

**Lesson 38: “The More Excellent Way”****1 Corinthians 13:1-8a****Craig Crawshaw**

**1 Corinthians 13:1-8a** *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*

*Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things. Love never fails.*

We finished chapter 12 with Paul telling the Corinthians that he would show them a more excellent way to manifest the edifying gifts of the Spirit – a more excellent way than desiring and coveting the gifts. And in Chapter 13 we find that more excellent way is the way of LOVE.

**SIX DIFFERENT GREEK WORDS FOR OUR ONE WORD FOR LOVE**

1. **Philautia** is the love of self.
2. **Pragma** is a model of love between two people who have had a lengthy relationship, such as a many-year successful marriage.
3. **Storge** is the love of affection, especially familial love between parents and children. It can also be used of love of country or a favorite sports team or hobby, etc.
4. **Philia** is the love of friendship, usually between equals. It speaks of a dispassionate virtuous love, such as “brotherly love.”
5. **Eros** speaks of sexual passion and intimate love, such as between a married couple. It can also refer to inappropriate erotic love or to the artistic love of beauty or moral love of truth.
6. **Agape** is the highest form of love – unconditional and selfless. The Biblical authors used it to refer exclusively to the love of God and the love through humans that could only come from God.

**BIBLICALLY, AGAPE IS THE VERY LOVE OF GOD**

“Agape” is the only one of these words used in 1 Corinthians 13, for it is describing the very love of God, which is “the more excellent way” to correctly utilize supernatural manifestations of the Spirit (spiritual gifts).

Because all humanity is created in the image of God, there is a sense in which agape love can come through all humans, Christian or not. But John, in his first letter, teaches that this agape love can only fully and truly come through a true follower born of God.

**1 John 4:7-8** *Beloved, let us love [agape] one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

You remember that 1 Corinthians 12:3 taught that no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. Well, in the same way we can say that no one can truly agape love except through the Holy Spirit of God. After all, Galatians 5:20 teaches us that the fruit of the Spirit is agape love. This is a supernatural love – one that we cannot muster or contrive by ourselves. Only God’s love is truly unconditional and completely selfless, so we must borrow from His love in order to “agape.” This is the love of which First Corinthians 13 speaks.

**GIFTS ARE WORTHLESS WITHOUT LOVE (13:1-3)**

Remember that the context of this “love chapter” is teaching about “spirituals” (spiritual gifts). In the opening three verses, Paul references five of the aforementioned gifts: (1) tongues (“if I speak with the tongues”), (2) prophecy, (3) knowledge (“and know all mysteries”), (4) faith (“all faith to so as to remove

mountains”) and (5) giving/generosity (“give all my possessions” and “surrender my body”).’ I see three key lessons in these verses.

### 3 KEY LESSONS

- ✓ Gifts are “nothing” without them being used in unconditional, selfless love (agape)  
 (“noisy gongs” and “clanging cymbals” were used in demonic ceremonies of speaking in tongues)
- ✓ A world without love would be a scary and meaningless place. A popular understanding of hell is a place devoid of God and any manifestations of love (joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness ...)  
 \* You might remember that in the early 1960’s Chad and Jeremy from England landed a hit song entitled “A World Without Love.” It’s opening lyrics go: “Please lock me away. And don’t allow the day here inside where I hide with my loneliness. I don’t care what they say, I won’t stay in a world without love.”
- ✓ There is a worth or spiritual “profit” to my giftedness, for it becomes nothing without applying love

Can we teach without God flowing through us in love? Yes – but it is not counted to our credit.

Can we give without it being done cheerfully in love? Yes - it might benefit others, but not us.

Can we help with an attitude of duty but not loving service? Yes – but it is a big “O” in pleasing God.

### THE 16-FOLD DESCRIPTION OF AGAPE LOVE (13: 4-8a)

- You might recall that in the ‘60’s Connie Stevens landed a top-10 hit with “16 Reasons Why I Love You.” This would be the 16 reasons how God loves us, and we are to love others.

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| 1. Love is patient                              | love is willing to wait, and never gives up        |
| 2. Love is kind                                 | love has a sweet respect for all                   |
| 3. Love is not jealous                          | love is glad for others’ blessings                 |
| 4. Love does not brag                           | love doesn’t have a swelled head                   |
| 5. Love is not arrogant                         | love looks on others as worthy of attention        |
| 6. Love does not act unbecomingly               | love is not rude or coarse                         |
| 7. Love does not seek its own                   | love is not always “me first”                      |
| 8. Love is not provoked                         | love doesn’t fly off the handle                    |
| 9. Love doesn’t keep account of wrongs suffered | love doesn’t keep score of others’ wrongs          |
| 10. Love doesn’t rejoice in unrighteousness     | love won’t use bad means for a good outcome        |
| 11. Love rejoices with the truth                | love always wants the truth to come out            |
| 12. Love bears all things                       | love can put up with most anything                 |
| 13. Love believes all things                    | love always gives others the benefit of the doubt  |
| 14. Love hopes all things                       | love is ever an optimist that things will work out |
| 15. Love endures all things                     | love perseveres through the toughest challenges    |
| 16. Love never fails                            | love never gives up – but keeps loving             |

You can put your name in the place of “love” and ask if that is you – at least most of the time.

Am I patient in love – willing to wait and persist selflessly?

Am I kind always – even when love is unrequited or even rejected?

And so on. Do I really believe and hope for the best in others – even if they have tried my patience to the max? Am I really able in Christ’s strength to endure and bear all things that come my way – showing love all the while? These are excellent tests of how deeply I am relying upon the supernatural love of God through me, as opposed to my own human efforts to love.

### ASCENDING DEGREES OF UNDERSTANDING

This list is INSTRUCTIVE - a good list to which to aspire

This list is CHALLENGING - a difficult list to achieve

This list is IMPOSSIBLE - there’s no way I can ever achieve this

This list is SUPERNATURAL - these are only possible with God’s intervention

This list is GOD'S LOVE TO ME - this is less about my love for others, and more about God's love for me

**L** God's **AGAPE LOVE** is **LIMITLESS** - without any strings attached; unconditional. He loves despite our unrequited love and loves in the face of our direct resistance to it.

**Romans 5:8** *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

**O** God's **AGAPE LOVE** is always about **OTHERS** - God initiated His love to us, reaching out through the ages to woo we who were His chosen to Himself. He tirelessly works for our good – leading us to the good fields, quiet streams and right paths.

**1 John 4:19** *We love because He first loved us.*

**Romans 8:28** *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

**V** God's **AGAPE LOVE** is always **VOLITIONAL** – meaning it is a CHOICE and an act of the WILL

For you to access this love of God to others you must make a choice of the will. If you are walking close to Him it will come automatically as the Spirit flows through you. If you are out of step with Him you must only confess your wandering, return to Him and ask His Spirit to fill you anew, and His love will once again flow.

This is not to say that loving others is up to us. It, and all supernatural actions come from God. Beneath the will, with its decisions, there is the heart, which produces our preferences, and these preferences guide the will. There is always the enemies of self and Satan who tend to push towards indifference to others or downright avoidance. But God's love is a compelling force of the will.

**2 Corinthians 5:14** *For the love of Christ controls us ...*

**Luke 6:45** *The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*

Remember that love is a fruit of the Spirit, not a fruit of my self-will or effort. BUT I must allow the Spirit to flow through me in love, otherwise I will "quench" His love flow. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

**E** God's **AGAPE LOVE** is **ETERNAL** – it will last forever; He will never, ever give up on you no matter what. This love has no beginning nor ending – it always has been and always will be. You can count on it every moment of every day, despite your failures or sins.

**1 Corinthians 1:4-8** *(The Message) . . . God, who got you started in this spiritual adventure, shares with us the life of his Son and our Master Jesus. **He will never give up on you.** Never forget that.*

So do you have the acronym?

L - Limitless

O – Others

V – Volitional

E - Eternal

That is the AGAPE LOVE of God for you and through you to others.

And as we use this love as we serve Him in speech or action, the supernatural manifestations of the Spirit (spiritual gifts) will both be effective and pleasing to God to our credit and His glory.

**THIS IS "THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY"**