

## Agape'

By Pastor Greg  
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1 Corinthians 13

Bunkertown COB

In the classic Star Wars saga, there are those who have the special ability to manipulate the force. However, Darth Vader uses this special ability for personal gain and to fulfill his own agendas. Obi Wan Kenobi uses this special ability to serve a greater good. Both sides have the ability; it's just that one is self-serving while the other is a servant of humanity. And in this story it was far more difficult to serve than it was to be served (You don't know the power of the Dark Side).

The Christians in Corinth were plagued with this same dilemma. Sure, they had become Christians because of their faith in Jesus. True to His word, God granted them the Holy Spirit and gave them a Special Ability so they might serve. But for some reason they used these Spiritual Gifts for their own glory and their own honor. Well, Paul was aware of this problem, which is why he talks about Love right in the middle of this discussion on Spiritual Gifts (or Special Abilities as it is more accurately translated). Missing from the heart of these believers was love; God's definition of love, that is (**Read 1 Corinthians 13**).

Many people fail to see that Paul was still dealing with the Corinthians' problems when he wrote these words: the abuse of the gift of tongues, division in the church, envy of others' gifts, selfishness (remember the lawsuits?), impatience with one another in the public meetings, and behavior that was disgracing the Lord. He had just talked about Special Abilities and later will discuss the proper exercise of those abilities. But for now he wants these believers to understand the proper attitudes and the proper atmosphere in which God has planned these gifts to operate in the first place. You see, a person may receive a gift or ability, but it doesn't mean it will be utilized with the right motives or with the right attitude. Although each Christian in Corinth was gifted in some way to strengthen the brethren and to glorify God, they did not utilize that Gift according to God's plan. Paul says a person must be motivated out of love; *Agape* love, that is.

The word *Agape* is one of the rarest words in ancient Greek literature. But in the New Testament the word *Agape* is used 116 times, clearly a sign that the love

mentioned in the Bible cannot be found within the world. Sure, there was love in that culture, but it was a self-centered, self-gratifying love. It was a love that looked out for number one. And it was a love born out of laziness; for a love that demands nothing of me is surly the most lazy and selfish love you will find.

Although we translate *Agape* as love, it does not have the same meaning that might come to mind when we hear the word. It does not refer to romantic or sexual love, nor does it refer to sentimental or pleasant feelings toward some thing or some one. Even today, most people (even Christians) seem to think of love as nice feelings, warm affection, romance, and desire. When we say "I love you" most often we mean "I love the way you make me feel". That, of course, is mere selfishness, the complete opposite of *Agape*. *Agape* love is the love that we first see in God and the love that should be seen in each believer.

John MacArthur describes *Agape* love as a "Self-giving love, a love that demands something from us, a love that is more concerned with giving than receiving. It is above all else a sacrificial love. It is a sacrifice of self for the sake of others, even for others who may care nothing at all for us, and who may even hate us. It's not a feeling, but a determined act of the will, which always results in acts of self-giving. *Agape* love is the willing, joyful desire to put the welfare of others above our own. It leaves no place for pride, vanity, arrogance, self-seeking, or self-glory".

This kind of love is not born of the flesh, but born from the Spirit. And I don't mean that it is one of the Spiritual Gifts. I mean that it is one of the Fruits we see in a person who walks according to the Spirit, not according to the world. Think about it, what person can possibly love with this *Agape* love that Paul has described here? No person who relies upon their natural human tendencies will ever accomplish this kind of love. It takes a power that comes from outside of ourselves to love this way. Thankfully, God has promised us a little help in this through the guiding and gifting of His Spirit. "*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*"<sup>1</sup> (Galatians 5:22-23) If you'll notice the very first fruit born in us by the Holy Spirit is Love; this

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<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

*agape* love. By walking in obedience to God and by, "*Let(ting) the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives.*" <sup>2</sup> (Colossians 3:16), a person will find themselves filled with the Fruit of the Spirit.

Do you see how all of this ties together? To use your gift according to God's design, a Christian must first have the Fruit of the Spirit to empower them to love according to God's standard. And a person receives this fruit when they let the Holy Spirit guide them; when they walk daily in obedience to God.

Each day that a Christian allows the Holy Spirit to guide them, they grow and mature. When they were a child (young in the faith) they thought and reasoned as a child (or loved like a child). But as a Christian matures, evidence of this Love (this Fruit) should be seen in them as they live and serve among God's people. A Christian who takes seriously their daily walk with God should become more loving the older they get, not more sour and grumpy. Here Paul is insinuating that the reason there was so much contention and division within the church was because their love had not matured properly. They had become lazy in their daily walk with God.

*Your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left.* <sup>3</sup> (Isaiah 30:21) says the Lord; a promise that if we will listen, the Spirit will transform us and guide us. But that takes discipline and hard work. It means we devote time to study and prayer; a prayer that more often listens than speaks. However, it's far easier to simply follow our own instincts or our basic human nature. But this is why the church so often fails. This is why the world doubts our message. They look at all that we do, with all our giftedness, yet see no evidence of Love. Sure we may have Gifts and Special Abilities (so did Darth Vader). The best way (but the more difficult way) is to show this world the reality of God and the Truth of Christ through our love as we use these abilities. "*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" <sup>4</sup> (John 13:35). The world is not impressed with our right theology, our service, our great

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<sup>2</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>3</sup>*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Is 30:21). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>4</sup>*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Jn 13:35). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

works, or powerful truths, not until they see within them our great love; a love born in us by the Holy Spirit. Now, if only we might let the Spirit teach us this love.