

Love One Another

Perhaps no other word in the English language is maligned and misused more than the word *love*. It is spoken of in music, literature, advertising, and the spoken language continually, to the point that its meaning is confused, but is generally defined as a attraction for the opposite sex, and everything pertaining to that. That is to be expected in a world filled with humanism and carnality.

The Scriptures show us a much different view of love than does the world around us. In the New Testament two basic Greek words are translated as *love*. *phileo*, “to be a friend of, have affection for, manifest some act or token of kindness, kiss,” but the word is never used as a command. Used 35 times.

agapao (from *agape*), “affection or benevolence, or a love-feast, the attitude of the Father toward His Son, the human race, and believers in Jesus Christ, be faithful towards, delight in.” Used 216 times.

There are a few Greek words translated “love” or variations of it in the New Testament, with slightly different meanings, but they will not be discussed here. *Phileo* and *agapao* are sometimes used interchangeably, but they have different meanings depending on the context of usage. One of the most famous contrasts of these two words is found in John 21, where Jesus is asking Peter if he loves Him.

v. 15. “So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, 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.’

v. 16. “He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [*agapao*] Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord: You know that I love [*phileo*] You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’

v. 17. “He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [*phileo*] Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him, ‘Do you love [*phileo*] 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.’”

Here we see that, while Peter answered Jesus all three times with the word *phileo*, Jesus the first two times asked with the word *agapao*, but the third time used the word *phileo*. This interchange suggests that “*Agapao* in the first two questions indicates that love which values and esteems. It is an unselfish love ready to serve, while the use of *phileo* in Peter’s answers and Christ’s third question conveys the thought of cherishing Christ above all else, of manifesting an affection characterized by constancy, from the motive of the highest veneration” (James Strong and J.R. Kohlenberger, III, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tennessee, 2017, page 264 of the Greek Dictionary).



Kohlenberger’s comments above do not

make absolutely clear the different meanings of the two words, but perhaps Jesus was bringing Himself down a bit to Peter’s level with his third question, by using *phileo*, or brotherly love, as his final effort to reach Peter so he might better understand what He was implying: “Feed My lambs” (John 21:15), “Tend My sheep” (John 21:16), and “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17).

feed = *bosko*, “to feed pasture, tend while grazing.”

lambs = *arnion*, “a young lamb.”

sheep = *probaton*, “a sheep.”

tend = *poimaino*, “to feed, pasture, tend a flock.”

Remember that Peter had denied Jesus three times before the crucifixion (Luke 22:54-62), and he was certainly concerned that his friendship with the

Master may have been irreparably damaged. Jesus had to assure him that he, Peter, was forgiven, being the *audacious* person that he was, for Peter had a great job to do ... and Jesus would be his Friend continually during that work, and an ever-present help.

The essence of these words is that the message of the coming Kingdom of God on earth needed to be preached, spread abroad across all of the earth, as the Great Commission exclaimed in Matthew 28:19-20,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Jesus was speaking to the eleven apostles here as a friend, and He desired that close, loving relationship (*phileo*) to enable them to endure even the greatest trials during the upcoming years of their lives.

Agape love requires a great deal of self-sacrifice for the sake of someone else or some great cause, which is putting the matter lightly when it comes to the burden placed on Peter’s and all of the apostles’



backs. They were all required to preach the message of the Kingdom, heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and encourage the brokenhearted as they spread the message of Jesus Christ raised throughout the entire civilized world, to Israelites and gentiles alike. This responsibility ultimately ended up in the ignominious deaths of eleven of these amazing men, the only exception being John, who was banished to



the Isle of Patmos his later years (Revelation 1:9). The fate of the apostles is outlined as follows.

- **Simon, AKA Peter.** Simon-Peter was eventually martyred in Rome during the reign of the emperor Nero. As the story goes, Peter asked to be crucified upside down, so that his death would not be the equal of Jesus, and the Romans supposedly obliged.

- **James (son of Zebedee. AKA James the Greater).** Acts 12:1-19 says that James was killed with a sword. The newly-appointed governor of Judea, Herod Agrippa, decided to ingratiate himself with the Romans by persecuting leaders of the new sect. After James was arrested and led to the place of execution, his unnamed accuser was moved by his courage. He not only repented and converted on the spot, but asked to be executed alongside James. The Roman executioners obliged, and both men were beheaded simultaneously.

- **John.** John was the only one of the original disciples not to die a violent death. Instead he passed away peacefully in Patmos in his old age, sometime around 100 AD, but not before he had been thrown into a pot of boiling oil some years before in Rome, without harm.

- **Philip.** Philip, the first of Jesus’ disciples, became a missionary in Asia. Eventually, he traveled to the Egyptian city of Heliopolis, where he was scourged, thrown into prison, and crucified to

in 54 AD.

- **Bartholomew.** Bartholomew supposedly preached in several countries, including India, where he translated the Gospel of Matthew for believers. In one account, impatient idolaters beat Bartholomew and then crucified him, while in another he was skinned alive and then beheaded

- **Thomas.** Apparently Thomas preached the gospel in Greece and India, where he angered local religious authorities, who martyred him by running him through with a spear.

- **Matthew.** According to legend, the former tax collector turned missionary was martyred in Ethiopia, where he was supposedly stabbed in the back by an swordsman sent by King Hertacus after he criticized the king's morals.

- **James (son of Alphaeus. AKA James the Less).** According to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, James, who was elected by his fellow believers to head the churches of Jerusalem, was one of the longest-lived apostles, perhaps exceeded only by John. At the age of 94 he was beaten and stoned by persecutors, who then killed him by hitting him in the head with a club.

- **Thaddaeus (AKA Lebbaeus, Judas or Jude).** According to several stories, he was crucified at Edessa (the name of cities in both Turkey and Greece) in 72 AD.

- **Simon the Canaanite (AKA the Zealot).** Simon preached in Mauritania on the west coast of Africa, and then went to England, where he was crucified in 74 AD.

This responsibility of all of the elements and meanings of love is epitomized within marriage, where the different aspects of love are combined, the *philio* (friendship), *agapeo* (sacrifice), and *eros* (sexual) love coalescing into the very image of the heavenly which Paul described in Ephesians 5:22-33. Note verses 24-25,



“Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her”

This reciprocal relationship of the husband [Christ] and the wife [the ecclesia] is the epitome of love in its depth and multitudes of expression, the wife obeying the husband in all things and the husband willing to sacrifice, nurture, and even die for the sake of his beloved. There is no greater analogy to describe love than within a properly ordered marriage.

Agape Love

How can we better define *agape* love so its intricacies can be understood. An excellent source for this is the words of Paul in I Corinthians 13. Note the character of this short message in its exquisite details.

“¹Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love [*agapeo*], I have become sounding brass or a clanging symbol. 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 move mountains, but have not love [*agapeo*], 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 [*agapeo*], it prof-

its me nothing. ⁴Love [*agapeo*] suffers long and is kind; love [*agapeo*] does not envy; love [*agapeo*] does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵does not behave ruddly, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, ⁸Love [*agapeo*] never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away ¹³And now abide faith, hope, love [*agapeo*], these three; but the greatest of these is love [*agapeo*].”

Love rises above — or should we say encompasses — faith and hope. It makes spiritual gifts like tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and faith, just spoken of by Paul in I Corinthians 12, moot and void unless buoyed by love’s innate character. Even sacrificing one’s life on the stake, or giving all of one’s possessions to the needy, is worthless unless underpinned with *agapeo*. Its character envelopes patience, humility, selflessness, purity of thought, hope, endurance, joy, graciousness, seeking for truth, and looking for the best in others.

In short, *agapeo* love is everything that every person on earth really wishes to enjoy! It is the nature of Jesus when He gave His life for all of us.

“For God [the Father] so loved [*agapao*] the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved [*agapao*] His own who

were in the world, He loved [*agapao*] them to the end” (John 13:1).

This same word *agapao* is used to describe the relationship we are to have with Jesus, the Father, and with one another (John 13:34; 17:21-23), a relationship that Christ termed a “new [*kainos*] commandment,” which actually was “new to the possessor,” as the word is used in Mark 16:17: “In Your name they will speak with new [*kainos*] tongues” Moreover, love [*agapao*] epitomizes the keeping of the commandments, the Laws of God, not just in their letter but in their intent when implanted within the hearts of the elect (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-11).



“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him’ (John 14:21-23).

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:9-12).

Doing the will of the Father by keeping His commands, His words, was a prime motive of Jesus during His sojourn on the earth (John 5:19-20), and the saints today likewise keep those laws and com-

mands. They “... live by every word of God” (Luke 4:4), and hold dear the words stated in I John 5:1-3,

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

The Conclusion

God is love [agapao] (I John 4:7). That statement sums up in three words what love means, but its ramifications are all-encompassing. It is ...

1. The character of our Father, and His first-born Son Jesus Christ.

2. The essence of the Laws of God, which is the internal code of conduct of the ecclesia, the fruits of the spirit within us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

3. The means by which all things that are exist.

4. The nature of our marriages as they ought to be lived.

5. The reason for our hope in the unveiling of a much better world, the Kingdom of God to be established on this earth.

6. The “new commandment” that enables us to overcome the world and Satan in it, even as Jesus Christ overcame the world.

7. The means by which we can “endure to the end” of this present evil age and be ready to face Jesus Christ and our heavenly Father when we are raised incorruptible!

In particular, are we willing to lay down our lives for others in the ecclesia! If we are following in the footsteps of Christ we will be willing to do just that, and if not literally then surely by giving of own time and energy to those in need. Note these scriptures.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

“But God proves His love for us in this:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

“By this we know what love is: Jesus laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (I John 3:16).

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet savor” (Ephesians 5:2).

Here are three examples of people who willingly gave up their own lives for the lives of others. They are examples from the world, but they can be shining lights for us to illustrate the nature of selfless love for others.

Arland Williams. In 1982, when Air Florida Flight 90 lost altitude after takeoff in a snowstorm, hit a bridge, and smashed into the Potomac River in Washington, D.C., all but six passengers were killed. Some 20 minutes later, a helicopter arrived to rescue the survivors. To the copter's two-man Park Police crew, Arland seemed the most alert, so they dropped life vests and a flotation ball to him. Arland passed them to the others. On two more occasions he handed away to others a life line from the hovering machine that could have dragged him to safety. The helicopter



crew — which rescued five people, the only persons who survived from the jetliner — lifted a woman to the riverbank, then dragged three more persons across the ice to safety. Then the lifeline saved a woman who was trying to swim away from the sinking wreckage. Then helicopter pilot returned to the scene, but Williams was gone. He had used his last ounce of strength to save complete strangers.

Rick Rescorla. A security guard who had served in military and law enforcement on four continents, Rescorla was well aware that in 1993 some terrorists had tried to bring down the World Trade Center towers with a truck bomb in the towers' garage. They were unsuccessful, but that event had left an impression on him. So, when Rescorla was promoted to director of security for Morgan Stanley, which occupied most of the South Tower in the mid-'90s, he decided to prepare for what he felt was another likely attack. A former Army colonel and Vietnam veteran, he used his military background in 1997 to construct his own evacuation plan, which he insisted on rehearsing twice a year. When the first plane hit the North Tower at 8:46 a.m., Rescorla jumped into action. Despite inexplicable orders to not use his evacuation plan, Rescorla quickly evacuated people from the tower. By the time the second plane hit the South Tower at 9:03 a.m., only 17 minutes after the first attack, Rescorla had gotten 2,700 people out of the building calmly and safely. Only 13 people died under Rescorla's watch. Sadly, one of those 13 was Rescorla himself. He had gone back in to look for stragglers.

Yuri Gagarin. You may recall that this man was one of the first astronauts in the Russian space program. Early on in the space program, Gagarin had tried to save the life of his friend Vladimir Komarov by urging his superiors to cancel the launch of the Soyuz 1 spacecraft, which was a poorly designed and doomed piece of junk. It was going to be launched due to pressure from the Politburo, and Gagarin knew it. He tried unsuccessfully to have the launch canceled, and when he could not he tried to take Komarov's place in the spacecraft. But the Politburo refused to allow a national hero on a flight they knew would be very risky, and Komarov went up as planned. Almost every system on the craft began to

fail almost immediately, and the mission was aborted. Unfortunately, the ship caught fire during re-entry, and both the main and reserve parachutes failed to deploy properly, so Komarov hit the Earth at full speed and was killed on impact on March 27, 1968. Years later, Gagarin was piloting a MiG-15 near Moscow, when it developed engine problems and was headed directly for a village. Rather than ejecting safely, he chose to remain in the plane and steer it away from the village and crashed it into a field, killing him instantly. He sacrificed himself for the lives of many others. It was his choice; to him there was no option.

Here is a story from *A New Earth* by Eckhart Tolle (Namaste Publishing, Vancouver, B.C., 2008) that shows us just how valuable this nature of love is that we all possess, and which lies within all of us, because the Eternal has placed it there.

“A beggar had been sitting by the side of a road for over thirty years. One day a stranger walked by. ‘Spare some change?’ mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap. ‘I have nothing to give you,’ said the stranger. Then the stranger asked, ‘What’s that you are sitting on?’ ‘Oh, nothing,’ replied the beggar. ‘Just an old box. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember.’ ‘Ever looked inside?’ asked the stranger. ‘No,’ said the beggar. ‘What’s the point? There’s nothing in there.’ ‘Have a look inside,’ insisted the stranger. The beggar stood up and managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.”

That box filled with gold is you. You are the Eternal's habitation (I Corinthians 6:19; II Corinthians 5:1). We are to be known as God's elect because of the love we express to one another (John 13:35). Do we really understand that kind of love, concern for our brethren that will cause us, as did Christ, to lay down our lives for our brethren? Is our love for our brothers and sisters that deep? If it is not, let us open our hearts and minds to the full impact of God's spirit living within us. We have it. Let's use it!