***"Agape" Love
Romans 13:8-10
RO168-01***

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Please open your Bibles to Romans 13:8-10. Our subject is "The Debt of Love," and this is segment number two.

**Owe no Man Anything**

In Romans 13:8, we have seen that God the Holy Spirit commands believers to let no personal debt remain outstanding. The passage literally says, in the Greek language, "Do not keep on owing anyone anything." It is a very precise and firm statement. However, the concept of unpaid obligations should be understood in a broader scope than just financial debts. People owe certain things to each other in various relationships in life that have nothing to do with money. These relationships, just for example, are obvious with obligations between husbands and wives; parents and children; pastors and congregations; believers and brethren; employer and employee; citizens and the state; neighbor and neighbors; merchants and customers; politicians and voters; teacher and pupils; and, the elder and the younger, as examples of just a few human relationships, all of which have inherent great obligations between the individuals involved.

**"Agape" Love**

One debt, that God the Holy Spirit points out to us here, that all of us owe, and which properly does remain unpaid (you never pay it in full) is the debt of "agape" love to all people. "Agape" love, we have shown you, is, from the Greek language, a mental attitude love. It's the spirit of goodwill; of concern; and, a willingness to sacrifice for another's benefit. "Agape" love is produced in the spiritual believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is part of that fruit of the Spirit, which is described in Galatians 5:22-23. Therefore, the unbeliever is incapable of "agape" love, and the carnal Christian is incapable of "agape" love. This is not humanly self-produced. It is a gift of God the Holy Spirit to the Christian who is in temporal fellowship.

"Agape" love affects one's dealings with other people. The person who does exercise "agape" love will also automatically so act as to fulfill the moral laws of God. Agape love will fulfill the Spirit also of all legitimate human laws. God loves His Own character of absolute righteousness and perfect justice. Therefore, His kind of "agape" love cannot flow to one who violates the laws of God. The one who is violating the moral code of God is not the person through whom the love of God is flowing. Civil rulers who function on "agape" love are the men who will fulfill God's moral laws and the laws of government establishment, and therefore will be a blessing to the citizens they serve. This man is God's ideal political leader.

**A New Commandment from Jesus Christ**

We now look, for a moment, the nature, in further detail, of "agape" love. The Lord Jesus Christ made a great deal of this kind of love, and He described it, to His disciples before His departure, as a new commandment. We find this in John 13:34-35, where the Lord says to us, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you 'agape' one another as I have 'agapao' you, that you also 'agape' one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples – if you have 'agape' love one to another.'"

So, here the picture is very clear. The Lord says, "I have a new commandment." It is new in that it commands a special kind of love for other believers which Jesus Christ Himself had been exercising toward them: "Here is a distinctively new kind of human relationship that I'm calling upon you to follow. It is, in fact, the human relationship that I have exercised in My humanity," Christ says, "with you as human beings." As a matter of fact, this particular quality of love is part of that power system for living the Christian life which God designed for the humanity of His Son; to be used by His Son as He lived on this earth. Jesus Christ, in effect, was field-testing this power structure of being able to live victoriously in the devil's world.

**Jesus Christ**

So, the Christian's Christ-like "agape" love toward each other, will enable them now to survive in Satan's hostile world as it enabled Jesus to survive in Satan's world Himself. Jesus Christ was the embodiment of God the Father's "agape" love. When you saw Him, you saw really what God was like in His fundamental, characteristic quality of this mental attitude love. And today, we Christians are to be the embodiment of this same "agape" love which was demonstrated toward us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This kind of divine love in the believer will mark him very clearly before all the world as a child of the real and the true and the living God. 1 John 3:14 puts it this way: "We know that we have passed from death (from eternal death) to eternal life because we love the brethren. He that does not love his brother abides in death. Now, you indeed can be a Christian who does not "agape" love your brethren. You, of course, will not suffer eternal death in the lake of fire. But if that is true of you, you will indeed immediately suffer temporal death. You will suffer the death of the loss of your fellowship with God the Father. So, there is a spiritual death quality upon the believer who does not function on this kind of love.

We don't have too many options here. "Agape" love will not harm anyone through the evils of either sins or human good. And that's what constitutes evil with God. Sins are outright violations of the commands of God. And the other kind of evil is old sin nature human good production. Both of these types of evil are revolting to God. "Agape" love, by its very nature, will enable the Christian to fulfill God's moral laws toward other people. When you do treat people with this kind of love, you don't break the ten commandments in your dealings with them.

**Keep Christ's Commandments**

In the Lord Jesus Christ, this quality of uninterrupted, "agape" love, and of perfect obedience to God's moral laws naturally came together. Obeying God's moral laws will indeed reveal our own "agape" love for the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 14:15, we have this statement: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." And there again, in the original language, that love is this "agape" love. If you love Jesus Christ, indeed you will keep His commandments. And if you do not have the love of the Holy Spirit functioning in you, you will not be able to love Jesus Christ, no matter how you try. And you will never be able to keep His commandments.

One of the all-time great descriptions in further detail of this kind of love that the apostle Paul is speaking of in Romans 13, is a passage that you're all well acquainted with. It is a classic, and it is fitting that we look at it at this time. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, we have a description in some detail of how "agape" love functions out in human relationships. And it's very important to remind ourselves of just the way it is supposed to operate so that we may indeed match up our own conduct. This is the description of "agape" love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.

1 Corinthians 12:31 says, "But covet earnestly the best gifts (here, referring to spiritual gifts), and yet I show unto you a more excellent way." The more excellent way for believers which is referred to here is a way of life. And this is the way of life which is characterized by "agape" love. This was the way of life that the Lord was trying to make clear to His disciples – that they were to be characterized by after His departure.

In John 15:9-12, He stresses this to them when He says, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Continue in My love." And all those English words for love are this Greek word "agape" love: "If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and I abide in His love. I am in fellowship with His love. These things I have spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is My commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you."

It is important for you to notice that the reason the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Function on 'agape' love, because that will cause you to be obedient to My commandments, the result of that will be enormous personal happiness. That's the way the system works: "Know My commandments, and treat them with 'agape' love. You will then obey them, and the result will be that, no matter what comes into your life, you will be in a status of joy and of peace, and on top of things."

**Love the Unloving**

So, here's a new and better way – "agape" love, which characterized the humanity of the Lord Jesus on the earth. Christians here are commanded by God to exercise this supernatural love not only toward Christians, but indeed toward all mankind. The description also of "agape" love, therefore, since it does apply to everybody, is a description here in 1 Corinthians 13, which is not limited to ideal human relationships; to conditions of friendship; and, to dealing with attractive people. It is not too hard to follow the admonitions of this kind of love with the people that are nice. But this description of love is love which operates as well in the midst of people who are mean; who are vile; who are evil; and, who are prone to violence – all of the things that make them unappealing and unloving. The Word of God makes no exception. This quality of "agape" love is to be applied to everyone.

Paul begins 1 Corinthians 13 with a description of our condition, in reality, if we like this "agape" love functioning in our lives: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not 'agape' love, I am become as a sounding bronze or tinkling cymbal." Great eloquence may be possessed by a person – eloquence in both human and angelic languages. So, when you stand up to speak, people are awed; they're impressed; and, they remember. Eloquence has clearly been before them. You have demonstrated the qualities of an orator. But you must remember that that doesn't last. People don't remember. People are impressed at the moment by an expression of oratory (an oratorical presentation). But the apostle Paul says that it's like somebody clashing two cymbals together, or somebody taking a beater and striking on a gong. When you hit two symbols together, or you hit a gong, it is very impressive, especially if you're standing right near it. And you are aware of it. And suddenly you know that something has happened. But it passes, and you forget about it.

So, here's an impressive thing to be a linguist of enormous abilities, in all kinds of languages. And to be an orator in the handling of those languages is but a passing honor of passing importance if you are functioning without "agape" love in your life. Here the implication is, in the very words of God, which you may be delivering, without the motivation of God's love, what you say has very little impact upon the minds of those who hear.

He goes on here to point out that even the awesome spiritual gifts of prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, and faith are neutralized if the Christian who has these gifts is not using them under the condition of "agape" love. Notice verse 2: "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am zilch (zero – nothing) in terms of my impact upon people spiritually, and in terms of saving my life in terms of eternal rewards.

**Mormonism**

Man, from his sin nature, can put on indeed a big religious show that impresses the carnal and the lost, but which has no acceptance or eternal value with God. It is not motivated by "agape" love. It is motivated by self-interest. There is a great deal that goes on religious television, for example, which is nothing more than religious entertainment. It has nothing whatever to do with God's work. There are great religious organizations, like the Mormons, for example, who are a tremendous fraternal organization. There are Mormons today by the hundreds who now are admitting to themselves that Joseph Smith did not tell them the truth, and that the Book of Abraham was indeed a fraud, and it has totally discredited the claims of Joseph Smith to be able to translate foreign languages, and that the very geography of the Book of Mormon is ludicrous. There's no place on the face of the earth where there are any places like that, or can be found, in such contrast to the Scriptures where we know where Jericho is; we know where Jerusalem is; and, we know where the Sea of Galilee is. All of these biblical things took place in a true, real, geographic location.

But do these Mormons abandon the Mormon Church? No. You can ask them, "Why do you stay in it then? It's not true." They say, "No, it's not true, but it is the greatest fraternal organization I've ever been associated with. And I like the people, and I like the care they give me, and I stay with it."

Well, you can join the Masons and get the same thing. You can join any fraternal order. But unless you understand this, you would look at the Mormon Church and think that they're doing the Lord's work. That's the word I've heard them use to me many times: "in the Lord's work." Well, they're not doing the Lord's work. God has nothing to do with what they're doing.

So, here you can have tremendous capacities in your sin nature to produce a great religious show. And unless you're a discerning Christian, you will not be able to say, "Yeah, this man is famous. Everybody knows his face on television. Everybody's impressed with his program. But when you look more closely, you realize that he is not conveying the Word of God out of the motivation of 'agape' love. What he is doing is building an empire upon great financial strength. So, God is not even needed in order to carry on the operation."

1 Corinthians 13:1-2 make it very clear that you can be a powerful religious influence that produces exactly nothing more than a clashing symbol and the strike of a gong, even if you've got great spiritual gifts, because it takes the key of "agape" love, produced by the Spirit of God, to make those things have eternal value.

1 Corinthians 13:3 says, "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing." Here the apostle Paul steps the picture up one notch further, and he points out that any service which is not motivated by "agape" love is not produced by the Holy Spirit, and so it produces mere human good. It is not an act of divine love. Here he says that it could be such a practice that people would have a great esteem for, and would be impressed with, such as that you sell your possessions and you feed the poor people, or that you even are willing to give your body to be exhausted in the service of people in need, and perhaps even in martyrdom. Here he uses the illustration of being a martyr – of being burned physically. But you can burn yourself out in your physical capacity in the service of other people. But if the motivation is not "agape," Holy Spirit-produced love, then it has no reward, Paul says, at the eternal Judgment Seat of Christ.

**Do God's Work His Way**

Now that's serious business. I could name many people to you right now, that you would recognize, who have worldwide fame and are characterized as people who are known for their works of mercy. Yet, some of them are clearly unsaved, but their works of mercy are great. Everybody knows them. And they are honored for that, but God is not in that. It is very important to understand this key distinction between doing God's work your way, and doing God's work His way. And what it's done His way, you discover that He is putting the picture together. He causes the pieces to fall in line. And you don't always know where the next step is. But when you're functioning on bringing glory to the Lord, He keeps readjusting the pieces until it all fits together, and the puzzle is complete.

Our world today is filled with human good works which are motivated by the sin nature. All of this is worthless before God. All of it is unrewarded, even if it is done by a sincere Christian.

**Love is Patient**

With that background of emphasis on how important this kind of love is, Paul proceeds in verse 4 to describe it. First of all, he says that: "This love suffers long." That means that this love is patient. It refers to the attitude which does not retaliate to evil treatment with blows and bitter words. It refers to an attitude where one remains calm, and responds to abuse with concern for the abuser. Your eyes are more on the abuser than they are on yourself. You are more concerned with what this person is doing to himself than you are concerned with what he is doing to you. Therefore, you remain in a very calm status as you observe him injuring himself through his attempts to injure you. You have sympathy for the self-injury which is suffered by this abuser before God, and you patiently wait for his coming to his senses and his repentance.

The "agape" Christian simply does not act with resentment toward the abuse of the spiritually ignorant; the malicious-tongued; and, the mean-spirited, whether that comes from believer or unbeliever. Love is very patient. It stands by, and it stands by, and it waits, and it waits. It is not impatient.

**Love is Kind**

Secondly, Paul says, "Its kind." That means that it's tender-spirited instead of mean-spirited. It doesn't hurt people with words and deeds. It treats people with graciousness, and it enjoys doing that. It just enjoys being gracious. There are some people who are just so kind that they just find great satisfaction in being gracious to other people in a variety of ways. That kind of graciousness indeed costs them something, but they find a great satisfaction in being gracious toward other people. Therefore, that graciousness moves out, and it meets, with this kind of treatment, a lot of human needs. Just because "agape" love moves you to see somebody who has a circumstance, and who has a need, and kindness whelms up from that "agape" love, you move out to do a gracious act.

**Love is not Jealous**

Thirdly, Paul says, "Love is not jealous." The King James Version says, "envieth not." This refers to a spirit which boils over with a desire for what another person has or what another person is. This jealousy is the resentfulness toward another's good fortune in some area. This is the spirit where you just wish somebody trips up, so that he can't enjoy something that you are envious of in him. This is the attitude which is glad. The "agape" love attitude is that you are glad to see good things happening to other people, and you don't try to belittle them, or to make light of the good things that have come to them. "Agape" love is not jealous of what comes to other people.

**Love Doesn't Brag**

A fourth thing is that Paul says, "'Agape' love does not boast of itself." That means that it doesn't brag. "Agape" love is not a show-off trying to exalt oneself before others. It doesn't have a conceited self-impression which other people do not share about you. It is straining to proclaim that you are an impressive person; a hero; and, an achiever, when indeed you may not be. "Agape" love just doesn't go around doing that, because that kind of a person is offensive, and is not attractive. But instead, "agape" love has a realistic picture of what your abilities are, and what your achievements are. And you understand that all that you do have, and all that you are is of credit to God, because He's the one that gave it to you.

This is a quality of bragging in a Christian when he so loves himself that he thinks because he has prospered, it is because God trusts him with His money. Did God trust Al Capone with His money? Is that why he was so prosperous? You see the nonsense of that line: "I've got lots of money. God sure knows a good man when He sees one. I congratulate you, Lord." That's bragging. That's self-love. A person who operates on "agape" love appreciates what God has given him, but he knows it is God who gave it. He brought it all together.

**Love is not Arrogant**

Therefore, you do not brag, and along with it comes a close cousin to that which is the next statement: "'Agape' love is not puffed up." That is, it is not arrogant. This refers to how the haughty attitude that abuses other people – treating other people with contempt as beneath yourself. You are superior. One of the ways I notice people do this is in restaurants – the way they treat waitresses and waiters. Some people who have this quality of arrogance seem to enjoy, most of the time, expressing it toward waitresses or waiters who are in restaurants. It makes them feel very powerful. These are people who view themselves as having godlike qualities, when indeed they are nothing but what the book of Job describes us as being, which is worms. The "agape" love person is not arrogant. He remains with a humble attitude, as one who is having what God has given him, and one who is only what God has made him. We have no ground for arrogance.

This is a very important point that Paul makes here, because the key quality, you will discover, of the sin nature, is arrogance. This is the one thing that is the primary expression of the sin nature – personal arrogance. You really think you're something. You really think you're God-like.

**Love is not Rude**

In 1 Corinthians 13:5, Paul goes on and says that: "'Agape' love does not behave itself unseemly." It does not act unbecomingly; that is, the person with "agape" love is not rude in dealing with other people. The person with "agape" love is not tactless. He is considerate of people's feelings. Bad manners are avoided by "agape" love in all situations with all people. You don't go around being rude to people.

Now sometimes we say things, and we do things that end up being tactless without meaning to. One of my sons, when he was in the second grade, looked at his teacher one day and said to her, "Are you as old as you look?" He did not mean to be unkind or tactless. As he explained, he just wanted to know: "Was she really such a mature person? Because he was such a little immature person, there was a great spread between him and her. And he couldn't believe that people lived that long. Well, that could have been considered a tactless remarks, but it was an innocent statement. And sometimes we stumble into things like that, but some people just do it deliberately. They're just, in the nature of the case, bad mannered. They just do not exercise the love and consideration for other people. The person, as he is in "agape" love, shows the kind of manners that he will produce. And people who are rude, and who are ill-mannered, don't like your calling their attention to it.

I remember many years ago, we had one of our all-time great musical programs in the academy. And I had noticed that, for several of these occasions before, we would send home a note and say, "Please do not bring your preschool children to our performance. It is tiring to them. They will disturb the audience. It is improper for us to not let people enjoy what our faculty and students have worked so hard to prepare for our parents." And what would happen? They would walk in with these babies (these preschoolers), and these characters will be mewling and puking all during the evening (using the words of Shakespeare); carrying on; and, disturbing an island around them. Finally, this time, it was a great program. I knew we had one of the big all-time winners, and it was just one of those things. We had the right actors and the right voices. It was a musical, and the right stage production. This was going to be a winner. And I was determined that this time I was not going to take foolishness from unloving people who were acting in a tactless, ill-mannered way.

So, we sent the notice home, and I said in the notice, "We must be absolutely certain that this is understood because we will ask any to leave and put the children in our nursery, which is open." Well, that night, what happened? I get up, and these characters are all over this auditorium, and this place was packed from here to the back. It was a big night. Well, the show proved to be a blockbuster indeed. And just before it began, I said, "As we have mentioned to you in our notice that we sent home, this production is not suitable for small children. And while the sound of your child's voice may be a delight to you, our parents have not come to listen to your children, but to our children perform tonight. So, as we sing this song, will you please take your small preschool children out of this auditorium to the nursery or other arrangements?" And we sang, and they began drifting out of all the doors, and we had a wonderful silent night – a real silent night program.

One father came up to me afterward, and he gave me some indignant words. He was really put out that I would have demanded that he leave with his child, and not permit this little kid to stay and watch this program. I didn't take any issue with him. I just said that I thought that this was the best thing to do, because children disturbed large numbers of people, and it's not a good idea.

That week I got a letter from a lady. She said, "My husband generally is not interested in spiritual things. I got him out to this program (and it was a tremendous program – on the fruit of the Spirit). And I was so glad to have him there. And when I walked in, and I heard all these noisy children, he has a hard time hearing. And I said, 'Oh, this is awful.' She said, 'You don't know how terrible I felt. And then you got up and told them to get out. And you don't know how my heart sang, and what joy I had." And she just carried on. And that letter just proved the point. These people who had bad manners were not acting in love, and it required hard love on my part to ask them to do right. And we were in a position to demand that they do it. So, we were treated with respect and esteem and lovingness what our teachers and children had prepared.

So, this is a very significant point. Love ("agape" love) does not act in an unbecoming way.

**Love does not seek its own**

"'Agape' love does not seek its own," Paul says; that is, it doesn't demand its own rights and desires at all costs. It is a spirit of self-indulgence which does that – demanding for yourself at the expense and injury of others. Selfishness is based on the spirit of greed, and it does indeed lead to many evils. And it is a sorry state when we see even Christians who cannot function on "agape" love, such that they are concerned for seeking something other than their own things. They're preoccupied with protecting their time, and their possessions, and their freedom so that you do not encroach upon it, because their eyes are only upon what they do, because you might be asking them to do something for the Lord – to be capable of serving for the Lord's glory rather than for self-glory. It does not seek only its own things. You do concern yourself for the things that concern others as well.

**Love is not Provoked**

Next, Paul says, "Love is not provoked;" that is, it is not touchy, so that a person is easily hurt and angered. And there are so many people that are so touchy; so easily hurt; and, so angered. I have to find out, as you do, about people who are like that, because I'm prone to joke with people. You know, I might go up to somebody and say, "Hey, why do they call you 'good old Mrs. Jones?'" I can understand the old, but I don't understand the good. Now I can't say that to some people. Some people burst out laughing. Others are wounded by it. They're so touchy. They're so sensitive. So, I don't joke with those people. If I don't joke with you, it's a good sign that you're probably touchy.

Love is not provoked. It doesn't erratically get ticked off so no one knows how to deal with you at any point in time. You're so stable under stress that you're not in constant moods of swinging up and swinging down, and we don't know where you are the next time we see you. Love blesses those who provoke, and who persecute. It's not embittered by the provocation.

**Love Forgives**

Then Paul says, "Love does not keep an account of mistreatments." The King James Version says, "Thinketh no evil." It doesn't keep an account of mistreatments. That's what it means; that is, it doesn't hold grudges, so that you deal with people in the future on the basis of your grudges. Love has a spirit of instant forgiveness for all ill-treatment received. Did you get that? Agape love forgives people pronto, at the moment that they have abused you or mistreated you. You do not wait, as some nonsensical religious leaders have been telling us, until the person comes to you and asks for your forgiveness. You don't find that in the Bible. That's human psychology.

**Forgiveness**

The Lord says, "You forgive as I have forgiven you." Jesus Christ says that: "You didn't deserve for Me to forgive you. But I forgave you without you deserving it, and without you asking." You don't even ask forgiveness to be saved. The Bible says that you trust in Christ to be saved. This is what's wrong with a lot of gospel tracts. They include the statement, "Ask God to forgive you your sins." Where did you ever find in the Bible that God says, "Ask Me to forgive you your sins, and then I'll send you to heaven?" Never. Forgiveness is something that God Himself instantly gives to those who respond to Him. And we leave the vengeance, therefore, with Him. We do not keep accounts. We do not hold grudges. We keep the door open to future good relations, even if a person is abusive and unkind and ugly. We leave vengeance to God to repay at the appropriate time, and in the appropriate manner. Love does not hold grudges.

**Love does not Rejoice in Iniquity**

In verse 6, the apostle Paul says that, "Love does not rejoice in iniquity;" that is, love does not delight in evil. "Agape" love doesn't find any fun in doing what God declares to be sinful. That's not fun. "Agape" love gets no satisfaction in seeing our society practicing evil, and flaunting it before all of us. That's not fun. It becomes tiresome. The "agape" Christian recoils with horror from the public portrayal of evils such that the world is so smug and thinks is so cute. "Agape" love does not take satisfaction in seeing evil practice. The loving Christian is grieved by that kind of observation. We do not find fun in jokes about immoral things to be amusing. We do not find jokes about evil actions to be amusing. Love does not delight in evil.

**Love Rejoices with the Truth**

Then Paul says, "Love rejoices with the truth" – happiness found in seeing the truth prevail, and falsehood rejected." There's joy in seeing God's doctrinal truth functioning in the lives of people. That's what pleases us. There is no real happiness when you try to function on false doctrine. But when God's truth comes in, and you're functioning with the truth of God, then you have righteousness in your soul, and you are a producer of divine good things. It is God's righteousness which drives out the unrighteousness of the sin nature.

We Christians should be saddened by false religious beliefs, which most of mankind shares. And it should sadden us that people do not think that we have the truth. A lady talk to me this week. She's gotten onto our tapes. She's going through the painful process that her husband is not receptive. She herself has been in church for 30 years, and she's hitting me with the same story that I've heard scores and scores and scores of times, that almost with tears in her eyes, she said, "I've just realized I don't know anything about the Bible. I've gone to church every Sunday morning and Sunday night for 30 years, and I cannot believe what I've heard on just a few of these Berean tapes, and what I've learned." She sat there for 30 minutes talking to me, just asking questions. And the painful thing was that her husband is not receptive. Do you know why? Because her husband says, "I'm not sure anybody can be so absolutely sure of what is true as he is on those tapes.

There is the problem. "Agape" love knows that God is capable of speaking to us, and that he is telling us the truth clearly so that we can understand it. It is amazing how many people think that you cannot know what God really thinks. But when you love Him, you learn that He has spoken, and you can trust His Word.

**Love Bears All Things**

In 1 Corinthians 13:7, Paul says, "Love bears all things. The Christian is sustained under any inward or outward pressure in his life because the love of God is flowing in him. He endures with honor while quietly suffering evil without turning to self-pity. He stands firm under the pressures of the angelic warfare, instead of getting discouraged, and cutting out from the battle. The Christian functioning on "agape" love is capable of fulfilling the love of God toward others in spite of the assaults of Satan.

There are some Christian soldiers among us that can't stand a Fig Newton of opposition. They are nothing but wet noodles when it comes to receiving the opposition of Satan in the course of spiritual service. When "agape" love is flowing through that believer, he suddenly finds that he is indeed a soldier of Jesus Christ who cannot be easily brought to his knees in defeat. He stands firm in the battle, and he doesn't turn tail and run, just because it has become hot up on the line.

**Love is Trusting**

Then Paul says, "Love believes all things;" that is, it maintains a spirit of trust at all times toward God and Man. It doesn't mean that "agape" love will cause you to believe every cockeyed, stupid notion that the religious world cranks out to you. It means that you have a spirit of trusting what God has said rather than being a cynic. People who do not operate on "agape" love are cynical all the time. You cannot speak to them. You cannot bring them to any understanding of the Word of God. The person who is on "agape" love is free from this attitude of suspicion that leads to guarded treatment of people, and of God's Word. The person who has a trusting attitude in God to work out the problems, and to take care of the situation, is one who will put the best light on what people do. It is the person who is suspicious that always puts the worst light on something that you may say or do. This is a non-antagonistic attitude which simply treats people fairly.

**Love Hopes All Things**

Then Paul says, "Love hopes all things;" that is, we deal with people on the expectation that they'll do better, and that they will do right. This is a very important quality. It is a terrible thing to be treated as an incorrigible. It is a terrible thing when a person makes a misstep, and from then on, you're treated as some scum that is never going to be able to rise to anything better. Love toward that person causes you to hope that he will respond. It avoids this pessimistic attitude that prevents taking appropriate action. You may not even want to help some people if you're operating on self-love. But when you're operating on "agape" love, there isn't anybody that you think is beyond the pale of help. You have hope for the worst of them.

Needless to say, we do not face the angelic warfare each day in a hopeless condition. We do not face it expecting to be defeated. We put on the armor of God, and then as Paul says, "We put it on expecting to stand."

**Love Endures All Things**

Next Paul says, "Love endures all things." There is a spirit which perseveres in God's service in the face of ingratitude, ignorance, and rejection. There is the resolve to live in godliness, and this is not weakened because we are in unpleasant circumstances in our life situation. This quality of "agape" love means that you do not lose heart, and retreat from the spiritual conflict, even if you are facing death itself. The old phrase "Keep on keeping on" sums up nicely what this quality of "agape" love does. It endures all things. It puts the Lord's glory ahead of your own glory. And when you do that, you can take a lot of gaff from people. You can take a lot of nonsense. And you can take a lot of struggle. Love endures all things.

**Love Never Fails**

Then he throws in the final summary in the first part of verse 8, where he says, "Love never fails." What does he mean by that? He means that love never becomes obsolete. We never get to the point in time where we do not need "agape" love. There are other spiritual qualities, he says here, that will pass away. Some of these great spiritual gifts of prophecy and tongues and knowledge – all these things are going to pass off the scene, but the quality of "agape" love will never pass off the scene. Human experience will always need this divine love in order to survive in the devil's world. And if "agape" love never becomes obsolete, and it is never phased out, you must understand that the implication is that you'll take it out into eternity. The believer who matures in "agape" love now, and functions on it, not only will bring great prosperity and blessing and fruitful service in his life now, but he'll go out into eternity with a quality about him that he will never lose, and which will stamp him in a distinctive way among the people (the saints) of God forever.

The quality of "agape" love is the way to leave this life – with "agape" love functioning in a maximum way.

So, when the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 13:8 not to owe any man anything, and especially to always remember to keep paying our debt of "agape" love, because when we do that, we fulfill all of the will of God; all of the more commandments of God; and, all of the laws of governmental establishment. All of the social relationships that the Bible spells out are going to be filled out, and will be fulfilled through the quality of "agape" love.

I remind you one more time. The lady who spoke to me said, "You talk about the same Scriptures, but when I listen to it on the tapes, they suddenly mean something to me where I'm living. I listen to those same Scriptures in church, and they don't mean a thing to me." I wouldn't want you to go out here and say, "This doesn't mean thing to me. There's a way to have "agape" love. There is a way not to have it. You know it. There is the inner circle (of the two concentric circles) of eternal fellowship that we enter at the point of our trust in Christ as Savior, at which time we enter the inner circle of temporal fellowship. This is that inner circle of spirituality. This outer circle, because of sin, is the circle of carnality.

"Agape" love can only function in this inner circle. This means that you are filled with the Spirit. This means that God the Holy Spirit controls your life. This means that you can, at this moment, run through your mind and say, "There is not one single factor between me and the will of God that I have not admitted. There is not a moral fracture. There is not a human relationship breakdown. There is no mental attitude sin. There is nothing between me and the Savior. There is nothing between me and My Father in heaven that keeps me out of fellowship with Him. If that is the case, then God the Holy Spirit is in the driver's seat. He is behind the wheel. He is guiding the vehicle of your life. And this isn't going to be a struggle: "Oh, what shall I do today, and what shall I not do today?"

I like it the way our friend Jack Smith in Kentucky puts it. He wakes up every morning and says, "Lord, here's your man. What are we doing today?" He is relaxed and laid back, and then he watches, anticipating, because he has made his confession. He loves 1 John 1:9, as indeed we should. And then he waits for God the Holy Spirit in that driver's seat to steer his life into contact. The last letter we got from him, he was just overflowing with joy, with the testimony that he gave to a Black man who was in prison, pained by the evil in his own life. And of all places, he had the conversation with him, it fell to Jack's lot to have to do shower duty. Usually he doesn't get that. And he said, "Here are all these naked men running around, and I'm standing there watching them and guarding them. And this man comes into my cage (into my restricted area), with not a stitch on him, and he wants to talk about God. And I say, 'Thank you, Lord – unusual circumstances, but this is the deal for the day.'"

Obviously, the man couldn't go anywhere. He had a captive audience, so to speak. But he also had a man who walked up to Jack and said, "Are you a Christian?" Jack said, "Am I a Christian?" So, immediately, Jack said, "Bingo. I know where the Lord has driven my life this day. And out of it, he expanded a testimony to this man in a terrible condition of life, and in intense personal turmoil, because he doesn't know how to act. A man of God operating on "agape" love can be led by God to perform the work of God that's going to count for all eternity.

Unless you're in this inner circle, it doesn't mean a thing. It's not hard to get in there. You just act on the doctrine you know, and you admit where you have broken it, and where you have not been obedient to it. And you get back on track.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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