

Is Agape Love Always A Good Thing?

(appropriate for High Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily, February 2021

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Agape: *unselfish, loyal, and benevolent concern for the good of another*

When the Greek word “agape” is used in the Bible (i.e. the New Testament), it refers to a willful, intentional, loyal, sacrificial love that desires another’s highest good.

Question: *Is agape love always a good thing? Are there situations where it is bad?*

Agape love can be good or bad depending on what the target of the love is. If the target of the agape love is God or other people it is good.

Luke 10:27

And he answered, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

Our love for God is to be agape love. Because we love God we are loyal to Him and we willfully and intentionally make sacrifices to follow Him and obey Him.

We are also to love other people with agape love. The Good Samaritan is an excellent example of this.

(Luke 10:30-37)

Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. ³¹ And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, ³⁴ and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’ ³⁶ Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ *hands*?” ³⁷ And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.”

But if someone is willfully, intentionally, and loyally sacrificing things that God says are good in order to gain things that God says are not good, that would be a negative example of agape love. Here are some negative examples from the Bible where the word “agape” is translated “love”:

Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

There are some people who willfully sacrifice the things that God says are important so that they can put more of their energy and time into gaining wealth. The Bible says that these people have a sacrificial, loyal, agape love for money!

II Timothy 4:10

for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Demas willfully and intentionally sacrificed his relationship with God, Paul, and other Christians in order to pursue his one true, agape love – the things of this present world.

John 3:19

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

Again, this verse tells us that there are people who put their energy, time, money, and loyalty into seeking darkness rather than light. What about you? Where does your energy, time, money, and loyalty go when you are setting priorities for the things you will do in life? What things are you sacrificing in order to divert resources to your one true, agape love?

God's Love For Us Is The Perfect Form of Agape Love

Agape love is displayed in actions and is not primarily a feeling. God's love for us is the perfect example of agape love. God intentionally and willfully sacrificed His Son for our eternal benefit while we were His enemies.

Ephesians 2:4-5

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

Romans 5:8-10

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

I John 4:9-11

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Note: "agape" is a New Testament Greek word. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word that is similar to agape is the word "*chesed*". This word is typically translated as "steadfast love" or "lovingkindness".

(Numbers 14:18)

'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.'

God's agape love for us also means that He does what is best for us, not necessarily what makes us comfortable or pleased.

James 1:2-4

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

I Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

(Romans 8:28-29)

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to *become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

Demonstrating Agape Love For Other People

God wants us to demonstrate agape love to other people. This includes Christians and non-christians.

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Matthew 5:43-44

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

This love for other people is described in I Thessalonians 5:14-15 and I Corinthians 13:4-7

I Thessalonians 5:14-15

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

Notice that agape love is about seeking what is ultimately good for other people rather than a feeling. In the case of an unruly person the best thing we can do to help them is to admonish them!

admonish: *to express warning or disapproval to especially in a gentle, earnest, or concerned manner*

When we do this will the other person like it? Probably not. But we do it because we genuinely want what is best for them. That is our motivation.

I Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

One of the most important tools for doing Bible study is a dictionary. Looking up the definition of key words often provides additional insight into what God is saying about something. In addition, you may find that a word means something that is a little different from what you thought it meant.

What follows is the definition of the key words in I Corinthians 13:4-7. As I read these out loud ask God to show you one area that you need to pay more attention to - an area He wants you to grow in.

15 Characteristics Of Agape Love

Patient: *endures pains, trials, strains, or provocations calmly or without complaint; is not hasty or impulsive; is steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity*

Kind: *has a sympathetic or helpful nature; gives pleasure or relief to others*

Not jealous: *is not hostile toward a rival or someone believed to enjoy an advantage; is not vigilant in guarding a possession*

Does not brag: *does not speak of oneself with excessive pride; does not possess and often call attention to something that is a source of pride*

Is not arrogant: *is not disposed to exaggerate one's own worth or importance; does not show an offensive attitude of superiority*

Does not act unbecomingly: *does not act in ways that are unattractive, unsuitable, or inappropriate*

Does not seek its own:	<i>does not seek power or mastery over property or position for oneself</i>
Is not provoked:	<i>does not allow others to intentionally stimulate, incite, or stir them to anger</i>
Does not take into account a wrong suffered:	<i>does not maintain a record of wrong's suffered for the purpose of modifying future interactions with the person who wronged them in order to limit additional hurts or to exact revenge</i>
Does not rejoice in unrighteousness:	<i>does not feel joy or delight from things that are evil or immoral</i>
Rejoices with the truth:	<i>does feel joy and delight from things that are real, factual, and consistent with the Bible</i>
Bears all things:	<i>accepts or allows oneself to be subjected to all types of stresses without giving way</i>
Believes all things:	<i>has a natural bent toward believing the best about someone or something; accepts a statement or evidence of something to be true, honest, genuine, real, and good, until shown to be otherwise</i>
Hopes all things:	<i>has a desire for and an expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises, resulting in steadfastness during difficult times</i>
Endures all things:	<i>remains firm under all types of suffering or misfortune without yielding or weakening</i>

What do you notice about these characteristics of agape love?

None of these things are easy for us to do. They do not come naturally to us. In fact, it will take our entire lives to grow into this type of love. But with the help of the Holy Spirit we can continuously grow in agape love for both God and other people.

Romans 5:5

and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

(Galatians 5:16&22-24)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

I Corinthians 13:4-7 is the standard for how we are to love God and other people. Its important that you understand and are familiar with God's standard for agape love so that you can cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He works on helping you grow in each of these areas of love during your lifetime.

Conclusion

Agape love is a love that makes willful, intentional, loyal sacrifices to do what is best for another. Agape love is shown to us by God and is the type of love we should have for God. Some people's agape love is not for God or people but is instead directed at the things of this world. God also works in us to help us grow throughout our lives in demonstrating agape love to other people, both Christians and non-Christians.

Appendix: Why Does God Love Us?

When answering this question we have to remember that, although we are made in God's image, He is quite different from us in many ways (**Isaiah 55:8-9**). For example, when it comes to loving someone, most people develop love for someone for reasons related to the following:

- 1) Similarity: the other person is a lot like you in terms of values, beliefs, and standards of conduct
- 2) Reciprocating Feelings: we tend to be attracted to those who like us
- 3) Mysteriousness: although the person has similar values and standards they also have a style or approach that differs from you in such a way that it makes them interesting.
- 4) Excitement: participating in emotionally exciting events together can add to the attraction.
- 5) Social Influences: being with the other person is viewed as a social plus for you by others.
- 6) Fills a Need: the other person has the ability and desire to fill a real need that you have.

OK, now let's see what happens if we apply these human reasons for loving someone else to God.

Similarity & Reciprocating Feelings

The Bible says that God loved us before we loved Him (**Romans 5:8**). This means that reciprocating feelings played no role in God loving us. In addition, **Romans 3:10-12** tells us that before God loved us we did not love Him, we did not seek Him, we did not desire Him, and we had rejected his values and standards. In fact, we were God's enemies (**Romans 5:10**). So, similarity also played no role in God loving us.

Mysteriousness & Excitement

Is there something mysterious about us that God was not aware of before He loved us? No. God designed you and created you. There is nothing about you that is mysterious to Him (**Jeremiah 1:5**). In fact, before you were even born He already knew about all the times that you would betray Him and turn to sin (**John 6:64**)! So, mysteriousness played no role in God loving us. Related to that God foreknew you (**Romans 8:29-30**, **Psalms 139:1-16**). In other words, God knew ahead of time everything that you would ever think and do before you were even born! So excitement played no role in God loving us.

Social Influences

Does having a relationship with us make God look good to other people? No. I saw a bumper sticker on a car once that said, "I've got nothing against God, its His fan club I can't stand". The Bible says that most of God's followers are not people that the World thinks highly of (**I Corinthians 1:26-31**). So, social influences played no role in God loving us.

Fills a Need

Does God have a need that you can fill? No. God does not have any needs (**Acts 17:24-25**). If God had needs He would not be God! So, filling a need played no role in God loving us.

From the exercise above we see that none of the reasons for why people love other people apply to God! (If you can think of another reason not listed above for why people love other people take the same approach and apply it to God and see what happens). OK, so why does God love us? The reason God loves us is because of the nature and essence of who He is. The Bible says that "God is love" (**I John 4:8-9, 16-19**). Compare this to the nature and essence of Man. **Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"** Man sins because that is his nature. Sin comes as easily to Man as drinking a glass of water (**Job 15:16**). Man can't not sin any more than God can't not love (i.e. sacrificial love). Because this is a fundamental aspect of who He is, God must demonstrate that sacrificial love just as He demonstrates all of His attributes. Why? Because the demonstration of His attributes through actions results in God being glorified. To be glorified means for others to give honor, praise, and admiration to someone by common consent. In other words, God's demonstration of His attributes in action results in people voluntarily choosing to praise Him, honor Him, and admire Him. While we were busy sinning and being God's enemies, God sent His Son to die on the cross and sacrificially pay for our sins (**I John 4:10**). When we get to heaven we will fully realize and understand the penalty we avoided and the paradise and inheritance God has given us, down to the very core of our beings. On that day we will be overwhelmed with a desire to praise and honor God for His love for us. Why does God love us? Because God is Love.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Is Agape Love Always A Good Thing?*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Luke 10:27&30-37*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Matthew 6:24, II Timothy 4:10, John 3:19*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Ephesians 2:4-5, Romans 5:8-10*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I John 4:9-11, Numbers 14:18*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *James 1:2-4, I Peter 1:6-7, Romans 8:28-29*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 13:34-35, Matthew 5:43-44*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 13:4-7*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:16&22-24*

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QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

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THEME: *Why Does God Love Us?*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Isaiah 55:8-9*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Romans 5:8-10, Romans 3:10-12*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Jeremiah 1:5, John 6:64*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalms 139:1-16*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 1:26-31*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Acts 17:24-25*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Jeremiah 17:9, Job 15:16*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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