

The Bible and Love

1 Corinthians 13:1-7, Romans 12:9-10, 2 Corinthians 5:14-18

Introduction

Illus: Skit about love potion #9.

Of course we all know there is no such thing as love potion number nine, ten or anything else. There is no magic potion that is going to teach us how to love or make others fall in love with us.

Before we talk about love, we need understand that in the English language of today, the word “love” is simply inadequate. In fact, the word love is virtually impossible to define. The only way we have any understanding of what someone means when they use the word love is to hear it in context. Consider the following sentences.

“I love my new computer, it is so much faster.”

“I absolutely love Alabama football.”

“I love my sister but she is driving me crazy.”

“We still love each other but we can’t live with one another.”

“God loves you so much that he sent his son to die for you.”

As you can see our English word love is used to describe everything from our fondness of a new gadget to the act God sending his son to die for us.

The English language needs words to describe the different types and depths of love. In the Bible there are different words for levels of affection and love. There is a word for love between friends and a word for family love. There is also Eros love which refers to a sensual or physical attraction. But the deepest word for love in the Greek is “Agape Love”. This is the word used to describe God’s love for his us and how Christians should love.

Agape is love that looks beyond your faults and sees your needs.

Agape love is unconditional love that does not take into account what

is given in return. In 1 John 4:8, when the writer declares, “**God is love**”, the original Greek uses the word Agape. God is Agape.

Agape is the type of love we are discussing this morning. Agape love is the love we should have for God in response to God. Agape is the type of love we should have for our spouse. And, agape is the type of love we should aspire to have for others.

So, as I speak of love in this message, please understand it is agape love, deep sacrificial love that is the subject. I am not speaking of the conditional love that says you must reciprocate in order for me to love you in return but rather selfless love.

Illus: When I mentioned this message a few weeks ago, I said it would be on the “Bible and Romance.” That afternoon after lunch, my wife looked at me and asked, “What do you know about romance?” She proceeded to point out how I never send flowers and do other things that are romantic to her. She was right, I know nothing about romance. So I changed the message title to “The Bible and Love.”

That is exactly the change I want you to make in your mind today. We are not talking about romance. We are talking about agape love, the kind of love that does not expect flowers or other things in return. It is love much deeper than we are accustomed to giving or receiving. Yet the Bible tells us it is the type of love we should desire to experience. Let’s think of agape love as godly love.

This message is a bit like castor oil, it is easy to give but hard to take.

Content

1. Agape love is genuine.

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Profound words are meaningless without sincere love. Sacrificial acts are worthless without genuine love.

Agape love must be genuine, it cannot be imitated. Time always reveals if our love is genuine or not.

Romans 12:9 reads, *“⁹ Love must be sincere.”* The word translated “sincere” (sine cera) literally means *“without wax.”* It is a term used to describe pottery that has no wax covering up the imperfections. In other words, it is 100% pure, not a fake or knock-off.

Too often, we express acts of kindness but, our words and actions lack genuine love inside. See if any of these ring a bell.

- You are talking with someone and they ask that you pray for them. You assure them you will but you never do.
- You smile while someone is talking to you but actually you aren't even listening to them at all.
- You tell someone to call anytime but when their number comes up on the caller ID, you won't answer the phone.
- The church has a work day and you show up to help. When you get home, you grumble about who didn't show up and about the task you were assigned to do.
- You say you love someone with all your heart but when an argument breaks out, you say things intended to hurt deeply.

Often our actions might appear genuine and our words may seem sincere but real agape love is not behind them. We are not sincere.

The Bible uses agape to describe the love that should exist between a husband and wife. We readily say, “I would die for my wife.” But, when she fails to cook supper on Monday night, we say “I'll be darn if I am going to do it or help clean up.”

We say, “I would do anything for my husband.” But when he wants you to go to Bass Pro Shop with him, you say “I just don't care anything about that place.”

We say, “I love the Lord my Savior.” But when he calls upon us to sacrifice a little to serve him, we pull out our bag of excuses.

It is easy to make big promises about what we are willing to do when there is little chance we will ever be expected to deliver. But when it comes to the real things of daily life, our love often proves to be shallow and not genuine. Real agape love rejoices in the happiness of others without being jealous or expecting something in return.

Agape love is genuine.

2. Agape love is unselfish.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NIV

As we read the attributes of biblical love, you will notice that these are unselfish and unnatural. Love is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs.

By nature I am not patient. By nature I am kind unless someone crosses me in which case I can be very unkind. By nature I do envy others and boast when good fortune comes my way. By nature we are self-seeking and rude and angered when it serves our desires or emotions. We are all of this by nature because at heart we are self-centered.

But when we experience and exercise agape love, we become influenced to be unselfish. We are told over and over in God's word to put others above ourselves.

Illus: When I think of this concept, I think of one of my relatives. If I get something new or build something and show it to him, he never has anything nice to say. He will either find something wrong with it or he will just grunt a little as though he is giving reluctant approval.

But let him get something new and he wants me to look it over and stroke him about what a good purchase he made and how much I like what he has. In reality he is selfish. He is not genuinely happy for others but expects others to be happy for him.

Agape love puts the feelings and needs of others in front of our own. Our marriages so desperately need to understand this concept. Instead, most operate on a reciprocal basis. I will do that for you if you will do this for me. We are always looking for what we will get in return. That is not agape love.

Unselfish agape love is contagious! When we exercise it in our marriages, it fuels a much deeper love that sincerely cares for and desires to bless our spouse. You talk about romance and genuine love, let agape (unselfish) love permeate your marriage and watch what God will do.

After 30 years of marriage, I sometimes just look at my wife and think to myself, "I sure do love that woman."

3. Agape love is discriminating.

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12:9-10 NIV

This is a bit of a difficult point to make but an important point nevertheless. When we aspire to have agape love we desire to love like God loves. What does God not love? God hates evil. God hates sin. He does not hate sinners but God does hate evil.

While agape love must be genuine and unselfish, it must also be discriminating. Agape love sincerely desires the best for others and hates evil thus the statement, "*Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*" Paul is describing how sincere God inspired love will behave.

This sounds strange to our ears. We believe hate and love cannot go together. On the contrary, hating what is evil is a requirement for sincere love. As a parent, do you hate it when your child comes home

broken-hearted because someone was mean to them? Do you hate when someone humiliates one of your friends publicly?

¹⁶ There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, ¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. Proverbs 6:16-19 NIV

We hate what is evil not because we are cantankerous. We hate what is evil because it hurts people and destroys relationships. We hate evil and sin because it pushes people away from God. If we truly love people, we must hate what is evil because it hurts those we love.

Too many people today have grown immune to evil and sin. Thomas Carlyle said, "*The Christian must be consumed with the infinite beauty of holiness and the infinite damnability of sin.*"

We are in trouble when we become numb to evil and we stop being shocked by it. We see murders, adultery, lying and stealing so much on TV that we are no longer shocked by it.

Illus: Have you ever genuinely loved someone but had to watch them make a terrible mess of their life. Perhaps you watched them live in adultery or abuse drugs or alcohol. You love them but you hate seeing what sin is doing to them. It breaks your heart to watch them miss out on what God has for them.

Listen, if you have someone who tries to hold you accountable and warns you when you when they see you making mistakes, you have someone who genuinely loves you and you should thank God for that person in your life.

An even greater danger comes when we find ourselves participating in sin because we have become numb to it and no longer hate it. When this happens, we lack genuine agape love.

Agape love discriminates between good and evil and hates what is evil while loving what is good.

4. Agape love is spiritual.

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:14-18 NIV

Notice the first sentence of this text, "¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."

It is the love of Christ that compels us to become someone different. In his intense instructions to married couples found in Ephesians 5, Paul opens with "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Everything I have said about agape love is impossible to experience without Christ. Every attempt at sincere godly love is in vein without the presence of Jesus Christ in one's heart. In fact, without Christ the motivation to express agape love does not even exist.

But upon experiencing Christ, we desire to begin acting in loving ways. We must begin practicing the principals of agape love.

We must do the loving thing even when it doesn't feel completely right. I know that sounds strange but by faith we practice and learn to obey. Just as a child wobbles before he learns to walk, we must begin learning the concepts of agape love.

A cook must learn to cook well. A craftsman must go through a period of apprenticeship before he is a craftsman. In the same way, we must practice the concepts of agape love. The inspiration is there through Jesus Christ. We are spiritually inspired to love others as God has loved us. But we must take the action to love with agape love.

The love we are talking about is un-natural. This is a type of love that can only be fueled by the transformation that comes through Christ Jesus.

We must fully believe God when he says, "I so love the world that I gave my only son that whoever believes in him might be saved."

Some people just do not want to love other people; something serious is missing.

When we have God's love changing us on the inside, people will see it on the outside.

When we are "in Christ", we are compelled to love others.

Conclusion

Illus: Show "Never Been Unloved" video. The video depicts different people who have been unfaithful, unreliable, unworthy, etc. But the video emphasizes though we have been all those things, we have never been unloved. God has loved us with agape love all along.

We cannot understand or experience the agape love until we first experience God's love for us.