

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## No Greater Love

by Dan Trygg

“As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Live in My love. <sup>10</sup> If ever you might keep My commands you will live in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and live in His love. <sup>11</sup> I have spoken these things to you so that My joy may continually-be in you and your joy might be fulfilled. <sup>12</sup> This (Live in My love.) is My command in order that you might love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one possesses a greater love than this, in order that someone would lay down his life for his friends.”

John 15:9-13

“For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For rarely will someone die for a righteous person-- though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!”

Romans 5:6-8

“We see that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. The one not loving continues-to-live in the death. <sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates (dis-regards) his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life living in him. <sup>16</sup> This is how we have come to experientially-know the *agapē*-love: He laid down His life for us. We should (are-obligated-to/indebted-to) also lay down our lives for our brothers. <sup>17</sup> If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him—how/in-what-way does God's love live in him?”

1 John 3:14-17

Jesus said that the noticeable mark that would truly indicate that we are following Him is if we have true *agapē*-love for one another. *Agapē* is not an emotion. It is a *choice* to prefer *someone else before yourself*. It is having the heart and mind to give of yourself to benefit another person, as God is leading you. **It is the choice to even sacrifice to benefit another person. It is the consistent direction of your self-will toward the well-being of another, or others, ...as defined by God's will.**

Unquestionably, that is a tall order. In fact, **it is not possible for us to do this on our own power or ability.** As John had said, “...every one loving (*agapē*) has-been-begotten out from God and experientially-knows God” (1 Jn. 4:7). **You can't love in this way, apart from being born of God. BUT, it is more than just that, ...you also need to be experientially-knowing God.** John went on, in the following verse, to say, “every one not loving does not experientially-know God” (1 Jn. 4:8). Note that he did not assert that this person has not been born out from God. He or she may in fact *be* “born again”, but *they are not walking in the fullness of that new life*.

If we think of Jesus' teaching to His followers on that final night, just before His arrest, we can see that **the Lord was trying to instruct the disciples in learning to walk in the *agapē* of God. This was meant to be the source, the fountainhead, for our spiritual life. We were meant to abide there.** “Abide” means to “live-in, dwell-in, continue-in, remain-in”. **We are to stay in His life, His love, His abiding Presence and Power, and live-out our lives from that Source.**

It is really very simple, ...at least in theory..., but **we have a tendency to put the cart before the horse. We have a tendency to focus on the behavior as the *proof* of our *agapē*, ...and proceed to try to *act* loving, so we could say that we *are* walking in love. This emphasis on behavior even creeps into our translations.** Note that John 15:12 is usually translated as though Jesus' command was to love one another, when in the context, the command was actually to abide in His love (vs. 9). When we finally see this, then we can correctly translate the rest of verse 12 as it is actually written: as a purpose clause: **This command ('Live in My love') is in order that you might love one another.**

**We see the same backward thinking in the translation of verse 13, as though it was a statement or description of the greatest love possible, ...namely that a person would lay his or her life down on behalf of a *friend*.** I'm sorry, but that is obviously *not* the greatest love possible, because **God demonstrated a greater love, in that He laid His life down for us while we were His *enemies*!** Paul makes the point that someone might even dare to die for a good man (or a friend, or a loved one), BUT God demonstrated His love for us while we were still *sinners*! So, obviously, choosing to lay your life down for your enemies is a “greater” expression of *agapē* than sacrificing yourself for someone you care about. In fact, Jesus Himself *commands us* to love (*agapē*) our enemies (Matt. 5:44). In the context, He even says, “If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Even the tax collectors do the same.” **So, loving our *friends*, or *loved ones* is NOT the “greater love”. Loving your *enemies* would be a “greater love”.**

**Furthermore, we take John 15:13 out of the context of Jesus' teaching. We make it a statement, as though it is meant to stand by itself.** We make bookmarks, placards and artwork to declare this truth, or to remind ourselves of Jesus' words, ...when we have actually misconstrued what He was trying to say.

**When we pull this verse from its context, and declare it as a truism, then the focus is on the behavior as the epitome of “love”.** I wonder how many sermons or speeches will be given this Memorial Day weekend, quoting

this verse? **Again, we have it all turned around. People can lay their lives down for other people, and it have no connection at all to the *agapē*-love of God.** By all means, we should remember those who answered the call of duty, and gave their lives. It is a tragic loss. But don't think that all of them were motivated by love, ... or even patriotism. **Let's just be realistic enough to say that people died, and *were experiencing all sorts of feelings, emotions, and motivations.*** Some were afraid. Some were just hoping to make it through their time of service. Some were filled with rage, or hatred at the enemy. Some were indeed trying to protect others. Some were knowingly, and voluntarily, taking great risks. Others did not even know what happened. Some were killed instantly. Others suffered horrendously. Many were just trying to survive. Some were gallantly doing their duty, knowing the danger. And, some chose to prefer the lives of their comrades, and knowingly made the supreme sacrifice for them. But, even then, their act of self-giving was not necessarily an indication that they were filled with the *agapē*-love of God. **As brave and commendable their heroic choices may have been, ...their *action* does not indicate that *agapē* was their motivation.**

Go back and take a closer look at John 15:13. **What Jesus is actually saying is that if someone possesses the *agapē*-love of God, that is the greatest power-of-love available *anywhere.* The verse is a purpose clause, however, ...this greatest-of-all-loves is given *in order that* a person might lay down his life for his friend.**

**Who is He talking about here? He is about to lay down His life for *them.* They are His friends.** But, it is in the power of the *agapē*-love of God that He is also going to face and embrace the cross for *His enemies,* as well. Even from the cross, it was love that motivated Him to pray for them, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). In the context, however, He is *instructing them* to love one another just as He is about to choose to prefer *them* over His own life. **The *agapē*-love that is empowering and motivating Him, will also empower and motivate them to give of themselves to value one another.** Jesus had just commanded them to "live in My love" (vs. 9). One of the repercussions of abiding in His love is that it will motivate them to lay down their lives for each other.

Let's move on to 1 John 3. **We can see and know that we have passed out from the death into the life when we are living out the *agapē* of God toward our brothers and sisters in Christ.** Any one who is not loving, is still living in "the death". Which death? The death we have passed out from when we came to faith in Jesus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (Jn. 5:24). It is possible to be born from above, and still experientially live in death. John likes to use opposites to describe the two realities of the Kingdom of God and the dominion of Satan, ...the light and the darkness, ...the life and the death. Paul uses "new man" and "old man". So, **it is possible to be "delivered out from the authority of the darkness, and transferred into the Kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13), and still choose to live as though we were in darkness (Eph. 5:1-16).** We need to *choose* to put those attitudes and practices aside, so that we can walk in the light.

**What John is saying in 1 John 3 is that we can recognize the change in identity and see the new life, when we love our brothers and sisters in Christ. The opposite of the *agapē*-love of God is to disregard others.** If *agapē* motivates us to choose to put others first, to consider their needs, and to sacrifice for them, ...then, operating in that old "death orientation" is to be selfish, to disregard others, and to keep all we have for ourselves. John says that **we "learned or experienced" the *agapē* of God when we saw how He laid down His life for us.** If we have chosen to identify with His grace, then we have accepted His payment of His life for ours. This means that **we have an obligation to lay our lives down for others, as He did for us.** One practical application of this is to help the poor. John says that, *if* we have the world's goods, and see our brother or sister in need, and close our hearts off toward that person, *how, or, in what way* does the *agapē*-love of God abide or live-in that person? **The implication is that the *agapē*-love of God would open our hearts toward that person, to recognize their need, and to take action to help them in some practical way.**

Again, **there is no greater love than the *agapē*-love of God.** It is given to empower and motivate us to lay down our lives, first for our friends and compatriots in Christ, and ultimately even for our enemies. **Jesus commanded us to abide in (live in) His *agapē*,...the *agapē* of God.** That is the basis and support for our walk with God. **It is the *agapē* working inside of us that will change us from the inside-out, and transform us.** It will change our perspective, and we will experience the reality of God's life leading us out from old thinking, old motivations and old behaviors. **As we live in the *agapē* of God, and choose to respond to the love-leading of the Holy Spirit, we will see the transforming power of love making us more and more like Jesus.** The *agapē* of God expresses the heart of God in and through us, and we will find ourselves acting like Him. **We will be led to lay our lives down for others, and the world will see, and recognize that we are following Jesus.**