



5. Learning About Agape (Real Love)

In our last study, we saw how much we need love:

(1) Not one of us on our own has what the New Testament says is the real thing.
(2) What we have in common with everybody (even the heathen) is the natural endowment of *eros*—the love that loves others because they are nice to us, or because they are beautiful, or valuable to us.

(3) When the Bible says that "God is love," it says "God is *agape*." This kind of love loves the unlovable, even enemies. That's something beyond us unless we get help!

(4) The Bible says that unless we have *agape*, even if we can speak with "the tongues of angels," we are nothing but beating a gong. If we "understand all mysteries," and even have all faith so that we could remove mountains, and have not *agape*, we are nothing. We can even give everything to feed the poor, and give our bodies to be burned, yet it "pronteth . . . nothing" without this wonderful gift of *agape*.

(5) The common denominator of all humans is fear, but it is cast out by *agape*. This immediately lights up something within us that tells us: not one of us as yet has too much *agape*!

(6) Our common love, *eros*, is dependent on the beauty or goodness of its object. *Agape* is a love which is free, and independent, and therefore it can love bad people, even enemies.

(7) *Eros* is a love that rests on a sense of need. *Agape*, on the other hand, is so rich that it has no need, and loves with no thought or desire for reward of any kind. What a treasure! It makes life worth living!

Can We Be Happy Without Agape-Love?

1. Even though *agape* is not natural to us, is it possible for us to receive it? John 13:34.

ANSWER: "A new commandment I give _____,
_____ ; as I _____

2. When will the world finally recognize God's true people? John 13:35.

ANSWER: "By this shall _____ that ye are my disciples, if ye

3. List several of the seven characteristics of *agape* that you feel you need especially. (See those listed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.)

YOUR LIST: _____

4. *If one follows Christ because of an appreciation of His agape-love rather than from selfish fear or hope of reward, do you think he will ever fall away? Compare 1 Corinthians 13:8 with John 10:27-29.*

WHAT DO YOU THINK? _____

It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They see the Saviour's matchless love revealed all His life, and the sight of Him attracts. It softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the hearts of the ones who look. They hear His voice, and they follow Him.

More Contrasts Between *Agape* and *Eros*

5. *Eros is a love that seeks after God. This is the foundation of most religions. This is why shrines and temples have been built. Eros is a noble search. But agape is the opposite: it is not man seeking after God but God seeking after man.*

Read Luke 19:10, and fill in the blanks: "For the Son of Man is come

6. *When we think of God's love as eros, we see Him playing "hide and seek" with us, making Himself difficult to find. That makes it hard work to search Him out, and we are never sure we are successful. In contrast, how near has God come to every one of us? Acts 17:27; John 1:9.*

ANSWER: He is "not _____ from _____." He is "the true Light, _____ cometh into the world."

How near is the Lord to you? How earnestly is He seeking you? He is as near as this "word of faith" which this lesson proclaims to you right now! Through this word He has already found you. He is knocking on your door at this moment (see Revelation 3:20).

7. *Rather than hiding Himself from you all your life, how near has He actually been to you since your birth, without your fully realizing it? Psalm 139:1-5, 7-13.*

ANSWER: "Thou _____ my path ... and art acquainted _____ ... Thou hast beset me _____ and _____"

8. *Another contrast: Eros is a love that is dependent on the value of its object. We naturally treat the mayor in a nicer way than we treat the garbage man (yet we would be in a terrible state without the latter). African "bride-prices" rise astronomically with the education and culture of the girl. Our customs are about the same in principle, though outwardly different. Again, agape is the opposite: rather than being dependent on the value of its object, agape loves the "worthless" ones along with the "good ones," but agape creates value in its object. (Read Isaiah 13:12.)*

FILL IN THE BLANKS: God "... will make a man _____"

Let us illustrate. Here's an ordinary stone picked up from a vacant lot. It's worth nothing. But suppose as I hold this stone in my arms that I could love it as a mother loves her baby. And suppose that by doing so, I could change it into a piece of solid gold. What would it be worth now? This is what the Lord does to you and me by His *agape-love*. And this is what we can learn to do for our fellow men as we learn to love as He does!

9. Again: *Eros is a love that seeks to ascend, to climb higher. It desires promotion. We see it everywhere in school, in politics, in business, even in the church. With whom did this self-seeking love have its beginning? Isaiah 14:12-14.*

ANSWER: With _____. (Mark in your Bible the five uses of the word "I" and the five verbs and nouns that express the thought of climbing higher.)

10. *In contrast, how does agape dare to come lower, to "descend"? Philipians 2:5-8.*

ANSWER (note seven steps found here that Christ took in stepping lower, in contrast to Lucifer's ambitions):

We can trace in Philipians 2:5-8 seven distinct downward steps that Christ took in showing us *agape*:

- (1) He gave up His crown voluntarily, moved by love.
- (2) He "emptied Himself," making a voluntary surrender for eternity of everything held dear, something impossible to do apart from this kind of love.
- (3) He took "the form of a servant" (slave). But He stepped still lower:
- (4) He was born in the likeness of men. No human being has ever fallen so low but the Son of God has come far enough to reach him/her.
- (5) He humbled Himself. His mother gave birth to Him in a smelly cattle shed, and was forced to wrap her little One in rags and lay Him in a donkey's feed box. His was the life of a toiling peasant.
- (6) He "became obedient unto death." The death Christ was obedient to was like going to hell, a living, conscious condemnation of every cell of one's being, the condemnation of all human sin. The seventh step He took makes it clear:
- (7) "Even the death on a cross." Not only was it the crudest death ever invented, not only the most shameful— being strung up naked before the taunting mob who watched your agony with glee. Death on a cross carried a built-in horror deeper than all that. It meant that Heaven cursed you, the death of the lost who must perish at last in hopeless despair, what Revelation calls "the second death." In despair He cried out, "My God, . . . why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Be quiet and reverent as you think about it. You and I would have had to go through that if He had not taken our place and died the equivalent of our second death as us and for us.

The Real Meaning of Jesus' Death on the Cross

11. *Consider what -was involved in Jesus' sacrifice on His cross:*

The sufferings of Jesus were greater than physical torture like that of the martyrs. Scripture says, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). That was

not true of any martyr.

"Iniquity" separates from God, leaves the soul desperately alone, destroys all sense of security (Isaiah 59:2). This means that God laid on Him far worse feelings of guilt, loneliness, insecurity, and despair than we can know. It was this that separated Christ from His Father.

Peter says, "His own self [He] bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). It was within His own nervous system, in His mind and soul, that Jesus bore the killing load. Paul is even more clear: "He [the Father] hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Christ was not a sinner, for He was sinless. But He was "made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). The "sin" and the "curse" are here identical.

There are two kinds of death in Scripture, one called sleep (see John 11:11,13), which is the death we commonly speak of; and the other the real thing, "the second death" (see Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 21:8). The latter is eternal separation from God—good-by to light, joy, and life—forever.

"Both He [the sinless Christ] that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified [sinners] are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11). He is your Brother!

This is how "He by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9). This sleep that we call death cannot be what He tasted, because "every man" tastes that kind of death for himself. What Jesus tasted was hell itself, that we might not have to taste it ourselves. When you grasp this, your heart is filled with never-ending gratitude.

12. Do you see a little more clearly what it means to "glory" in the cross of Christ? _____

"Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." 1 Peter 5:7 "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17