



Love

Seeking the greater good

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Love

By

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Love has more than one meaning

There is the story of the father and son who were returning from Sunday bible class in which they studied the topic of the Ten Commandments. The boy asked his father, “Daddy, what does it mean when it says, ‘Thou shalt not commit agriculture?’” The father did not hesitate to answer, “Son, that just means you are not supposed to plow the other man’s field.”

The answer satisfied both father and son.¹

Words of a language have many meanings, and sometimes a speaker conveys the meaning by implication. Regrettably, indirect references to meaning can lead to misunderstanding, but people use indirect references anyway.

Writers, and for that matter speakers, have a tendency to avoid harsh or suggestive words and instead to employ other words that convey a meaning similar enough to that intended, but with milder or more pleasant meanings. These milder and pleasanter words are called euphemisms. Euphemisms are common in the Bible. Jesus used such a euphemism when he said the daughter of Jairus was “asleep.” He spoke similarly of Lazarus. Edersheim says that the rabbis—the Jewish teachers of that time—frequently used the term “to sleep” instead of “to die.” The word “*demakh*” meant “to sleep” in the sense of an overpowering and oppressive sleep.^{2 3 4}

¹ Michael P. Green, (1990 *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, p. 17.

² Edersheim, A. (1896). *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Vol. 1, p. 630). New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. The Rabbis also frequently have the expression ‘to sleep’

John, in his gospel, told of what Jesus said when he spoke of Lazarus,

John 11:11 ... after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.” 12 The disciples then said to Him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. 14 So Jesus then said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,

Modern speakers and writers are no different in the use of euphemisms. Fiction writers and screen writers often use the word “love” instead of “sex.” In this way they obscure the meaning of the word love and cause it to be confused with something else.

The writers of the New Testament in most cases used the word *agape* (ah-gah'pay), for 'love.' Of the three words for love in the Hellenistic world, *agape* was the least common. The other two words were *eros*, which meant sexual love, and *philos*, which meant friendship. Even the meanings of these

(*demakh* דמך, or דמך, when the sleep is overpowering and oppressive), instead of 'to die.

³ Matthew 9:24.

⁴ Kaiser Jr., W. C. (2007). *How Has Archaeology Corroborated the Bible?* In T. Cabal, C. O. Brand, E. R. Clendenen, P. Copan, & J. P. Moreland (Eds.), *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1171). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers. Permanent sleep is merely a metaphor or euphemism for physical death (Ps 76:5). This verse does not teach about what happens after death; that is taught in passages such as Is 66:24 and Heb 9:27.

three words could vary according to the context in which they appeared.⁵ Another word, *astorgos*, refers to a lack of love or affection for close associates, or family. It means, to be —‘without normal human affection, without love for others.’⁶ Paul used a variation on *astorgos* in his Roman letter which is *philo-storgos*.⁷ Thayer says that *philo-storgos* means the mutual love of parents and children; also of husbands and wives. It is loving affection, or to be prone to love, loving tenderly; used chiefly of the reciprocal tenderness of parents and children.⁸

The New Testament never uses the word ἐρως [*erōs*] a word that means lust.⁹

Love, sometimes called Christian love or charity, is something that can be commanded. Jesus said to His disciples,

John 15:12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”¹⁰

⁵ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper’s Bible dictionary* (1st ed., p. 14). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

⁶ Romans 1:31; 2 Timothy 3:2-3.

⁷ Liddell, H. G. (1996). *A lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English lexicon* (p. 865). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. **φῖλό-στοργος**, ον, (στέργω) *loving tenderly, affectionate*, of the love of parents and children, brothers and sisters. Romans 12:10.

⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, D. D., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1962. φῖλό-στοργος, p. 655.

⁹ Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (1 Th 1:3). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

This type of love is not primarily an emotion, although love in this sense involves a genuine affection. It is the idea found in the story of the rancher whose barn burned down. The rancher could only watch as flames consumed his barn and all the equipment inside. Later, as he sat in his house lamenting his loss, he heard a knock on the door. When he opened the door he met his neighbor's son who said, "My father is sorry he could not come himself at this time, but he sends his love. It's out in the wagon. Won't you come and help me unload it."

Paul wrote,

Romans 13:10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Love is active good will as seen in the neighbor of the rancher who lost his barn. Thayer defines it as, "...to be full of good-will and exhibit the same."¹¹ Vine says of Christian love, "Love can be known only from the actions it prompts. God's love is seen in the gift of His Son, 1 John 4:9, 10."¹²

Love in the Bible is also expressed in terms of affection. This type of love is not commanded.¹³

¹⁰ Quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. (1995). (Jn 15:12). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

¹¹ Ibid., Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D., ἀγαπάω.

¹² Vine, W. E., & Bruce, F. F. (1981). *Vine's Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (Vol. 2, p. 21). Old Tappan NJ: Revell.

¹³ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. Vol. 1, p. 293). New York: United Bible Societies. φιλέω or φιλία : to have love or

Sometimes children are the best to show this type of love. Harry Pickup, a preacher widely known for his talent, friendliness and affable personality, worked at Florida College in Temple Terrace and preached in Florida for many years. In a sermon at the MacDill Avenue church of Christ in Tampa he told of a time when he was preaching, and he was in the middle of his sermon. He was "just getting wound up," when he saw a child, a little girl, get down from a pew and start down the aisle. He watched her as she came toward him. Not knowing what she had in mind he walked toward her to meet her. All the while he kept preaching. As she drew close to him, he bent down to pick her up. Then to his surprise, as he bent over, she tiptoed as high as she could, and planted a kiss right on his cheek.

This could have been the one time that Harry Pickup had a loss for words. We will never know. But the incident shows us what love as *phileo* ought to be. It is like the spontaneous affection that is shown by a little child. It should be as Peter says,

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,

affection for someone based on association. Love as affection is not commanded. Though some persons have tried to assign certain significant differences of meaning between ἀγαπάω^a, ἀγάπη^a and φιλέω^a, φιλία (25.33), it does not seem possible to insist upon a contrast of meaning in any and all contexts. For example, the usage in Jn 21:15–17 seems to reflect simply a rhetorical alternation designed to avoid undue repetition. There is, however, one significant clue to possible meaningful differences in at least some contexts, namely, the fact that people are never commanded to love one another with φιλέω or φιλία, but only with ἀγαπάω and ἀγάπη.

It should be a “sincere love,” a sincere affection (*philadelphia*), and fervent love (*agape*) from the heart.

Love of God

An individual makes his Christian love (*agape*) evident by seeking the good for a neighbor or a friend. Love is also, and it truth, primarily, seeking the greater good for God. Matthew wrote in his gospel,

Matthew 22:35 One of them, a lawyer,
asked Him a question, testing Him, 36
“Teacher, which is the great
commandment in the Law?”

37 And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL
LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH
ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL
YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR
MIND.’ 38 “This is the great and
foremost commandment. 39 “The second
is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR
NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ 40 “On
these two commandments depend the
whole Law and the Prophets.”

- The Lord spoke of *agape* in this conversation.
- The love of God is the foremost commandment. The Ten Commandments were expressions of love.
- The love of God is to be total; i.e., the whole being of man is involved, including the heart which is the causative source of a person’s

psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts. This love involves the heart, or the inner self. You must love God with all your being—this includes all you desire and think; together with your faculties of understanding, reasoning and thinking.¹⁴

The New Bible Dictionary says of the love of God,

Love for God (is to be done) with the whole personality (Dt. 6:5) (and is) God's demand; though this is not to be understood as meaning merely a punctilious observance of an impersonal divine law but rather as summoning to a relationship of personal devotion created and sustained by the work of God in the human heart (Dt. 30:6).

It consists in the simple joyful experience of communion with God (Je. 2:2; Pss. 18:1; 116:1), worked out in daily obedience to his commandments (Dt. 10:12, it is 'to love him, to serve the Lord your God'; Jos. 22:5, it is 'to love the Lord your God and to walk in all his ways'). This obedience is more fundamental to the nature of love for God than any feeling. God alone will be the judge of its sincerity (Dt. 13:3).^{15 16}

¹⁴ Ibid., Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A., Vol. 1, p. 320). New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁵ Palmer, F. H. (1996). Love, Beloved. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 701). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The testing of Abraham is the classic example where the crucible of choice sets a man's love for God against another object that is dear to the man. In this case Abraham's choice is between his son, Isaac, and God.

God had fulfilled a promise to Abraham and had given him a son in his old age.¹⁷ And Abraham loved his son. But Abraham also loved God. And then a day came when God tested Abraham.

Genesis tells what God said,

Genesis 22:2 ...“Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”

Abraham was a devout believer in God, but he also loved his son, Isaac. The command placed Abraham upon the merciless horns of a dilemma. He must either obey God and slay his only son, or he must ignore the command of God and preserve Isaac, alive. Whom did he love more, Isaac or God? If he offered up Isaac he would destroy his only offspring and eliminate all his posterity. If he did not offer up Isaac then he would bring down the wrath of God upon himself. What could he do? Whom did he love more?

Genesis says that Abraham rose early in the morning, split wood for the offering, and went to the place of which God had told him.

¹⁶ I have inserted parenthetical phrases for readability. Author.

¹⁷ Genesis 15.

Genesis 22:5 Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.” 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” 8 Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

The dilemma brought Abraham’s love of God, and, therefore, his faith, into the crucible of choice. “Where is the lamb, my father?” Isaac had asked. Surely, the boy’s words broke Abraham’s heart, but Abraham answered in faith. God will provide the sacrifice.

Then they came to the place for the sacrifice, and Abraham built an altar. He put the wood on the altar and then placed Isaac on the wood. Abraham had made his choice. He would obey God. So he stretched out his hand, took a knife and prepared to slay his son.

Genesis 22:11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 12 He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you

fear God, since you have not withheld
your son, your only son, from Me.”

So, Abraham then found a ram caught in a
thicket and offered it up in the place of Isaac. In this
way Abraham demonstrated his love for God above
all else.

Jesus said,

John 14:15 “If you love Me, you will keep
My commandments.

John 15:10 “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.

Luke 16:13 “No servant can serve two
masters; for either he will hate the one
and love the other, or else he will be
devoted to one and despise the other. You
cannot serve God and wealth.”

King David fell into temptation when he valued
the illicit love of Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the
Hittite, over obedience to the commands of God.
His desire for Bathsheba led him to commit
adultery, then to attempt to cover his sin with
deception, and finally to conspire in the murder of
Uriah the Hittite. In doing this David did not abide
in the love of God. David suffered for his sin, but to
his credit, he repented.

Jesus healed a man at Bethesda of his infirmity
on the Sabbath and His Jewish opponents accused
Him of breaking the Sabbath. Among the things that
Jesus said to them was this,

John 5:39 “You search the Scriptures
because you think that in them you have

eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. 41 “I do not receive glory from men; 42 but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. 43 “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. 44 “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?

- These men did not have the love of God in themselves.
- These opponents of Jesus sought approval from others like themselves. They should have sought the approval of God above all else.
- A person who seeks God’s approval obeys the commands of God.

1 John 2:3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

- The person who knows God keeps His commandments.

- The one who does not keep God's commandments, but says he knows God, is a liar.
- Love of God is seen in the one who keeps God's commandments.¹⁸

In the Old Testament book of 1st Samuel the Bible says that the prophet of God, Samuel, told King Saul,

1 Samuel 15:2 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. 3 'Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.' "

Samuel had anointed Saul as king of Israel. It was a lofty office and laden with responsibility, but on this occasion Saul did not listen carefully to what Samuel told him. God commanded him, through Samuel, to repay the Amalekites in kind for what they had done to Israel when they came up out of Egypt.

¹⁸ Palmer, F. H. (1996). *Love, Beloved*. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 701). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. "So closely related is God's love for man and man's for God that it is often difficult to decide whether the phrase 'the love of God' denotes a subjective or objective genitive (*e.g.* Jn. 5:42).

So it happened that Saul gathered his army and struck the Amalekites, and his soldiers wrought great destruction among these enemies of Israel, but he did not destroy them as God had commanded. The bible says,

1 Samuel 15:9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

Despite the clarity of the command, Saul failed to carry it out. Moreover, he convinced himself that he had done what God wanted, and this to the extent that he set up a monument to himself at Carmel. When the prophet came to him he told Samuel that he had carried out the command of the Lord.

The “bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen” convinced Samuel otherwise. Saul then attempted to shift the blame to the people, but Samuel would have none of it. Samuel told him,

1 Samuel 15:22 ...,

“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices

As in obeying the voice of the LORD?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

And to heed than the fat of rams.

23 “For rebellion is as the sin of divination,

And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.

For his disobedience Saul fell out of God’s favor, and lost his office as king of Israel.

- We must conclude that Saul did not really know God.
- King Saul did not have the love of God in his heart; else, he would have kept God's commandment.

There is a story told in Benjamin Franklin's autobiography of a clergyman who was ordered to read the proclamation issued by Charles I, bidding the people to return to sports on Sundays. To his congregation's horror and amazement, he did read the royal edict in church, which many clergy had refused to do. But he followed it with the words, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," and added: "Brethren, I have laid before you the commandment of your king and the Commandment of your God. I leave it to you to judge which of the two ought rather to be observed."¹⁹

Obedience above all else

Love of God involves obedience to God above all else. Even the king—or the emperor—must subordinate himself to God. Ordinary men are tempted to place ambition or desire, or even obedience to men above God. Such should not be.

As the legend goes, The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste were Roman soldiers in the *Legio XII Fulminata* who had been converted to Christ.²⁰ They were soldiers known as the "Emperor's Wrestlers." They were stalwart men, picked from the best and the bravest of the land, recruited from

¹⁹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 1392). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forty_Martyrs_of_Sebaste.

the great athletes of the Roman amphitheater. In the amphitheater they upheld the arms of the emperor against all challengers. Before each contest they stood before the emperor's throne, and their voices rose through the courts of Rome crying out: "We, the wrestlers, wrestling for thee, O Emperor, to win for thee the victory and from thee, the victor's crown."²¹

A day came when their Legion was on a campaign in the high mountains of Armenia, in Asia Minor. It was winter and bitterly cold. It was then that the Roman Emperor Licinius issued a decree to the commanders of all his armies that on a given day the soldiers had to march past a statue of the Emperor, do obeisance, pour out a libation of wine, and drop incense on the fire. These were acts of worship to Caesar, treating Caesar as a god.

At the appointed time the trumpets blew and the Legion marched past the statue of the Emperor. All the soldiers bowed their heads, poured out the wine, and offered the incense to the Emperor as to a god—all, except the Forty. These Christians refused to pay divine honors to a man. They believed such devotion was reserved for God alone. Thus, they kept their confession of Christ.

Their commander, a centurion named Vespasian, who thought highly of them, begged them to obey the decree. It is said that they considered the offer, the sweetness of life, and their families at home, but in the end they answered the centurion, "For Rome we will fight on any field and under any sky. In the service of the Emperor, if necessary, we will die. But we worship no one save our Master, Jesus Christ."

²¹ Ibid., Tan, P. L. (1996). (p. 786).

With sorrow the commander pronounced judgment upon them. They were stripped of their armor, their helmets, breastplates, shields, spears and swords, Then the commander ordered that their garments be taken from them, and their sandals. Naked, they were driven out in the sub-zero cold upon a frozen lake.

Night fell, and the soldiers of the legion sat around the fires in their bivouacs. They could hear the voices of the Forty as they sang, "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for thee O Christ, claim for thee the victory, and from thee the crown."

As the night passed their voices became weaker and weaker as, one by one, they succumbed to the cold and died. At length, only one survivor was left. This one failed in his resolve, and he sought the warm baths near the lake which had been prepared for any soldier who might abandon his confession. Shivering and trembling, he presented himself before the tent of the commander and said to the guard, "I will drop the incense, and pour out the wine."

But the guard, who had been moved by the heroic faith of the men who had been condemned to death, said, "Since you have proved a coward, and have broken your fellowship with the Forty, I will take your place." With that he stripped off his armor and his clothing then went out into the night to take his place upon the frozen lake. As he stood among the thirty-nine who had fallen he sang, "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for thee O Christ, claim for thee the victory, and from thee the crown."

At last, he too fell dead. When the morning sun rose above the wintry Armenian mountains it looked down upon forty martyrs who had kept their confession and had died for Christ.

- Love and loyalty are closely allied.
- Love and loyalty gain respect; cowardice does not.
- Jesus said, “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 “But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”²²

The Apostle John wrote,

1John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Love and wealth

Durant says that “Nearly everybody in Rome worshiped money with mad pursuit, and all but the bankers denounced it.”²³ They were much like the people of modern America.

In the Roman Empire of about the 2nd Century AD a legal distinction arose which divided the body of citizens into two classes: the *honestiores* (i.e., men of honors, such as senators and equestrians) and all the rest, which were the *tenuiores* (the weak) and *humiliores*, (the lowly). To the *honestiores* belonged the Roman senators and knights with their families, soldiers and veterans with their children, and men who held or had held municipal offices in towns and cities outside of Rome, including their descendants. All the other citizens belonged to the

²² Matthew 10:32-33.

²³ Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1944. p. 332.

tenuiores, unless wealth or ability brought them into public office.²⁴

The two highest groups among the *honestiores* were known as "orders," and were composed of first senators then knights. The members of the lower of the two highest groups was the Equestrian Order. To enter this class one had to possess a minimum of 400,000 sesterces,²⁵ and have the specific nomination of the prince. At the summit of the social scale was the Senatorial Order. A member of this order had to possess 1,000,000 sesterces. Appointments to administrative office depended upon the social class and the amount of money a person had.²⁶

It was at about this time, when Antoninus Pius became emperor of Rome, that the Roman government inaugurated a severe persecution against the Christians. The emperor remained silent while they subjected the followers of Christ to scourging, consigned them to the flames, or sacrificed them to the wild beasts in the arena.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., Will Durant, p. 332,

²⁵ The **sestertius** (plural **sestertii**), or **sesterce** (plural **sesterces**), was an ancient Roman coin. During the Roman Republic it was a small, silver coin issued only on rare occasions. During the Roman Empire it was a large brass coin. The name *sestertius* means "two and one half", referring to its nominal value of two and a half *asses* (a bronze Roman coin, singular *as*), a value that was useful for commerce because it was one quarter of a denarius, a coin worth ten *asses*.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sestertius>.

²⁶ F. R. Cowell, *Life in Ancient Rome*, A Perigee Book, 1980. p.p. 193-194.

²⁷ Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, pp. 52-53.

Christ and His disciples taught people not to be lovers of money. But that was not popular then and it is not popular today.

As was the Roman regard of their Lord so was the regard of Christians in the Roman world. Paul wrote,

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

- The pursuit of love begins with the pursuit of God.
- The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil.

Jesus said,

Matthew 10:37 “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Paul wrote,

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the

Son of God, who loved me and gave
Himself up for me.

- Love of Christ must be greater than love of all else.
- Love is seen in self-sacrifice.

Love of one's brother

The Apostle John wrote further in Chapter 3,

1John 3:17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.²⁸

- The love of God abides in the one who helps his needy brother.

There is the story of the missionary who went to South Africa to proclaim Christ to the people who lived there. He came one day to the top of a hill from where he could look down on a farm. It was a farm where lepers tended the fields, and he could see two of them at work sowing peas. One of them had no hands; the other had no feet. Leprosy had deprived them of the limbs that are so necessary for work. Yet, in spite of these infirmities they labored. The one who had no hands was carrying on his back the one who had no feet. The one who had

²⁸ Ibid., Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Vol. 1, p. 293). New York: United Bible Societies. 25.44 ἀγαπάω^b: to demonstrate or show one's love—'to show one's love, to demonstrate one's love.' μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μηδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ ἀλλὰ ἐν ἔργῳ 'let us show our love, but not by just word and talk, but by means of action' 1 Jn 3:18.

no feet carried a bag of seed from which he dropped a pea in measured cadence which the other pressed into the ground with his foot. In this way they managed the work of one man even though they were two.²⁹

Such help and cooperation ought to be found among all men and especially Christians. Love abides in the one who helps his needy brother.

Jesus is the foremost example of self-sacrificing love because he laid down His life so that all who believe in Him would live.

In his *Legend of the Eagles* George d'Espartes says that the most heroic piece of self-sacrifice known to history occurred in the building of a bridge. In the depths of winter the French army, pressed on all sides by the Cossacks, had to cross a river. The enemy had destroyed all the bridges and Napoleon was almost at his wit's end. Suddenly came the order that a bridge of some sort must be thrown across the river, and the men nearest the water were the first to carry out the almost impossible task. Several were swept away by the furious current. Others, after a few minutes, sank through cold and exhaustion; but more came, and the work proceeded as fast as possible.

At last the workers completed the bridge and the army crossed to the opposite bank in safety. Then followed the most dramatic scene, and one of the most touching, recorded in the annals of history. When the men who had built the bridge were called to leave the water, not one moved. Clinging to the pillars, they stood silent and motionless, frozen to death.

²⁹ Elon Foster, 6000 Sermon Illustrations, p.428.

Even Napoleon wept.³⁰

- Love involves sacrifice.
- Love your brothers.

1 John 4:20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

- A person who hates his brother does not love God.

There is a famous poster showing two young boys. The older boy is pictured carrying the other on his back. When a man remarks about the weight the first was carrying, the young man replied, “He’s not heavy. He’s my brother.”

1 John 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

- The test of whether we love God’s children is when we love God and keep His commandments.
- The love of God consists in keeping His commandments.

Lucian was an ancient satirist and rhetorician who lived in about the years 120 AD to 200 AD.

³⁰ Ibid., Tan, P. L. (1996). (p. 1181). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Upon observing the warm fellowship of Christians he remarked, “It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator (Jesus) has put it into their heads that they are brethren.”³¹

Jesus said to His disciples,

John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- Mutual love among Christians is what characterizes them and distinguishes them from the world.
- Christians act in the best interest of their brethren; that is, they seek the greater good of their brothers.

Paul wrote,

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- God extends His benevolent providence to those who love Him.
- In this He expresses His love for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

³¹ Michael P. Green, (1990 *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, p. 225.

What “love” means

Repeating Vine’s comment, “Love can be known only from the actions it prompts. God’s love is seen in the gift of His Son, 1 John 4:9, 10. But obviously this is not the love of complacency, or affection, that is, it was not drawn out by any excellency in its objects, Rom. 5:8. It was an exercise of the Divine will in deliberate choice made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself; cp. Deut. 7:7, 8.”³²

The meaning of love as *agapao* may be seen in the contrast of behaviors as shown by God’s command in Leviticus,

Leviticus 19:18 ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

- Love does not take vengeance.
- Love does not bear a grudge.

The Apostle Paul gave this meaning to love:

1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all

³² Ibid., Vine, W. E., & Bruce, F. F. (1981 (Vol. 2, p. 21).

things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- Love is patient – despite difficulties.
 - Love is kind – it provides something beneficial as an act of kindness.
 - Love rejoices with the truth – is happy together with the truth.
 - Love bears all things – it endures the annoyances.
 - Love believes all things – has complete trust, or confidence, in all things.
 - Love hopes all things – it looks forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial.
 - Love endures all things – it bears up despite difficulty and suffering.
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- Love is not jealous – does not experience envy and resentment against someone.
 - Love does not brag – it does not praise itself.
 - Love is not arrogant – is not haughty or puffed up.
 - Love does not act unbecomingly – does not act shamefully, indecently or disgracefully.
 - Love does not seek its own - does not demand something for itself. Love is unconditional.
 - Love is not provoked – does not become seriously emotionally stirred at someone or something.

- Love does not take into account a wrong suffered – it does not keep a mental record for future action to be taken because of an injury.
- Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness – it is not happy with an unjust deed.

LOVE—is patient in doing good.

Years ago the asylums for the mentally ill were crude, primitive, more jails than hospitals. One had a dungeon where they put the most unmanageable, the most violent, the most hopeless. Into this dungeon they put a little girl. The only thing they knew about her was her name--Annie.

Sometimes, she would be violent and abusive. At those times Annie would throw herself at the bars of her cage when anyone approached. Then there were times when she would sit in stony silence.

There was an elderly woman who worked at this asylum, and she was approaching retirement, having spent many years in caring for the mentally ill. She took her lunch one day and went down to the dungeon. Near that cool and damp cage she found a seat and ate. She offered some food to Annie, but Annie refused--protesting loudly.

The elderly woman had no success that day, nor the next, nor for many days after, but in spite of the discouraging results she persisted. She came every day to eat her lunch beside the little animal-like girl, to receive her abuse, and to offer her some food. One day she brought some brownies, and offered some of these to Annie. Annie refused. So the woman left some of the brownies where Annie

could reach them--and the woman left. When she returned, the brownies were gone.

That was the beginning of a slow and agonizing treatment for the mad little girl. Slowly, Annie regained her faculties--through kind and loving care, until one day she stood before the doctor's of the asylum fully recovered. They said to her, "You may leave now, and go anywhere you wish."

She said, "I don't want to leave. I prefer to stay where I have received the kindest treatment. I want to repay in kind what I have received so generously myself."

Her name was Anne Sullivan. You might remember her as the woman who patiently labored with Helen Keller so that the blind and deaf Helen might learn to communicate with the world, and gain world fame for her help of the handicapped. Helen Keller became a respected author, and lecturer. She graduated from Radcliffe College, but all of it became possible because of the labors of Anne Sullivan.

Helen Keller was blind and deaf because of a childhood disease, and because of her misfortune became violent and abusive to anyone who was sent to care for her. Annie Sullivan had been over that road before. She had suffered from eye trouble, and had learned the manual alphabet at the Perkins Institute. She was uniquely equipped to be a companion to Helen Keller.

Anne Sullivan married to become Anne Sullivan Macy. Anne Sullivan received from Queen Victoria an award for the one who greatly exemplified service to mankind.³³

³³ Source: Zig Ziegler, WNN Radio, June 4, 1988. Et. al.

- “...and the greatest of these is love.”
- And let us not forget the love of the elderly woman who remains unnamed. It was she who began a story of love.

Love – when obedience is difficult

Jesus and his disciples observed the Passover meal in an upper room in a home in southwest Jerusalem. Afterward, they traveled to the Mount of Olives, northeast of the city. Nearby, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, apparently knowing that the time of his death was near, suffered great mental anguish, and, as described by the physician, Luke, his sweat became like blood.

Matthew wrote,

26:37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. 38 Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” 39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”

The hour of His death was upon Him. And the difficulty He faced we can see not only in the sweat that became like blood, but in His anguished appeal to His Father. He had humbled Himself and now He faced death for every man. As Paul wrote,

Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with

God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

He did this because He loves you.