

THE GREATEST IS...LOVE

All Christians are familiar with the closing words used by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 following his inspired analysis of Love: *“And now abides faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”* In Chapter 12 Paul had discussed the relationship of spiritual gifts to Love by closing the chapter with these words: *“... eagerly desire the greater gifts and I will show you a more excellent way.”* This more excellent way is the walk of love.

How important is this walk of love? We find the answer in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3: *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”*

Jesus, when asked what was the greatest commandment, answered, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:37-39).

The love that is spoken of in all these texts is not what the world knows as love. It is a God-based spiritual love that comes from above. There are two prominent words used for *love* in the original Greek. One is *philio* and the other is *agape*. *Philio* is a love that is less than *agape*. *Philio* represents the affection and concern that motivates action towards others with expectation of recognition. *Agape* would be all that but much more. It is a love that is *totally selfless and self-sacrificing*. There is no better example of this love than what we see in the Lord Jesus Christ who gave His life as a sacrifice to redeem all men from the penalty of sin and death. Those who possess *agape* likewise are willing to be *broken bread and poured out wine* for others.

Agape always flows outward. It is unconditional and expects nothing in return because the welfare of others is its primary concern. It is totally *foreign* to human nature and therefore not understood or exercised by the natural man. It is only when God’s Holy Spirit indwells a born-again Christian’s heart that such a love exists within a person. Those filled with *agape* love from above are motivated to do as Jesus would do and are always willing to pay the cost of doing the Father’s will as did Jesus.

God’s motive for sending the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Savior of mankind was *agape* love. The words of John 3:16, 17 make this very point: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”* God’s love flowed out, offering us Salvation, at great cost to Himself and His Beloved Son.

Such Christian love expresses itself in concern for the welfare of even an enemy. When Stephen was being battered with rocks thrown at him by the furious mob, his concern was not for himself but for those who were in the process of this evil act. Consider his example of *agape* love as recorded in Acts 7:59, 60: *“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.”* No hatred, no malice, just concern for their spiritual welfare! Only a fully mature Christian, filled with the Holy Spirit and *agape* love, can utter such a prayer.

This God-like Love is really our allowing the Lord to work in our lives. We find love beautifully described in 1 Cor. 13: 4-8: *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, it always perseveres. **Love never fails.**”*

When the natural man reads this list, he thinks this is impossible to attain unto, for when he tries to live out these things, he finds himself woefully lacking and eventually gives up. But this is not a love we can exercise on our own! We need to remember what Paul says in Phil. 1:6: *“Being confident of this, that **He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**”* If you haven't allowed God to begin His work in you, make the choice to do so today, and He will totally change you into the image of His Son.

If you would like to know more on this subject, send for the free booklet *“A Treatise On Love.”* Mail your request to:

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLING MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL
32 Chapel Lane, Somersworth, NH 03878