

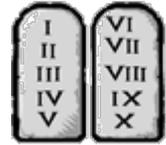
Spiritual Growth Lessons

LESSON 11 of 32

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

When Moses was on Mount Sinai, God gave to Israel, through their leader, the ten commandments. These can be summarized as follows:

1. *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"* (Exodus 20:2-3).
2. *"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image"* (verses 4-5).
3. *"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain"* (verse 7).
4. *"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy"* (verse 8).
5. *"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee"* (verse 12).
6. *"Thou shalt not kill"* (verse 13).
7. *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* (verse 14).
8. *"Thou shalt not steal"* (verse 15).
9. *"Thou shalt not bear false witness (lie) against thy neighbour"* (verse 16).
10. *"Thou shalt not covet (desire) . . . any thing that is thy neighbour's"* (verse 17).



During the ministry of Jesus, He informed His disciples what the two great commandments were:

"...The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment: And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

Toward the close of Jesus' ministry (as His death drew nearer), Jesus gave to His followers a new commandment--one that demanded a higher quality of love for others than the law had demanded: *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (John 13:34-35).

"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12, 13).

John also wrote in one of his epistles that we should have this kind of love for one another: *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"* (I John 3:16).

Notice that this kind of love is not optional. We are commanded to love one another with the same kind of love Jesus has for us--love to the extent we would be willing to die for one another! Jesus said, *"By this (kind of love) shall all men know that ye are my disciples."* A disciple is a follower or learner of any teacher, but that which would identify people as true followers of Jesus is that they would possess the same love

Jesus possesses. Do you have this kind of love for others? How many people would you be willing to die for? If we do not have love like this, we need to sincerely strive and pray for it.

THREE GREEK WORDS FOR "LOVE"

1. Eros: The Greek goddess of love and beauty was Aphrodite. According to Greek mythology, Eros was the son of Aphrodite, who excited people in a sexual way by shooting them with "love arrows." This is where we got the word "erotic" from, which means: tending to arouse sexual love or desire. The Greek word "eros" means "sexual love."

2. Phileo: This is the Greek word for friendship love. This type of love involves the emotions. It means: to be fond of, to have affection for.

3. Agape: This is the highest form of love. It is the love that God has for us. It is the love that causes us to act for the benefit and welfare of other people--not for ourselves. It involves the will and mind. It is love given without expectation of return.

OUR PERVERTED WORLD

Today the world is so filled with perversion that when someone uses the word "love," most of the time people think of it in relation to sexual desires. Thus, many people are even afraid to express their love for their brothers and sisters in Christ, "lest they get the wrong idea." The answer to misuse and abuse is not no use, but proper use.

The world has enthroned sexual love as its almighty god. Cigarette and liquor advertisements glorify it as the most important thing. Television and video portray it in all forms and fashions, as do the movie theatres. It is often the main subject matter of discussion in the office and in factories between men (and maybe even women?).

The word "love" is found in the New Testament approximately 270 times. About 230 times it was translated from the Greek word "agape." Approximately thirty times it came from the Greek word "phileo." How many times was the word "love" translated from the Greek word "eros"? Not even one time in the whole New Testament! Evidently sexual love is not as important as some would have us to believe!

Even when Paul encouraged the husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25), the word he used was "agape," not "eros." Sexual love is good and to be desired when it is practiced within the marriage boundaries: *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge"* (Hebrews 13:4).

However, if there is no real love in the marriage, the couple are merely using one another, not really loving one another. The command by Paul to the husbands was: *"Husbands, love (agape) your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"* (Ephesians 5:25).

The women are commanded "to love (phileo) their husbands, to love (phileo) their children" (Titus 2:4).

When God gave Adam a wife, the total purpose was not procreation and sexual pleasure, although that was certainly a part of it: *"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him"* (Genesis 2:18).

Eve was first of all Adam's friend, and secondarily his lover! Relationships based on the fulfilling of unholy desires are not true love relationships. Remember that agape love causes one to act for the welfare and benefit of others. The love of God in us will cause us to lift others up to a closer relationship with God. It is lust, not love that will not wait until marriage!

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

I Corinthians, Chapter 13 is often called "the love chapter," and truly it beautifully relates to us the importance of possessing "agape" love, which is God's love. The word "charity" in the King James Version is translated "love" in all other versions. In the days when the King James Version came into being, the word "charity" meant God's love, the highest quality of love, but it has since lost this meaning. The word was translated from "agape." We will use the word "love" here in the place of charity.

Agape love is more important than having the gifts of the Holy Spirit: *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as 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 love, I am nothing"* (I Corinthians 13:1, 2).

Agape love is more important than benevolence without love: *"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing"* (verse 3).

AGAPE LOVE DESCRIBED

*"Love suffereth long, and is kind;
love envieth not;
love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
Doth not behave itself unseemly,
seeketh not her own,
is not easily provoked,
thinketh no evil;
Rejoiceth not in iniquity,
but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things,
believeth all things,
hopeth all things,
endureth all things.
Love never faileth...."* (I Corinthians 13:4-8).



THE GREATEST OF THESE IS AGAPE LOVE

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (I Corinthians 13:13).

Faith is important. We cannot please God without faith. We cannot receive salvation, healing, or anything else without faith. But agape love is even more important!

Hope is important. It is the hope that we have in Jesus, His second coming, our eternal reward, etc., that keeps us living for God. But agape love is even more important! Paul wrote to the church at Colosse: *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity (agape love), which is the bond of perfectness"* (Colossians 3:12-14).

Peter, that big, strong, and rugged fisherman also believed that agape love was very important: *"And above all things have fervent charity (agape love) among yourselves: for charity (agape love) shall cover the multitude of sins"* (I Peter 4:8).

"Above all things have intense and unfailing love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins--forgives and disregards the offenses of others" (I Peter 4:8, Amplified Bible).

The Epistles are filled with exhortations to Christians to love one another. Please read the following verses of Scripture:

1. In these verses of Scripture, the word "love" was translated from the Greek word "phileo": Romans 12:9-10; I Thessalonians 4:9-10; Titus 2:4; Hebrews 13:1; I Peter

2:17; I Peter 3:8, 9

2. In these verses of Scripture, the word "love" was translated from the Greek word "agape": Galatians 5:13, 22; Ephesians 4:2-3; Ephesians 5:1-2; Colossians 2:2; I Thessalonians 3:12; I Peter 1:22; I John 3:18; I John 4:7-8; I John 4:20-21; Jude 20-21 *ds*

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