



Knowing Love: Part one

Ephesians 3:17-19

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ephesians 3:17-19 (NKJV - New King James Version)

¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—

¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the Christian life = to be filled with the fulness of God

The fullness of God = the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

You see, for the Christian, there is no greater imperative to pursue, no greater attribute to obtain, no greater action to display than love. It's true that love is not the only aspect of the Christian life, but it is the origin from which every other aspect of the Christian life ought to flow. In other words, if you don't have love down, you don't have the hopes of living a Christian life that pleases God and is helpful to others.

Paul echoes this in his letter to the Corinthians, when he says,

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NKJV - New King James Version)

¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

APPLICATION

The POINT – Paul uses these examples for a reason.

- If you saw someone speaking in mighty words or tongues, wouldn't you assume they are spiritual?
- If you saw someone accomplish an amazing feat of faith, wouldn't you assume they are qualified?
- If you saw someone sell everything and give it to the poor, wouldn't you assume they are filled with love?
- If you saw someone boldly give up their life for a cause, wouldn't you assume they've arrived?

And yet Paul says there is a more significant test to true spirituality than all of the above actions.

- The most accurate test is, “Do they possess the love of God?”

Do you want your Christianity to be a painful and **pointless noise** or a **beautiful symphony**? The difference maker is love. Do you want your Christianity measured by **how much you**

know or by **how much you possess the heart of Jesus**? Love is the game changer. Do you want your Christianity to be **outwardly impressive** or **eternally effective**? The difference maker is love.

Yet, herein lies the problem. Few things have been as jaded, twisted, redefined, manipulated, abused, and eviscerated as love. More than any other English word, it has been stripped of its depth of meaning.

- Today, love has been minimized and become synonymous with terms like “nice,” “tolerant,” “inclusive,” and “accepting.” It has been associated with a positive emotional feeling toward another person.
- People still revolve their lives, their music, and their pursuits around the idea of love. They are chasing something in love but perverting its very essence in the pursuit.

APPLICATION

I read a short article on psychology today where one Ph.D decided to tackle the question, “What is love.” After reading the very first line, I knew we were in trouble. It read,

“Love is a force of nature.”

Oh no... She continues to define love according to clear cultural standards and convictions. There is no authoritative standard for love, just a bunch of natural forces we can’t control. She writes,

you cannot dictate how, when, and where love expresses itself...

and continues...

Love does not come with conditions, stipulations, addenda, or codes...

This is all nice and fluffy, very poetic, and a good attempt for someone who doesn’t know God, but unfortunately, it falls tremendously short.

One Psychology 101 textbook defines love as ***“an agitated state of psychological arousal.”*** Boy, doesn’t that warm the heart?

APPLICATION

Over the next five weeks, you might be shocked at how unique God's love is in this world and what it really looks like in practical, everyday life.

- We will look at how love and truth are inseparable
- We will look at love in the marriage relationship
- We will look at love in the act of forgiveness and in friendship
- We will examine what love should look like in the Church and to the lost world.

QUOTE

“To know love is to know God. To know God is to know love.”

APPLICATION

A quick recap on the Greek ideas of love. In Greek literature, there are four main words that are often translated as the English word love.

- Sometimes love is difficult for us in the English because we love our spouse, we love our children, we love our church, we love ice cream, we love football, etc. Of course we don't love all those things to the same degree, or with the same actions... at least we shouldn't! The Greeks were wise to differentiate between the connections and emotions we feel.

Eros - A romantic love. A love that is driven by passion and emotion with a desire for physical and emotional connection, but distinct from mere lust. In its basest form, eros seeks self-gratification from others. In its highest form, eros seeks union and mutual delight with the beloved.

- *Eros* is like a fire in a fireplace—beautiful and warm when contained by commitment but destructive when left uncontrolled.

Storge - *Storge* is natural affection, primarily seen within families. It is characterized by quiet, enduring bonds and does not require effort to develop but must be nurtured to remain healthy. This is the love we naturally feel toward our family and close friends. It's a love of comfort through availability.

- **EXAMPLE:** My son tells me he loves me. He feels a deep, safe, and dependent connection with me.

CS Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*, warns that *Storge*, when driven by selfishness, can become overly possessive to the point of being destructive.

Phileos - *Philia* is the love of friendship and companionship, a bond formed through shared experiences and mutual respect. Philadelphia - the city of brotherly LOVE. It contains a sense of loyalty and camaraderie.

.Then comes the Greek word **agape**.

- This is interesting because this word is RARELY used in Greek literature. Before the Bible, we only had a handful of uses of the Verb form of *agape*.
- In fact, The Bible is the first ancient Greek text that we find the word “*agape*” used in its noun form, actually defining this as a unique attribute!
- It was chosen as the key term to describe the kind of love that God demonstrates to and gives to man and the kind of love that Christians can give back to God and others after first experiencing it and knowing it for themselves.

Agape love is unique in that other natural loves can be experienced by human beings, but agape love is something that comes only from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. That's why Christian love is described in such a way that people should know we are Christians "by our love for each other." How can our love be a unique identifier if it's the same as everyone else?

Some have described it as:

- **“A love that gives expecting nothing in return.”**
- **“A self sacrificing love”**

We could say that **agape love is selfless, sacrificial love** that seeks the highest good of another without expecting anything in return. It's also the hardest love for humans to embrace because it doesn't come naturally or align with our inclinations. Not only that, but *Agape* love leaves one exposed to the reality that they might be taken advantage of. CS Lewis writes a sobering thought:

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.” – C.S. Lewis

When Paul describes the agape love demonstrated by God in Christ, he writes that the love of God has depth, width, length, and breadth that is beyond human knowledge and understanding. As the old hymn put it:

QUOTE

**““Could we with ink the ocean fill,
and were the skies of parchment made,
were every stalk on earth a quill,
and every man a scribe by trade.
To write the love of God above,
would drain the ocean dry,
nor could the scroll contain the whole,
though stretch from sky to sky.”**

APPLICATION

And yet, Paul wants us to comprehend with all the saints, and experientially know this mind-blowing love to its fullest!

Knowing, embracing, and implementing this love literally has the power to change everything; everything in me, and everything around me.

- It is safe to say that every person, every relationship, ever father, mother, husband, wife, friend and neighbor needs the transformative love of God in their lives.

Now, it would takes eons to try and encapsulate and define the love of God, but the best way to sum it up is to look at that love in the height of its demonstration. John 3:16 is a great place to start:

BIBLE PASSAGE**John 3:16 (NKJV - New King James Version)**

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

1 **Agape love is rooted in a Divine source (GOD so loved/God demonstrated)**

BIBLE PASSAGE

[1Jo 4:7-8 NKJV] 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

APPLICATION

- It's incredibly depressing when you study secular or atheistic scholars, philosophers, and psychologists on the subject of love.
- When you read Sigmund Freud, Bertrand Russell, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Aristotle, you see them trying to analyze love, which seems to them to be a mystery.
 - It's confined to a biological necessity to propagate the species and fulfill sexual desire, as Freud assessed, or a mechanism to obtain control and power over others, as Nietzsche claimed. He was against selfless love, seeing it as

diminishing personal strength and autonomy. For Aristotle, love was more about shared goals and rationality than emotional connection.

But the Bible is so unique, because it makes the claim that love is not defined by human emotion, experiences, or natural processes. Love, the way it ought to be, is defined by the nature of God.

APPLICATION

NOTICE: The scripture doesn't tell us that God is loving, or that God loves, for this would imply that love is defined apart from God, and God simply adheres to that definition. No, Love is not an action God performs or a definition God adheres to, God is the definition...

God is the action. God is the soil from where the very concept of love blossoms. Or again, as John puts it:

Earlier in verse 7, John states, "Love is of God."

- The Greek is powerful. It means love "is out of God." It's word that indicates a source. As water flows out of the well, so love is birthed in, and flows from the heart of God.
- Without God, there is no standard of love, no defining point for love, no litmus test for love, no measuring rod for love. Without God, love simply becomes a nice word that means whatever the person using it wants it to mean at the time.

Could we discuss the light of day if the sun if the sun did not exist?

- Could we discuss the coolness of the breeze if there was no such force as wind?
- In the same way, it is utterly silly to discuss the nature and the ramifications of love if one ignores the very source and standard of love.

How many people when they say, "I love you", and "love is the answer" and "all you need is love", actually mean, "We need to discover who God is, what God does, what God says, how God acts, that God is the answer, and all we need is God?"

There's never been a single thing that God's done or that God's said that has been unloving. This, of course, is because He is the definition of love.

- The compassion of God is loving, but so is His justice
- The mercy of God is loving, and so is His wrath
- The generosity of God is loving, and so is His holiness
- The love of God is love, and so is his hate... Yes, you heard me right! God is love, and God also hates.

- He hates idolatry.
- Mal 2 - He hates divorce.
- (Prov 6) He hates pride, lies, murder, and hearts that devise wicked plans and run swiftly to evil. He hates a false witness and the sewing of division.

When you look at the person of Jesus Christ, you see the love of God embodied in human flesh.

- When Jesus called the Pharisees a brood of vipers and whitewashed tombs, it was done within the perfect realm of what love is.
- When Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple with a homemade whip, it was within the perfect boundaries of what love can do.
- When Jesus chose to forgive an adulterous woman instead of condemn her it was just as much an expression of love.
- When Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Get thee behind me Satan", it was within the borders of true love.

But how many times have you heard from people's mouths, "well that God of the Bible and that version of Jesus isn't for me... My God is a God of LOVE." What they are saying is, "I want to construct a god in my image based on my desires and feelings. God agrees with my decisions because He is love. God affirms my lifestyle choices because He is love.

EXAMPLE: What if you were drinking a can of Coke and you said, "this doesn't taste like Coke!" Well, it's nice you have an opinion, but unfortunately the authority for what a coke tastes like is the can in your hand, not your opinions or taste preferences! Neither could you say, I don't like how that dog barks, therefore, it's not a dog. Hey, you don't have to like the dog, or its bark, but you don't have any authority to change reality.

This is what many people do with love and with God. God is the definition of love, Jesus is the embodiment of that love, but if someone decides that God doesn't fit their style, Jesus words are a bit rigid and narrow, all the sudden they are the ones who get to define love while putting God on the sidelines.

To gain an understanding of the basis of love, we must peer deeply into the nature of God. In order to initiate true love in our lives, we must then imitate that which we have found within the nature of God.

You see, you cannot ever truly love to the fullest expression of what love is unless you are imitating God. The entire basis of love is to imitate God.

2 Agape initiates positive action towards the undeserving (The He gave/God demonstrated)

BIBLE PASSAGE

Romans 5:8 (NKJV - New King James Version)

⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ephesians 5:1-2 (NKJV - New King James Version)

¹ Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 John 4:9-10 (NKJV - New King James Version)

⁹ In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

APPLICATION

You see, the love of God is not something that sits on the sidelines. It is manifested and demonstrated.

- As we will see in future studies, this is the greatest characteristics of the kind of love we ought to have towards others... a love that is more than theory, an idea, or an emotion. We are to have love that is visibly demonstrated, tangibly seen, and practically experienced.

WHAT IT DOESN'T SAY:

- For God so loved the world that he sent positive vibes, thoughts and prayers toward humanity, encouraging us to hang in there.

This is the same God who owes us nothing, yet Jesus tells us that he **GAVE** us everything!

- “He gave” tells us that the only reason for any amount of hope we have is that God decided to initiate his generosity toward us, even when we didn’t deserve it; even if there was nothing we could reciprocate, even when we didn’t have ANY ability to move towards Him or give Him anything, **GOD GAVE** and **GOD LOVED**.
- LOVE IS NOT AN AGITATED PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE, IT’S AN ACTIVE, INTENTIONAL STATE OF GIVING ONE’S SELF TO THE FULLEST.
- When was the last time you looked at someone who not only didn’t deserve anything from you, perhaps even your enemy, and initiated a generous action toward them for no other reason than God’s love?
- That’s exactly what God did when He sent His son into the world.

3 Agape love gives generously and sacrificially (His only begotten son)

APPLICATION

When you give away something you have a lot of, it's one thing; when you give away the only one you have, it's another.

- There was only one way for us to be rescued from sin, and that was for God to give us of himself.
- Begotten doesn't mean created or even born. In its Greek form, it literally means:

Begotten - single of its kind, the only one

EXAMPLE: My dad gave me **this guitar**. It was the only one like it he had. It was extremely generous of him. I've watched him give away guitars to other people, people who aren't his sons and are barely even his friends.

But God, didn't just give us a guitar, or something that even could have a monetary value placed on it. Even if we were to give our life for a random stranger or an enemy, the value of our life would even pale in comparison to the worth of the Only Begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, for this was God giving himself of his own unique nature.

4 Agape love is willing to absorb the failures of others

APPLICATION

He gave us His Son. But what does that imply? When we read about the Son of God we realize an incomprehensible truth:

Son = Sacrifice

- **[Mar 10:45 NKJV] 45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”**
- **[Eph 5:2 NKJV] 2 ...Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**
- **[Heb 9:26 NKJV] 26 ...but now, once at the end of the ages, He (Jesus) has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**

Why a sacrifice?

- For God so loved the world that he said, “Hey you do your thing and I’ll do mine, and I won’t judge you bro! Love you!”

NOPE: on the contrary, God fully saw how wretched, undeserving, dirty, rotten, sinful creatures we were. He knew He could never accept us on our own merit or righteousness because we had none.

- But instead of leaving us to rot away as we deserved, he said, “I’ve got it covered. I’ll pay the price. I’ll take the blame. I’ll suffer and die the death they deserve. Though I’m completely innocent, just and righteous, I’ll become the sacrifice and give them all my qualifications. I’ll take the death; they can have the life. I’ll take the sin; they can have forgiveness. I’ll take the pain; they can have the healing!”

5 Agape seeks the best outcome for those it's directed toward (should not perish but have everlasting life)

APPLICATION

- Those who don’t believe will only find condemnation and judgment at the end of their life because they refused the love of God in the gift of Jesus. Is that fair? Of course, it

is. Agape love can also be rejected by the recipient.

- To force himself on all would be contrary to the love
- that He has. There is no love in forcing one into a relationship they want no part of. No, a loving relationship MUST involve the act of the will of both parties involved.
- God already demonstrated His love, now humanity is in the position to either receive that love and enter into a relationship with God or reject that love and suffer the consequences of rejecting such a gift.

CONCLUSION

Josh! You didn't tell us anything about what it means for us to love, what love looks like when it comes to us! Hey, don't worry; that's coming in full force in the next 4 weeks, but for now, remember this.

“To know God is to know love. To know love is to know God.”

If you want to be radically transformed by love, then the best place to start is by getting to know the genuine and only true source of love. Study Jesus, get to know the nature of His love, and before you know it, that same love of God will be transforming the world through you! Amen.