

# *LOVE, WHAT'S THAT?*

Tom Stephens

Mom and Dad are gone. Dad passed in December, 1971 in Arizona. Mom followed approximately thirty years later in Abilene, Texas. I have a brother who is about 16 months older than I, and a sister who is six years younger. Add me to the picture and you see my family - photographically, that is.

The story I'm about to tell is true, and though it opens up some wounds, I'm sure mom and dad would understand, because my brother and sister would find at least an ounce or two of healing through this; they each have stories of their own I know little of. Mother (she always insisted we children call her "Mother"), I pray you understand what I am doing. Dad (he learned from Mother, and determined we should call him "Father"), you died believing not a soul in the family loved you.

I pray both of you (if you can see and hear) understand what I'm doing in the sake of "love". We were a dysfunctional family, and no one gets more blame than the other, except when the three children were little. Mom and Dad are always to blame when little children are concerned. But the thing I want to instill in the hearts of my readers is this: Children *always* feel and accept all the blame. Let me say that again..."Children always feel and accept *all* the blame".

## *Nightmares*

I'll be sixty-two this year and have only recently seen much healing from terrifying nightmares depicting awful demon-like beasts. In the darkness these beings would chase me through the house, and out the front door where the terrain would suddenly be a huge "knee deep" body of water. When I tried running through this shallow lake, I would become even more frightened. Terrified, I would scream with all the power of my lungs as I struggled against the water. My legs would not carry me fast enough and the awful beings closed in around me!

I would awaken, sitting up in my bed screaming so loud I would frighten myself. This dream became my personal enemy and I always felt only inches away from death. I was just a little child not more than five or six years old. As the years passed, I learned this evil would be my continual accuser. I met him in my youngest days; I remember witnessing his horror during my teens; In the military, I remember waking myself up screaming,

"Why doesn't anyone love me!"

While men stirred, not one of my army peers ever mentioned this embarrassing incident.

After the Army tour, I found Jesus anew and entered college where I met my wife Linda. Believing everything was finally over and I had found peace, I relaxed and attempted to find the healing I knew I needed for my soul. But it wasn't to be that easy, as those same familiar beasts were still lurking around the corner wanting my victory...even my life!

Linda would gently waken me when my terrifying screams would startle her. Concerned, many times as I would attempt to fall off to sleep once more, I could feel the prayers of my wife going up to heaven. Healing delayed as more years passed us by.

Finally, we had children of our own...and I had not found my healing...mainly because I hadn't been serious enough with the Lord. My own children found themselves in a deadlock just as I had while growing up.

It was late in the night. I believe I was around five years old. During the terrible fight, I observed my brother's face. It was knarled up. His hands were shaking in front of him, and he was jumping around near the corner of the room where mom and dad were in physical battle. There was blood on dad's face and back. It looked to me like he was simply trying to protect himself from the belt buckle mom was swinging at him.

My brother was panicking. Now he was running in circles with his hands around his head, and in his hair. He ran out the door. Then seconds later, dad and mom followed, but went another direction...toward the car.

Seems mom wanted the keys to get away, but dad opened the car hood and ripped some wires from the motor. Again they fought in the yard, ceasing when a neighbor and my brother returned. Over the years, I determined I would not allow myself to be so emotional as my brother. I would not allow anything to hurt me again, ever. I needed healing, and hardly a day passed I didn't recognize the condition of my heart and soul.

There was plenty of fear in my home growing up. Both my older brother and my younger sister, from their youth, were in and out of trouble with the law. Though he is settled down now with a lovely wife who loves him dearly, my brother is still in denial over his ever existent grief from his past. My sister knows what living in the world will do to a person physically and emotionally.

So then, what *is* love? True Love is not a thing, but a Person. Love is Eternal.

### ***Love Is Not Fear***

The story above is only one incident of a dysfunctional family. God showed me recently the biggest problem in my life was fear. Fear and love are enemies. I didn't realize the love of God can destroy that kind of fear in a person's life until I was ready to accept healing from the Master. The following exhortation may be very radical to you, though what I'm saying is true by the prophetic and lovely Word of God.

“If you do not believe we are living in the day of the supernatural gifts from God whereas His people continue in ministries of healing and deliverance, prophetic ministries, Word of Knowledge, speaking in other tongues, and other ministries as delivered to the New Covenant saints on the day of Pentecost, then you have never received a true and full revelation of Who Jesus Christ really is. If you will continue with me, I will show you why I make this statement.”

Assuming you identify with the above doctrine, I have one question to ask you. Hopefully you will meditate just a little while before giving the answer: “Do you read and study the Words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to learn at His feet the things closest to His heart; or do you read the Bible only to learn facts and contend for the faith?”

## *The Great Commandment Of The Law*

Taken in Part From Dave Roberson's July, 2004 Newsletter

It seems very important to God that the new nature He has given His people flows through us in the form of "Agape" love. God looks for those who will allow that kind of love to be manifest in their lives.

The importance of this truth is confirmed by Jesus' words in Matthew 22. In this passage, the Pharisees heard Jesus shut down the Saducees, so no one really wanted to ask Him any questions.

Finally, a lawyer who thought he knew something spoke up. He must have thought, "Well, the others were Saducees, and I'm a Pharisee, so maybe I can tempt Jesus to make a mistake." Of course, it didn't work, but let's follow this conversation for a moment and see what Jesus had to say about agape love.

*But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.*

*Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:34-40).*

Note Jesus likens the second commandment - "to love our neighbors as ourselves" - to the first and great commandment, which is to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds. We are to love others with a love that is like our love for God. In fact, Jesus said we only truly love God as we walk in love toward our brethren, for the second commandment is like unto the first one. We can't love God more than people, because it is the same kind of love!

These verses used to be a mystery to me because of Jesus' statement in verse 40: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." That didn't make sense to me. When the lawyer tempted Jesus with the question, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus responded by quoting what He called "the first and great commandment." It sounded like He was isolating a commandment out of the original Ten Commandments, such as "Thou shalt not steal." The problem was, when I went to the Word, I couldn't find the one Jesus was referring to. Then Jesus quoted the second great commandment - we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

But I couldn't find the second great commandment in the Ten Commandments either!

As I prayed and meditated on the Word, I'd go through the Ten Commandments one by one in my mind. *First*, there must be no other gods before Him. *Second*, we are not to worship anything created. *Third*, we must not take God's name in vain. *Fourth*, we are to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

After these four commandments, the next six change in nature, addressing sins against our fellow man. The fifth is the first commandment with promise - to honor our fathers and mothers. The sixth states we shall not murder; the seventh, we shall not commit adultery. Finally, there are the last three commandments: We shall not steal, lie, or covet what belongs to another. The more I meditated on these Ten Commandments, the more I realized the two great commandments Jesus referred to in Matthew 22 were hidden there all along! The initial grouping of four commandments cover the first great commandment – to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, our minds, our souls, and our strength. This is true even of the fourth commandment – to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. The last six commandments are all summed up in the second great commandment: to love our neighbor as ourselves, including doing no harm to him.

Everything hinges on these two great commandments that deal with our love for God and our love for each other. Nowhere is this truth emphasized more than in the book of First John.

### *Agape Love And The New Nature*

Every time I read the five little chapters in First John, I see more clearly how the apostle John considered the new nature and agape love to be synonymous terms. We are born of God and saved with love, which is the core nature of our Father. God doesn't HAVE love; He is love. That's why Paul said in First Corinthians 13 love never fails, even though prophecies will cease and tongues will be done away with (v. 8). Why is this? Because prophecy and tongues are two revelation gifts. We only need these gifts here in this life while we are being taught how to walk in the Spirit instead of in the flesh. Prophecy and tongues are not going to Heaven with us because we won't need them there.

On the other hand, love is eternal and never fails. Love crosses the barrier between this life and the next because it is the core nature of what we received when we were born again. God considers agape love as the most lethal weapon we possess - and if we will allow the Holy Spirit to cultivate that love nature in us, our days of failure will become a thing of the past!

So as we look in the book of First John, we see the apostle John freely interchanges the concepts of loving God and loving our brother. This fits with Jesus' words to the lawyer in Matthew 22:39 when He said, "The second commandment is like unto the first." In other words, if we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, we will also love our neighbor as ourselves, for that is what makes the second like the first. That means if we are NOT loving our neighbor, we are also not fulfilling the first great commandment to love God.

Let's look at one passage in First John and see if we fit the description of those who truly love God: *"Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth"* (1 John 2:8).

John is explaining here we don't have spiritually dead spirits any longer. We have a new nature, and the true light now shines within us. Then he says abiding in this new nature is synonymous with walking in love. *"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes"* (1 John 2:9-11).

Even if we are not spiritually dead, we still act like spiritually dead people when we don't walk in love, for we cannot see where we are going. This leads to the apostle John's conclusion: Once we are born again, we are to walk in love with others. It is as simple as that.

Someone might say, "Yes, but that poor man lived about a hundred and five years. He must have gotten senile along the way to actually think all those who are saved should love their brother. John was probably about a hundred and two when he started talking like that!"

But God is the One speaking to us through the apostle John, and He has more to say on the subject. Let's look a little further: *"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world"* (1 John 4:16,17).

Why can we stand boldly on the Day of Judgment? Because our love is being perfected. How does our love get perfected? Through the realization AS JESUS IS, SO ARE WE IN THIS WORLD.

John is talking here about Jesus' humanity. Jesus glorified humanity when He sat down at the right hand of the Father, for Jesus possesses a human spirit with the same divine love nature we possess as new creatures in Him.

We are standing on this planet; Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. But as Jesus is with His divine love nature, so are we on this earth, walking through life with that same new nature. And if we will perfect the love the Holy Spirit has planted in our hearts, we will have boldness in the Day of Judgment.

John explains the nature of that love in I John 4:18: *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."*

There is no fear in agape love. In verse 19, he says, We love him [Jesus], because he first loved us. Then comes another reference to the synonomous nature of our love for God and our love for each other: *"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? ...this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also"* (1 John 4:20,21).

Why is a man a liar if he says, "I love God" yet hates his brother? The second commandment is like unto the first! Verse 21 talks about this truth when it says, "This is the commandment we have from Him – he who loves God loves his brother also." John did not say, "MAYBE you will love your brother." He said, *"If you love God, you WILL love your brother as well!"*

Someone obviously convinced John our love for God is synonymous with our love for our brethren. We can't have one without the other, for they are the same kind of love.

### *Search The Scriptures*

During a feast in Jerusalem at the Pool of Bethesda, Jesus met an invalid who had been sick for years, and bedridden much of that time. Note here the Lord entered the city to be there for the feast, but He went to the hospital first. You know the story. It's found in St. John, Five.

Yes, for all intents and purposes, the Pool of Bethesda was a hospital, and Jesus knew where He was going. He said He came to this world to heal and to save those who needed a doctor; not those who did not need the doctor. Jesus healed the man, told him to go and sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to him. Then...When the Jews learned what Jesus had done at the pool, they accused Him, and wanted to kill Him.

Among other things, Jesus' response included: *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only"* (John 5:39-44).

These Jews who faced Jesus that day were learned in the scriptures. They knew them so well they could quote much of the prophetic old covenant. Yet they did not know the Man Who wrote the book! The book spoke of Jesus throughout its pages, yet not one of these Pharisees and scribes could find the Savior there.

Jesus healed a man with terrible physical ailments, and we ask why. Everything Jesus did on the earth in meeting every need of mankind was to glorify the Father. Remember, His meat, or spiritual nutrition, was to fully complete His Father's will.

Scripture tells us Jesus died on that Cross at Calvary even from the foundations of the world, Why? Because of a great love for mankind. Why did He create the heavens and earth? Because of His majestic love for all men. Though you were not in existence 6,000 plus years ago, He knew you and desired to have you as a part of His Bride. The scripture tells us all things were created with man in mind. He held all the stars and all the universes between His thumb and little pinkie.

To God, man is no bigger than a mite that must be magnified 10,000,000 times just to be seen by the naked eye. Maybe that's the reason King David, while in worship, cried out, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"

God sent His Son to make man like Himself; to have a Christ-like mind; to minister the way Christ did on the earth. Fact is Jesus insisted His Church would glorify His Father just as He had. He therefore authorized His disciples to carry the same burden of love in the administration of their ministries. Jesus' ministry was founded on "Agape Love".

John, the disciple who loved the Lord above the others, said about Jesus shortly before the day of Pentecost, *"And there are so many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written"* (John 21:25).

I like the way Reverend Scott Hagen put it: "The Bible doesn't say, *"There's not enough books in the world."* It says, *"There's not enough world to hold the books, if everything about Jesus were committed to parchment. The apostle John's intention wasn't to dazzle you and me with the enormity of planet Earth, but to showcase the glory and girth of Jesus Christ."*

Isaiah once called the earth a mere “footstool” for the Father. (See Isaiah 66:1). But the earth shrinks even smaller than a footstool when John calls for it to become the vault for Emmanuel’s archives. Confining Jesus to a library would be worse than trying to confine the Library of Congress to a matchbox.”

Every miraculous feat accomplished by Jesus in the Word of God can all be numbered and proven by Agape Love. It is not reasonable for humanity to be able to get a handle on that sort of love. It is simply impossible for man alone to realize the kind of love it took for the Father to dare take that kind of risk with us. But what Jesus wanted was to glorify His Father, and His Father’s heart was enmeshed with mankind. He loved mankind so much He continued century after century babying the evil minded, murmuring Israelites, and now us.

The Father even built Himself a house on the earth in the midst of these people. He taught them to worship and have sweet communion with Him; He showed them through the law a picture of the Cross. That plan was carried out, and for the first time in history, God the Father was able to pack up His bags and move out of that earthly house. He ripped the curtain from top to bottom to show He was the One who broke down the barrier between Himself and man.

Earlier, the Lord Jesus looked over Jerusalem and cried out: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”* (Luke 13:34, 35). KJV

Jesus showed His awesome love for a generation of malcontents. What I see here is a Father who loves His children so much He broke down all barriers so He could have close communion with them. Israel killed all the prophets and stoned those sent to give the message of His deliverance. Finally, He gave His own Son on the Cross so men could come to Him simply because of the “Agape” word.

Yet, men still rejected Him, so He told them their house, meaning the Temple, would be left desolate. He was moving out and they would no longer find Him there. The cloud by day and the fire at night would be no more. Israel would not be able to come to Him through a building again. They now must come through Jesus. That’s why He told them they would not see Him again till they proclaimed, *“Blessed is He that cometh in the name of they Lord.”*

One day during the tribulation, Israel will finally see and know who Jesus is. They will call Him their Messiah, and will worship them. They will mourn for the things done against Him (See Isaiah 52:15).

### ***Conclusion***

If you, the reader made it through this exhortation on love, Let’s answer the question I asked earlier, “Why did Paul write the first three verses of I Corinthians 13: *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I*

*am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”*

Since all three verses are emphasizing the identical same meaning, Let’s use only the first verse. Paul said, “Though I speak with the tongues of men..”,

*First*, By his own admission, Paul spoke in tongues of men by learning one or more earthly languages. *Second*, Paul spoke in tongues of men that required interpretation, supernaturally, by himself, or someone else whom the Lord revealed to message to, lifting up the body of Christ; and *third*, Paul spoke in *unknown* tongues (*tongues of angels*, not understood by any man without the revelation by the Holy Spirit through an interpreter).

When Paul completed his sentence “..and have not charity (love) I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal”, he was not teaching “tongues” was ugly and would soon be done away with, or cancelled out; but what Paul did say was: “Brother and sisters, if we do not possess this agape love by revelation of Jesus Christ our Lord, we *will never* see growth in the fruits of the Spirit – and without our lives being filled with the “fruits” of the Spirit – the “gifts” of the Spirit will never be manifest in our lives for the Glory of God. That would be a lose-lose situation. Why?

Because our own righteousness is still *as filthy rags*. Need I say more?

And “Brethren, seek for yourselves as ministries all the gifts, but especially the very best ones – but you must never attempt to operate in these gifts without the love of God in your hearts!

### ***\*Characteristics Of Agape Love (I Cor. 13)***

**Love Suffers Long** – Love is patient, forbearing, and even-tempered, especially toward persons who provoke or injure us. It does not allow resentment to arise even toward repeated wrongs. It goes the second mile, turns the other cheek, endures insult, and bears with those who disgrace, mock or jibe. It cannot be short-tempered with those for whom Christ died.

**Love Is Kind** – Does not stop with a patience that puts up with abusers; is actively kind, returns good for evil, seeks out things it can do for others, graciously puts itself at the service of others.

**Love Envies Not** – Is never jealous, never expresses ill-will, malice, or peevishness. Its heart is too big to engage in littleness or jealous rivalry. It sees the good in others and desires to promote the good of the body.

**Love Vaunts Not Itself** – It is humble, truly humble. It never shows off, never parades its own virtues, and never calls undue attention to itself. After love does its work of kindness it steals back into the shade so that Christ may receive all the glory.

**Love Is Not Puffed Up** – Some people may appear very humble, but inwardly feel how important they are. Love is never inflated with pride, never self important, nor is it ever anxious for honor. It does not "Lord it over" those less fortunate, nor does it treat others as inferiors. It is never self satisfied, arrogant, conceited, or overbearing. It never demands its rights nor feel recognition for faithful service is its due.

**Love Does Not Behave Itself Unseemly** – It is never rude, unbecoming, or indecent. Jesus was a perfect gentleman. His love is always considerate, polite, and gentle, never coarse or vulgar. It



never knowingly or needlessly embarrasses, injures or humiliates another but is always courteous.

**Love Does Not Seek Her Own** – It is never selfish, grasping, or greedy. God so loved the world that He gave. The same divine love in us will make us more concerned about giving than getting.

**Love Is Not Provoked** – The word "easily" is not in the Greek. Love is not provoked, irritated, or angered by affliction or by any circumstances, however bad they may be. Any irritability that arises comes from a different source, not love. Love keeps the victory even when everything seems to go wrong.

**Love Thinks No Evil** – It is not resentful of evil done to it. It is forgiving and never holds a grudge. Actually, there is no limit to its forgiveness. Love takes the one who has wronged it into its heart, forgetting the past.

**Love Rejoices Not In Iniquity** – It is not happy at injustice and unrighteousness, nor does it gloat over and make fun of the weaknesses of others. Negativity and gossip is not a part of its speech pattern.

**Love Rejoices In The Truth** – It delights when right and truth prevail, and focuses on those things which are of good report in others. It speaks well of others and has a positive confession.

**Love Bears All Things** – It bears up under anything and everything that comes. It works through every difficulty and looks for the solutions.

**Love Believes All Things** – It is ever ready to believe the best of others. It has faith in others as well as in the Lord. It keeps pressing on in faith knowing that, "faith ...works by love." Gal 5:6

**Love Hopes All Things** – When it cannot see how things are going to turn out, when circumstances are against it, it keeps a confident hope that is fixed on Jesus and loves His appearing.

**Love Endures All Things** – It bears up under all things, and stands its ground like a courageous soldier. It bears up instead of giving up. It sees where help is needed and gets under the load without being asked or begged. It provides sincere and real encouragement.

**Love Never Fails** – It never fades out, becomes obsolete or comes to an end. It always wins. Whenever faced with a difficult situation or individual ask the question "What would love do?" The answer will pull you through to victory!

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