

Agape Love and the Sabbath

Can We Grasp the Expansiveness of God's Love in the Command to Observe a Day?

As the years have passed and I have grown older — and hopefully a little wiser — a deeper understanding of love has become an obsession I simply cannot escape. This obsession has become so strong that I was motivated to write a book about love in its various nuances, entitled *Do You Know What I Have Done to You?* It is a takeoff on Christ washing the feet of the disciples the night before His Crucifixion, expanding upon this awesome act of selflessness to reveal ten major aspects of His love for us: (1) the Ten Commandments, (2) the fruits of the spirit, (3) laying down your life, (4) God multiplying Himself, (5) living His government, (6) the least being the greatest, (7) marriage, (8) the creation, (9) health and fulfillment, and (10) fellowship of the saints. Jesus even washed the feet of Judas, His betrayer, which in itself tells us a lot about the depth of love.

The endless messages of Scripture reverberate through my mind about our Creator being the literal personification of love, such as expressed in I John 4:7-8:

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (NKJV, here and throughout).

The Greek work for love here is the well-known *agape*, meaning “affection or benevolence,” which is derived from *agapao*, which means “to love in a social or moral sense” (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, J. Strong, edited by J. Kohlenberger, III, Thomas Nelson, 2001). The core of this love is obedience to the commandments of the Creator, as so eloquently stated in Matthew 22:37-40:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

This follows the straightforward statement of I John 5:3, that “... this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” Breaking any of the first four commandments — which show love to God — or any of the last six commandments — which reveal love to our fellow man — is not only sin, but shows a lack of love. It is a truth that follows directly from the “new commandment” that Jesus told the 12 the night He was betrayed:

“A new [*kainos*] commandment I give to you, that you love [*agapao*] one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

This “newness” of the commandment does not mean that He was adding an Eleventh Commandment to the Decalogue, but that the understanding of love He was alluding to was new ... a love unaccustomed or unused by them, “new as to form or quality, of a different nature than before” (Strong, 2001).

A New Slant on *Agape*

These matters most of us understand, but do you know that *agape* can also be used to identify darkness? Read John 3:19 and I John 2:15.

“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men *loved* [*agape*] darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

“*Love* [*agapao*] not the world, neither the things, that are in the world. If any man *loves* [*agapao*] the world, the *love* [*agape*] of the Father is not in him.”

Here we have, in I John 2:15, agape and agapao used to show love of this evil world and love of the Father in the same sentence! What is the meaning of this word?

There can be no doubt that ***agape and agapao must mean “to prefer above others,” not just have a higher form of Godly love.*** Using this definition we can understand how the word can be used to describe our relationship to both righteousness and evil, or light and darkness. We can love this world’s system in its present carnality and pride, or we can love the realm of the Creator who has promised to set things right when Jesus Christ returns. Satan is the present ruler of this world (II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; Matthew 4:8-9), and we can love his system that expresses itself in terms of adultery, uncleanness, sorcery, jealousy, envy, murder, and a host of other fleshly lusts (Galatians 5:19-21; II Timothy 3:2-5) ... or, we can love the Creator God who made each one of us, and His Son, that shows itself through joy, peace, patience, kindness, humility, and other fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

For us as the elect, we use *agape* to refer only to the benevolent preference for our Creator, and also for our fellow man, who is made in God’s very image. I Corinthians 13 makes extensive use of *agape* in relation to how we must relate to both the Eternal and our fellow man.

Enter the Sabbath

So, to *love* [*agapao*] God is to keep His commandments, and those commandments are not *burdensome* [*barus*, “weighty or grievous”]. They are the opposite of being a burden, being instead the crux of liberty. David in Psalm 119:45 stated that he walked in *liberty* [*rachab*, “roomy, or open in every direction”] because he kept the precepts of God, while Paul declared his *liberty* [*exousia*, “privilege, capacity, freedom”] due to the spirit of God residing within him: “... where the spirit of the Lord is, there is *liberty*” (II Corinthians 3:17). In fact, James declared that the law defines *liberty* [*eleutheria*] in James 2:12.

Thus, the law is the road to freedom and liberty through love, which is the essence of the Creator and the meaning and intent of the commandments. Let us now take a closer look at this love of the Sabbath day, and how we may incorporate *agape* love — that is, “preferring it above others” — into the day and to the Creator of it. Of course, it is not the day that we love, but the One who made it and commanded us to keep it FOR OUR OWN GOOD (THE LAST SIX COMMANDMENTS) AND THE GOOD OF THE ONE WHO MADE US (THE FIRST FOUR COMMANDMENTS).

Do we prefer our heavenly Father above all others so that we will carry out His divine will in our lives? The scribe in Mark 12:28 — the same individual that approached Jesus in Matthew 22:35-36 — asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” I have already quoted Jesus’ response in Matthew 22:37-40, and Mark restates His response by saying that we must *love* [*agapao*] our heavenly Father with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourself. No other commandments exceed these. This love, of course, includes the keeping of the Fourth Commandment. Now notice what the scribe says in Mark 12:32-33:

“Well said, Teacher, You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Jesus acknowledged that this scribe was “not far from the Kingdom of God.” He nailed the right answer, which relates to the awesome love of God that the Fourth Commandment hearkens back to after the creation week ... for the Eternal connects the seventh day rest directly to the creation week:

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11).

Recall that Elohim saw that everything He had made was not just good, but *very good* (Genesis 1:31). In Hebrew [*meod tobe*], this means “properly or vehemently, wholly good in the widest sense” (Strong, 2001). Then He rested on the seventh day from this work He had done, and He blessed it and sanctified it (Genesis 2:2-3). The entire creation was accomplished because of His love for these living animals, birds, fish, other creatures, and especially for man made in His express image. One might say He would not have had to create all of these beings ... but love demanded that He had to, especially to multiply Himself through the creation of Adam and Eve and their multiplication of human-kind to ultimately be changed to the very God-kind at the end of the age.

All of this creation was consummated because of agape love. It is His nature. His eternal commandments guided the creation into the pathways of abundant living — again based on love — in order that the earth and its inhabitants might seek out and find the joy, peace, kindness, patience, goodness, and faithfulness that constitutes the very existence the Creator had in mind for a renewed earth. This includes the giving of the Sabbath day, in which we might say He encapsulated the six days of creation so that the joy of this creation might be full.

“For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:18).

Loving the Sabbath Day

Our eternal heavenly Father granted us the Sabbath day out of His love for us. He knew we would need a day of rest following six days of labor, just as He rested after six days of “working” to refurbish and repopulate the earth. Let us briefly look at the Sabbath commands and see just how they express love. Look at Isaiah 58:13-14.

- * Do not do your own pleasure on it. *pleasure = chephets*, “what your own mind desires.”
- * Call the Sabbath a delight. *delight = oneg*, “luxury”; from *anag*, “to be soft, luxurious.”
- * Observe it as a holy day that is honorable to God. *holy = qodesh*, “sacred, to make clean, consecrated.”
- * Desist from doing your own ways and pleasures. *pleasure = chephets*, “pleasure, desire”; from *chaphets*, “to incline to, be pleased with.”

God calls the Sabbath “My holy day.” As stated above, *holy [qodesh]* means “sacred or consecrated.” It must not be taken lightly. We must do what He tells us to do on the day, and we should above all *want to*, for He promises great blessings to those who keep the day. THIS SHOWS THE GREAT LOVE THE ETERNAL EXPRESSES TO US WHEN WE FOLLOW HIS COMMANDS; HE WANTS TO BLESS US!

“Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 58:14).

When we delight ourselves in the Eternal by keeping the Sabbath day — and by implication all of the commandments — He in His endless love for us promises to shower us with blessings unimaginable, both individually and nationally. We will be looked upon by other nations with great admiration, and individually we will be blessed, not just materially but spiritually. What has been promised to Jacob will fall upon us. It is a promise that is so clearly elucidated in Leviticus 26:1-13. These blessings related in Leviticus 26 are contingent on keeping “My Sabbaths” and reverencing “My *sanctuary*” [*miqdash*, a consecrated place”] (verse 2), ... which is referring to the dwelling place of God in the Tabernacle or Temple. Today, since there is no temple, that dwelling place is within our very beings (Romans 8:9-11; I John 4:13; I Corinthians 6:19).

Our Creator’s agape love is shown so profoundly by His giving us the Sabbath day. We “prefer Him above others” who might wish to argue that Sunday observance is acceptable, or Christmas and Easter are as good as the Holy Days. We obey His commandments — including the Sabbath — because we love Him who first loved us. Let us observe the seventh day each week with joy and delight as we strive to serve Him with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength — and love our neighbor as ourselves — for by doing so we are fulfilling the meaning of the Law and the Prophets. That is our calling. There is no other way!