

man attempting to “trick” Him into showing preference to one command over another. Jesus’ answer indicated that God requires **whole hearted** *agape* (and therefore, obedience) to *all* of His commands. Whether they apply to God (the first commandment) or to others (the second), there is no order of importance other than putting God first. So Jesus’ response did not say that there are only two commandments we must obey, but that those two if obeyed, encompass *all* of the others. (Note: For us today this is of course, not speaking of the Old Law or the Law of Moses. That Law was made obsolete by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross [Hebrews 8:6-13]. There are numerous commands [or “laws”] given to us throughout the New Testament that God expects us to obey).

Another great Scripture concerning love is I Corinthians 13. Since we are nearly out of space and are concluding our study with this issue, let us just leave you with an assignment for some “food for thought” about this beautiful passage of Scripture. Armed with our perspective of how *agape* and *phileo* differ from each other in the way we apply a given Scripture in our lives, read in detail, I Corinthians 13. As you read, consider how the fact that *agape* is the Greek word *exclusively* used for “love” in this Scripture. Will our understanding of *agape* and *phileo* change the perception we have of this Scripture? To give you an idea of what we mean, here’s a few possibilities just to get you started.

I Corinthians 13:4-6  
(as it appears in the NIV using *agape*)

v. 4 — love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

v. 5 — It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrong.

v. 6 — Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth.

I Corinthians 13:4-6  
(as we might translate it using *phileo*)

v. 4 — Love is patient and kind, it will never offend anyone or appear arrogant by standing for the truth as revealed in the Scriptures, everyone has the right to their own belief.

v. 5 — Love does not seem rude by inflicting the truth of Scriptures on others, but is tolerant of all manner of sin, it will never be angry because anger might damage our earthly relationships.

v. 6 — Love never tells anyone that there is a hell, or that they must obey Scripture to obtain salvation.

We certainly do not mean any irreverence toward the Scriptures by this chart above. We only hope that it will demonstrate that there is a **vast** difference between applying *agape* and applying *phileo* in our lives. God’s enduring *agape* is that which will surpass *everything* because it is His very nature.

“Diligence” is a publication of:  
Dennis and Sherri Owens — Cincinnati, Ohio  
[diligence@gorfsystems.com](mailto:diligence@gorfsystems.com) — <http://www.gorfsystems.com/diligence/>



# DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

Volume 1

July 1, 2002

Issue 10

The past several issues have involved a study of the different Greek words used for “love” in the New Testament. We certainly don’t qualify as “scholars” of the Greek language, so we definitely don’t understand nearly all that there is to know on this subject. We simply continue to grow as we have opportunity to consider God’s Word and are sharing what we have learned with you, through *Diligence*.

As we conclude this subject, you may be asking one of two questions: 1) What is the point of this study? Or, 2) How many times have I mistakenly applied a definition for the word “love” that was probably not the writers intent? Obviously, It is *our* prayer that there has been something included in these issues that has challenged you to look a bit deeper into, or perhaps better understand the Word of God.

If you’ve been studying along with us, it should now be apparent that the most frequently used words for “love” in the New Testament are either *phileo* or *agape* (or some form of one of those). It should also be apparent that even though these two words are seldom totally absent of each other, they nevertheless have considerably different meanings when applied in our lives. *Phileo* is much more commonly used in our everyday language when we say the word “love” but *agape* goes well beyond our feelings and reaches the level of what is best for others in spite of the effect its application may have on *us*. If we were to define *agape* we *might* do so this way: *agape* is that kind of love which *will* do, and *does* do the best for the beloved regardless of the response or lack thereof from the object of that love. Another description that we might sometimes apply to *agape* love could be one stated by C.S. Lewis: “Love is sometimes as hard as nails.” Dr. James Dobson has used the term “tough love.”

We sometimes think that love means nothing more than to be sweet and syrupy. We might think that a definition of love is being *really* nice to *everyone*. There is indeed, an *element* of truth to that statement since being nice to others is certainly a *part* of being viewed by those around us as a “loving person” who is a representative of Christianity. One who goes through life with a scowl on their face all of the time is surely not behaving in a manner that is becoming to a child of God. We must however, as Christians guard against *only* (and *always*) applying a definition of love that selfishly protects our own ego and its desire to be liked by everyone. Such a selfish employment of “love” is not what God commands and it places those who are the object of that love at risk of being lost for eternity.

The love that God has for mankind is the love that was demonstrated when He gave His Son to be crucified for us *in spite of* our rebellious nature (John 3:16 and Romans 5:8). When we consider that God is *agape* (I John 4:8), it takes on a new dimension. God touches believers and non-believers. His will is that all mankind should be saved (II Peter 3:9). But in spite of God's love for us, He *did not abolish* hell (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5; Luke 16:23). Instead He provided a way to allow us to be saved from that eternal punishment (Romans 5:8 and 9 and John 3:16). This is truth. The harsh reality is that those who *reject* the fact that His love provided that way of salvation, will face judgment without its saving benefit. That is a harsh message. Yet it is a message that has been entrusted to those who believe and are obedient. How can we deliver a message that by its very nature includes the fact that those who reject it may face God's condemnation? Does simply delivering that message to a lost world make the messenger a negative, unloving individual? No! Delivering that message is in fact demonstrating *agape* love to that lost world.

*"Jesus said unto him, 'Thou shalt (agape) the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt (agape) thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'" Matthew 22:37-40 (KJV)*

To *agape* our neighbor as ourselves is a big order — especially now that we understand it is *much* more than just being nice and kind to him/her. Loving our neighbor *now* has eternity in mind for him/her! As Christians, we have surely done whatever we deemed was necessary for *our* eternal salvation. So according to Matthew 22:39, we must be as concerned for the eternal welfare of our *neighbor* as we are for our *own* eternal welfare. Now, *that* takes on a whole new responsibility. If *we* have heard, believed, confessed, repented and been baptized for the remission of our sins so that *we* may have eternal life, how can we be obedient to this command and *not* tell our neighbor to follow that same path? Failure to do so would be disobedient to the command. Obedience to this command makes it *impossible* for us to "hedge" by accepting the *world's* perspective concerning love and salvation. For example, the world would have us accept many false beliefs such as: "Your way to God is just as good as my way to God. We just interpret the Bible differently." Or, "I love you too much to force my beliefs on you. I'll let you do what *you* believe is right for *you*." Or "There's no such thing as absolute truth. We all just see things differently." How can we possibly accept one of these lies and say that we love God? Remember that God *is* love! He *is absolute*. We can be sure that He always was and always will be (John 1:1 and 2; Psalm 72:5 and 17; Psalm 9:7 and 8). To reject absolute truth is to reject the love of God. *Agape* love will not *let* us let our neighbor go on believing that there are many ways to God and to eternal life. If there *are* many ways, why did

*we* choose the route we did? Would we feel confident of our salvation if we had *only believed* that Jesus is the Son of God and yet had never been baptized for the remission of our sins? If we practice *agape* love we won't accept that there *is no* absolute truth because *God is agape* and His Word is absolute truth. So if we as Christians, believe that the Scriptures are God's Word revealed to us through inspired writers, how can they possibly be anything less than absolutely true? We know that the Scriptures tell us that there is only one way to God and that way is through our Lord and Savior who is Jesus Christ. (John 14:6; I Timothy 2:5 and 6; Ephesians 4:4-6)

We live in a world that for the most part only understands *phileo* and *eros* love. Replacing the *agape* love of God with *phileo* love reduces the power of those Scriptures using the word "*agape*." I Corinthians 13: 8 states

*"Love (agape) never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. (NIV)*

Then I Corinthians 13:13 states:

*"And now these three remain: faith, hope and (agape). But the greatest of these is (agape)." (NIV)*

*Agape* love is not always appreciated and accepted by the world or sometimes even by those within the brotherhood of believers but it **is** the love by which we are to be known (John 13:35). *Agape* love **is** the love that will always remain. *Phileo* is wonderful. It's comfortable. It's warm. It's very Christian. Brothers and sisters in Christ *phileo* each other (Hebrews 13:1). Christians *phileo* Jesus. God the Father *phileos* us because we *phileo* Jesus (John 16:27). *Phileo* is *good!* It's very, very good. But we must never let it overtake our emotions *or* our ego to the extent that we are not obedient to God's commands to *agape* one another. For, "...*the greatest of these is (agape)*."

There are *many great* Scriptures about love and how we are to apply it in our lives. One of those great Scriptures is of course Matthew 22:37-40. We've already discussed this Scripture but before we conclude the study lets consider one more point that is very important now that we know that there's a difference between *agape* and *phileo* and their use in the Scriptures. Notice that verse 40 states that "*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*" Remember in issue # 9 we studied that John 14:15-24 makes it clear that *agape* love requires obedience. That Scripture states that "*If you (agape) me you will obey what I command.*" Therefore, since *agape* is used in that verse, *agape* requires obedience. So the two commands given to us in Matthew 22 mean that our obedience to these commands **will** include being obedient to **all** other commands. The statement made by Jesus in this verse was in response to a question from a