

# Agape

Perfect Love

By Craig Paardekooper ©2009

## The Greatest Commandment

When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus said,

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.*

*And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

### Matthew 22:37-40

In Judaism, the first ("...love the LORD your God...") is the [Shema](#), the second ("...love your neighbor...") is the [Great Commandment](#).

At the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Jesus said:

*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?*

Christian writers have generally described *this love*, as expounded on by Jesus, as a form of love which is both unconditional and voluntary.

Tertullian, in his 2nd century defense of Christians remarks how Christian love attracted pagan notice: "What marks us in the eyes of our enemies is our loving kindness. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another'" ([Apology](#) 39).

## **We have the capacity to love unconditionally**

The Christian Bible speaks of a form of love that is unconditional, that reaches out to all people – in fact all creatures – regardless of whether they are kin, or whether they can give us anything back in return.

What is truly amazing is that the Bible assumes that we have the capacity to love in this way.

In modern times we have become so used to placing conditions upon whom we can love, that it seems remarkable to love unconditionally. Yet the Bible not only assumes that we have the capacity to love unconditionally, but goes further and actually commands us to do so.

## **Old Age and the Death of the Ego**

Childhood is characterised by our need to receive. We are dependent on our parents and on our teachers to provide us with many things. This receiving or taking attitude persists into adolescence and young adulthood, where our aim is to get the best relationship, get the best career, and carve out a place for our name in the world. However, middle age seems to be a time when taking and getting become harder. Age brings with it the loss of youth with its good-looks, and a diminishment of our health. On a purely physical level we become unattractive and people are far less inclined to want us, and less inclined to do things for us. We may feel invisible – people don't notice us anymore, or reject us more often. Many people lament old age for this very reason – what does it hold out for us except a slow downward decline into increasing isolation. All the rewards of youth are made unavailable, and life can seem a futile trudge. There doesn't seem to be anything to take or get anymore.

It is at this point that severe depression can set in.

However, in this dark night there may be a glimmer of hope. We can no longer take or get, but we can give. Perhaps this is the purpose of old age – to move us on from receiving and taking to giving. And the giving is pure because there is nothing in it for ourselves anymore.

We know that taking and getting are rewarding, especially when we get beautiful things or social status or physical pleasure. But can giving be rewarding too? Could the practice of compassion, or unconditional love give a meaning to our lives that could carry us through middle age and old age?

Perhaps the pure act of giving is as intrinsic to our later years as taking and getting seem to be intrinsic to youth

If we can find within ourselves the capacity for unconditional love, then surely this will fill our lives with richness when we can no longer take and get, but can only give.

The Bible says that “perfect love drives out all fear”, even the fear of aging and death.

## **Love is linked to joy and peace**

Actually, what the Bible is suggesting here is quite fantastic. Imagine how good it feels to love one person. Psychological research confirms that love is associated with a sense of peace and joy. Therefore love is its own reward.

Now imagine what would happen if we found within ourselves the capacity to extend our love, care and respect to all the people we meet in our everyday lives, unconditionally. There would be nothing (no condition) to restrict us from experiencing love, and so love, with its associated emotions of joy and peace, would fill our lives to the brim.

## **Overcoming compulsive desire and egotism**

Love can help us overcome our own suffering. Much suffering arises from compulsive desire, and from an egotistical outlook. Unconditional love puts our desires and ego in the bigger context. Our desires are tamed by a genuine concern for others, and by a greater vision. What's more, the freedom from which unconditional love springs is the freedom from conditions – and this includes freedom from the compulsion of desires – Our desires become subject to love, rather than our love being subject to desires.

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

**Some emotional states are incompatible with others, eg peace is incompatible with anxiety. So one can be used to drive out the other.**

Psychologists have long recognised that opposite emotional states can cancel each other out. For example relaxation and peace are incompatible with anxiety and fear. Psychologists use this principle to help people overcome their fears by getting them to relax and feel at peace in the presence of a feared object. They find that peace drives out fear, so the patient learns to feel relaxation in the presence of the object instead of fear.

**In the same way, the fruit of the Spirit may be incompatible with the acts of the sinful nature. So one might be used to drive out the other.**

If the fruit of the Spirit are incompatible with the acts of the sinful nature, then by developing the fruit of the Spirit we will overcome the acts of the sinful nature.

All of humanity feels driven by lust and ambition and greed, and people regard these drives as inescapable. They feel compelled to act upon them. Many people cope with desire by either trying to drive it out of their minds, or by trying to find gratification. Here we can see that the best way is to develop the Fruit of the Spirit - something that is incompatible with compulsive desire.

## **But how do we develop the Fruit of the Spirit??**

Perhaps the most important fruit of the Spirit is Love. Jesus summed up the Law as –

*love your neighbour as yourself, and love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.*

Love sums up the correct relation between people, and between people and God. The kind of love described here is unconditional love – that is, love for all people and all creatures. It is not love based on reward, biological kinship or physical attraction. It is unconditional – free of all conditions.

But how do we develop this kind of love?

YOU decide to love, rather than waiting for conditions

Normally we wait for conditions to be just right, before we can love. But unconditional love is independent of any conditions – inside or outside, so it must be a simple act of will. We decide to love.

When the Bible commands us to love others, it assumes we have the capacity to love in this way, but it also recognises that this love does not come automatically - we are not robots. Rather, we must choose to love and apply ourselves – hence the need for a commandment.

1. First identify the Fruit of the Spirit
2. Make a conscious effort to practice the Fruit in your day-to-day life.

We can develop this kind of love simply by doing it. Making a conscious and deliberate effort to think compassionate thoughts and act compassionately.

## [What is Unconditional Love & How to Practically Put it to Use](#)

by: Nicholas Powiull

### **What Does Unconditional Love Mean?**

The obvious definition, is love without condition. Yet, that does not give it enough credit, to accurately describe the meaning.

Unconditional love is, the ability to put yourself in another persons shoes under any situation or condition. In other words, no matter what is happening in your environment, how 'another makes' you feel, or what you think of another: you choose to always put yourself in the position of others and treat them exactly how you would like to be treated (under any condition, even if they are 'your enemy').

### **What is the Difference Between Unconditional and Conditional Love?**

Love that is conditional says: "I love you, but...". Unconditional love says: "I love you for who you really are! Period."

### **How Can Love Be experienced in this Way for a Stranger or Enemy?**

Conditioned love is seen through emotion. If you wait around for an emotional **reaction**, that feels like love, then you are choosing to love based on a **reaction**.

Unconditional love is seen through the filter of choice or **action**. We initiate, we choose, we **act rather than react**. You literally choose to understand that under the right conditions (with enough time), you can have love (a emotional reaction) for ANYBODY. You choose to love another, based on the knowledge that we all feel love and are capable of being loving. Therefore, you treat them as you yourself would desire to be treated. You choose to have a connection with all human beings, even before the connection is felt through the emotional charge of a chemical response.

### **How Does One Apply Unconditional Love in this Manner?**

After 22 days of doing something constantly, your subconscious programs itself to put it into habit. Habits are made possible by the subconscious mind taking over for the conscious mind. In other words, you will automatically apply unconditional love without conscious effort or thought.

Therefore, keep a reminder to yourself to always put yourself in others shoes and to treat them as if you were them (for at least 22 days).

## **The Change Within**

If you decide to fix your mind right now on loving people unconditionally, one of the first things you will notice is a deep relaxation which begins to pervade almost everything you do. You will notice this quite quickly. You are no longer striving against people. Rather you seem to be gliding along taking in the scenery – going at your own pace. I found this happening within half an hour, and it was a very deep relaxation. As I cycled through the park, it was almost as if I could hear a quiet music filling the breeze.

Another thing I noticed during the first day that I practiced this, was an increase in my ability to concentrate. Usually I find it hard to rest my mind and settle down to learn computer programming, yet I noticed my mind was a lot less jumpy, and more ready to relax and concentrate.

- We soon begin to notice how natural and good it feels to love others unconditionally.
- The perception of the beauty of our surroundings becomes heightened – so we begin to see and feel beauty every-where.
- We become more sensitive to the needs and circumstances of others, and unwilling to hurt others to achieve our ends.
- A soft peace descends that feels like the deepest tranquillity. It makes life feel joyous.