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The Greatest Love (Part 2)

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As difficult as it is to go against nature to work for the highest good of the meanest people, Jesus commanded us to do so that we might “be children of” the heavenly Father (Matt. 5:45). In the eyes of Jesus, by our developing commitment love, we will become “mature” as the heavenly Father is “mature” (Matt. 5:48, FHV, perfect, complete). And we are commanded, “be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love [*agape*], even as Christ loved [*egapesen*] us, and gave himself for us” (Eph. 5:1-2).

It is commitment love that God expects in marriage: “Husbands, love [*agape*], your wives, even as Christ loved [*egapesen*] his bride, and gave himself for her” (Eph. 5:25). Marriage vows are a commitment: “for better, for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.”

When one asks for a divorce, saying, “I don’t love him (or her) any more,” that person is really saying, “I don’t like him (or her) any more.” The commitment (*agape*) promised at the wedding is no more and even the affection (*philia*) has died.

A Christian mother and father, though grieving that their daughter had been raped and murdered, had so learned commitment love for their Lord that they went to the jail and told the murderer about salvation from sin in Christ, prayed with him, and led him to be baptized! Unbelievable!

This Christian couple was practicing a love that came from heaven, a love that completely reverses human nature, a love born in their hearts when they themselves were born again (John 3:3-5), when they themselves became new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

It follows that *agape* love is in a realm to itself, a *sui generis*, a *monogenes*. Its selfless devotion originated in heaven. As the sun outshines the stars, so *agape* love is more brilliant, more lasting, and more meaningful than three other God created loves: sex in marriage (*eros*), family (*surge*), and friendship (*philia*). *Agape* becomes unique, alone, solitary, a “super-word” (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13).

Agape, being a “super-word,” envelopes and is “above all these things: tender affection, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience” (Col. 3:12-14), said Paul. Then Peter said that “above all things” Christians are to practice “fervent *agape*” among themselves (1 Peter 4:8).

Seven admirable attributes (faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness (*philia*)) by themselves are inadequate, said Peter. They must be supplemented, “adding on your part” *agape* (2 Peter 1:5-7).

As Jesus was a *monogenes* (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9), the only being of his kind, *agape* is the only word of its kind.

The distinctiveness and high excellency of *agape* are evident when the good Samaritan saw a beaten, bloody, half-dead foreigner lying in a ditch. Since the victim was not a kinsman, *storge* love would not have moved the Samaritan to render aid. Since the victim was not a friend, *philia* love would not have moved the Samaritan. Only *agape* love would bind up wounds, get the man to a bed, sit up with him, and pay his bills.

Though *agape* love is “the greatest” of all virtues, human or divine (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 John 4:8; Col. 3:14), it is not everything. It is Satan who teaches people that “nothing is wrong if you do it in love—even to fornicate, to steal, to kill.” It is Satan who teaches that “love displaces all law,” for the New Testament is “the Law of Christ” (Gal 6:2; Rom. 8:2; 1 Cor. 9:21).

Even with a profession of love, “except you believe that I am he,” said Jesus, “you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Even with a profession of love, “except you repent,” said Jesus, “you will perish” (Luke 13:3). Even with a profession of love, they who say that baptism is not necessary for salvation reject “the counsel of God against themselves,” for baptism “saves” (Luke 7:30; 1 Peter 3:21).

And even with a profession of love, Christians who do not “continue in the faith” will “shrink back to destruction” (Col. 1:23; Heb. 10:39). One cannot truly say that he loves God if he rejects any of God’s commandments, for “this is the love of God that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). “If you love me,” said Jesus, “you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

It is Satan who teaches people that if they have love they will fellowship everybody. That kind of love would include not only all so-called Christians, but also all the Jews and the Mohammedans and the Buddhists and the drunkards and the sodomites, and so on and on.

That kind of love never criticizes anybody for anything. That kind of love inspired the misleading words:

“There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, it does not behoove any of us to talk about the rest of us.”

That kind of love is really loveless, for it sees people violating God’s laws and keeps quiet, as if those people will not “appear before Christ’s judgment seat, that each one may receive the things he did in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). A love that does not speak up is perverted.

True love respects “the word of the truth, the gospel” (Eph. 1:13), “the things that are written” in 66 books (1 Cor. 4:6, ASV).

Since only “the truth of the gospel” (Col. 1:5) can make sinners “free” (John 8:32), wise people “buy the truth and sell it not” (Prove. 23:23). They know that God is watching, and that he knows when people have “the love of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:10) in their hearts.

When they do not, he sends to them “a working of error, that they should believe a lie in order that they all might be judged who believed not the truth but enjoyed wrongdoing” (2 Thess. 2:11-12).