

LOVE

Jesus told us that **love** is the **most important** thing we can do:

- “You shall **love the LORD your God** with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. ³¹And the second, like it, is this: ‘**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

The **apostle Paul** reiterated this when he wrote:

- “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but **have not love**, I have become sounding brass or a **clanging cymbal**. ²And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but **have not love**, I am **nothing**. ³And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but **have not love**, it **profits me nothing**.” (1Corinthians 13:1-3)

What is Love?

We use the word “**love**” all the time, but do we really **know what it means**? **Webster** says that love is:

- “a **deep and tender feeling of affection** for or attachment or devotion to a person or persons”

But what does the Bible mean by the word “**love**”?

- Actually, we translate **3 different Greek words** into “**love**” – a **big mistake!**

1. agapaō *ag-ap-ah'-o* (verb, noun is **agape**)

Strong’s Greek Dictionary: to *love* (in a social or moral sense)

Holman Bible Dictionary: **Unselfish, loyal, and benevolent** concern for the well-being of another... The reader who comes to the *agape* of the New Testament with the idea of **benevolence** in mind is better off than the reader who comes with the idea of physical pleasure and satisfaction.

2. phileō *fil-eh'-o*

Strong’s Greek Dictionary: to *be a friend to* (*fond of* [an individual or an object]), that is, *have affection* for (denoting **personal attachment**, as a matter of sentiment or feeling; while G25 (**agapao**) is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the **deliberate assent of the will** as a matter of **principle, duty and propriety**:

3. eros *er'as*

Webster: **sexual love** or desire

In the Scripture verses above, Jesus and Paul are speaking of “**agapao**” love, **not “phileo”** love

- The differences in these two words for love are highlighted in the verses where Jesus asks three times if Peter loves Him (John 21:15-17)
 - ¹⁵So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (agapao) Me more than these?**” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You.” He said to him, “**Feed My lambs.**”
 - ¹⁶He said to him again a second time, “**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (agape) Me?**” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You.” He said to him, “**Tend My sheep.**”
 - ¹⁷He said to him the third time, “**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (phileo) Me?**” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “**Do you love Me?**” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love (phileo) You.” Jesus said to him, “**Feed My sheep.**”

Peter used the word “phileo” because he loved Jesus as a friend which he believed to be more important than a more general and less personal “agapao” love

- However, it is “agapao” love that is the most important and it is this form of love that the Scriptures exhort us to have toward God and one another

The great thing about the Bible is it usually gives us the best definitions of such key words

- We find a clear idea of what “agapao” love is all about in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV)
 - *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”*

This mix of **is** and **is not** is more clearly seen in the table below:

LOVE IS:	LOVE IS NOT:
Patient (long-suffering)	envious
kind	boastful
rejoices in the truth	proud
protects	rude
trusts	self-seeking
hopes	easily angered
perseveres	unforgiving (i.e. keeps no record of wrongs)
never fails	evil

“Agapao” love is **unconditional** and **always** is **flowing from the throne of God** toward us:

- *“Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, **shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” (Romans 8:38-39)*

It is only through “agapao” love that we can become holy and sanctified:

- *“And may the Lord make you **increase and abound in love to one another** and to all, just as we do to you, ¹³so that He may **establish your hearts blameless in holiness** before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” (1Thessalonians 3:12)*

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit seek to have a **love relationship** with us, not just a **works-based fulfillment of the law**

- *“But as it is written: ‘**Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love (agapao) Him.**’” (1Corinthians 2:9)*

Agapao Love is Unnatural

Agapao love is **not human** – we cannot manufacture it or generate it from within ourselves

- It is the **not a feeling** such as the affectionate love we feel for others (phileo or eros)
- Instead, it is a “**state of being**” that transcends the natural, sensual world and it **only** comes from God:
 - ⁷*Beloved, let us love (agapao) one another, for **love is of God**; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.* (1John 4:7)

Note that “**love is of God**” – it can only come from Him through us

- Note also that “**everyone who loves is born of God**” – or, conversely, if we **don’t love** (agapao), then we **are not born of God**
 - ⁵*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love (agape) for one another.* (John 13:35)
- Note too that “**everyone who loves... knows God**” – conversely, if we **don’t love** in this manner we don’t “**know God**”
 - ⁸*He who does not love **does not know God**, for **God is love**... If we **love one another, God abides in us**, and His love has been perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us. (1John 4:8,12-13)*

It is absolutely **crucial** that we understand **what agapao love is and how it operates**

- We **receive** the ability to **manifest God’s love only** through the “**new heart**” and “**new spirit**” that we receive when we are **born again** (Ezekiel 36:26)
 - *The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5)*

Agapao love only functions when it is **given away** – and, in this manner, it **flows through us**

- ⁷*“But I say to you who hear: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹ To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. ³¹ And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.***
- ³²*“But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. ³⁵ But **love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.***
- Agapao love enables us to “**love our enemies**” to such an extent that we seek to “**do good**” and to “**bless**” and to “**pray for**” those who come against us
- And, agapao love means we should “**turn the other cheek**” and “**give**” to those who **steal** from us or **anyone who asks**
- To only “**love those who love you**” is not agapao love because this makes it **conditional** and agapao love is **totally unconditional – no strings attached**
- In fact, we are supposed to give and expect “**nothing in return**” – and then our “**reward will be great**” in Heaven (Matthew 19:21)

A key to understanding agapao love is to realize that it is an **initiating** love – i.e. **proactive not reactive**

- God the Father has modeled how this **unconditional, initiating love works**
 - *In this the love of God was **manifested toward us**, that God has sent **His only begotten Son** into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, **not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, **we also ought to love one another.** (1John 4:9-11)*
- This is why we are told to **consider the needs of others**
 - *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each **esteem others better than himself.*** ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also **for the interests of others.** (Philippians 2:3-4)
 - *If anyone desires to be first, he shall **be last of all and servant of all.*** (Mark 9:35)

If we don't love others this way, then **we are in darkness** and will **stumble along in life**

- However, if we do love others **proactively** and **unconditionally**, then we are **“in the light”** and we will be able to **see where we're going**
 - *He who loves his brother **abides in the light**, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.* ¹¹But he who **hates his brother is in darkness** and walks in darkness, and **does not know where he is going**, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1John 2:10)

We must **consciously choose** to give forth agapao love – this is the only way that **we can receive it**

- *You did not choose Me, but **I chose you** and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.* ¹⁷*These things **I command you, that you love one another.*** (John 15:16-17)

Jesus also modeled agapao love for us and then tells us to **“go and do likewise”** (Luke 10:25-37)

*And behold, a certain **lawyer** stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*

²⁶*He said to him, “**What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?**”*

²⁷*So he answered and said, “**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,**”[□] and **‘your neighbor as yourself.’**”*

²⁸*And He said to him, “**You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.**”*

²⁹*But he, **wanting to justify himself**, said to Jesus, “**And who is my neighbor?**”*

³⁰*Then Jesus answered and said: “**A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.***

³¹*Now by chance a certain **priest** came down that road. And when he saw him, he **passed by on the other side.*** ³²*Likewise a **Levite**, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and **passed by on the other side.***

³³*But a certain **Samaritan**, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he **had compassion.*** ³⁴*So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and **took care of him.*** ³⁵*On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, “**Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.**”* ³⁶*So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?”*

³⁷*And he said, “**He who showed mercy on him.**”*

Then Jesus said to him, **“Go and do likewise.”**