

LOVE?

What is love? This is a question that mankind has been asking for all of time. Philosophers have bloviated on the topic, authors have invented quotes about it, and singers/songwriters have belted their feelings about it. Love has been equated with a feeling that ebbs and flows like the tide, grows lava hot, and then dissipates to ice cold. However, like most things, if we make ourselves and our feelings the focus, we miss the bigger picture of what love really is.

As we have discussed, life and all the “good activities” don’t mean much if we don’t have love. But, in order to have it, we must understand what it is and where it comes from.

First, Paul uses the word ἀγάπη (agapē) in 1 Corinthians 13 for *love*. *This term means “love” but can also denote ideas such as benevolence or goodwill.* It describes the love one person has for another (human), but more importantly, theologians describe agape as God-like love. When we understand this and read the apostle John’s words, it begins to become more clear.

1 John 4:7–12

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Thankfully, mankind does not define agape love. If it were so, there would be as many definitions as there are people. John tells us that God is love; he defines it, lives it perfectly, and sets the course for mankind to follow his example. As one scholar has said, Agape is volitional, meaning it is an act of the will, not a product of the emotions. Moreover, it cannot be attained outside the presence of God, for it is a fruit of abiding in him (1 Jn 4:15–21) and he in us (Gal. 5:22).

The greatest manifestation of love is explained this way:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...

Agape love is, first and foremost, humble (Phil. 2:1-11) and sacrificial for the benefit of others so that they might be redeemed and blessed. When his disciples are called to love, this is what Paul is talking about and goes on to define in more detail in the subsequent verses of 1 Corinthians 13.

Every time we read it, there is an occasion to evaluate our love. Are we running off emotion or is our love from a deep abiding in the Lord? Do I consider agape love as optional or required? Am I giving myself for the redemption and blessing of others or seeking for myself? Are my family, friends, coworkers, fellow students, neighbors, and my fellow man covered in my agape love?

You may be asking, what does that look like? Stay tuned for more.

Eyes up,

Ryan