

1 Corinthians 13 • Love Properly Applied

Introduction

(Sorry for the grammar lesson but I think it may help.)

Homonyms (one of two or more words spelled and pronounced alike but different in meaning (such as “key” in the lock or the song is in the “key” of F) are different in every language. This is why every once in awhile we must examine the Greek and Hebrew languages as our study of the Bible gets deeper and deeper to understand the context and translation.

In English we have one word for “love” which we give many different meanings by adding a qualifying adjective. For instance, “romantic love” or “brotherly love” or “first love”. Greek has 3 distinct, separate words for different types of love, only 2 of which are found in the NT.

Eros is not found in the NT but refers to love for an adorable object, especially for love between a man and woman. Depending on the context we would translate this as “first love”, “romantic love”, etc. It’s akin to infatuation for a person (“I really love her/him.”) or a thing (“I love potato chips.”) This kind of love presumes that the object of the love is worthy of one’s love – the object’s value is relative. The beauty or worth of the object of love is in the eye of the beholder.

Phileo is the Greek word equating to friendship-love and is found frequently in the NT. From this word we’ve derived “Philadelphia”, meaning “brotherly love”. Phileo implies mutual affection and that the value or worth of the object of the love is relative; it’s in the eye of the beholder. (For instance, one criminal may have a close friendship with another criminal.) Phileo is used in some surprising places in the NT such as 1 Cor. 16:22, “If anyone does not **love** the Lord, he is to be accursed.” Two verses later in 16:24, however, Paul states, “My **love** be with you all in Christ Jesus.” using the next word for love: Agape.

Agape is frequently described as “unconditional love” (note the adjective). This is true but it means much more. Agape characterizes God. 1 John 4:8, “The one who does not **love** does not know God, for God is **love**.” It’s the love God manifested in the gift of His Son. John 3:16, “For God so **loved** the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” It is much more than just mutual affection; it expresses **unselfish caring for the object of love based on his or her intrinsic value**. Meaning that the value of the person is not relative but that he or she has value in and of themselves. The value for each person is not supplied by man but by God.

Agape can also refer to a person or things. 1 John 2:15, “Do not **love** the world nor the things in the world. If anyone **loves** the world, the **love** of the Father is not in him.” When Scripture states, “God so **loved** the world,” it implies that the world (mankind) has an intrinsic value, that value being placed by God Himself. Therefore a quality of agape is it’s the kind of love that loves the unlovable. However, intrinsic value does NOT imply that the love is deserved. In fact, agape implies that the love is offered whether it is deserved or not, such as for our enemy. Matthew 5:44, “But I say to you, **love** your enemies....” Our enemies may not deserve agape but we are to offer it anyway because of the intrinsic value God has placed on them as an object of love.

The NT brings additional qualities to the Greek definition of agape by teaching that the love offered is so great that one is willing to lay down his life for the sake of the other person. John 15:13, “Greater **love** has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” Acting on this love that was first revealed from the Father (John 3:16), as disciples of Christ we are instructed in John 15:12, “This is My commandment, that you **love** one another, just as I have **loved** you.”

Finally, agape does not imply “without feeling”. It does not translate into an emotionless act based purely on obedience. It can carry very strong emotion with it. However, the essential nature of the word is that one offers agape whether they feel like it or not. Why? Because the **object** of the love **carries more value** than one’s personal feelings, needs, wants, desires or instincts. From this understanding we get the concept of “sacrificial love”. Therefore, by putting one’s negative feelings aside, love is given in the most difficult and even repugnant situations (e.g., a missionary’s work in India). Agape, as described in the NT is beyond human ability. It is the record of the life and earth of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit that enables the believer to love in such a manner.

¹If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

[Read 1-3]

Q: Each verse groups specific spiritual gifts together and shows the results they produce when exercised without agape. What are those mentioned in v.1 and their relationship to each other?

A: Tongues of men and of angels. They are the ultimate profession of our faith or belief in God. Yet without *agape*, they're relegated to just being noise.

Application: *Is our profession of Christ, our public and private witness of Him, truly accompanied with the burden of our love for Him?*

Q: How about v.2?

A: Prophecy, wisdom (“*all mysteries and all knowledge*”) and faith. These are the “power” gifts that distinguish the noblest and most mature members of Christ’s body that can reveal the very mind and thoughts of God to the rest. Yet without *agape* their standing and stature is lower than the lowest.

Application: *Have we ever thought that the exercising of our gift – the unique work of ministry God has given us – does not have to be “watered down” with the overriding consideration of love, but that love is what actually multiplies the power of our gift?*

Q: And v.3?

A: Giving away everything physically belonging to us, both our possessions and even our very body. Yet without *agape* there is no profit, no reward for such sacrifice as we’re just doing it for ourselves, not the object of our love.

Application: *Ever known someone whose contributions of time, energy or money – even though the end result benefited those in need – were really done for their self, to either make their self feel good or to elevate their self above those in need?*

Q: Taking all 3 verses together, what is an application of how we use our gifts and resources for God?

A: Out biblical love is completely different from the world’s definition of love.

Q: Do these verses say that if a believer doesn’t manifest agape that they won’t be saved?

A: No. However, the implication is that there is little personal profit manifesting spiritual gifts – even to the point of giving up one’s life – if love for others is not the motivation. Thus all gifts are to be “other oriented” in regard to the church. No spiritual gift has been given for personal use. All are for the building up of the body of Christ.

⁴Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[Read 4-7]

Q: What is the intent of these verses? What purpose do they serve us as believers?

A: These verses are the standard, the measure of how we're actually performing in our love. They describe what *agape* is in real life and immediately tell us whether we actually have God's love or not.

Q: These descriptions fall into 2 categories: "Is" and "Isn't". List the 7 "Isn't" attributes.

1. (v.4) "Is not jealous"
2. (v.4) "Does not brag"
3. (v.4) "Is not arrogant"
4. (v.5) "Does not act unbecomingly"
5. (v.5) "Does not seek its own"
6. (v.5) "Does not take into account a wrong suffered"
7. (v.6) "Does not rejoice in unrighteousness"

Application: Have you ever withheld love through any of these situations? Can we see how the higher NT definition of *agape* is beginning to show through on a practical level in these attributes?

Q: List the 7 "Is" attributes:

1. (v.4) "Patient"
2. (v.4) "Kind"
3. (v.6) "Rejoices with the truth"
4. (v.7) "Bears all things"
5. (v.7) "Believes all things"
6. (v.7) "Hopes all things"
7. (v.7) "Endures all things"

Application: Notice that the "Isn't" category is more reactive and the "Is" category is more proactive. If through our obedience to God's Word we bring our hearts and minds into subjection to Him over and above our feelings and circumstances, we will be better able to exhibit love in the reactive situations.

⁸Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

[Read 8-10]

Q: Why will spiritual gifts cease? Won't they continue forever?

A: The purpose of spiritual gifts is earthly, the goal being to build up the body into One head, Christ. It is a work that *begins* on earth but is made complete in heaven.

Application: The gifts are for **HERE** and **NOW**. We cannot make up for lost opportunities of love later.

¹¹When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

[Read 11-12]

Q: What is the application we can take from this regarding spiritual gifts?

A: We must have God's view of time and eternity in the application of our gifts. In our present state on earth, we don't know the **WHOLE** picture 100%. The difference – those things we don't understand or see fully – are covered through our gifts applied with love. We can't apply knowledge since it is incomplete – our *faith* makes up the difference through the application of love.

¹³But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

[Read 13]

Q: What are the 2 great commandments that summarize the OT Law?

A: Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.

Application: Ever notice that the Ten Commandments lack the words “faith” or “hope”? Everything is derived from love – not the other way around.