
 - Reject that it is bad because *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* Romans 8:28. Thank God for the situation and ask Him to reveal what His purposes are in it. He is probably seeking to teach you something or to mature you.

Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10:38-39

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

- **Agapê love results in a positive mind and attitude.** When we love we are focused on others and not on ourselves. It helps us to stay other-centred, and God-centred, rather than being self-centred. We are freed from the pervasive selfishness that seeks to trap us in our own little world. This is very freeing, and gives a central satisfaction in which we know we are loved, we are loving, and we are lovable. We have joy in living and a deep peace in our hearts!

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Philippians 4:4

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

Paul could say: *I have learned in whatever state I am to be content.* Philippians 4:11. So can we!



How wonderful that God loves us! And how wonderful that we can live a life of love!



Here's how George Matheson expressed his response to God's love. He wrote this hymn as he was going through an intense time of suffering. He said it was as if the Lord dictated the words to him, and the whole hymn was written in 5 minutes.

*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.*

*O light that followest all my way, I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray, That in thy sunshine's blaze its day, may brighter, fairer be.*

*O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain, and feel the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be.*

*O Cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead, and from the ground there blossoms red Life that shall endless be.*

Discussion questions

Explain the difference in the types of love that the Greek words are able to express. Why do we find it hard to distinguish these types of love in English?

God is love. What are the implications of this in terms of His nature; His actions: His creation and the way He interacts with us. How does this fit with other aspects of His character, such as mercy, justice, anger at sin, forgiveness, righteousness, and holiness?

Love comes from God. What type of love is this talking about? Does it mean that God is the only source of love? There is a lot of 'love' in the world. Is this not really 'love' unless it is from God? .

What is agapê love? (as compared to other forms of love). How does agapê love show itself? What are the benefits of demonstrating agapê love?

'Selfishness is the opposite of love.' Does this apply just to agapê love or to all types of love?

The Teacher in Ecclesiastes says *there is a time to love and a time to hate.* Ecclesiastes 3:8. Does this mean that it is OK to hate? What should you do if you feel hatred towards someone?

List all of the qualities of love mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13 and in the Sermon on the Mount. Apply them to a situation where you had to love someone, when you didn't feel very loving, or had reasons for not loving. Was it better to love in this situation? What were the results of your demonstration of love?

What have you learnt about love from this study? How will you apply this in future?