Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Love Without Hypocrisy
Scripture: Romans 12
Code: BQ21411

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. (Romans 12:9)

The greatest virtue of the Christian life is love. The use of *agap* (**love**) was rare in pagan Greek literature, doubtless because the concept it represented—unselfish, self-giving, willful devotion—was so uncommon in that culture it was even ridiculed and despised as a sign of weakness. But in the New Testament it is proclaimed as the supreme virtue, the virtue under which all others are subsumed. *Agap* **love** centers on the needs and welfare of the one loved and will pay whatever personal price is necessary to meet those needs and foster that welfare.

God Himself “is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16). Jesus made unequivocally clear that in both the Old and New Testaments the two greatest commandments are: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–39). In fact, He went on to say, “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (v. 40). Echoing that same truth, Paul later admonishes in his letter to Rome, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (13:8; cf. v. 10).

Love is more important to a Christian than any spiritual gift he may have. “But now abide faith, hope, love, these three,” Paul explained to the Corinthian believers, “but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13; cf. 12:31). It is therefore not surprising that the first“fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22) and that it is by our love for our fellow believers that “all men will know that [we are Jesus’] disciples” (John 13:35). In behalf of the Thessalonian believers, Paul prayed, “May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another” (1 Thess. 3:12; cf. 1 John 3:18). Suffering “much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,” Paul himself served the Lord’s people “in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love” (2 Cor. 6:4–6).

It is that same unfeigned love of one another that Peter admonishes all believers to exhibit: “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). Later in the same letter, the apostle repeats the command: “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).

Genuine love is so integral to supernatural living that John declares, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death” (1 John 3:14). In other words, a person who shows no evidence of *agap* **love** has no claim on Christ or on eternal life.

A Jewish woman who lived near our church was refused marriage counseling by her synagogue because she had not paid her dues. She was upset and determined to go to the nearest religious institution to get help. As she walked past our church one Sunday morning, she soon found herself inside. As she explained later, she was drawn to her Messiah and Savior that day because she could sense the great love manifested by our members for each other.

The love of which Paul, Peter, and John speak is genuine love, the sincere and fervent love that is completely **without hypocrisy** and untainted by self-centeredness. Christian love is pure, guileless, and unaffected.

Hypocrisy is the antithesis of and completely incompatible with *agap* **love**. The two cannot coexist. **Hypocrisy** is exceeded in evil only by unbelief. The consummate hypocrite in Scripture, Judas, was also the consummate egoist. He feigned devotion to Jesus to achieve his own selfish purposes. His hypocrisy was unmasked and his self-centeredness was made evident when he betrayed Jesus for the thirty pieces of silver. Commenting on this verse in Romans, the theologian John Murray writes, “If love is the sum of virtue and hypocrisy is the epitome of vice, what a contradiction to bring the two together.”

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