

How to Define the Love of God

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In the New Testament, the Greek word *agape* is often used to describe God's love.

For God so loved (SGD 25; *agapao*) the world that He gave His only begotten (SGD 3439; *born*) Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love (SGD 26; *agape*), I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal (1Cor. 13:1; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

He who does not love (SGD 25; *agapao*) does not know God, for God is love (SGD 26; *agape*) (1Jn. 4:8; cf. 1Jn. 4:16; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Jesus said to him, 'You shall love (SGD 25; *agapao*) the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' (Mt. 22:37; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added)

It is important to note that other Greek words are also translated into the English word "love", but they carry a different meaning. For instance, the word "phileo" is used to describe brotherly love, or love

for family and friends. Another Greek word "eros" is used to define sexual attraction or affection. In our modern world today, people exercise little distinction when they use the word "love." For instance, they will say they love their car, their house, their job, their new hairstyle, etc. This trend makes it very challenging for anyone to grasp how God loves because He states clearly that he does not love material things, including the methods associated with acquiring them.

Do not love (SGD 25; *agapao*) the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves (SGD 25; *agapao*) the world, the love (SGD 26; *agape*) of the Father is not in him (1Jn. 2:15; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Therefore, in order to come to a better understanding of God's love, the reader must look beyond material things and the methods used to acquire them. God's love is focused on improving the spiritual condition of everyone He has created. This is why His written word is the only source for an accurate definition of His love.

He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But **whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.** By this we know that we are in Him (1Jn. 2:4-5; emphasis added).

Put another way, Jesus Christ emphasized that a person's spiritual relationship with their Creator can only be maintained if they live by every word He says; just as one's physical existence can only continue through the consumption of food,

But he answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Mt. 4:4)

Left to themselves, this is an insurmountable problem for mankind because everyone enters this world with a mind that is focused on itself, and therefore hostile toward God's word, or His perceived interference in their lives,

Because the carnal (fleshly) mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be (Rom. 8:7; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Even spirit-beings can become carnal minded if they begin to focus on themselves and their perceived problems/grievances. An example of this occurred when Satan attempted to influence Peter, and was rebuked by Christ,

But he turned and said to Peter, "**Get behind me, Satan!** You are an offense (stumbling block) to me, for **you are not mindful of the things of God**, but the things of men." (Mt. 16:23; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added)

Sadly, the majority of mankind is under the influence, and therefore value system, of Satan which prevents God's word from taking root in their lives,

...(sins) in which you once walked according to the course (Gr. aion; aeon – ancient being; cf. Rev. 12:9) of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience** (Eph. 2:2; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart... (Mt. 13:19a).

So, without God intervening in someone's life, they will remain in a state of rebellion against God's word to one degree or another.

...this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord. ¹⁰Who say to the seers, 'Do not see (God's truth),' And to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; (instead) Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. ¹¹Get out of the way, turn aside from the path (cf. Mt. 7:13-14), cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." (Isa. 30: 9-11; Ed. notes in parentheses)

In this condition, the love of God cannot be understood correctly, experienced, or practiced. This is because God's love is summarized by His law and commandments, which the carnal mind rejects.

For **this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments**. And His commandments are not burdensome (1Jn. 5:3; cf. Jn. 14:15; emphasis added).

Only Almighty God has the wisdom to foreknow every consequence for contravening His law and commandments. Those who are spiritually mature recognize that God's love for mankind is expressed by these "laws", and they trust that He created them for their benefit and ultimate happiness. For those who reject these, there will be serious consequences sooner or later. Therefore, disobedience toward God and His word will never result in a truly happy life.

Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God (Psa. 146:5).

Where there is no revealing of truth, the people cast off restraint; but **happy is he who keeps the law** (Prov. 29:18; emphasis added).

Some may claim this is unfair because their carnal mind prevents them from embracing God's law and

commandments, which is the only way they can truly experience His love and concern for them (Eze. 18:24-25, 28-29). To address this dilemma, while still satisfying the penalty for breaking His law and commandments (cf. Eze. 18:4b, 20a; Rom. 6:23a), Almighty God provided the means through which every repentant sinner can be forgiven (cf. Ac. 2:38).

For God (the Father) so loved the world that He gave His only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16; Ed. note in parenthesis).

God's law is clear that a sinner forfeits their life when they commit a capital offense. However, because He is merciful, Almighty God provided a substitute during the First Covenant period through the shed blood of a "clean" animal.

Then he (the priest) shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, and the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar. It is a sin offering (Lev. 5:9; cf. Heb. 9:22).

The priest shall make atonement for him, for his sin that he has sinned in any of these matters; and **it shall be forgiven him...** (Lev. 5:13a; emphasis added).

As the animal sacrificial system was only intended as a temporary measure for dealing with sin (Gal. 3:19; cf. 1Jn. 3:4; 2Tim. 2:19b), a much greater sacrifice

had to be offered that would not only remove sins but also positively affect the "conscience" of the repentant sinner (Heb. 9:9, 14). The Greek word (#4893) translated onto the English word "conscience" has the following meaning,

The ability to distinguish what is good and bad, and then acting to do the former and shun the latter.

It is because Jesus Christ became the ultimate sacrifice for sin that every repentant sinner can be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit that will work in the mind and conscience of each convert to assist them in their new life of making decisions between good and evil as defined by God's word (Rom. 6:4b; Ac. 5:32b; 1Pet. 1:2),

I (Paul) tell the truth in Christ, **I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit** (Rom. 9:1; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Therefore, as a result of Christ's sacrifice, repentant sinners can receive God's Holy Spirit and continue to improve their ability to make right choices when it comes to issues of good and evil (2Pet. 3:18),

But reject profane and old wives' fables, and **exercise yourself to godliness** (1Tim. 4:7; emphasis added).

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, **beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men** and lose your own stability.¹⁸ **But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** (2Pet. 3:17-18; RSV; emphasis added).

The law and commandments of God define how to love God and our fellowman. In other words, if we steal from someone, we are not exercising love toward them.

And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God must love his brother also (1Jn. 4:21; cf. Mt. 5:43-46).

The same principle applies in our relationship with Almighty God. For instance, if someone claims they love Him, but believes they can disobey what He says, they do not love Him.

But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him... (1Jn. 2:5a).

And if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to walk always in His ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself... (Dt. 19:9a; cf. Lk. 19:12-19).

Those who have God's love will be willing to fulfill His word no matter how difficult

that might be, including loving one's enemies,

But I (Christ) say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Mt. 5:44; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Jesus Christ fulfilled Matthew 5:44 by laying down his life on behalf of every sinner who, one way or another, is an enemy of his Father, the Almighty God (Jn. 17:3),

By this we know love, because he (Christ) laid down his life for us... (1Jn. 3:16a; Ed. note in parenthesis).

During his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ referred to Judas Iscariot as one of his friends, even though he knew that Judas would betray him (Mt. 26:50). Therefore, Judas is included with those who are responsible for Christ's death. Despite this Christ loved Judas, and mankind, so much that he was willing to die to fulfill his Father's law, regarding the penalty for sin, and provide the way for every sinner to be forgiven (Eze. 18:4b, 20a; Rom. 6:23a; cf. Heb. 9:22; Mt. 5:17),

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (Jn. 15:13; 18:10).

As Jesus Christ was begotten by his heavenly Father, it would have been equally painful for The Father to witness the extreme suffering and death of His son, who had **not** committed any sin worthy of capital punishment (Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 2Cor. 5:21). What parent would choose to allow their son or daughter to die in order that someone guilty of committing a serious sin could live? This would require a love totally foreign to that of any human being.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. ⁹"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:8-9)

One example of a loving parent allowing their child to die in order to fulfill a much greater purpose was portrayed in the life of Abraham and Isaac,

And He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Gen. 22:2)

The greater purpose in this case was to test Abraham's faith and obedience to God's word, but Abraham was prevented from executing Isaac at the last minute (Gen. 22:11-12). However, in the case of Jesus Christ, his heavenly Father allowed him to suffer and die in order to provide

the only way for sinners to be forgiven of their sins and spared from everlasting death,

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me. ⁴⁰But you are not willing to come to me (so) that you may have life (everlasting) (Jn. 5:39-40; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Jesus said to him (Thomas), "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Christ's shed blood) (Jn. 14:6; Ed. notes in parentheses).

So, the love of God can only be experienced by those who understand the serious consequences of sin, and that Christ had to die in order to "cover" these sins. Included in this understanding is that God's love is expressed through His law and commandments, which were given to mankind for their ultimate benefit and happiness. If the law and commandments were not critical and central to God's plan, Jesus Christ would not have died to uphold them (Mt. 5:17-19). Therefore, if we love God, we will want to obey His every word "trusting" that this is the only way to achieve harmony in the family of God. This "trust" in God's word is synonymous with "faith". Consequently, those who claim to have faith in God, but continue to reject his law and commandments, are not true servants of Almighty God. Instead, they

are deceitful impostors (2Cor. 13-15; cf. Gal. 1:6-10) who do not understand the love of God.

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