

The Excellence of Love

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 07 August 2011 16:17

Text: 1 CO 12:31b-14:1

12:31 ...And now I will show you the most excellent way.

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. (I Corinthians 12:31b-14:1, NIV)

Definitions: *Agape* is God's love—that God-given motivation to seek the best for the beloved on the highest moral plane. *Eros* is romantic, sexual love. *Philia* is friendship love.

Storge
is family love.

Throughout 1 Corinthians 13, the word *agape* is translated "**charity**" in the King James Version.

translated

"love"

in the New International Version and The Amplified Bible. Paul defines

agape

in verses 4-7. The Amplified gives a more detailed definition:

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4 Love endures long and is patient and kind; love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy; is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. 5 It is not conceited—arrogant and inflated with pride; it is not rude (unmannerly), and does not act unbecomingly. Love [God's love in us] does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; *it takes no account of the evil done to it—pays no attention to a suffered wrong* [italics mine].

6 It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. 7 Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances and it endures everything [without weakening]

(1 CO 13:4-7, AMP)

Introduction: Jesus *commanded* us to love everyone with God's love (*agape*).

He commanded us to love (*agape*) other Christians:

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:34-35, KJV).

Jesus commanded us to love (*agape*) God, others and ourselves:

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:34-40, NIV)

Jesus commmanded us to love (*agape*) even our enemies:

43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love (*agape*) your enemies, bless them that curse you,

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do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

(Matthew 5:43-44, KJV)

Jesus also *demonstrated* his love for us when he was crucified: ". . . **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.**

"(LK 23:34, KJV). He practiced what he preached!

1 Love is the Pinnacle (1Corinthians 13:1-3)

Love is

- 1.1 Better than the gifts of the Spirit.
- 1.2 Better than giving money.
- 1.3 Better than being martyred.

Paul does not depreciate the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives His gifts because he loves us.

Likewise, giving tithes and offerings are Scriptural and are therefore important. However, our giving should be motivated by love.

It is possible to give one's life to a bad cause and go to hell. It is possible to give one's life for a good cause and not have the right motive. The motive should be love.

2. Love is Pure (1Corinthians 13:4-7)

Love is

- 2.1 Not jealous or boastful but patient and kind.
- 2.2 Not arrogant or rude but endures all things.
- 2.3 Not self-insistent but bears all things.
- 2.4 Not provoked or vengeful but believes the best of everyone.
- 2.5 Not joyous over wrong but rejoices over right.

By knowing Paul's description of love, we can know whether or not we are walking in love or in the flesh.

3. Love is Perpetual (1Corinthians 13:8-13)

- 3.1 Prophecy will cease but love will continue.
- 3.2 Tongues will cease but love will continue.
- 3.3 Knowledge will cease but love will continue.
- 3.4 Faith will cease but love will continue.
- 3.5 Hope will cease but love will continue.

When our salvation is complete, prophecy will be fulfilled and there will be no need for it.

Likewise, when our salvation is complete, tongues will be replaced by a higher level of communication.

The fragmentary and distorted knowledge we now have will be replaced by a higher type of knowledge.

Faith for salvation will not be needed after our salvation is completed.

Hope will no longer be needed then, for we will have experienced that for which we have hoped.

4. Love is Possible

God has commanded us to do a humanly impossible thing. We are to love as He loves.

However, He would never command us to do something that he would not give us the ability to do. Dr. Mendell Taylor said many years ago, "With the commandment comes the enablement." God has supernaturally given us the ability to love. He has given us His love nature through the new birth.

God has given us the greatest riches. He has given us His love. In all our getting and grasping in this materialistic world, let us never forget this. Let us continually be grateful for His precious gift of love:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love (*agape*) of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

(RO 5:5, KJV).

5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love (*agape*) into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us

(RO 5:5, NIV).

9 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. 10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. 11 And of which of you that is a father shall his son ask a loaf, and he give him a stone? or a fish, and he for a fish give him a serpent? 12 Or [if] he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? 13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall [your] heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:9-13, KJV).

16 And so we know and rely on the love (*agape*) God has for us. God is love (*agape*). Whoever lives in love (

agape

) lives in God, and God in him.

(1 John 4:16, NIV).

Every Christian believer has been born again by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit imparts to us the love nature of our Heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit then indwells those whom he gives the new birth. *Agape* is a concomitant of the Holy Spirit—apart from the Holy Spirit, *agape* does not exist. It is not native to fallen humanity. In short, the Holy Spirit brings with Him the love of God and gives us the ability to love as God loves.

Conclusion:

Paul states that love is "**the most excellent way**" in 1 CO 12:31. Paul also says to "**Follow after charity (**

agape

)"

in 1 CO 14:1. How do we love? Love is a choice.

God has already given us the ability to love—the choice is ours!

Tertullian said, about AD 200, "The heathen are wont to exclaim with wonder, 'See how these

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Christians love one another . . . and how they are ready to die for one another."

To **"follow after love"** means that we must make a commitment to love everyone as God does. This commitment is a deliberate choice (or premeditation) to love everyone regardless of whom the person is or regardless of the circumstances. As we exercise the love that God has already given us, he will increase our capacity to love more. Let us obey Christ and love one another:

A song is no song
'til you sing it.
A bell is no bell
'til you ring it.
And Love wasn't placed
in your heart there to stay.
Love isn't love
'til you give it away!

—author unknown <><

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In Essentials: Unity; In non-essentials: Liberty; In all things: Charity—Peter Meiderlin 1626.

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