

Come to Understanding

**They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24**

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The Love of God

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, he addressed it to a body of confused believers. They were trying to blend the customs of the pagan Greek worshippers with Christianity. Many found themselves following the wisdom and teachings of men instead of the Word of God. As he tried to bring the Corinthians back to the knowledge of the truth, Paul addressed many of his concerns on such wide ranging topics as the blending of idol worship with Christian communion, spiritual gifts, marriage, and many other interpersonal issues (see 1 Corinthians 1-12).

Then Paul went on to discuss one of the most important and confusing topics in the world. He wrote:

- 1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling 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, and have not charity, I am nothing.
- 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing. -1 Corinthians 13

The Greek word which Paul used in this discussion was “agape,” which is translated here as “charity.” Pronounced as “a-gá-peí,” it is also often translated as “love.”

To readers of modern English, the word “love” is a source of great confusion. We use the same word to express our feeling for our aunt or uncle, our friend, our spouse, our child, our cat, our dog, our car, our clothes, and our favorite food or sport. We also use the word to express God’s relationship with us and ours with Him. The word is so imprecise, that many of us are afraid to use it, for fear that it will be misinterpreted.* Therefore, we cannot tell others that we love them nor can we tell God that we love Him.

*Several Greek words are translated into English as “love:” storge – love of relatives or family; phileo – friendly or brotherly love; eros – romantic or sexual love; and agape – selfless or Godly love.

Yahweh requires that we love and obey Him:

- 12 And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require of you, but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul,
- 13 To keep the commandments of Yahweh, and his statutes, which I command you this day for your good? –Deuteronomy 10

When Yahshua (Jesus) was asked which was the greatest commandment of all, the answer was clear:

- 28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?
- 29 And Yahshua answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:
- 30 And you shall love [agape] the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this *is* the first commandment.
- 31 And the second *is* like, *namely* this, You shall love [agape] your neighbor as yourself. There is none other commandment greater than these.
- 32 And the scribe said to him, Well, Master, you have said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:
- 33 And to love [agape] him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love [agape] *his* neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. –Mark 12

The greatest commandment is to know that there is one God, whom we must “agape” love with all of our being. The next greatest commandment is that we “agape” love each other as ourselves. The kind of love that Yahshua said we are *required* to have for God and for each other is expressed by the Greek word, “agape.” That is the kind of love which God has for us. It is the love He showed by giving His only begotten son to give us everlasting life:

- 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. -John 3

**So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8**

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If we claim to be born of God, then we *must* have the same kind of selfless “agape” love for Him *and* for each other that He has for us. John explained that, without this kind of love, we don’t even know God. Unless we know this Godly form of love that we receive from Him, we can’t even know Him. That is because He *is* “agape” love:

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God.

8 He that loves not knows not God; for God is love.
-1 John 4

We witness one of the most famous failures of all time to express agape love through the exchange between the resurrected Messiah and Peter. Even though Yahshua already knew Peter’s heart, He asked him, “Do you agape [αγαπας] love me?” But Peter answered, “I phileo [φιλω] love you.” [The Greek word is in brackets.]

15 So when they had dined, Yahshua said to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, love [αγαπας] you me more than these? He said to him, Yes, Lord; you know that I love [φιλω] you. He said to him, Feed my lambs. -John 21

Peter said in effect, “I love you as a friend, but I don’t love you with the unconditional love of God.” Yahshua asked him again, “Do you agape love me?” But Peter again replied, “I phileo love you.”

16 He said to him again the second time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, love [αγαπας] you me? He said to him, Yes, Lord; you know that I love [φιλω] you. He said to him, Feed my sheep. -John 21

Knowing that Peter did not yet have the kind of love that God requires of us, Yahshua rephrased His question. To Peter’s grief, this time He asked him, “Do you phileo love me?” Sadly, Peter again confirmed, “I phileo love you.”

17 He said to him the third time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, love [φιλεις] you me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Love [φιλεις] you me? And he said to him, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love [φιλω] you. Yahshua said to him, Feed my sheep. -John 21

Peter failed three times to express *agape* love for the Messiah.

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Yahshua had told the unbelieving Jews that if God were their Father, then they would agape love Him:

42 Yahshua said to them, If God were your Father, you would love [agape] me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. -John 8

By example, Yahshua was able to have the kind of love for His friends that Peter was unable to have for Him. It made no difference whether they were male or female, Yahshua had agape love for His friends:

5 Now Yahshua loved [agape] Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. -John 11

He commanded us to have the same kind of selfless agape love for each other that He has for us. This love is so great that it exceeds our understanding:

12 This is my commandment, That you love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. -John 15

This commandment to love one another is not a new one. John wrote to the “elect lady” that we had it from the beginning. We are to love one another with the kind of love that God has for us, the unselfish agape love:

5 And now I beseech you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. -2 John 1

We have access by faith into the grace of God, whereby, even through struggles, we have hope, knowing that we have received the love of God, who came in the flesh to die for our sins:

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Yahshua the Messiah:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us.

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time the Messiah died for the ungodly. -Romans 5

As Paul continued to the Corinthians, he concluded:

13 And now remains faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity [agape love]. -1 Corinthians 13

Are we able to give this great love of God to others? Can we unselfishly say from our hearts, “I love you?”