***Love God; Love your Mate; and, Love Your Friends
Romans 13:8-10
RO168-02***

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We are studying Romans 13:8-10. Our subject is "The Debt of Love," and this is segment number three.

**Agape Love**

God, Who created the material universe and mankind, is motivated by mental attitude, "agape" love in all that He does. He is thus described in Scripture as indeed being the very epitome of "agape" love. In 1 John 4:8, this is indicated, when we read, "He that does not love does not know God, for God is love." The Greek word for "love" there is the word "agape," which is that mental attitude goodwill, free of all bitterness, and free of all antagonism – that attitude of concern for the benefit of another individual. The mental quality of goodwill in "agape" love actually caused God to send His Dear Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of all mankind.

So, 1 John 4:9 says, "In this was manifested the "agape" love of God toward us, that God sent His Only Begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." And it is important to realize that the kind of people that God sent this Son in behalf of were not nice, attractive, good people. They were the vilest kind. They were all sinners. They were all the enemies of God. And "agape" love is not restricted because the object of that love is not attractive. God's love in providing salvation actually acted apart from any response in return on the part of the sinner.

So, in 1 John 4:10, we read, "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" that is, to be the satisfaction of God's justice for our sins. God cannot take a sinner into heaven. God must have that sinner's sin covered (paid for). And that is called justification. The Son of God came in and made that payment so that, because of the love of God, justification is available to every one of us.

**God First Loved Us**

1 John 4:19 adds to that: "We love Him because He first loved us." It wasn't because we loved God, and then He did something coming for us. It is because He loved us.

So, it is clear that "agape" love is a divine quality which is simply not naturally found in human beings who are contaminated by a sin nature. And yet, God the Holy Spirit, in Romans 13:8, we have seen, actually commands believers of the church age to exercise "agape" love toward all mankind.

**Love One Another**

Now this humanly impossible feat can only be accomplished by God Himself working through the believer with that kind of love. And again, that's exactly what the Bible teaches us. 1 John 4:11-12 point out, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another." All of these English words for love are the Greek word "agape" and "agapao:" "No man has seen God at the time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us. What an amazing thing. Humanly, I cannot possibly have the quality of "agape" love. Yet with God the Holy Spirit indwelling me, and functioning through me, wonder of wonders, I, a sinful human being, suddenly have the capacity to love people in exactly the same way that God loves them. That is a superhuman achievement.

The supreme reason for this is because it is God reproducing in the spiritual Christian (and in the spiritual Christian only) this quality of "agape" love. This love cannot be produced through an unbeliever. This "agape" love can never be expressed through a carnal Christian. 1 John 4:13-16, therefore, say: "By this we know that we dwell in Him; that is, that we are in Christ, and He in us, because he has given us His Spirit, and we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love, and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him." So, again, the book of 1 John stresses to us that the quality of divine, "agape" love is the product of God Himself working through the individual believer.

The supreme reason for "agape" love to control and motivate a Christian's life is that that will produce, in the believer, the kind of life with which he may then face God with complete boldness. The person who is not sure that he is going to heaven does not feel very comfortable about facing God. His boldness is very thin. The Christian who is living out of the will of God, and the Christian who has gnawing on the inside of him, these resistances, these indifferences toward the principles of the Word of God, is just not very bold in God's presence.

**Great Ignorance about Heaven and Hell**

There is a great deal of ignorance concerning heaven and hell in American society today. This past week, there was a Donahue program that dealt with that very subject. I had hoped to record it, but my recorder malfunctioned, so I didn't get it, because I wanted to show it to all of you. If any of you happen to have it, please let me know. But it was a startling program because it just raised the question: "Is there a heaven; and, is there a hell?" And what they had up on the platform were religious leaders. Only one of them was sort of a humble, low-key fundamentalist, biblical Christian, and believed that there was a heaven, and believed that there was a hell, and believed that there was a way to get into heaven, and a way to escape from hell.

You could not believe the ignorance which was expressed in that audience. Worse, you could not believe the disorientation spiritually that was expressed by the religious leaders up on the platform. And when the question came up of who goes to heaven, almost everybody agreed that everybody goes to heaven, including the religious leaders on the platform. And the humble Christian minister said, "That is not true, because Jesus said, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes unto the Father but by Me.'" Donahue's eyes opened; his head jerked around; and, he said, "Did he say that?" And I said, "There you have it – enormous ignorance of the only source of information that can tell us about heaven and hell and God, the Bible, and he knows so little about it as a Roman Catholic." And that audience knew so little because even if they go to church, they're not generally taught what's inside Scripture.

So, here we have these arrogant human beings sitting around talking about heaven and hell, not with any hesitancy, but with great confidence. And I wondered how much like this must be the way it was in the days of Noah, before the flood came and closed all those arrogant, bold mouths with water pouring down into their lungs. And God is going to do it again.

The Christian who lives on the basis of "agape" love is going to face God with great boldness. 1 John 4:17 says, "Herein is our love made perfect (mature), that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world." The way He operates, and the way He thinks, that's the way we operate. And because he operates on "agape" love, and we operate on "agape" love, we are going to stand courageously before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and that's what he's referring to here. This is not referring to boldness in terms of personal salvation, because a Christian never faces the question of salvation. That's settled this side of eternity – this side of death. What it refers to here is boldness in standing and being judged for your life, and the kind of life you lived, and the works that you produced at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

What he's referring to here is that you will stand up there without any hesitancy or fear of the kind of report card you're going to get. You're lying in a hospital bed. You know, you're going to be checking out at any moment now. And as a Christian, your thoughts naturally and reasonably would go out to the fact that, very soon, you're going to face God. And someplace along the line, you're going to be called to the Judgment Seat. Now either you're going to go out with great enthusiasm, and with great confidence, and very relaxed, ready to face that judgment; or, you're going to be very uneasy, and you're going to think of all the things you wish you had done differently, and of all the investments that you had made that were wiser in terms of eternity.

1 John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." It is for this reason that I say that there will be tears shed by Christians at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That is because 1 Corinthians 3 tells us that some Christians will suffer painful loss, meaning that they will see what rewards could have been theirs, had they lived their lives for God instead of for themselves. And the result will be that Jesus is going to have to wipe away those tears, and take us, stumbling, with regrets, into eternity, where we can never change the rewards and the kind of life we could have had.

"Agape" love is the only way that a Christian can make it today. It is the only way that he can make his days on earth count for eternal rewards, because when he is functioning on "agape" love, he is filled with the Spirit. So, the Spirit is producing this love. And when the Spirit is in control, your life is being invested in the things that count with God, and not just with yourself. Holy Spirit "agape" love, operating in a Christian produces a godly lifestyle and divine service of divine good works for God.

**Characteristics of "Agape" Love**

We looked at 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, which is the classic example of how "agape" love from God operates in society in relationships between people. There we saw certain characteristics of "agape" love. We found that "agape" love is *patient* so that it does not retaliate to an injury done to you. It is *kind* so that it does not hurt people, but instead treats them graciously. It is *not jealous*, so it does not nurture resentment over the good fortune of others. It does *not brag* in conceited self-exultation in order to lord it over others. It is *not arrogant* but *humble* in its attitude, recognizing one's own limitations and failings. It is *not* rude so that it is tactless with people. It is *not self-seeking*, with no consideration for the needs of others. It *keeps no records* of personal mistreatment so as to hold grudges. It does *not delight in doing or observing evil acts*. It *rejoices with the truth*, so it finds no pleasure in falsehoods. It *bears all things* so that it protects rather than harms. It *believes all things* so that it puts the best light on what people say and do. It *hopes all things* so that it is not discouraged by the trials of the moment. It *endures all things* so that it perseveres in doing what is right before God. And it *never fails* so that it becomes obsolete in human relationships.

Now that is quite a summary of the tremendous effect of "agape" love. And indeed, when you read it, the normal Christian just has a sinking feeling of heart – of how often we don't even scratch the surface of just these simple little principles in these few verses in 1 Corinthians 13. They bear our frequent reading and reviewing.

Christians, we have seen, in Romans 13, should pay all outstanding obligations as a matter of personal integrity before God and man. The greatest obligation is "agape" love owed to everyone. This obligation, the apostle Paul points out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is perpetual in our dealing with people, and we can never pay "agape" love in full. The exercise of "agape" love will enable the Christian to fulfill the moral code of God in his social relationships, which is why it is so important. Obedience to God's moral laws, on the other hand, brings one happiness on earth, which, through rewards, is parlayed on into eternity. It's a win-win life style. When you live by "agape" love, it's a win-win love style.

"Agape" love functions in the Christian who has confessed all known sins to God the Father. When you keep your records clean, and you keep your nose clean: you make correction; you repent when you've stepped out of line; and, you stop being stubborn and resisting what you know is the truth about yourself and about what God expects of you. You get online and on-track with Him, and you make correction, and you admit it. God the Holy Spirit swoops in, and once more He's in charge. And What He's in charge, you find that something is very different in the way you function; in the way you look at things; indeed, in everything you think about people; in your outlook; and, you find suddenly that the most offensive, unattractive, individuals become the object of your deepest concern and love and tenderness. And what you discover is that strange quality of "agape" love welling up within you, which for the life of you, you could never have produced. And you wonder how on earth it can be functioning through a person like yourself, with all of your weaknesses and failings and shortcomings. But it does.

In Romans 13:9-10, we have the moral code of God and love: the moral laws of God. Paul says, "For this." And he's going to summarize something now as a subject that he's going to talk about. Specifically, "For this" refers to a quotation that he'll be dealing with shortly in Leviticus 19:18. It says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." Here is a basic principle: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is a familiar quotation to Paul's readers, "For this" is referring to this love for neighbors.

Then he quotes four basic commandments – sample commandments from the Mosaic moral code. And he uses the strong negative "ou," when he says, "You shall not commit adultery." Every time he uses the word "not," it is this strong absolutely never. There is no indication from the Greek language that Bishop Joseph Fletcher was right when he said that you add the word "ordinarily" to the moral code of God, and that there are sometimes, therefore, the bishop said, when adultery and fornication are acceptable; when stealing is acceptable; or, when lying is acceptable – where everything that the moral code denies, there are times when it's okay to do it. He didn't get that from the Greek language, because the Greek very beautifully uses the word that says, "Absolutely no, at any time, under any condition – this is an absolute law."

So, he says, "We have a sample from the moral code. He says, "You won't commit adultery." He says, "You won't murder." He says, "You won't steal." In your King James Version, you have, "You won't bear false witness," but that's not in the Greek. And he says, "You shall not covet." Here are four things, very specifically in dealing with other human beings: adultery; murder; stealing; and coveting. And he says, "If there be any other commandments (any other rules) from God." And the "if" here is first-class condition: "if, and there are, other commandments" – "other" meaning different from just the Mosaic code? God has given us many commandments as Christians. They are commandments to deal with moral issues. But these are just illustrative that Paul has selected here.

**Love your Neighbor**

He says, "If there are any other commandments from God, They're all briefly comprehended." Any other commandment (any other biblical principle from God) is briefly comprehend. The Greek word looks like this. It's a very long word: "anakephalaioo." "Anakephalaioo" means that it is summed up. It is presented as a whole. This is in the present tense. It means that here is one thing that will sum up everything that God has ever told a person to do when he says, "This is what's right. This is what is morally right." And I can give you one key that sums it all up. Even if you never knew these other commandments, I can give you one statement, and you'll do all of those even if you've never heard of them. And it's passive voice. That means it is done to these commandments. They are summed up. It is indicative mood – a statement of fact. It's summed up mainly in this one statement: "You will love," and it's the Greek word "agapao." So, right away we that know we're talking about a mental attitude outlook: "You will love somebody: your neighbor." This is the Greek word "plesis." "Plesis" is every other person in the human race. It applies to those who are pleasant people; and to those who are unpleasant. It applies to those who have flaws and ugliness; and, to those who are very attractive.

**The Good Samaritan**

This category of who is your neighbor is, of course, illustrated by the Good Samaritan. And that parable is very significant because it alerts all of us that we are indeed responsible for consideration for every other human being on the face of the earth. And the Bible gives us very strict guidelines on how we are to treat other people.

In Luke 10:33-37, we have the parable about the question of who is your neighbor. The word "plesis" means "one who is near." Therefore, any human being near you at any point of time is your neighbor. In this story, the priest and the Levite lacked "agape" love, so they had no neighborly obligation to this wounded man. The Samaritan, however, was a half-breed by birth. He was half-gentile and half-Jewish, so he was held in considerable contempt by the Jews. The Jews had no use for Samaritans. The Samaritan, of all things, was compelled by God to help this wounded Jew that he found by the side of the road, because he saw him as his neighbor. And because he was his neighbor, he was an object of concern to him, and he knew this from God.

Here's what it says. Luke 10:30: "And Jesus answering said, 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho." Jerusalem to Jericho is a winding road. It is often constricted often by cliffs on each side. (I think that it is something like 12 miles.) Therefore, it is an ideal kind of road for a bandit to hide if you're going to spring out to jump on somebody to rob him. So, here's the road (Jerusalem to Jericho) – ideal bandit territory.'

"He fell among thieves who stripped him of his raiment; wounded him; and, departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance, there came down a certain priest that way. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." There was no "agape" love in this priest. He was a religious leader, but with no "agape" love: "Likewise, a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." There was a man in the tribe that serves in the temple all the time. There was no "agape" love in him: "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him." "Agape" love leads to an emotional expression. "Agape" love is a mental attitude of goodwill, and out of that triggers emotional responses.

"'And he went to him; bound up his wounds; poured in oil and wine (medicinal effects); sat him on his own beast; and, brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, 'Take care of him.' And whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you. Which now of these three do you think was neighbor onto him that fell among the thieves?' And he said, 'He that showed mercy on him.' Then Jesus said unto him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

This is a very perceptive illustration, and a very important divine command. The neighbors are out there (the people who are near you) – treat them as those toward whom you have a divine responsibility. Do not follow the pattern of the priest and the Levite.

So, the apostle says, "All of these moral codes of God are summed up, and will thereby be executed in this saying: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself." "As thyself" in the Greek language indicates yourself as an individual. People by nature always love themselves, so they seek their maximum well-being. There never was a human being who did not like and love himself. A lot of psychology says, "No," but unless you are crazy, you like to feed yourself. Unless you are really wacko, you do not sit around beating yourself in the head with a hammer because it feels so good when you stop. Unless you have one ore in the water, you do not see how much you can freeze yourself in the winter time, and you do not see how much injury you can do to yourself. Any normal person takes care of himself. Any normal person is very much in love with himself.

That's why the Bible says to husbands, "Treat your wives with the same degree of consideration as you do for yourself, because your love for her must be extended to her, because she is a one-creature with you." You are one person with her, "And no man," the Lord said, "ever yet hated himself." Now you can read a lot of Christian books. The Christian bookstores are full of books about how you need more self-love; how you need a better self-image; and, how you need a better self-everything, but that is totally contrary to the Word of God. What the Bible tells us is that the more you are occupied with yourself, the less you are occupied with Jesus Christ; and, the more you are occupied with yourself, the more evil person you become, because self-occupation zeros in on what you want at the expense of anybody else. So, people really do love themselves.

This is a big problem for us as Christians. Some of you spend so much time in your lives, just investing in yourself: earning; spending; buying; and, doing. There is but a minimal effect of your life for eternity in God's service. There used to be a time in the Berean ministries where we could not use all the women in Christian service ministries, of which we have always scads to do. But now all those women work. We can't find wives who are homemakers, and nest-makers, and nurturers of their children. They're all out there exhausting themselves in order to gain temporally, so that when they get around their children and their husbands, they're nuisances and they're irritants. They have better things to do now that they're free at their work age than to spend their time with the family and the children.

It is very hard now for us to do Christian service ministries because those women aren't here. They're not being cared for by their husbands so that they are free to be engaged in Christian service. And it's because excessive love for ourselves has shredded the relationships in marriage and in the family's arrangement.

So, Paul says, "You understand mental attitude, goodwill toward yourself, which all of you should understand. You do it to a nexus. We treat ourselves kindly even when we act ugly and offensive and dumb. Do you remember that dumb thing that you did last week? Do you remember how nice you were about excusing yourself? You were very kind to yourself. You wouldn't have been nearly as kind if I had done it. We are very much in love with ourselves, and we are very kindly disposed toward ourselves no matter what we do. As self-love enables us to pity ourselves in our foolishness, so we ought to be considerate of others in theirs. When you love other people the way you love yourself, then you are indeed characterized by the love of God. People without "agape" love are big on loving themselves, but they're little loving other people.

Certainly the Lord Jesus Christ had this straight. And He exemplified the principle of loving others the way He loved Himself. Ephesians 4:32, for example, points this out to us: "And be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you."

**How Many Times Should we Forgive Someone?**

In Matthew 18:21, we have this principle reiterated: "Then came Peter to Him, and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?' Jesus said unto him, 'I don't say to you until seven times, but until 70 times seven.'"

Then the Lord illustrates this in the verses which follow with the man who owned his master an enormous sum of money. The amount of money here is staggering. I mean, it is something like, in our terms, it would be like $10 million. I mean, the Lord really pulled a big, big figure here – something like $10 million. And the master said, "This is it. You pay up; or, I'm going to put you in prison." And the man pled, "Please give me time." The master's heart was softened, and immediately acted on "agape" love, and said, "How would I like somebody to treat me in this case?" And he said to the man, "I forgive you. Forget the debt. We're square."

This man, now elated, walks out, and finds a friend who owes him a small amount of money. I mean, something like $20, $30, or $40, in the same comparison. And he grabs this guy and says, "I want you to pay up now, and I'm going to beat the tar out of you if you don't come across." Well, some of the servants saw this and said, "This is wrong. The master treated him with 'agape love, and he treats someone who does not owe him nearly as much with hatred. He is not loving this man as he loves himself." They report it to the master, and the master took him to task: "The lord was angry, and delivered him to the inquisitors till he should pay up all that was due to him. So, likewise, shall My Heavenly Father also do unto you, if you, from your hearts, do not forgive everyone, his brother, his trespasses." If you treat your neighbor as yourself, and if you love him as yourself, you will very gladly do exactly this. The Lord Jesus was very clear on teaching this, and He illustrated it in His own experience.

Romans 13:10 sums this up with the statement that "agape" love does no injury: "Love works no ill." Love is a mental attitude. And in the Greek Bible, the word "love" begins this verse, and the word "love" ends this verse. It encases it on both sides so that that is the focal point. Mental attitude love from the Holy Spirit in the spiritual Christian is what is referred to. Referring to personal dealings with people: "This does not perform (and it uses the strong negative) any ill." The word "ill" is that word we've had before, "kakos," which means something that is inherently evil. It is something which is in the nature of its own situation (in the nature of the case), in violation of the character of God. It implies that "agape" love will not do you harm. It will do you good.

This kind of love does not do any injury to its neighbor – to other people. Therefore, the statement is made: "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." A Christian who is functioning on "agape" love does not harm other people with morally evil acts. God's moral laws do nothing but bless those who obey them. They are the basis for maximum happiness in life. If you obey the moral code, you're smart. You will find that it's not as much fun at the moment, but in the long run, it is the best of all lives. And you will look back upon it with gratitude forever.

**Sex in Marriage**

So, genuine love between people prevents them from violating the moral code of God. "Agape" love, Paul has pointed out, preserves the sanctity of the marriage bond. A spirit of lust from the old sin nature is really concealed hatred for the limitations of the marriage vow. People who are guilty of adultery are irritated at God. They hate God, and they hate His rule about the sanctity of sex within marriage. Those who are sensual and self-centered are not operating on a love from God. Unbelievers, of course, are hopelessly enslaved to the animal conduct that the sin nature brings out of them. That's all they can do.

God, of course, is not trying to deny sexual pleasure to people as if it were an evil act. Sex is not an evil act. Sex is an act which is restricted within the confines of marriage. Then it rises to its maximum ennobling effect. Sex is reserved, therefore, by divine law that nobody can change, whether you like it or not. It is within marriage. Then it ennobles the individual, and it preserves the family unit.

In 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, the Bible makes it very clear that sex is to be a part of marriage, and it is sinful if it is not. It is a very grievous sin if it is not: "Let the husbands render unto the wife her due (her sexual privilege), and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife has not power over her own body." Wow. I hope the feminists, and the anti-life abortionist don't see that. Phil Donahue would say, "Did God say that? The woman doesn't have power over her own body?" (Jokingly) Do you see how the Bible just doesn't know where it's at? "The wife has not authority over her own body, but the husband. Likewise, also, the husband hasn't got the authority over his own body, but the wife. It is her body that her husband has. It is his body that his wife has: "Do not defraud one another (don't deny sexual relations), except it be with consent for a time that you may give yourself to fasting and prayer, and come together again, such that Satan doesn't tempt you for your incontinency." Don't avoid the sexual relationship because Satan will use that as a wedge to get at you, and cause you to pursue it outside the marriage bond. Outsiders to the marriage can only enter sexual relations as a degrading, mean act of lust. There's no real love involved. Situation morality is an idea of Satan designed to injure mankind.

So, you young people get smart. If you find some girl or some boy who is willing to violate sexual morality, wash your hands of him. The character is of dog. You don't want to be related; you don't want to be associated; and, you don't want to have anything to do with the individual. Wash your hands, and put distance between you and that person. If you don't do it, you will run the serious problem of getting used to that person. And pretty soon, this old dirty goat will look like a much cleaner sheep to you than he really is, or than she really is. "Agape" love preserves the sanctity of the marriage bond.

**Killing vs. Murder**

"Agape" love does not hate, and lead to murder. That's what the Bible is talking about. One of the ignorant statements on the Donahue Show was by a lady who is into reincarnation, and into eastern mysticism. And she said, "You see, the Bible is such a brutal, contradictory book. God says in one place, 'You shall not kill,' and then a little bit over (just a chapter or two), he directs them to kill a whole mass of people in Canaan." And the simple little preacher (I just wish he'd have been more aggressive) said, "What... well..." And all these people were talking. And he spoke up and said, "But God forbad murder – not killing." And Donahue never picked it up. He just passed by and let it go in the mass of the talking.

That was an important point. We are talking about first-degree willful taking of a life. You don't do that to people that you love. Maximum effort is instead made to preserve life – not to murder it. "Agape" love gives, in fact, your own life to preserve another's life. The note that we have on the envelope in which we mail out the Berean evangelism brochure is an expression of "agape" love. It says, "The contents can save your life," right down there in the lower left-hand corner, in script, in red letters, it says, "The contents can save your life." That is the expression of "agape" love. It saves a life. It does not destroy it. The arrogance of the murderer is seen in that he has appointed himself to deal out what he considers to be justice, instead of leaving that with God.

**Material Possessions**

Furthermore, "agape" love does not take away part of a person's life by stealing his possessions. Love seeks to help people preserve their prosperity. Love produces a control over a mastery of the details of life so that we are not enslaved to our possessions. The rich young ruler could not fulfill the moral law of Moses as he claimed, because when Jesus said, "OK, get rid of your money, and give it to the people who can use it (the poor who need it), and you have rewards in heaven," he wouldn't do it. "Agape" love does not steal from people and, in effect, take the part of the life that they used to earn that possession.

In the fourth place, using the fourth commandment here: "Agape" love does not covet another person's position and status." You are not trying to take away what another person values. You rejoice instead in another person's good fortune if you're operating on "agape" love. You're glad for the good things that come into the lives of other people. Covetousness is the product of hatred – ill will, not of goodwill. "Agape" love exercise toward others tends to bring out the noblest qualities in them, and it enables them to know that they can trust you.

So, Paul says, "When you operate in 'agape' love toward your neighbor, it is the fulfillment of all the moral code of God." You will never violate that code. "Agape" love is to be exercised in three directions. Let's tie it up.

**Love God**

First of all, it is exercised toward God.

**Abraham**

Abraham was a great example of this. God called Abraham out of a pagan family and culture to become the father of God's special earthly people, the Jews. This people would one day have a superior place on the face of the earth. They would always have a superior place in the love of God. Abraham's Jewish posterity was promised a nation; a land; and, a blessing in the form of salvation. God's love thus destined Abraham and his descendants for maximum happiness in time and in eternity. Abraham responded with "agape" love to God. He left his home in Ur of the Chaldees. He migrated to the Promised Land in Canaan, not knowing what was awaiting him. Abraham learned basic Bible doctrine from God, and he constantly grew, therefore, in his "agape" love for God. This love enabled him to trust God to fulfill the promises that he had made to Abraham.

Abraham's love for God only lessened when he yielded to human viewpoint actions. When he got off of "agape" love, then he got uncomfortable that Abimelech the king was going to take Sarah into his harem, so he started lying and conniving and creating a problem. When he started deviating from "agape" love, he decided to take the Egyptian serving girl, Hager, as a wife so that he could get the heir that he needed, so that God could fulfill the promises.

Abraham's love for God got back on track, and it carried him up into old age, up to 100 years. And suddenly, at 100 years old, he becomes a father. And the birth of the son Isaac to fulfill the promise comes on the scene. Abraham's maximum "agape" love for God, some years later, passes the test of offering up his teenage boy on the altar of sacrifice when God commanded him to do so. Abraham's "agape" love for God gave to him the honored title of "friend of God," James 2:23 tells us. Maximum "agape" love for God is always expressed as obedience to the Word of God. 2 John 6 points this out.

**Love your Mate**

Secondly, "agape" love is to be exercised toward your mate. "Agape" love enables you to treat the opposite sex, first of all, with godliness. Relationships between a man and a woman who are operating on godly love will operate from intimacy at the spirit level; then intimacy at the soul level; and, finally, in marriage, intimacy at the body level. "Agape" love-oriented men and women are not drawn to the non-"agape" louts which are found among both Christians and unbelievers.

I cannot believe some of the people that women will marry – non-"agape" lout types. I can't imagine some of the women that some men will marry. If you're oriented to "agape" love, you are not going to get into marriage with someone that is simply your own invention. God set the pattern at the very beginning when he said, "Adam, when it comes to a wife, I'll bring her to you. Just lay back, and keep your eyes open." And so, indeed, He did. That's the way it works today. When God is ready for you to have that wife, He brings her to you. When God's ready for you to have that husband, He brings you to him.

"Agape" love leads to compatibility, therefore, with someone in spirit, soul, and body. Thus you are protected from mismatching with your wrong man or your wrong woman. "Agape" love enables marriage partners to fulfill the roles of male leadership and of female subjection. "Agape" love preserves one from fornication before marriage, and from adultery after marriage. "Agape" love meets the stresses of marriage in stride, and preserves a lifelong union of mutual loyalty and friendship.

The trouble with a lot of marriages is that the people living it aren't friends. It's not enough to love a person. You have to be friends too. Then you have an "agape" love situation that's offering. Mental attitude sins will destroy "agape" love in a marriage, and that will lead to many evil consequences from the sin nature. It is "agape" God that leaves a husband to provide for his wife and his family. And it is "agape" love that leads a wife to care for her husband and the home.

**Love your Friends**

The third category is toward your friends. Two people cannot walk very long together who do not share "agape" love. So, don't seek close friendships with unbelievers or carnal Christians, or you will lose your sheep-like quality, and you'll become a goat, as they are.

**David and Jonathan**

A great example of this in Scripture was David and Jonathan, who exemplified "agape" love between two friends. David was hated by Jonathan's father, King Saul. But Jonathan was still loyal to his friend David. Jonathan himself was a very gifted military leader whose "agape" love toward God enabled him to win great victories over the Philistines. David, who himself was no mean military leader, had an "agape" love toward Jonathan that caused him to admire the military victories that Jonathan had achieved, and caused him to have a great affection for Jonathan as a man of God.

When King Saul, out of jealousy, tried to have David murdered, it was Jonathan, his friend, out of "agape" love, who warned David of what was coming, and saved his life. Jonathan knew that David would become the next king over Israel, instead of himself. But he did not hate him. He has a very beautiful statement in 1 Samuel 23:16-17, where he declares that he knows what's coming. He knows what's in God's plan. The whole statement of Jonathan, this terrific young man, is permeated indeed with the "agape" love of God for his friend David.

1 Samuel 23:16-17: "And Jonathan, Saul's son, went to David into the forest and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, 'Do not fear, for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find you. And you shall be a king over Israel, and I shall be next unto you. And Saul my father also knows that." Jonathan says, "I'm going to be second in command. You're going to be number one. Now that, folks, is "agape" love. After Jonathan's death in battle, indeed, David did care for his family.

**Qualities of "Agape" Love for a Friend**

Here are some of the qualities of "agape" love for a friend. "Agape" love, will not shrink from personal sacrifices to protect a friend. "Agape" love will stand by a friend unashamedly, even when evil people attack your friend. "Agape" love will put your own interests aside to share your successes. Christian camaraderie is based on a spiritual maturity structure in each soul. "Agape" love keeps relationships between friends within the bonds of godliness. And "agape" love between friends enables them both to bring out the best in each of them. In short, "agape" love is a relaxing lifestyle, and it is conducive to a long life in the service of our God.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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