

LESSON 11

Love

"[add] to brotherly kindness love"

THE GRACES WE ARE
TO ADD FORM AN
ASCENDING LIST WHICH
SUMMITS AT LOVE.

Fruitfulness *"in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 1:8) is the result of adding these virtues to our faith. This is the knowledge which gives all things pertaining to life and godliness (v. 3), and through which we come to partake in the divine nature (v. 4). Starting with *"virtue,"* the graces we are to add form an ascending list which summits at *"love (agapē)"* (v. 7). *"God is love (agapē)"* (1 John 4:8). Thus, having grown in the knowledge of Jesus to the point of possessing fruitful love (*agapē*), we have come to *"be partakers of the divine nature"* (v. 4). As God is summed up in love, so are His children to be.

LOVE (AGAPE) DEFINED

- "love, i.e. affection or benevolence" (STRONG)
- "the quality of warm regard for and interest in another" (BDAG)
- "brotherly love, affection, good will, love, benevolence" (THAYER)
- "the characteristic word of Christianity, and since the Spirit of revelation has used it to express ideas previously unknown, inquiry into its use, whether in Greek literature or in the Septuagint, throws but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the NT." (VINE)

As noted in the previous lesson, *philadelphia* and *agapē* are distinct from one another. A primary distinction is affection, which is inherent in *philadelphia*, but not necessarily in *agapē*. The inspired use of *agapē* in 1 John 4:8 to describe God shows its depth of meaning. As W.E. Vine noted above, its transcendent meaning is wanting in texts other than the New Testament. Some descriptions are helpful:

"While the Hebrew and Greek words for "love" have various shades and intensities of meaning, they may be summed up in some such definition as this: Love, whether used of God or man, is an earnest and anxious desire for and an active and beneficent interest in the well-being of the one loved." (ISBE)

"One can say that it means the interest in the other person that expresses itself in action designed to bring about good or benefit to the person." (Clinton D. Hamilton, Truth Commentaries – 2 Peter and Jude)

“In friendship (*philia*) the partners seek mutual solace; in sexual love (*erōs*) mutual satisfaction. In both cases these feelings are aroused because of what the loved one is. With *agapē* it is the reverse. God’s *agapē* is evoked not by what we are, but by what he is. It has its origin in the agent, not in the object. It is not that we are lovable, but that he is love. This *agapē* might be defined as a deliberate desire for the highest good of the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for that person’s good.” (Green, Michael, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – 2 Peter and Jude)

As “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8), it is better demonstrated than defined. God showed love in giving His only Son for the world (cf. John 3:16). Jesus showed love in voluntarily carrying out the loving will of God by giving Himself (cf. 1 John 3:16). These are described as the greatest actions of love (cf. John 15:13). As Green noted above, such action is seated, not in the nature of its object, but in its agent (cf. Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:8, 10).

The greatness of *agapē* love is that it **always** acts in the best interest of its object. However, for this reason it is ironically often misunderstood. In our foolishness, we are at times ignorant of what is in our best interest (cf. Proverbs 14:12). But God knows. For this reason, love is sometimes tough. God loves us by chastening us (cf. Hebrews 12:6). This is not harmful (cf. Romans 13:10) but for our good (cf. Hebrews 12:11). Consequently, *agapē* love transcends emotion, but is only fulfilled in its greatest form under the guidance of divine revelation (cf. Matthew 22:37-40). Therefore, this love is to “*abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God*” (Philippians 1:9-11).

THE PREEMINENCE OF LOVE (AGAPE)

A lawyer once tested Jesus by asking, “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?*” (Matthew 22:36). Such debate between the relative importance of the commands of God was frequent among Jewish Rabbis. Perhaps hoping to catch Jesus with an impetuous reply, the lawyer asked a question which could elicit an answer that belittled a divine command. Jesus’ perfect knowledge of the Law resulted in the perfect answer. “*Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 22:37-40). The explanation of Jesus concerning His answer in verse 40 shows the truth and wisdom in the reply. Love is the preeminent command because it encompasses all the commands (cf. John 14:15; Romans 13:9-10) and gives the fulfillment of each command substance (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Love is the purpose of the commandment (cf. 1 Timothy 1:5) and is therefore the greatest commandment.

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Above all else we are to have love for one another (cf. 1 Peter 4:8). This includes the virtues we are to add to our faith (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-7). Love is the tie that binds all these virtues together in harmony, purpose, and meaning. Paul said it this way, *“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection”* (Colossians 3:14). Paul had commanded the Colossians to put on various virtues (cf. Colossians 3:12-13). Love is the glue that binds them all together and makes one complete. The presence of the other virtues implies the presence of love, but love is the transcendent quality that fits them together like a well-oiled machine. All the parts move in harmony achieving a common goal because they are infused with love. Without it they would fall apart.

THE SCOPE OF LOVE (AGAPE)

The dimensions of love are far reaching (cf. Ephesians 3:18-19). Love is not limited by time, circumstances, or people. While governed by God’s law, the scope of love stretches to all.

1. **Love for God:** Love for God is most important (cf. Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:4-5). We were created for the purpose of seeking Him to find Him (cf. Acts 17:24-28). When we find Him, we are to fear Him and keep His commandments (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). This is how we love Him (cf. John 14:15; 1 John 5:3).
2. **Love for God’s People:** God’s people do not simply have an affection for one another, but they serve each other from that affection (cf. 1 Peter 1:22). The world knows Jesus’ disciples through their imitation of Him in the service of love they provide each other (cf. John 13:34-35). We love each other because God first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:7-11). We love God and those who are born of Him (cf. 1 John 5:1-3). We do not just boast of love in our speech, but we show it by our actions toward each other (cf. 1 John 3:16-18). We serve each other out of love in providing for the physical (cf. Matthew 25:34-40), and most importantly the spiritual (cf. Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Peter 5:8; James 5:19-20; Hebrews 10:24-25).

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3. **Love for All People:** Love for all is what separates *agapē*. Jesus explained that it is common to love those who love you, but what makes us like God is loving even our enemies (cf. Matthew 5:43-48). Peter’s list is about growing to maturity. This is what Jesus expects of His followers – *“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”* (Matthew 5:48). Love calls us to leave mediocrity and go on to excellence. If we are imitating God (cf. Ephesians 5:1-2), we are not just loving those who the world might expect us to love, but even

the unlovable (cf. Romans 5:6-11). This is the lesson of the good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:25-37). This is what God expects of His children.

GROWING IN LOVE (AGAPE)

We need to grow in love. It is something that should be ever increasing. The greater the heights we reach in our love, the higher we see the bar of God ascend. To grow in this, we must grow in knowledge and discernment (cf. Philippians 1:9-11). The Holy Spirit has provided us with an excellent description of *agapē* love which equips us with a picture of how love acts (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). We should insert our name in place of “love” in the text and strive to live accordingly.

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- “Suffers long” – patient, not short-tempered.
- “Kind” – in dealings with others, not harsh.
- “Does not envy” – rather is happy for the success of others.
- “Does not parade itself” – is not boastful.
- “Is not puffed up” – not arrogant, but humble.
- “Does not behave rudely” – is considerate and respectful.
- “Does not seek its own” – is not selfish, but selfless.
- “Is not provoked” – is not negatively affected by mistreatment of others.
- “Thinks no evil” – takes no account of evil to hold it against others in the future. Does not dwell on offenses suffered leading to bitterness.
- “Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” – finds no positive in sin with self or others, but delights in the things of God.
- “Bears all things” – bears up under any trial, tribulation, adversity.
- “Believes all things” – believes the best in men.
- “Hopes all things” – is optimistic and hopes for the best in others.
- “Endures all things” – it perseveres through negative circumstances.

LESSON 11 QUESTIONS

1. Why might “love” be the virtue at the top of Peter’s list?
2. In your own words, define or describe *agapē* “love.”
3. What is inherent in “brotherly kindness” which is not necessarily included in every case of *agapē*?
4. How does scripture show that “God is love” (1 John 4:8)?
5. Why do some misunderstand *agapē* “love?”
6. How must “love” abound? (cf. Philippians 1:9-11)
7. Why is “love” the greatest commandment? (cf. Matthew 22:37-40; 1 Timothy 1:5)
8. How does Paul describe “love” in Colossians 3:14? What does he mean by this?
9. To whom is our “love” to extend?
10. How can we grow in “love?”

