

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 17, 2019

## Love Builds Bridges, Not Walls

by Dan Trygg

**“Knowledge puffs up, but agapē builds up.”**

I Corinthians 8:1

**“But truthing in agapē, we might grow all things toward Him, who is the head (the source, origin, the one who brings to completion), Christ, ...out from whom all the Body, being tightly fitted together and being knitted together by means of every bond of support according to the in-working in proportion of each individual part, by agapē makes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself.”**

Ephesians 4:15,16

**“Fear is not in the agapē, rather the fully-grown agapē throws fear outside, because fear has to do with punishment/pain/torment. But the one fearing has not been fully-matured in the agapē.”**

I John 4:18

**I have lifted these three selections from their original contexts to identify, illustrate, and to help flesh out, the edifying motivation of agapē love.** Normally, it is not advisable to do this, because it is too easy to distort the meaning of passages, when removed from their contexts, and to fall into a technique of Bible study without objective safeguards. This can lead to “doctrine spinning” and proof texting, where a belief is supported from a surface reading of the *language* of verses, ...verses which, when seen in their original contexts, have nothing whatever to do with the point being made. This misappropriation and misapplication of Scripture can lead to any number of offbeat and erroneous beliefs. Here, I believe I am on solid ground, because the first and third selections are general statements about agapē, principles which are readily self-evident, ...while the middle selection provides a context where agapē is clearly to be applied. The first and third selections provide some insights into the application of agapē in the Body-life described in Ephesians 4, ...insights which are consistent with the nature of agapē and relationships, not in any way foreign to them.

Let us look at the first selection, taken from I Corinthians 8:1, **“Knowledge puffs up, but *love builds up*.”** In this context, **Paul is addressing the need to be sensitive to one another**, especially to avoid encouraging someone to do something that they do not have a settled confidence about (cf. Rom. 14:23). We may have knowledge that frees us from fears of superstition, taboo, or religious ritual. If another believer sees us acting according to our freedom, ...and joins us out of social pressure, or a desire to please us, but does not have this same freedom..., our example may unintentionally trip that person up by enticing them to sin against their own conscience. They will feel guilty, and be self-condemned, and possibly fall prey to fear, anxiety, sickness, spiritual attack or other consequences, because they tried to live beyond the limits of their own personal faith and conscience.

**Is that *their* problem? Yes, but it becomes *mine*, too**, since they are a fellow-member (or “limb”) of the Body of Christ. **By tripping up my brother or sister in Christ, I have effectively undone the work of Christ in their present experience, and have crippled myself (and the rest of the Body) at the same time. I have unintentionally *hurt them*, spiritually and emotionally, and have “sidelined” them as completely as any successful attack of the enemy might.** In our twentieth century Western culture, we want to individualize this problem, and separate ourselves from their plight by insisting that we did nothing wrong. Of course, there are many variables to this situation, e.g., how much did you know or suspect this might be a problem for this person, etc.? The point is *not to find fault*, or to *come under condemnation* about this. **What Paul is saying is to *accept responsibility* for how you *may* have affected the situation; ...*accept responsibility* to help resolve it, if you can; ...and *adjust your behavior to those around you*, so that you can avoid tripping them up, or knocking them down.**

**“What! Limit my freedom because of *their* weak conscience, *their* superstition?” Exactly.** Here is where the principle comes in: **Knowledge puffs up.** The word picture describes someone inflating themselves with **self-importance, arrogance, ...becoming “larger than reality”** (bigger than their britches). The focus is on *self*: *self-expression, self-fulfillment, self-rights, self-freedom, self-justification*, even a “getting-big” in order to overpower in *self-defense* or *self-agenda*. In the surrounding world of nature, animals will puff-up to either appear more fearsome (to ward off attackers) or to impress a potential mate by their larger-than-life display. It is no different with people. Whether out of fear or self-aggrandizement, such posturing is not consistent with our humble calling as disciples of Christ, and it is in conflict with the responsibility to love (choose to prefer) those around us. **Instead of puffing-up in self-importance (or self-defense), it is the nature of agapē to be concerned for others, to build them up, and to care for their needs and well-being. To adjust ourselves to accommodate another goes against the flesh, but it is the very heart of agapē.** *We are only truly free in an area when we can voluntarily refrain from expression, as well as give expression, in that area.* If we are *compelled* to express our “rights”, ...then we are simply *bound* to another form of expression, *not free* to do what is required or edifying in the situation, ...which may be to be quiet and listen to *someone else*, ...to prefer *them*.

The second passage describes in greater detail **the edifying motivation of love**. In the larger perspective of “Body-life”, **agapē will be concerned to help others come to their maturity**, their place of health and expression in the Body of Christ. The interconnectedness of the Body is the result of **agapē’s** desire to reach beyond self to others, the “choosing-to-give of oneself for the health and well-being of others”. **Love values the other person enough to speak and live honestly in relation to them, ...to identify, affirm and encourage what is healthy and real about the other person, ...as well as to identify, expose and discourage what is unhealthy or untrue about the other person..., within the context of a relationship that communicates “I value and appreciate you.”** To “grow all things toward Christ” means to establish every relationship in that context, and to draw near *together* to Him who is both the Source of life, as well as the Servant and Completer of our life potentials. As we draw near *together*, we will find a *deeper commitment to serve each other*, and a *deeper appreciation for the other’s design and potential*. We will become the tools in *God’s hands to assist one another* to grow up into maturity in Him. **The strong message of this passage is that agapē not only values the growth of the other person, but also the development of community.** Community is the framework and backdrop for **agapē** to become regularly apparent. **A regular, identifiable community of people who are involved consistently in esteeming, valuing, and serving one another will become quite noticeable**, whereas a few isolated, unrelated individuals may be easily dismissed as an unusual curiosity. A community of such people, growing and maturing in **agapē**, will become identified as a movement. **The actions of love will then provide fertile ground for sharing the message of love.**

The passage from I John speaks of the **incompatibility of mature agapē and fear**. In the context, the relationship John is describing is that of our relationship with God. As we consider our own moral failures, we have enough within our own memory that we would be ashamed to speak of, or would prefer to keep hidden from others. The prospect of having to appear before the absolutely holy God of the universe to give account of ourselves and our behavior, ...to come before Him Who knows our very thoughts and intentions with complete clarity, so that it would be impossible to lie or to hide anything from Him..., would be a frightening thought to most of us, especially in light of past experiences we may have had with humans who have “sat in judgment” over us. **Some of us, in particular, have been abused and shamed by people so often in the past that it is very difficult to open ourselves to anyone. THE FEAR FACTOR IS HUGE!** We have been criticized, ridiculed, or rejected so many times that we have determined to no longer let *anyone* inside. **We have put up high, fortress-like walls, ...surrounding our inner thoughts with a maze of self-protection..., so that we will not be hurt anymore.** All of these elaborate defenses are *not* the plan and desire of God. They were created *by us* to distance ourselves from hurtful people and painful experiences. They were also part of *the design of the enemy* to isolate us, and to keep us stuck.

Now, however, we have chosen to follow Christ, and have become members of His church, His family. **In order to function in the Body of Christ**, in order to receive its benefits and in order to add our own strength, **we must come out from behind the fortress of self-defense we have constructed and share ourselves openly**, and with vulnerability. Of course, many even of our brothers and sisters in Christ, ...because of their own immaturity and “humanness”..., still inflict hurts in our interactions with them. What are we to do? Are we to just allow ourselves to be cut to ribbons? **How do we safely come out of the fortress to interact?** How do we overcome the crippling power of fear? Sometimes I would rather not deal with it, at all. **What would motivate me to keep taking risks?** ...to keep getting hurt, and still continue to try? The apostle John gives us a ray of hope here in this passage. Several points for you to consider:

**(1.) God has initiated a process of healing in us by experientially-showing us His love.** First, as Romans 5:8 and I John 4:9 declare, God demonstrated His commitment of **agapē-love** to us by sending Jesus to be our Deliverer. This commitment of love, ...when we had done *nothing* to deserve it, not even to have shown any glimmer of interest toward God, but rather to “have loved darkness rather than light” (Jn. 3:19) and to even have had hostility toward this God who gave Himself for us..., is a clear statement of God’s heart. **We know agapē, because He has first loved us** in this way. **We have seen nothing like this before!** He loved us to the extent of dying in our place. He loved us *personally*, ...enough to come and dwell with each of us individually by the Holy Spirit, who continues to communicate to us concerning His love. **He personally comes to enter and dwell in the deepest places of our fortress (dungeon), in order to bring us hope and healing.**

**(2.) His love spreads out within us to liberate us from fear.** John’s language (I Jn. 4:18) clearly indicates that this is a process, and that one aspect of it will be a removal of fear.

**(3.) As we experience the affirmations of His love, we begin to feel better about ourselves, and are more willing to take risks with others.** As we see His love commitment, and experience His daily attention, we gain confidence concerning who we are, and our significance to the advancement of His Kingdom work.

**(4.) His commitment of love allows us to be able to receive love from others, and to disregard the hurtful actions of those who reject us.** God’s stable, dependable love is our source. It is more real than the opinions of others.