



“A More Excellent
Way”

AN EXPLORATION OF
AGAPĒ

For Paul,

- ▶ Love is action: nothing less will do. Where inaction resides, love does not. As such *agape* is neither a human virtue inherent within the soul nor a talent developed by discipline and hard work. It is the touch of the Divine (Rom. 5:5)

Chiastic Level One (1 Corinthians 11-14)

- ▶ A Men and women in worship service: On proper dress (11:2–16)
 - ▶ B An order of worship: The sacrament (11:17–34)
- ▶ C Spiritual gifts and the metaphor of the body (12:1–31)
- ▶ D The discourse on love (13:1–13)
- ▶ C' Spiritual gifts and the building up of the body (14:1–25)
 - ▶ B' An order of worship: Prophets and speaking in tongues (14:26–33a)
- ▶ A' Men and women in worship: On proper decorum (14:33b–36).

Chiastic Level Two (1 Corinthians 12-14)

- ▶ A “The spiritual gifts (12:1–31)”
- ▶ B “Love and the spiritual gifts (13:1–3)”
- ▶ C “Love defined (13:4–7)”
- ▶ B’ “Love and the spiritual gifts (13:8–13)”
- ▶ A’ “The spiritual gifts (14:1–25)”

Chiastic Level Three (1 Corinthians 12-14)

- ▶ A Continue in zeal for spiritual gifts but follow “a more excellent way” (12:31)
- ▶ B Love and other spiritual gifts (13:1–3)
- ▶ C Love positively defined (13:4a)
- ▶ D Love negatively defined (13:4b–6)
- ▶ C' Love positively defined (13:7)
- ▶ B' Love and spiritual gifts (13:8–13)
- ▶ A' Continue in zeal to follow after spiritual gifts (14:1).

The Process in Acquiring Love

- ▶ Come to Christ in love
- ▶ Keep his commandments (John 14:15).
- ▶ Be endowed with greater spirituality, for “he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).
- ▶ Receive the fuller love that comes only to those “who are true followers of [God’s] Son, Jesus Christ” and who ask for it “with all the energy of heart” (Moro. 7:48).
- ▶ Maintain that love “by diligence unto prayer” (Moro. 8:26).
- ▶ Thus, “herein is our love made perfect” (1 John 4:16–17), and we come to a fullness of joy.

The Characteristics of Agapē

- ▶ *Love is patient (makrothymeō)*:
 - ▶ (1) “to bear up under provocation without complaint,”
 - ▶ (2) “to remain tranquil while waiting.” The two combine to express love’s ability to wait patiently for the proper time or circumstance before taking any kind of direct action.
- ▶ *love is kind (chrēsteuomai)*:
 - ▶ to be loving and merciful, in addition to being kind. The weight of the verb is on providing something beneficial to another as a kindness.
- ▶ *love is not jealous (zēloō)*:
 - ▶ The verb here carries the very negative connotation of being filled with envy, resentment, even anger over another’s good fortune because of pride. The force of the word is in the depth of the feeling.

The Characteristics of Agapē

- ▶ *Love does not brag (perpereuomai):*
 - ▶ To heap praise upon oneself. The noun refers to one who constantly boasts about his or her accomplishments. Paul's point is that love never "plays the braggart."
- ▶ *Love is not conceited (physioomai)*
 - ▶ To become puffed up, conceited. The verb points to an inflated ego manifesting itself in arrogant behavior and feelings of self-importance. It is self-conceit at its best and stands opposite of self-respect. The vice that promotes this ungodly behavior is pride. That Paul denounces this wickedness three times in this epistle (4:6, 18–19; 5:2) shows that it is one of his major concerns. He, therefore, stresses that love avoids, at all cost, ostentatious and conceited behavior.
- ▶ *It is not rude (aschēmoneō)*
 - ▶ "to treat unfairly, to behave unseemly" or "to disgrace oneself," points to actions that go well beyond propriety. It stands in contrast to that which is courteous, proper, and in good taste. It, therefore, is the opposite of good manners. One who loves, on the other hand, does that which is proper, in good taste, and makes others feel comfortable.

The Characteristics of Agapē

- ▶ *Is not self-serving (ou zētei ta heautēs)*
 - ▶ Seeks not its own interests. The phrase conveys the idea that it is not self-promoting or insistent on getting its own way.
- ▶ *Is not easily angered (paroxynō)*
 - ▶ “to urge, spur on, stimulate” but especially “to irritate” or “provoke to anger,” and, “to be irritated, angered.” The adjective *oxys*, has the sense of “sharp, keen,” and when applied to emotions, it denotes very sharp or keen feelings. On the light side, it refers to being touchy or overly sensitive; in the middle, it means being piqued or irritated; on the heavy side, it refers to anger that expresses itself in sharp disagreement and contention. The context here points to the offense taken when one’s self-regard has been pricked or punctured. Paul’s point is that love does not become upset, irritated, embittered, or angry over injuries whether perceived or real.
- ▶ *Does not hold a grudge (logizomai)*
 - ▶ “to reckon or calculate.” In a commercial sense it means to keep track of credits and debits. Paul associates it with the adjective *kakon*, used nominally to mean “evil, wrong,” referring specifically to actions that are harmful or injurious to an individual. Paul is saying that love does not keep track of injuries received and, therefore, never seeks vengeance.

The Characteristics of Agapē

- ▶ *It does not delight in injustice (chairō):*
 - ▶ “To take pleasure or delight in something. The noun *adikia* looks more specifically at “acts that violate standards of right conduct” and more broadly denotes all wrong doing. Since the noun is set against *alētheia*, “truth,” in the connected phrase (see below), it connotes deliberate lies and deceits that hurt others.
- ▶ *It delights in truth (synchairō; alētheia)*
 - ▶ The verb has the same root as the verb *chairō* in the preceding phrase. The prefix *syn* however, intensifies the quality and adds the idea of participation since it means to do something *with* another person. Here it connotes taking great delight *with* another in some truth. The noun *alētheia*, “truth,” for Paul and other Christians, denoted gospel doctrine. It is grounded on the Atonement of the Savior and is expressed in his teachings. Paul's point is that love applauds, rejoices, or delights with others in finding and sharing truth. Because love has no agenda, it does not fear truth and, therefore, boldly seeks it wherever it can be found with the intent of delightedly sharing it.
- ▶ *It bears all things (panta stegei):*
 - ▶ “All things”: completeness and wholeness. It connotes the absence of all limits. It does not, therefore, define what might otherwise be seen as the inclusive limits of love. Rather, it forces an expansion that reveals its full limitlessness and all-encompassing nature.
 - ▶ The verb *stegō* has two definitions that work here: The first means to keep something confidential, that is, to pass over it in silence. The second is to bear up under difficulties with emphasis on endurance. The idea the verb conveys is keeping quiet about what is displeasing about another person. This quality is grounded in love's continually enduring nature that makes allowances for another's weakness.

The Characteristics of Agapē

- ▶ *It believes all things (pisteuō):*
 - ▶ “To give credit to” or “to entrust.” It suggests more than mere credence but shows a willingness on the part of the lover to take another’s word rather than being unduly suspicious.
- ▶ *It hopes all thing (elpizō)*
 - ▶ “favorable and confident expectations.” It looks to the future with complete assurance of promised blessings, especially those promised in the gospel message. In Paul’s context, it is the ability to see a good outcome in the potential of other people and, therefore, provide a willingness to stay with them.
- ▶ *It endures in all thing (hypomenō,)*
 - ▶ “To stand one’s ground, hold out, endure” It denotes something staying in place longer than is expected, especially as it pertains to maintaining a belief or course of action in face of opposition.
- ▶ *Love never fails (oudetote piptei)*
 - ▶ The verb *piptō* has a wide range of semantic nuances, including falling down, losing station or position, being ruined or destroyed, and failing in one’s faith. The context here suggests something becoming invalid, falling apart, or collapsing. The phrase, therefore, does not mean that love never ends, albeit Paul brings in that quality in verse 13. Since the English verb “fail” means the abandonment or omission of something that is expected or required of a person, it works. Paul’s point is that love will never become invalid or unnecessary. It will never fall apart when needed. It continually and consistently meets all that is required of it and always will. In sum, “it stands when all else fails.”

The Distinctive Theological Meanings of Agapē

- ▶ 1. It represents the power behind the restored gospel that was breaking into the New Testament era (and, by extension, that of the Restoration). As such, it was the only vital force which has a future. Indeed, it is *the* fervent virtue of the future celestial realm where respect, regard, and the welfare of others dominate all that transpires.
- ▶ 2. Second, it denotes an attitude or stance taken by the Christian which manifests itself most purely not just in willful acts of kindness and consideration but more so in self-sacrifice for the good of others. In short, it is a personal manifestation of the pure love of Christ.

In sum

- ▶ Love never fails because it never falls apart, never quits, never gives up.
- ▶ Thus, God is love.

THE END

