

## Meaning of Love

I Peter 1:22; I Corinthians 13:1

The true meaning of love as defined in the Bible has been corrupted in the common usage of our English language and society. Most often, love is confused with infatuation – that elated, "high" feeling we get when we "fall in love." This kind of "love" is something that lasts typically less than a year, and unless replaced by true love, results in broken relationships.

### ORIGIN OF LOVE

The Bible indicates that love is from God. In fact, the Bible says "God *is* love." Love is one of the primary characteristics of God. Likewise, God has endowed us with the capacity for love, since we are created in His image. This capacity for love is one of the ways in which we are "created in the image of God."

*WE ARE NOT TO LET OUR LOVE GROW COLD – FOR OUR LORD OR OTHERS!*

### DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE

The Greek language (the language of the New Testament) uses two SPECIAL words to describe and define love. (Even though there are 4 Greek words for love.) The most commonly used Greek word translated "love" in the New Testament is "agape." (ἀγάπη) This love is represented by God's love for us. It is a non-partial, sacrificial love probably best exemplified by God's provision for our rebellion:

## Meaning of Love (Continued)

"For God so loved (ἠγάπησεν AAI 3<sup>rd</sup> p.s. of ἀγαπάω – from agape) the world, that He gave (AAI 3<sup>rd</sup> p.s. of δίδωμι) His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, (AMSubj.3<sup>rd</sup> p.s. of ἀπόλλυμι) but have eternal life." (John 3:16)  
The gift of God's Son as a provision for sin was given to all humans, regardless of who we are. God's love is unconditional.

In contrast, our love is usually conditional and based upon how other people behave toward us. This kind of love is based upon familiarity and direct interaction. The Greek word "phileo" (φιλέω) defines this kind of love, often translated "brotherly love." Phileo is a soulish (connected through our emotions) kind of love – something that can be experienced by both believers and non-believers. This is in contrast to agape, which is love extended through the spirit. Agape love requires a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, since the non-regenerated soul is unable to love unconditionally. Agape love gives and sacrifices expecting nothing back in return.

(See the doctrine of [Personal & Impersonal Love](#)).

Those who have studied the Bible and know about Peter's character know that Peter was ruled by his emotions and often responded to situations emotionally, rather than thinking before acting. Sometimes this kind of response led to good things (Peter walking on the water to meet Jesus – [Matthew 14:25-33](#)), whereas at other times,

## Meaning of Love (Continued)

Peter's response was inappropriate (he was interrupted by God while suggesting that he build three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration – [Matthew 17:4](#)). Peter was quite proficient at expressing phileo love, and was probably very popular because of his dynamic character. However, God wants us to express both phileo love *and* agape love. Peter expressed this idea in his first epistle: Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love (phileo) of the brethren, fervently love (agape) one another from the heart ([1 Peter 1:22](#)).

Believers in the churches of Asia Minor had already expressed phileo love, but Peter was encouraging them to fervently express agape love as well. If you are a Christian, you are encouraged to express both soulish, familiar love and spirit-led unconditional love. The goal of the Christian is to become "partakers of the divine nature." In Peter's second epistle, he says that we are to behave with moral excellence. However, this is not enough. Christians tend to be characterized by non-believers as telling other people how they ought to behave. However, the Christian life should not be restricted to just moral excellence, but above all else, should include both phileo and agape love:

*“Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and*

## Meaning of Love (Continued)

*in your godliness, brotherly kindness [phileo], and in your brotherly kindness, love (agape)” (2 Peter 1:5-7).*

The most famous biblical chapter on love is from [1 Corinthians 13:1ff](#).

*“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. 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. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. 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. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 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. 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. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)*

## Meaning of Love (Continued)

This is a description of agape love. It is described as being patient, kind, truthful, unselfish, trusting, believing, hopeful, and enduring. It is not jealous, boastful, arrogant, rude, selfish, or angry. True love never fails. The description perfectly fits God's love toward us, and should be the way we love each other and God. However, could we say that we have met someone who perfectly fulfills this biblical definition of love? The Bible says that this unconditional love is more important than everything else (a partial list includes oratory ability, prophecy, knowledge, faith, philanthropy and hope). All of these things, which are "good" things, will pass away. Only love is eternal, since love will be the basis of eternal life. In fact, when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He said, "*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.*" ([Matthew 22:37](#)) He then added that the second most important law was "*YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*" Jesus said that the entire law was dependent upon these two commandments.

### CONCLUSION

If you are not a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, I trust that you will desire to express love as defined in the Bible. However, wanting to do so and attempting to do so in the power of your own will is guaranteed to fail. This kind of love is only possible through relying on the power of God, through faith in Jesus Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." [Acts 16:31](#)