

# SUNDAY SCHOOL

## NEW JERUSALEM BAPTIST CHURCH

*Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:10)*

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**SUNDAY JANUARY 9 & 16, 2011**

### **FOUNDATION FOR A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN LIFE**

## **GROWING IN LOVE (Part 1)**

**Study Texts:** Leviticus 19:18, 34; Psalm 116 :1-2; Mark 12 :29-30; John 15:12-13; Romans 5 :1-8 ; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 John 3:1, 17-18; 4 :8-10; 5 :1-3.

**Memory Verse:** 1 Thessalonians 3:12 - *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*

**Main Truth:** An ever increasing love for God and for other people is the greatest Christian accomplishment.

**Introduction:** They said that "love turns the world". If it is true or not, it seems that it is really love that drives the world of entertainment. Singers from all musical genres are listed in the charts singing love's joy and sorrow. The novels about romance, as predictable as they are, remain continuously popular. In almost every film, regardless of the place and the theme, there is usually a sort of love plot that directs the action or complicates it. Sought love, found love, lost love, regained love - it is amazing to see the number of stories that can be invented on these fundamental issues.

We have offered various definitions for love: "an extreme increase in value of the loved one and a subordination of all things for his/her good", "a search for communion, inspired by kindness and pleasure, tending to reciprocal sacrifice to one another for the achievement of common goals", "to love is to think of" etc...

However despite the number of times the glories of love are sung and represented, it is always a mystery. Especially in today's culture, love is often taken for sexual desire and self-serving appetites. To arrive at the bottom of the meaning of love, we should look at its source in the heart of God.

### **Biblical definition of love:**

The Old Testament brings to the foreground the love of God for us. It uses various Hebrew words to express the nuances of love: "*ahabh*: love for food (Gen. 27: 4), wisdom (Prov. 4: 6), sleep (Prov. 20: 13), agriculture (2 Chr. 26: 10) and good (Amos 5: 15); *ahabhah*: human love, sometimes the love of God (Isaiah 63: 9); Jer. 31: 3; Zeph. 3: 17); *hessed*: constant love, mercy, divine kindness; *do*: human sexual desire (Song of Songs 1: 13-16; 2: 3).

The New Testament uses two groups of Greek words for love: *philia*, *phileô*: a feeling of strong friendship, which is eventually expressed through gestures of affection (Luke 7: 38-45; 15: 20; 22: 47; Acts 20: 37-38; Mat. 10: 37; Jn. 5: 20); *agapê*, *agapaô*: pertaining to the spiritual and moral sphere, depending on willingness rather than feeling; *agapê* love characterizes the love of God for man (John 3: 16; Rom. 5: 8) and that which exists among men themselves (Mat. 22: 39), even for enemies (Mat. 5: 44); sometimes it applies also to the lost love for honors (Luke 11: 43; Jn. 12: 43), for the world (2 Tim. 4: 10; 1 John 2: 15), and for money (Mat. 6: 24; 2 Peter 2: 15), in a word: for darkness (John 3: 19). The Greek word "eros" which characterizes the passionate aspect is not used.

Edgar V. Knight, in *Holman Bible Dictionary* presents love as follows: Love becomes a central theme because of Paul's understanding and discussion of love, and he uses the name *agapê* so that it becomes almost a technical term. Before Paul, in reality, the Greek word *agapê* was used little. Rather than using a word for love which had already a lot of meanings, Paul took a term rarely used and made it a term full of

Christian meaning. The love that Paul wrote is somewhat different from what we now know or are talking about. Christian love is not merely an emotion which is due to the nature of the person we love. It is not attributable to the loving quality of the person who is in love. It is a link of selflessness which is the result of the activity of God in Christ. The source of Christian love is God (Romans 5: 8), and the believer's faith response makes of love a human possibility (Romans 5: 5).

Louis Second's version uses the word charity instead of the word love to translate the Greek word *agapê* that Paul has used. The word charity is derived from the Latin word "caritas" which means tenderness, affection or great esteem. Today, the word "charity" is used mainly to describe acts of kindness, and therefore the word love can be presented as a translation of the word *agapê*. Nevertheless, the reader who is looking at the word *agapê* from the New Testament with the idea of charitable deeds has a better idea of its true meaning than the one who looks at it with the idea of fun and physical satisfaction.

In today's lesson, we are enjoined to receive, reward, and convey God's love. This is the only way by which we can begin to discover the true meaning of love.

### **1. Accept God's love** (Romans 5: 5-8; 1 John 3: 1; 4: 8-10)

God gave us the living proof of his love in the cross of Christ. The cross is a symbol of God's love because it shows us that God was not ready to balk at anything to redeem us. While salvation is free for us, God has paid a terrible price. God ordered his Son to die a horrible death into the hands of guilty men who have nailed his hands and his feet to a cruel cross and who have made fun of him while life left his body with each breath. And why? It is not for something good or pleasant that He saw in us, but only because He has chosen to be the object of his gracious and infinite love. The unselfish, generous, and sacrificial nature of this love was evident in a striking manner by the undeniable and unforgettable path which led to Calvary.

However God's love was not exhausted when He had completed our salvation and had delivered us from the death's condemnation and hell. His love was not met until He has found a way to make us a part of His family, to make us His children. He said that we were His; we were adopted and were sealed with His name and His spirit. He wants the world to know that we belong to Him. And by the Holy Spirit that He has placed in our hearts, He ensured Himself that His love would be more than an abstract doctrine for us. He has made possible for us to feel His love in a direct and personal way. Thanks to God for His love which is revealed to us by His Son and His Spirit!

(To be continued ...)

*Guide de l'Etudiant – Adultes* (Maison de Publication Aile Blanche)  
*Nouveau Dictionnaire Biblique* – Editions Emmaüs, 1992

### **QUESTIONS**

1. What Greek word the Apostle Paul has used due to his understanding and his discussion of love in the New Testament?
2. Complete: Christian love is not \_\_\_\_\_. It is not \_\_\_\_\_. It is a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What is the source of Christian love?
4. What word does the Louis Segond's version use for love?
5. What is the root of the word "charity"?
6. What is the true idea that the word "agape" emits to the reader of the New Testament?
7. Why are we told that the cross is a symbol of the love of God?
8. Why did God ordered His Son to die a horrible death in the hands of the guilty men?
9. Did God's love for us now have exhausted? Prove your answer?