

1 Peter 1:22 – Part SS

1Pe 1:22 (NKJV) Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

As we continue in our study, we have seen that the primary verb in v22 is the verb “love”. It is “*agapao*” and represents the love that God has for the believer. However, in this verse Peter is describing the kind of love that God wants believers to have for one another. In Jesus’s final prayer to His Father, He says this in [John 17:26](#),

Jn 17:26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

The phrase “**may be in them**” is one of the obvious goals for the Christian life - for God’s love to become fully integrated and assimilated into the believer’s personal life. The reality is that a Christian can never fully display and reveal Christ in their life if they lack God’s love. If our Christian life is unloving and cold towards people, then we have no meaningful witness. Just think how little we enjoy people when they are unloving and very self-absorbed in what they want rather than what God desires for their life. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that is over-absorbed with the individual - fascinated with having my way, captivated with meeting my needs, consumed with getting what I want, engrossed with doing it my way, and immersed with being loved the way that I want to be loved. However, none of that is reflective of God’s love, and in the end it will only leave people more miserable and more dissatisfied. Some of the most miserable people in the world are those people who are never satisfied until they get what they want. Jesus expounded it this way in [Matthew 16:25](#) when He said these amazing words,

Mt 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

This verse is repeated six times in the gospels alone. What Jesus is saying in that verse is that the more that a person has to have what they want and has to do what they want to do, the more miserable and dissatisfied they become. When that happens, the kind of life that God truly wanted them to live is what they actually lose and forfeit. Why is that? How can I make a statement like that? On the surface it certainly seems that the more that a person gets of what they want that the happier they would be. However, that is an illusion. True happiness and contentment is never an issue of getting what we want and having things our way. In fact, always getting what we want is the guarantee that we will never be satisfied. That is exactly what this verse is communicating. One of the practical lessons that comes from a verse like this is that the Christian life is never about the individual or what the individual wants. To put it in even simpler terms, the Christian life is never about me. It is always about reflecting Christ in our life. It is always about letting Christ live in us. It is never about me and what I want and how I want to do something. This has got to be one of the hardest and most difficult lessons to learn in the Christian life.

Now, in understanding this passage, it is important to have a deeper understanding of the noun form of the word “love” which is “*agape*”. This is one of the monumental and defining words of the New Testament and of Christianity. In some ways, the whole of the Bible is encapsulated and encompassed in this one word. It is a word that describes both the mind and heart of God, who certainly was under no

obligation whatsoever to save anyone or to even love anyone. [1 John 4:8 and 16](#) state that “**God is love**”. It means that God is full of sacrificial love. God loves the individual when they do not actually deserve to be loved. God loves the individual when they are unworthy of being loved. The definition of the word “*agape*” simply means to have an affectionate regard, goodwill, and benevolence towards someone. However, when “*agape*” is used to describe the kind of love that God has, it refers to the willful direction that He has toward man.¹ For instance, [Romans 5:8](#) expresses this willful direction of God,

Ro 5:8 (NKJV) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The word “**demonstrates**” means to prove. It is a word that commends something as being worthy. It means to declare, to show, to make something known and conspicuous.² [John 3:16](#), probably the classic verse on the love of God, says that God loved and God gave,

Jn 3:16 (NKJV) 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.

That is the redemptive story of the Bible in one verse – God loved, God gave.

To properly understand this word, it is important to appreciate that God’s love does not necessarily give man what he desires, but focuses entirely on what he needs. My grandson would eat candy all day if we let him, but that is just not what he needs. So, subjectively this is the kind of love that God exercises towards believers, and one of the unique aspects of this kind of supernatural love is that it can actually be developed in a person’s life.

For instance, [Romans 5:5](#) says,

Ro 5:5 (NKJV) Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

[2 Thessalonians 3:5](#) says,

2Th 3:5 (NKJV) Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

The “*agape*” love of God is not the kind of love that just comes naturally to someone - never. To the contrary, this is a very different kind of love and it has to be learned, it has to be developed, and it has to be cultivated in a believer’s life. What comes naturally is self-love, loving ourselves more than others, protecting ourselves, always looking out for ourselves. That is always the natural tendency and predisposition.

The verb form of the word “**love**” that is provided in [1 Peter 1:22](#) is the Greek word “*agapao*” and it means to esteem someone highly. Its life giving reality is grounded in the direction of the will that is exercised towards someone,³ and especially when the emotions and the heart may not be inclined to do so. It is not a natural emotion to love someone sacrificially when they are fundamentally undeserving. For instance, [Ephesians 2:4](#) says,

Eph 2:4 (NKJV) But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

We know someone, and maybe they have mistreated us, said unkind things about, maybe even defamed our integrity and character. From our natural perspective, they are undeserving of this kind of love. However, the problem is that before God we are all undeserving, and that spiritual reality is what is ignored, overlooked, and disregarded when we begin to assess someone that has mistreated us. No one, no matter who they are, deserves the love of God and should never have been the beneficiaries of His love. That is the spiritual issue that is so casually dismissed by most Christians. I.e., every believer's natural inclination is to see others who have done something unpleasant toward them as undeserving of their personal and unconditional love. Maybe they were unkind, selfish, flippant, disrespectful, or derogatory towards us. Maybe they took advantage of us in some way or lied to us. So, we look at them and make our personal evaluation and come to the settled conclusion that we will act rather indifferently to them, ignore them, neglect them, disregard them, and oftentimes actually condemn them. We are not going to let them hurt us any further, and we want them to know that. However, and this is the point, from God's perspective we are just as undeserving as the next person. At a very personal level, I am so grateful that God did not and does not treat me like I have treated other people. I am more than grateful for God's mercy, for His patience, and for His longsuffering towards my often egregious actions, neglect, and indifference towards Him. [Ephesians 5:2](#) says,

Eph 5:2 (NKJV) And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

The phrase "**walk in love**" is in the imperative mood, so it is not a preference or an option, but an actual command. The verb "**walk**" refers to a person's manner of life, how they actually live, how they relate to people, and how they treat people. I.e., to "**walk in love**" is God's formula for the believer's manner of life, what could be called their "lifestyle". Here is what every believer needs to understand about the "*agape*" love of God. God's love is always a self-giving love that is for the sole benefit of someone else who is undeserving. It is a giving that brings about both blessing and good in the lives of those to whom He exercises this love.⁴ [1 John 4:10](#) says,

1Jn 4:10 (NKJV) 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.

This is a giving love. [Galatians 2:20](#) says,

Gal 2:20 (NKJV) I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

What is important when talking about the kind of love that God has is to understand that God does have affections and He does have emotions, but they are not the same as ours. His emotions are not driven by passion or feelings, but are completely controlled by His godly attributes. To state it another way, believers constantly experience emotional and affectionate impulses and fluctuations in their love for other people. That is why they are generally not inclined to love someone if the other person mistreats them or acts ugly towards them. However, God's affection and His love is NEVER subject to emotional fluctuations, but is completely controlled by His divine attributes which never fluctuate or waver.⁵ Now, obviously, it would be a great error to not recognize that the love of God, by being a giving love, is by nature a very sacrificial love. The love of God for those who would be saved was a love that cost Him

the very thing that was the dearest to Him. As stated so often, there is no meaningful way to measure the magnitude of the sacrifice that God the Father had to make so that we could be saved. To try and give definition to that aspect of God's love would be futile on our part simply because there is no practical or meaningful way to actually measure the extent of that sacrifice. The point, however, in making that observation is the simple fact that if love cost God an immeasurable sacrifice, then that same reality applies to the believer. The committed believer must see that, must understand that reality. There is nothing cheap, inferior, second-rate, or common about the kind of love that God desires to be developed in every believer's life for other believers.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Zodhaites, 66.
- ² Zodhiates 1344.
- ³ Zodhiates, 64.
- ⁴ Grudem, 199.
- ⁵ MacArthur, 181.

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