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Is Christian Love Different?

1 Peter 1:22: (NKJV) "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart."

What does it mean to be a Christian? Obviously, (to us anyway) the "trademarks" of Christianity include being a follower of Christ, a believer in God and a believer in the Bible. As we see it, one other "trademark" of Christianity is the implementation and manifestation of "Christian Love" into your life. So, what is Christian love anyway? How does it work? Where does it come from? How do you get it? This week we look into Christian Love and how it can be a life altering experience should we adopt its principles.

Questions for consideration:

1. What kind of love are we talking about when we say "Christian Love"?
2. Is "Christian Love" different than other expressions of selfless love?
3. How do we develop this kind of love in our lives?

1. What kind of love are we talking about when we say "Christian Love"?

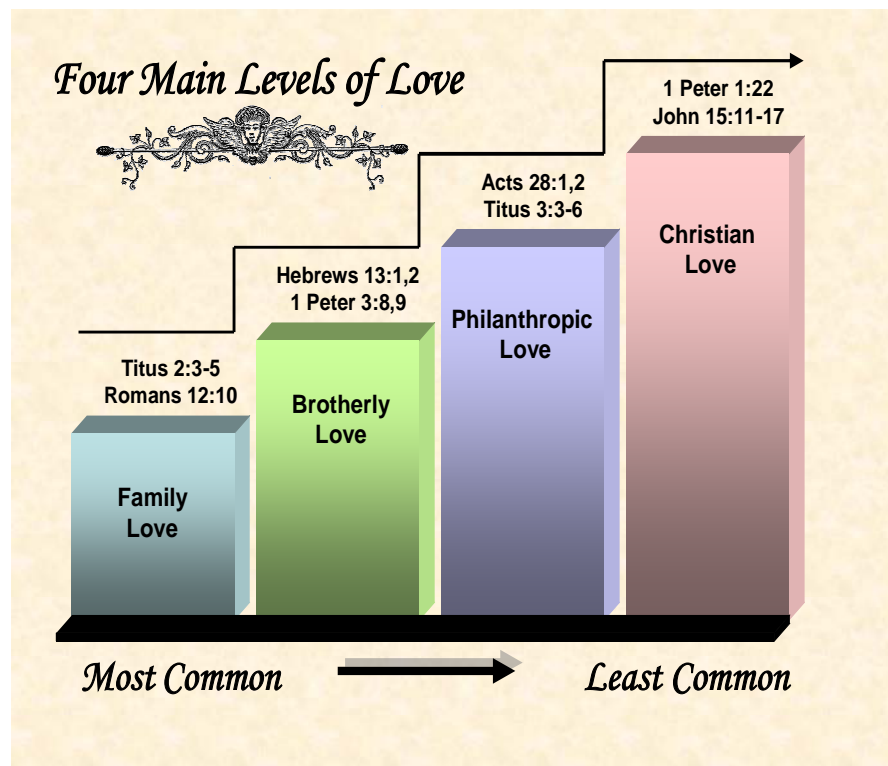
There are two entirely different words used to describe love in this scripture:

1 Peter 1:22: (NKJV) "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere *love of the brethren* <5360>, *love* <25> one another fervently with a pure heart."

In the Greek language a number of different words are used to describe "love" in the New Testament, each with different shades of meaning. Our English language is not as specific as the Greek in describing love. These first two will be our primary focus, the rest are building blocks for our discussion:

Love: Strongs #25 agapao (ag-ap-ah'-o); to love (in a social or moral sense): **Love:** Strongs #26 agape (ag-ah'-pay); love, i.e. affection or benevolence; specially (plural) a love-feast: **Love:** Strongs #5360 philadelphia (fil-ad-el-fee'-ah); fraternal affection: **Love:** Strongs #5361 philadelphos (fil-ad'-el-fos); fond of brethren, i.e. fraternal: **Love:** Strongs #5362 philandros (fil'-an-dros); from 5384 and 435; fond of man, i.e. affectionate as a wife: **Love:** Strongs #5387 philostorgos (fil-os'-tor-gos); fond of natural relatives, i.e. fraternal towards fellow Christian: **Love:** Strongs #5388 philoteknos (fil-ot'-ek-nos); fond of one's children, i.e. maternal: **Love:** Strongs #5363 philanthropia (fil-an-thro-pee'-ah); fondness of mankind, i.e. benevolence ("philanthropy"):

The Bible defines different levels of "love," and based on our observations, we have grouped these into four "levels." The **First Level** is the most basic and common in practice and the **Fourth Level** is the rarest.





First Level: 5362 philandros, 5387 philostorgos, 5388 philoteknos: The affection between spouses, parents to children and children to parents. Though these expressions are more intimate than the second, they are based on that same fraternal approach. This level is the most basic and instinctive. Titus 2:3-5 Romans 12:10: You should be loving fellow Christians as you love your own natural relatives. There is a natural basis for connection already in existence.

Second level: 5360 philadelphia, 5361 philadelphos: Brotherly love - fraternal affection, fondness. After familial love, this is the most common expression of love among mankind. Families have it, teams have it, those who serve in the military have it, even gangs have it. It is common to all, for it is a form of give and take, protect and be protected. It is expressed in the "I've got your back" sense of loyalty. There is a connection from a common goal or activity. Hebrews 13:1-2: 1 Peter 3:8-9:

Third Level: 5363 philanthropia: This level moves out of the relationships which are natural or forged by common ground and into relationships of no previous commonality, love being generously expressed without previous ties or obligation from the one who expresses it. This third level is where we find the basis of Philanthropy - this word is only used twice in the Bible. Acts 28:1-2 Titus 3:3-6:

For these first three levels, there is some clear give and take involved. The higher the level, the more giving and the less taking - this brings us to the **Fourth Level** of love. 1 Peter 1:22: **Fourth Level:** 25 agapao, 26 agape: This is a level of selflessness and benevolence that surpasses philanthropy as it encompasses a level of giving that has no thought or need of reciprocation. Philanthropy is generally accompanied by some manner of public recognition, but this fourth level has no concern for such things - it is only concerned with the well-being of those to which it is giving. John 15:11-17 Jesus is speaking to his disciples the night before his crucifixion. He knew his time was very short, so he spoke those things that were of absolute importance. This is the core of his message to his followers. He **commands** a selfless love where it doesn't matter what comes back, just as he himself loved them. This is the deepest form of love.

So, what kind of love is Christian love? It is a rare form of love, of the highest order that has been built upon the more commonplace levels of love. It is a love that is meant to transcend all barriers.

2. Is "Christian Love" different than other expressions of selfless love?

The concept of selfless love is not the sole property of Christianity. The history of our world is filled with those who lived lives in selfless giving, yet were not Christian. Their examples of giving regardless of the cost are to be honored and learned from. Other words that describe this unique way of life include "altruism" and "benevolence."

What kinds of people do we think of when we hear these words? Obviously Jesus and the Apostles to begin with, but what about Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Hippocrates...?

Selflessness is essentially the same, wherever it is found, so is there a difference with Christians?

- **Reasons:** Matthew 5:44-45: God is a good and just God as shown in the seasons. Even when you are being persecuted, God is still a good and just God.
- **Example:** Luke 9:22-24: Jesus showed us the way to be selfless by his own actions. He was clear that our path would require clearly selfless choices. If we do not choose this path, we cannot be his followers.
- **Implementation:** Galatians 6:9-10: To live such a life, we must be always looking for opportunities. Though it may be draining and at times discouraging, these are not reasons to quit. Just because you are a Christian doesn't mean everything will fall into place - everything instead must "grow into place." The graces of the spirit must be cultivated and developed.
- **Method:** The first two levels must be in place to properly execute practice of the fourth.

First Level Titus 2:4 Romans 12:10 **Second Level** Hebrews 13:1 1 Peter 3:8



Why is the **Third Level** (Philanthropy) not used in these Scriptures? Perhaps it is because the third level is in many ways a public showing of benevolence. The Christian, rather than being in such a perceived position of power, ought to graduate right to the fourth level of a completely selfless approach. The point for us is to love - not to draw attention to ourselves. Philanthropy is excellent, but this in itself does not require the basic levels of love to have been mastered.

3. How do we develop this kind of love in our lives?

Back to the theme text: We must be willing to "walk the walk" in order to grow, for a lack of growth is not acceptable: 1 Peter 1:17-23

Observation upon what is this "walk" based:



- > **God is fair** (verse 17) **Our redemption is by the blood of Christ, therefore perfect and permanent;** (verses 18-19)
- > **This is a plan that had its beginnings before the world began and is not arbitrary;** (verse 20)
- > **The miraculous raising of Jesus from the dead sealed our faith in God who *always* delivers;** (verse 21)
- > **Because of all these things, we can now follow through on** verse 22:

1 Peter 1:22: (ASV) "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto **unfeigned** <505> **love of the brethren** <5360>, **love**<25> one another from the heart **fervently**.*"

Unfeigned: Strongs #505 anupokritov an-oo-pok'-ree-tos without dissimulation, without hypocrisy, undisguised, blatantly outward

Fervently: Strongs #1619 ektenwv ektenos ek-ten earnestly, fervently, intensely

The Apostle Peter would have known all about the sincerity and passion required to go from one level of love to the next. We drop in on Peter early in his life, after Jesus' resurrection:

John 21:4,6,7: Upon realizing that Jesus is there, Simon is unable to contain himself and wait.

John 21:15:

The Question: Do you "agape" love me?

The Answer: You know that I "phileo" love you...

The Mission: "Feed my lambs" (the young, beginners in the way needing the "milk of the word")

Peter thus states his personal attachment and devotion to the Lord, but refrains from claiming the highest love for which our Lord inquired. This humility was an excellent sign, showing Peter had learned a needed lesson and had ceased to boast and feared his own weakness.

This mission would only be given to one who is trusted, one who has been given a new name (from Simon to Peter).

John 21:16:

The Question: Do you "agape" love me?

The Answer: You know that I "phileo" love you...

The Mission: "Tend my sheep" (the more mature followers who need guidance and direction)

This mission would only be given to one who is trusted, one who has taken on a new vocation and direction.

John 21:17-19:

The Question: Do you "agape" love me?

The Answer: You know everything, you know that I phileo" love you... Peter knows he can't go beyond where he is.

The Mission: "Feed my sheep" (the weak sheep, weak in faith who are to be fed and cared for.)

This mission would only be given to one who could understand weakness and give what is necessary to overcome it. Peter would not make a confession he was not yet capable of, but Jesus was willing to work with him. (Note that Jesus asked him three times - just as Peter had denied him three times. Peter was also drawn to the Lord at three different times.)



Practical examples of developing this magnificent love:

- Being a conduit of those who give anonymously
- Foundations which can support anonymous gifts ([Matthew 6:3,4](#))
- Trying to give without getting caught (this is a nice thing to teach your children!)

Agape Love: Love God first and above all: [Matthew 22:37-39](#)

Love what is right: [Hebrews 1:9](#)

Love those around you after the example of God and Jesus "stepping it up" to the higher level:

[1 Thessalonians 4:9](#) [John 15:9](#): [John 15:12](#): [Ephesians 5:25](#):

Realize the grace in which we stand: [Matthew 5:43-46](#): You must rise above those around you in life. Everybody loves the people that love them - that's not hard! Jesus wants you to love your enemies. We must put things in perspective and separate the sin from the sinner. [John 15:13](#): The highest form of love requires the highest form of commitment. Do you put your passion into your giving with selfless love?

Agape love makes us honorable: [1 Corinthians 13:1](#): Without the highest form of love, the most eloquent of speaking is just noise.

Gives meaning to our giving: [1 Corinthians 13:3](#): Even if you are extremely generous, the point is still not what you give, it's how you give.

Love is patient, kind, not envious and humble: [1 Corinthians 13:4](#): While philanthropy is valuable, it is not the highest form of love.

Love is always appropriate, unselfish, understanding and does not assume: [1 Corinthians 13:5](#): This is the kind of love Jesus demonstrated.

Love takes no pleasure in sin, rather its pleasure is in truth: [1 Corinthians 13:6](#): This love is a culmination on focusing only on that which is good.

Love is faithful: [1 Corinthians 13:7](#): Because it is founded in truth and righteousness from God through the example of Jesus, it is absolutely faithful.

Love never fails: [1 Corinthians 13:8](#)

*So is Christian love different?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

