

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

“God is love.”<sup>1</sup> It is His very being and character. Therefore, knowing God requires understanding agape love. This might seem obvious but agape love is very unique to the human experience since it only comes from God. So, what exactly is agape love?

The “**purpose** of the commandment is love from a pure heart” (1 Tim. 1:5)—agape love is the RESULT of keeping the Law. In one prophecy, Jesus said that “because **lawlessness** will abound, the **love of many will grow cold.**” (Matt. 24:12). He spoke this to the disciples as affirmed in the next verse so it is a condemnation of believers in the end times. What is lawlessness? Lawlessness is sin and sin is transgression of the Law of God<sup>2</sup>. The Law deals with sin by requiring a blood sacrifice<sup>3</sup> but the reality is that God does *not desire* blood sacrifices:

PSALMS 51:16 For **You [God] do not desire sacrifice**, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering.

ISAIAH 1:11, 13, 15 “To **what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices** to Me?” Says the LORD. “**I have had enough of burnt offerings** of rams and the fat of fed cattle. **I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.** ... 13 **Bring no more futile sacrifices.** ... 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

Instead of blood sacrifices, God pleads with people to *stop* doing evil. If keeping the Law of God produces agape love, then transgression, which is sin, is the opposite of agape love. Therefore, God desires people to put off evil works and put on agape love<sup>4</sup>:

ISAIAH 1:16-17 “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; **put away the evil** of your doings from before My eyes. **Cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good;** seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Blood sacrifices are required to atone for Evil Works but not Good Works. That is why God does not desire blood sacrifices. Even so, God does not despise *all* sacrifices—there are sacrifices that are well-pleasing to God:

PSALMS 51:17 **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart**—these, O God, You will not despise.

The key to knowing God is understanding agape love, which is the result of keeping the Law. However, putting aside the fact that “all have sinned”<sup>5</sup>, even perfect obedience to the Law is still insufficient if there is no agape love:

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4:8, 16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 3:4.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 40:6-8.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 3:23.

LUKE 18:18-23 Now a certain ruler asked Him [*Jesus*], saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit *be an heir to* eternal life?” 19 So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. 20 “You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ “ 21 And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” 22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “**You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven;** and come, follow Me.” 23 But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

The young man kept the Law of God but knew that it was not enough to inherit eternal life as evident from his question. Jesus said he was LACKING something. What was it? SACRIFICING for others (“Sell all that you have”)!

The sacrifices that God desires are not the ones done by TRANSGRESSING the Law but, rather, those done by KEEPING the Law. God wants sacrifices of *agape love*, which are Good Works. In fact, that is a perfect definition of agape love—AGAPE LOVE IS A SACRIFICIAL LOVE. This is evident in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

JOHN 3:16 “For **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

EPHESIANS 5:2 And **walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice** to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

That one sacrifice of God and Jesus Christ was done out of love for mankind. That is why any who is a child of God in the regeneration<sup>6</sup> is required to BE perfected in agape love. They will all be able to say “I AM agape love”. TO BE LIKE GOD REQUIRES BECOMING AGAPE LOVE AND THAT INVOLVES SACRIFICE! This is a mandate of “reasonable service”:

ROMANS 12:1 I [*Paul*] beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* **your reasonable service**.

1 PETER 2:4-5 Coming to Him [*Jesus Christ*] *as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, 5 **you also**, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to **offer up spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

How does one sacrifice in or for agape love? A few examples might best describe it. The first is the Moabite widow Ruth who loved Naomi, her mother-in-law, and followed to her homeland of Judah so that she could care for her:

RUTH 1:11, 16-17 But Naomi [*mother-in-law of Ruth*] said, “**Turn back, my daughters;** why will you go with me? *Are* there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? ... 16 But Ruth said: “**Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.** The LORD do so to me, and more also, if *anything but* death parts you and me.”

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<sup>6</sup> Matt. 19:28; Titus 3:5.

Another widow, a Canaanite woman, gave food to Elijah even though she had only enough for herself and son that day; after which they would starve to death:

1 KINGS 17:8-13 Then the word of the LORD came to him [*Elijah*], saying, 9 “Arise, go to Zarephath, which *belongs* to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.” 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow *was* there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.” 11 And as she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” 12 So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, **I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.**” 13 And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go *and* do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring *it* to me; and afterward make *some* for yourself and your son.

Finally, there was a poor Israelite widow who gave all of her money to God:

MARK 12:41-44 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. 42 Then **one poor widow came and threw in two mites**, which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 “for they all put in out of their abundance, but **she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.**”

AGAPE LOVE IS AN UNQUENCHABLE DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS:

1 JOHN 3:17 But **whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?**

Helping others is, generally speaking, doing Good Works. However, if that causes our own hurt, then it is also a sacrifice. Sacrifices come at a personal cost so the amount of personal hurt is a reflection of the depths of agape love. For example, laying down one’s own life for another is the deepest agape love because it is greatest sacrifice of all:

JOHN 15:12-13 “This is My [*Jesus Christ*] commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 “**Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.**”

1 JOHN 3:14-16 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. **He who does not love his brother abides in death.** 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 **By this we know love, because He [*Jesus Christ*] laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

Animal blood sacrifices are only offered for personal sins—never for others. They are performed to RECEIVE mercy from God. Sacrifices of agape love, on the other hand, are always FOR others. They are to GIVE mercy to others. The sacrifices of agape love are unselfish. That is why a sacrifice of agape love is greater than all animal sacrifices—blood sacrifices are about personal failures to love others whereas a sacrifice for others is a work of agape love:

MARK 12:33 “And **to love Him God** with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and **to love one’s neighbor** as oneself, **is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.**”

While human love—brotherly, familial, or spousal—can prompt someone to sacrifice for family or friends, sacrificing for an enemy can only come from *agape love*:

ROMANS 5:7-10 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But **God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we **were enemies** we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

The ultimate sacrifice of agape love by Jesus Christ was for a world full of enemies. That is why God can require and demand of those who would be His eternal children to likewise sacrifice for others, including THEIR enemies. The parable of the Sheep and Goats contrasts those with agape love and those without. The Sheep gave of their food, clothes, possessions, and time to the needy but the Goats did not sacrifice anything for anyone. Worst of all, they were too busy with their selfish lives to even *notice* that others had needs<sup>7</sup>. The Sheep will receive eternal life whereas the selfish Goats will be destroyed. And that is the SUM of the whole matter of salvation—sacrificial love. Those who are not willing to sacrifice for others in agape love will not have eternal life.

But agape love is important for another reason—forgiveness of sin. No one keeps the Law perfectly but God forgives those who have it<sup>8</sup>!

LUKE 7:47 “Therefore I [*Jesus Christ*] say to you, **her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.** But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little.”

PROVERBS 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but **love covers all sins.**

Agape love is an unselfish desire to do Good Works *for* others. At times, they involve personal SACRIFICE. This can also include patiently bearing personal loss, maintaining hope in afflictions, and enduring suffering<sup>9</sup> from *anyone*—believers, unbelievers, family, and enemies alike. God sacrificed. Christ sacrificed. They have given the greatest sacrifice of agape love so that your character—your very being—can become agape love in this life with an unending desire for Good Works and, at times, to sacrifice for others!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>7</sup> Matt. 25:37-39.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Pet. 4:8.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. 13:7.