

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Understanding the relationship between the Law of God and agape love can be confusing. While they point to one another, they are different in many ways. Start with the Law:

- The Law defines conduct that is either required or prohibited. It is a list of rules that codify behavior and forces compliance through threats of punishment.

The problem is that obeying the Law does not actually require love. Modern humanoid androids can smile and seem polite but those are nothing more than responses to its programming (for now). Those who limit themselves to keeping the Law of God are similar—their behavior is dictated by the list of “thou shalt NOT” restrictions and “thou shalt” requirements. One of the most bizarre of the commandments is to love God:

DEUTERONOMY 6:5-6 “**You shall love** the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 “And **these words which I [God] command** you today **shall be in your heart**.”

The Law commands people to have heartfelt love for God. And, yes, the Hebrew word for *love* means what you think—emotional affection. No one can do this; it is impossible to love someone upon command. A relationship is built on bonds of trust over time through open and honest communication and reciprocal acts of kindness.

In my experience, religious organizations have done much to hinder love. Some is the result of them being ‘closed’ churches—non-members need to be invited by a preacher. For similar reasons, they also discourage people from being a light unto the world and messengers of the Gospel. It may be different these days, but people were actually afraid to tell employers about the Sabbath or say they are going to a church convention instead of keeping the holydays. One of the worst was the unspoken rule that everyone had to be perfect so no one ever admitted they sinned. They kept people in fear by disfellowshipping some. Many times no Law of God was violated. It happened to some who simply asked the minister a question about Scripture! They also paint love as a weakness by criticizing Protestants for emphasizing love over the Law. Much of how the COGs operate destroys trust among people. Love cannot prosper in an environment of fear and distrust.

Controlling people was a big factor. For example, they had endless rules including which Bible to use, appropriate dress, hair length of women (and men), how to raise children, what are permissible sex acts between husbands and wives, and the list goes on. None of these are biblical. They kept attendance and ensured people were tithing. Like the Gentiles rulers¹, they exercised control over their members, claiming the authority to “bind and loose.” (NOTE: No one has the authority to bind and loose today. It was strictly limited to the apostles who were given the “keys to the Kingdom of Heaven”—Matt. 16:18.) And, yes, those are real life experiences.

But strict Law-keeping is not, and has never been, the goal of the Law. From the beginning, God wanted people to have agape love. This is obvious because the Law is summed up by the Two Great Commandments that are LOVE for God and LOVE for neighbors and enemies². To these,

¹ Mark 10:42.

² Matt. 5:43-44—Jesus Christ included enemies as part of the Second Great Commandment.

Jesus Christ added the New Commandment³ to love the brethren as He loves us. Agape love goes beyond strict Law-keeping⁴ because it is a matter of the heart:

ROMANS 13:8, 10 Owe no one anything except to **love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.** ... 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Fulfilling something means meeting or satisfying the requirements. In that regard, agape love is the same as Law-keeping. However, Jesus Christ explained that agape love is more than that:

MATTHEW 7:12 “Therefore, **whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is [or fulfills]⁵ the Law and the Prophets.**

Verse 12 is commonly known as the Golden Rule that is usually modernized as “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This was a new way to describe the purpose of the Law. Instead of dealing with people according to strict rules of conduct, the Golden Rule views others from the perspective of our own thoughts and emotions. It humanizes others by recognizing that they, too, have feelings and needs. Agape love is mindful of all the jots and tittles of the Law but views others through the lens of MERCY and COMPASSION. The Golden Rule teaches empathy for others instead of legalizing the Two Great Commandments like the scribes and Pharisees:

LUKE 10:25-29 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him [*Jesus Christ*], saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “**What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?**” 27 So he answered and said, “‘You shall **love the LORD your God** with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘**your neighbor as yourself.**’ “ 28 And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” 29 But he, **wanting to justify himself**, said to Jesus, “And **who is my neighbor?**”

The lawyer asked Jesus how he could have eternal life. Jesus wanted to know what he thought was commanded in the Law. After giving his answer, the lawyer asked Jesus to describe a neighbor so he could CODIFY what it meant to love his neighbor. For him, to be JUSTIFIED in the Law required a rule he could obey. This perfectly describes those who are strict Law-keepers. They want a list of do's and don'ts that can be checked off for “eternal life.” Love for them is nothing more than a commandment. How did Jesus explain love to the lawyer?

LUKE 10:30-37 Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. 31 “Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 “Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 “But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had **compassion**. 34 “So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 “On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ 36 “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” 37 And he said, “**He who showed mercy on him.**” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

³ John 13:34-35; 15:12; 1 John 2:7-8; 2 John 1:5.

⁴ Also Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8.

⁵ NET2.1 Bible.

Those who are strict Law-keepers do not grasp the mercy and compassion of the Golden Rule. If you ask people why they keep the Law, they usually give one of two answers. Either they want eternal life like the lawyer or they want to be in the Kingdom of God. These are completely different ways of thinking. Wanting eternal life focuses on ourselves and does not necessarily consider others:

1 JOHN 4:20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for **he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?**

Those who want to be in the Kingdom are often motivated by the Golden Rule. They “sigh and cry over all the abominations”⁶ in this world and want all people to have the blessings of God. They want justice, equity, and fairness for everyone—neighbors, enemies, and brethren. They want the Kingdom of God to be a reality now, in this physical life, because the world is full of pain, suffering, poverty, disease, injustice, and innocent bloodshed. Wanting eternal life and seeking the Kingdom are fundamentally different motives. The Beatitudes assure the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted that theirs will be the “**kingdom of heaven**, not “eternal life.”⁷

The Golden Rule fulfills justice to others according to the Law with mercy and compassion. But even if we have that kind of justice, it still falls short of a greater justice revealed by Christ⁸:

[DOUAY] ROMANS 3:21-22 But now without *[apart from]* the law the **[justice] [G1343 = dikaiosune] of God is made manifest [revealed]**, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. 22 Even **the [justice] [G1343 = dikaiosune] of God, by faith** of Jesus Christ, **unto all and upon all** them that believe in him: for there is no distinction:

The Justice of God is justice decided BY God in HIS mercy and compassion. Our justice, even with mercy and compassion, is “filthy rags”⁹ compared to His.

But agape love is still greater than even the Justice of God. Justice is still a legal relationship in accordance with the Law even with mercy and compassion. While it is the basis of relationships that are acceptable to God, He wants there to be more; much more. Notice what is unique about agape love¹⁰:

1 THESSALONIANS 3:12 And may the Lord make you increase and **abound [superabound] in love** to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you,

2 THESSALONIANS 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and **the love of every one of you all abounds [superabound]** toward each other,

God wants us to have agape love that SUPERABOUNDS and it starts with agape love for neighbors, enemies, and brethren¹¹:

ROMANS 12:10 **Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love**, in honor giving preference to one another;

⁶ Ezek. 9:4.

⁷ Matt. 5:3, 10.

⁸ Isa. 56:1; Rom. 1:17.

⁹ Isa. 64:6.

¹⁰ Also Phil. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:7-8.

¹¹ Also Phil. 2:1-2.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on **tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another**, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must* do. 14 But **above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.**

There is no abounding in the Law; at best, someone is a Law-keeper. There is no abounding in justice; at best, it is just, equitable, and fair dealings with others. Only agape love can abound without limits. How? Through Good Works:

HEBREWS 10:24 ... consider one another in order to **stir up love and good works,**

TITUS 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, **zealous for good works.**

1 TIMOTHY 6:18 ... do good, that they **be rich in good works,** ready to give, willing to share,

Abounding in agape love is being STIRRED UP, ZEALOUS, and RICH in Good Works! Agape love is the greatest of all the Fruits of the Spirit because Fruits are freely given to others! All of this is why the Second Great Commandment is crucial to fulfilling the First Great Commandment:

1 JOHN 4:11-12, 21 Beloved, **if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** 12 No one has seen God at any time. **If we love one another [the SECOND Great Commandment],** God abides in us, and **His love [is] perfected in us.** ... 21 And **this commandment we have** from Him: that **he who loves God [the FIRST Great Commandment] must love his brother** also.

Agape love is being perfected in us¹² through the Second Great Commandment:

1 JOHN 4:17 **Love has been perfected among us** in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; **because as He is, so are we** in this world.

Being perfected in the agape love through the Second Great Commandment for neighbors, enemies, and brethren is the beginning of understanding God who “first loved us”¹³ while we were His enemies¹⁴. That is how the First Great Commandment begins to be fulfilled. It is why people want above all to be in the Kingdom of God rather than focusing on eternal life—because God IS agape love unto ALL and upon ALL. Now agape love can now be defined:

- **Agape Love** is the result of God’s works in us. It fulfills the Law and justice with mercy and compassion. But more than that, it is manifested as Fruits of the Spirit in abundant Good Works unto all and upon all. Agape love is the perfection of God!

Love is a commandment because, as with raising children, that is where agape love begins. The Law is simply the beginning because the purpose of the Law is agape love out of a pure heart!¹⁵

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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¹² Also John 17:23; 1 John 2:5; 17-18.

¹³ 1 John 4:19.

¹⁴ Rom. 5:10.

¹⁵ 1 Tim. 1:5.