

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

LOVE

The love of God is far above natural love; nevertheless the love between a husband and his wife is typical of the love of God for Israel and of Christ for the ecclesia. In the Greek there is a word for the love of God, namely, *agapē*, and a word for natural love, *phileō*. In the Hebrew Old Testament, however, there is one word, *ahab*, for both the love of God and natural love.

Agapē is described as sacrificial love because it is love of a person contrary to our natural feelings when no cause for love exists. It is best expressed in the words: "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Phileō means to be a friend or to have affection for (denoting personal attachment as a matter of sentiment or feeling). *Agapē* is wider, as shown in the above quotation. In nearly every place where it is used it is in connection with the love of God. In a very few instances it is used in such ways as the love of the world, possibly because *agapē* conveys the idea of a deliberate act as opposed to a natural act. If we turn from the Truth to the world it is a deliberate act in opposition to the Truth.

God's love for us

Agapē love is so bound up with God that we read that "God is love". Hence the words: "Beloved, let us love one another: *for love is of God*; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for *God is love*. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jno. 4:7-10).

The character of God is love. In the Hebrew the word 'name' has the meaning of 'character', and God's Name is revealed in Exodus 34. Moses desired to know God's way that he might know Him, and to be shown His glory (Ex. 33:13,18), and Yahweh replied:

"I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD [Yahweh] before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (v. 19).

Then, in the morning, Moses went up Mount Sinai with the tables of stone, and Yahweh proclaimed His Name there:

"And the LORD [Yahweh] descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD [Yahweh]. And the LORD [Yahweh] passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD [Yahweh], The LORD [Yahweh] God [EL], merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (34:5-7).

In this Name are expressed the qualities of love. Let us note the qualities of the love of God: merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. But He will by no means clear the guilty. The last part of the above quotation is qualified by Exodus 20:5, where we read: ". . . visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them *that hate Me*".

We see, then, that love is a combination of goodness and severity. Hence the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:22: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell [Israel at this time], severity; but toward thee [the Gentiles], goodness, *if thou continue in His goodness*: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off". Also the words in 1 Corinthians 13:6, which says that love "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth". (Note that 'charity' should read 'love' here; it is the word *agapē* in the original.)

Our love for others

There are fifteen elements of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, all worthy of consideration. It:

- 1 "suffereth long"—forbears, shows fortitude, is slow to anger;
- 2 "is kind"—shows usefulness, is gentle;
- 3 "envieth not"—does not show misguided zeal, is not jealous;
- 4 "vaunteth not itself"—does not boast, is not a braggart;
- 5 "is not puffed up"—is not inflated, proud or haughty;
- 6 "doth not behave itself unseemly"—is not void of proper deportment, does not act with moral deformity;
- 7 "seeketh not her own"—see Philippians 2:4;
- 8 "is not easily provoked"—is not incited, does not become exasperated;
- 9 "thinketh no evil"—does not take an inventory to estimate or judge;
- 10 "rejoiceth not in iniquity"—does not delight in what is contrary to right, or in impropriety which is repugnant;
- 11 "rejoiceth in the truth"—rejoices in truth as the revealed reality lying at the basis of and agreeing with an appearance;
- 12 "beareth all things"—covers with silence, endures patiently;
- 13 "believeth all things"—has faith in all things in God's Word;
- 14 "hopeth all things"—hopes, trusts; see Romans 8:24;
- 15 "endureth all things"—bears trials, has fortitude and perseverance, remains behind after others have gone, bravely bears up against suffering.

The number fifteen is used in connection with a vow or promise to God for a male of sixty or above (Lev. 27:7). Perhaps it is a reminder that love is a sign of maturity in the Truth (Col. 3:14) and that we should promise to strive to walk in love. It is a good practice to memorise these qualities of love and to repeat them in prayer to our heavenly Father, asking for His help to manifest them in our lives.

We stated at the beginning that the love between a husband and wife is a pattern for God's love for Israel and Christ's love for the ecclesia. The ultimate expression of God's love is the giving of His only begotten Son (Jno. 3:16). Hence the words of the Apostle Paul: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church [ecclesia], and gave himself for it . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies" (Eph. 5:25,28).

The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ was a manifestation of true *agapē* love, and we are exhorted to manifest this sacrificial love to the ecclesia, by laying "down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jno. 3:16). The object of Christ's love was: "that he might present it to himself a glorious church [ecclesia]" (Eph. 5:27); so our objective with one another should be that we might help one another to attain to the Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:19).

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity [love], these three; but the greatest of these is charity [love]" (1 Cor. 13:13).

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