

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## The Importance and Centrality of Love

by Dan Trygg

- “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 people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35  
“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.  
8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8  
“The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” 1 Timothy 1:5

It is quite clear that Jesus commanded us to love (*agapaō*) one another, and that this kind of love (*agapē*) would be something unusual, something notable. In fact, Jesus said that this kind of love would uniquely identify those who were actively following Him. “...by *this* all people will know that you are My disciples...”

This is a quality of love that is different from what most people express. ***This is a love that comes from God Himself.*** In fact, according to 1 John 4:7, those who are able to express this kind of love are only people who have been born of God, and who experientially-know Him. Those who are not born-from-above believers in Jesus are not capable of operating in this kind of love that uniquely comes from God. There may be many exemplary, kind and good people who are not believers in Jesus Christ. Their best efforts, however, fall short of this love that can only come from the Living God. Moreover, there are also born-from-above followers of Jesus Christ who have not yet learned how to experience and operate in this special kind of love that comes from God. They have the potential, but their limited experience of the *agapē*-love of God in their own lives hinders them in their ability to walk in, and express, that kind of love.

**This kind of love was such a central focus for the apostle Paul that he said that it was the “goal” or “end point” of what he taught and proclaimed to them** (1 Tim. 1:5). He said *agapē*-love was “a more excellent (or, ‘extraordinary’) way” than even the expressions of the Holy Spirit through the manifestation of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31). We are to serve and minister to one another through this kind of love (Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:15). **It was his prayer that we “increase and overflow in *agapē*-love to one another and to all people”** (1 Thess. 3:12). Because God loved us first, with *agapē*-love, we are obligated to love (*agapaō*) one another (1 Jn. 4:11; Rom. 13:8). ***If our walk in Christ is healthy, this should be an obvious outward indication,*** since we can expect to be “taught by God (lit., ‘God-taught’) to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9), and this should be an increasing characteristic of our lives (2 Thess. 1:3). *Agapē*-love is a key aspect of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). **As we meet together, we are to be thinking about one another for the purpose of sharpening or stirring up of *agapē*-love and good deeds** (Heb. 10:24,25). We are to prayerfully ponder how to help one another grow in our ability to experience and express the *agapē*-love of God.

Jesus spoke of *agapē*-love as a central aspect of the new covenant and commandment. **God poured out His *agapē*-love capacity within us by His Holy Spirit** (Rom. 5:5). **He Himself intends to teach and develop this love in our lives,** but there is a learning curve there. **It does not simply happen automatically, or there would be no need to speak of it so often.** We are to “pursue *agapē*-love” (1 Cor. 14:1). We are to work-out the inworking of the *agapē*-love of God by responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:12,13). **Learning to operate in the *agapē*-love is the fruit of our healing and growth in Christ, and the deepening of our walk with Him.** The *agapē*-love of God is meant to stand out, to be extraordinary and notable. It is to be the defining mark of what it means to be a “Jesus-follower”. As such, teaching about this love, and **helping our people to grow in this skill and capacity from God should be at the top of our list of priorities for the body of Christ.**

## What IS *Agapē*-Love?

We tend to read our cultural definitions into our study of the Bible, even though the Biblical world was very different. **Cultures often develop precise terminology to describe more clearly concepts that are of great importance to daily life, or are highly valued and discussed.** For example, the Inuit Eskimo culture near the Arctic circle has twenty-one specific words for snow. In their culture, there is a great need to be able to communicate precisely what kind of snow conditions exist outside. There is snow that is good for building igloos, snow that is crusty and strong enough to walk on, snow that is powdery, snow that is wet, snow that is treacherous to walk upon due to hidden fissures in the sea ice, etc. Because these people’s very survival depends upon accurately communicating the nature of snow conditions, they developed a very precise vocabulary of specific words to

communicate the necessary nuances. We may be able to communicate these in English by using a phrase, or even an explanatory paragraph, but we do not have words that carry the same precise meaning as their vocabulary.

**The Greek culture**, having highly valued philosophical discourse and the discussion of ideas, developed a much more specific vocabulary in this area. The *Koinē* Greek (*koinē* means “common”) language of the New Testament had been honed by centuries of philosophical debate and articulation. The language had been specifically adapted to communicate abstract thought, ideas, emotions, etc. in a precise manner. Due to this value on the human intellectual and emotional experience, they **had developed four words to delineate different aspects or nuances of “love”**:

**1.) Eros** -- a passionate love which desires someone (or something) for oneself. It is illustrated by an arrow that reaches out toward someone else, but always curves back toward itself, like a fishhook. **The essence of this type of love is self-fulfillment, self-gratification.** It desires the other for the intoxicating experience which seems to lift oneself to a new level of awareness and pleasure. It could be sensual, emotional, or even religiously ecstatic.

This form of love is named after the Greek god, Eros. **Eros was the Greek god of love, passion and fertility**, whose Roman counterpart was Cupid. The power of Eros lay in his ability to compel a person to become struck with desire for another, ...a passion so overwhelming and compulsive that reason, reflection, and prudence are often cast aside in the driven, fixated need to obtain the object of one’s desire. In a culture that exalted reflection as one of the highest gifts given to humankind, *eros*-love was at once both *a fearsome and horrific loss of all reason*, but also *an incredibly blissful experience to be desired by all people*. **The heart of Eros worship was to burst through the restraint of rationality to an intoxication beyond reason or senses**, a feeling of transcendent union beyond one’s own life. This ecstatic experience that transported the worshiper beyond himself is at the heart of much of ancient Greek religion. Eros worship, along with many of the so-called “mystery religions”, employed fertility rites and temple prostitutes (male and female) as a method to not only honor Eros, but also to propel the followers into this state of ecstasy. **The experience of intoxication, or ecstasy, was the purpose and goal of pagan Greek religion.** A god, or goddess, was served for what he or she could give to the worshipers, in their present experience, or in terms of future prosperity, to follow as a subsequent result of the service offered. **The term, eros, is never used in the Bible.** This kind of love is studiously avoided, any reference to it shunned. This was a conscious decision, since *this* was the *prevalent term for religious love in the Greek culture*.

**2.) Phileos** -- a tender affection, i.e., to like, enjoy, be fond of, or to delight in someone, or something. In a relationship, it is **a love characterized by mutuality, interaction, and enjoyment of the other person**. It would be illustrated by two arrows facing each other, representing the back-and-forth, give-and-take nature of this kind of positive exchange. It is not an intoxication which overcomes a person, but a warmth that grows with pleasant experiences with the other person. It is **devotion based upon emotional affinity**. Since it is an emotion (an involuntary response), it is never *commanded* of us in the NT.

**3.) Storgē** -- a love of kindred, **a family bond**, characterized by both a natural affection for, and especially a loyal, protective concern on behalf of, those within a person’s family circle, or identity group, such as a guild or club. In fact, it could be illustrated by a circle of arrows, each pointing in both directions around the circle. The maxim, **“blood is thicker than water”**, roughly identifies the same kind of love. Though you may not “like” (*phileō*) a brother or sister, there is still a place of concern and protectiveness which one has *because* they are family. **The source of affinity is based a common place of identity**, not out of self-desire, or relational enjoyment.

**4.) Agapē** -- **a devotion to another person based upon choice; a commitment to value, esteem, to lift up and give preference to this person above others, and beyond self.** It can be defined as the consistent direction of your own self-will toward another’s well-being. It could be illustrated by a series of arrows pointing out from a person, ...going out, but requiring nothing in return. It is given from a heart that is full of benevolence and good will, choosing to act to benefit another person. It is a devotedness, kindly-concern or loyalty to another person’s interest that is *not* based upon an emotional feeling, or even a group affinity. **The essence of the word itself is that it makes a distinctive choice to value and to serve.** Love is *seen* by what love *does*. **Agapē is a love that acts.**

**Agapē was a Koinē Greek word for this sort of good will and benevolence toward another, but it was not a highly valued concept by the Greek culture.** The word was rarely used. The other forms of love were more esteemed in their minds. *Eros* ecstasy and intoxication was most highly sought for. **Jesus and the NT writers chose to use this word to describe the unique love that God causes in the lives of those led and empowered by His Spirit.** *Agapē*-love treats others with patience, respect, and propriety, acting according to what is righteous. It is gracious, forgiving, persevering and even sacrificial in its actions. **It is especially notable for “never failing”.** **It goes beyond human love.** Thus, John wrote that only those who were born of God and know Him can love in this way.

# Comparison of Eros and Agapē Love

## EROS

A general love seeking satisfaction wherever it can find it.

Determined by a more or less indefinite impulsion towards its object.

Seeks in others the fulfillment of its own life-hungers. It wants to get an experience from the other person, thing, or activity.

*Eros* is a universal, non-selective love, generous and even lavish at times in its expression and pursuit of experience, but unbound by loyalty or commitment. It goes wherever it can get what it wants.

In its highest, religious sense, *eros* is used of the upward impulsion of man, of his love for the divine, especially of the seeking to *be lifted up in self-fulfillment* in union with God.

Consciously used to describe an *upsoaring love*, a desire to transcend oneself in an emotional, orgasmic experience.

An experience which transports a person beyond rationality into blissful self-fulfillment.

The original objective of erotic religion is the experience of sensual intoxication, and the supreme goal is ecstasy.

## AGAPĒ

A love which makes distinctions, choosing and keeping to its object.

A free and decisive act determined by the subject, i.e., the chooser.

Must often be translated “to show love”. It is a giving, active love that seeks to benefit the other person.

The essence of *agapē* is that it selects, commits, and remains faithful to the person.

*Agapē* is God’s love within, a love of the higher lifting up the lower, *a desire to elevate others above oneself*.

Consciously used to describe a *condescending, serving love*; a reaching beyond one’s self-comfort to extend practical help to others.

A free choice by which a person lowers him/herself into practical, wise, well-thought acts of service to fulfill another.

The original objective of faith working through *agapē* is the choice to value another person, ultimately being willing to “lay down your life for your friend” in service and self-sacrifice.

To better understand the nature of this concept of *agapē*-love, it is helpful to distinguish it from *eros*, with which we are more familiar. The contrasts above help to clarify and set apart *agapē* from other ideas of what we may consider love to be in our culture. These comparisons are from the article on *agapē* by E. Stauffer found in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI 1964), Vol. I, pp. 36-39.