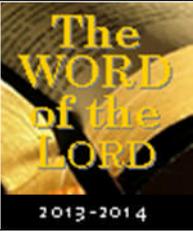


<h1>LOVE</h1>  <h2>Agape</h2>	Transliteration: <h1>agape</h1> <small>(conversion from Greek to English)</small>	
	Pronunciation: <i>ag-ah'-pay</i>	
	Strong's: G26 - <i>agape</i>	
Definition: a noun denoting selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love, the highest of the four types of love in the Bible. This Greek word and variations of it are found throughout the New Testament to describe the fatherly love of God for humans and their reciprocal love for God. The term perfectly describes the kind of love Jesus Christ has for his Father and for his followers that extends to the love of one's fellow humans. The kind of principled love that all Christians are taught to have between each other and their neighbors is Agape.		
Sermon: "Gifts of the Community"	Scripture Focus: Romans 12:3-8	

We use the word love to describe all kinds of feelings - from adoration to lust. In the Greek language, as in Hebrew, there are several terms used for the emotion "love": (1) *erao* for physical love or "sexual passion," a word not found in the New testament; (2) *storgeo* for "family devotion," a word used in a negative sense in 2 Timothy 3:3 as "unloving"; (3) *phileo* for "friendship," a word expressing love of family or love of mankind which appears frequently in the New testament; and (4) *agapao* for "loving kindness" or spiritual love.

The first three Greek words were used abundantly in Greek writings, but the fourth word *agapao* (the noun form is *agape*) was rarely used in Greek literature prior to the New Testament. When *agapao* was used, it denoted showing kindness to strangers, giving hospitality, and being charitable. In the New Testament, the word *agape* took on a special meaning. It was used by the New Testament writers to designate a "volitional love" as opposed to a purely emotional love, a "self-sacrificial love", and a "love naturally expressed by God," but not so easily by men and women. It is a word that speaks compassion, regard, kindness, and true love. It is an unselfish love that transcends natural affinities. In short, it is a love that we do not naturally have. It is divine.

As the word *agape* is used in the New Testament, it can express the love that God has for mankind in general and was shown best when He sent His only Son to earth to die on the cross for our sins as in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." In this way *agape* refers to a love already promised to a specific group of people. Ephesians 2:1 says that we were dead in trespasses and sins. And in Romans 5:8, we see that "God demonstrated his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." That is one of the characteristics of this type of love. It is always demonstrated in some way; it is sacrificial. It puts the needs of the one loved ahead of our own needs or desires. Also, it is not based upon feelings. Rather it is an act of the will, or a joyful resolve to act on behalf of the object of our love.

The second way *agape* is used is not only for God's love for us but also for the human response to God's love as well as for love shared and expressed between covenant believers, brothers and sisters in the covenant

family. For example in John 21:15, Jesus asks Peter: "Do you love (*agapas*) me more than these?" In Matthew 5:43, *agape* is used to refer to love of neighbor and seems interchangeable with *philos*, brotherly love: "You have heard how it was said, 'You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." In this case, *agape* is even used when Jesus refers to loving an enemy. Therefore, *agape* is not just a covenant love owed in loyalty to a particular person or group with whom one is in a committed relationship whether it is God or another person in the human family. *Agape* love refers to a more unique love, to an unconditional, self-sacrificing love which does not expect reward.

John made a wonderful proclamation when he said, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). This means that God creates and sustains all things in love. Love is the very essence of God. No one could possibly be described as being "love" itself. Only God is completely loving because love is His very entity, nature, and character. When John writes, "God is love," he is giving the reader the dearest, briefest, most comprehensive expression possible of the nature of God. This divine love motivated God to give His Son to this world to die for our sins. God loves us and as a natural consequence of this love, He gives us: His Son, forgiveness, salvation, fellowship, and eternal life. Believers can see the love of God most clearly in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul gives instructions to all Christians on how they should use their spiritual gifts. He begins his treatise with the words: "Though I command languages both human and angelic, if I speak without love (*agape*), I am no more than a gong booming or a symbol clashing" (1 Corinthians 13:1). Paul uses the word *agape* as the expression of love all Christians should exhibit using the spiritual gifts God has given them. Therefore, *agape* love, whether divine or human, is a self-sacrificial love which John says characterizes God, and which should characterize all of us in our response to God and to each other. For the Christian, *agape* love is defined as an expression of divine grace which means it is undeserved and unmerited. In its unique redefined Christian definition, *agape* is a love human beings cannot give apart from God because *agape* expressed as self-sacrificial love is the example He set for us on the altar of the cross, and its true expression flows from Christ, just as the blood and water flowed from His side, in abundance to us and from us to the world. For the Christian then, *agape* love is a higher order love because it is divinely inspired by Christ Himself; it is founded in unmerited grace. *Agape* love, unconditional self-sacrificial love, is how Jesus commanded us to love when He said: "Love one another as I have loved you."

The *agape* love that we are talking about here does not come naturally to humans. Rather it must come from its source, God Himself. Our natural sinful tendency is to put ourselves, our needs and desires, ahead of everything and everyone else. But when God enters our lives, He gives us a new nature, one capable of this kind of selflessness. Jesus now commands us who know Him: "As I have loved you, you should also love one another" (John 13:34). Love is part of the Fruit of the Spirit of God who indwells every believer (Galatians 5:22). As He begins to change us, conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ, others should be able to see us becoming more and more loving. If not, then they can rightfully question whether or not we have ever truly been saved. *Agape*-love comes from the divine nature. When we are born again through the Spirit, we too can express *agape*-love (2 Peter 1:3-9, 1 John 3:9). With this love that God gives us, it is possible for us to truly love our friends, co-workers and neighbors.

The Church Fathers also used the Greek term to designate both a rite using bread and wine and a meal of fellowship that included the poor (Jude 1:12, 2 Peter 2:13).

The term *agape* is used about 228 times in the New Testament.

Additional Scriptures: Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27, John 15:13, 1 John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Colossians 3:14

Sermon Scriptures Revised Standard Version (RSV)

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. **4** For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, **5** so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. **6** We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; **7** ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; **8** the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.