Growing in Agape Love

Foundational Truth Volume 11

By Peter Tan

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PREFACE

The whole law and all the prophets are summed up in two great commandments: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). The apostle Paul declares that love is the fulfilment of the law (Romans 14:10). Our Lord Jesus gave us the commandment to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34). Yet, it is strange to see that Christians are still not taught about this commandment of love as a basic foundational principle.

The purpose of this book is to explore all the aspects of love as covered in the Scriptures and firmly found the believer in the fact that love is the beginning, the middle and the end of all of Christianity. We should live, move and breathe in the atmosphere of God's love.

It is no longer we who live but Christ who lives through us and the life which we live, we live by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20). We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). By His love we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). We need not fear any circumstances when we love Him for all things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

May we all grow rooted and grounded in the love of Christ and comprehend with all the saints, the width and length and depth and height of the wonderful love of God in Christ (Ephesians 3:17-19).

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CHAPTER 1
FOUR GREEK WORDS FOR LOVE

There are four Greek words for love: *eros, storge, phileo* and *agape*. The New Testament only uses the words *phileo* and *agape*. It is important for us to understand the place of these four types of love in the Christian life. We all need to learn to handle all these areas of love for a balanced Christian life.

Understanding Eros

Eros love is sexual love. This is the most misunderstood, the most abused but the most tangible area of our physical life. Christianity has a tendency to swing to extremes on the subject of human sexuality. Sex has been viewed as evil by some early Christians and its function has been reduced to that of mere procreation. On the other hand, spiritual men and women of God tend to be silent on this subject. As a result of their silence, some of the best teachers in church history have left many people in the dark as to what their revelations were on this subject.

The tragedy of silence is that Christians are left to fend for themselves without sound teaching on an essential area which affects their daily lives. The Bible, however, is not silent on this subject. It records the failings of men of God like David in this area (2 Samuel 11:4). It also records the success of men like Joseph in the area of sexual temptation (Genesis 39:7-12). The act of sex was originally ordained and sanctified by God (Genesis 1:27, 28; Hebrews 13:4).

Christians must learn to accept their sexuality and be balanced. They must not reject sex as evil neither must they be licentious about sExodus Sexuality is a part of our physical makeup. God ordained that the act of sex is to be restricted to the covenant of marriage. Anything outside marriage is a trespass and sin. Within a marriage, however, sex should be considered sacred, holy and pleasurable. When Sarah overheard the fact that she was going to have a baby, she laughed within herself saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old?” (Genesis 18:12). She regarded the act of sex as a pleasurable act. The apostle Paul pointed out in his writings that it is rightful for sexual passion to be fulfilled within the boundaries of a marriage relationship (1 Corinthians 7:9). (This subject is further discussed in the book ‘Family Relationships’ Volume One of the Family Series).

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On the other hand, within a marriage relationship, control over all physical appetites including sex, must be exercised to a certain extent. In a marriage relationship, Paul spoke about how when one partner desires to fast, they can refrain from sexual intercourse for a period of time (1 Corinthians 7:5). It is important that this is done with the consent of both; otherwise it will be depriving each other of the physical affection (1 Corinthians 7:3, 4). Although God has designed sex as a means by which married couples can enjoy physical affection to its fullest, He does not intend for sex or any other physical aspects of our physical bodies to control our lives. Instead, the newborn spirit within us should control all of our souls and bodies.

Outside the marriage relationship, all sexual passions must be controlled. The management and control of sexuality is to neither directly oppose it nor try to eradicate it. As long as you are in this physical and imperfect body, in which Paul declared that sin still dwells, you experience all the urges and needs of the physical body (Romans 7:17-21). By directly trying to oppose it or trying to eradicate it, you actually give it more strength and energy. That which you give attention to tends to grow even stronger. If you try to eliminate bad thoughts by fighting against the bad thoughts, for example rebuking them and talking against them; it might work momentarily but sooner or later your strength to fight it wears you out. The key is to simply focus on good thoughts and the bad thoughts disappear. Victory over our carnal body is similarly achieved by yielding to the Greater One inside your spirit (Romans 7:22, 25).

Five Keys to Controlling Eros

There are five major keys in the control of sexual passion. A lack of physical exercise can cause our biological rhythms of wake and sleep, hunger and thirst to be off balance. The modernization of civilization has made mankind more and more physically lazy. The best means of physical exercise is walking. A daily walk of half an hour to an hour would help relieve the stress, strains and tensions of the physical body. Sexual passions in a sound relaxed physical body would remain at a normal level. The stress and tensions of people who lack physical exercise cause them to seek relief through indulgence in wrongful sexual activities. If they learn to relieve these tensions through normal physical exercise, they would not feel the abnormal compulsion of sexual passion.

The second key in controlling sexual passion is in avoiding all literature, music, radio, video and television programs which promote sexual lust (2 Timothy 2:22). People who ask God to help them to control their sexual passion but who continue to indulge in these activities are like the farmer

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who sows weeds and afterwards prays for God to get rid of the weeds. We should treat the root of a problem and not just its symptoms.

The third key in controlling sexual passion is in occupying our time with healthy Christian activities. Get involved in your church activities. An idle life is an open ground for the devil to sow lust (1 Timothy 5:11-13; Ezekiel. 16:49). Christians who have too much idle time will find their minds tempted with worldly pursuits and lusts. The devil will occupy you if you don't keep yourself occupied with the Lord's Will.

The fourth key in controlling sexual passions is in meditating the Word of God (Psalms 119:9). Meditation on the Word has an effect on the physical appetites of the body. If we feed our spirit man, our spirit man will have the strength and the ability to subdue all the physical desires of the body. This is not an instant cure-all. It is a gradual and permanent key to the full control of the soul and the body by the spirit within us.

The fifth key in the control of sexual passion is praying in tongues. When we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Before we can walk in the Spirit, we have to learn to live in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). And before we can live in the Spirit, we need to learn to pray in the spirit, which is prayer in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:14). I have experimented with prayer in tongues for long hours and have noticed that after long hours of prayer in tongues, your whole physical body seems to feel warm and saturated with a supernatural presence and peace. All the desires and appetites of the physical body seems to be fulfilled and at rest. I began to understand what the Bible meant when it said that we enter the rest and cease from our own works (Hebrews 4:9-11). Prayer in tongues is a key to enter this rest (1 Corinthians 14:21; Isaiah 28:11, 12). The fire of physical passion is tamed by the greater fire of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 7:9; Acts 2:3, 4).

In conclusion, we see that *eros* is a gift from God. It is sexual love and physical affection that is to be freely enjoyed and expressed between a husband and wife. Outside of a marriage relationship, *eros* is to be controlled. The fact that God has given some the gift to be single shows that *eros* can be totally controlled.

Understanding Storge

Storge refers to the love and affection that is shown between family members. In a sense it is family love, family affection and family loyalty. The Bible treats family units as one. Noah's family was saved because of his faith (Genesis 6:8; Hebrews 11:7). God's intention is to save people by

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whole family units (Acts 16:31). Children are sanctified by a believing parent and an unbelieving partner is sanctified by the believing partner (1 Corinthians 7:14). This verse does not advocate marriages or partnerships with unbelievers but rather speaks about family units where one of the members of the family accepts Christ.

There must be basic faithfulness and loyalty to the family. It is within the family unit that we learn submission to one another, delegation of authority, forgiveness and acceptance, the sharing and exchange of help and information, team ministry, etc. A person who does not provide for his own household is worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8). Jesus strongly pointed out the error of those who used religion as an excuse to avoid the responsibility of taking care of their parents (Mark 7:11, 12). Children who obey their parents in what is right will live long on the earth (Ephesians 6:1-3).

We need to note that the Bible says to obey in what is right (Ephesians 6:1). If a parent demands obedience in areas that are in direct conflict with the commandments of the Bible, the commandments of the Bible take precedence. However, it should not be the loud, boastful and rebellious disobedience that dishonours them. We can still honour them by seeking biblical ways to express our love to them. When their commands conflict with the Word of God, we must convey clearly that our disobedience is not the result of our lack of love or respect for them but rather because of the conscience. By whatever means possible, we must convey that we do have *storge* love for them.

One of the attacks by the devil in the last days is against family units. Men have become more disobedient to parents (2 Timothy 3:2). One of the restorations of the last move of the Holy Spirit is to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and to turn the hearts of the children to their parents (Mal. 4:6). Family units form the basic infrastructure of society. If family units break down, the whole social structure of a nation collapses.

It is a fact of life that many homes are broken because of greed and selfishness. *Storge* love must be restored to all homes. We need affection, love and loyalty to be restored in homes. At the same time, we also need to understand that the love for God takes precedence over and above *storge* love (Matthew 10:37; Mark 3:33-35).

Understanding Phileo Love

This is a love that is born out of a relationship and an experience of giving and receiving. *Phileo* love covers all aspects of human relationships,

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including that between husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters. It is a relationship born out of an emotional bonding. The same root word '*phileo*' has also been translated as 'kiss' (*phileema*) (Romans 16:16; 1 Thess. 5:26). Other forms of the same word have been used in reference to friendship (*philia*), hospitality (*philoxenia*) and friends (*philos*). It is the purest form of human affection to be shared between human beings.

Phileo love is also used in reference to the love of God for us. Jesus said that the Father *phileo* the disciples as they have *phileo* Jesus (John 16:27). *Eros* love involves the body; *storge* love involves the physical blood relationship; but *phileo* love involves the soul. It is the binding of two or more souls into one: one in mind, one in will and one in emotion. The early church moved as one soul together (Acts 4:32). There can be no unity in the church without *phileo* love. The church needs to increase in *phileo* love (Romans 12:10; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22).

This bonding of the emotions, mind and will is achieved through the sharing of experiences in each respective aspect of the soul. Emotional bonding takes place through the sharing of human experiences together. When we have spent much time with a person an emotional bonding takes place. It is even greater when the persons involved go through the same crisis, failures and successes together. A small measure of this takes place in a camping trip where people return closer and more bonded together. We feel closer to those who have shared our tears and laughter because *phileo* love has been developed in the emotional area of our soul.

Intellectual bonding of the soul takes place through the sharing and exchange of ideas. For this to take place there must be some manner of dialogue involved. Sometimes through writings and other means of communication, people are bonded in *phileo* love to one another in the intellectual realm. Although we may not have physically met the person before, we sometimes feel a loving bond towards an author when we agree with his ideas. This is a *phileo* bonding through the intellectual realm. I am personally grateful to many early Christians who have gone on to be with the Lord but whose writings and testimonies have affected my life in many ways. By the grace of God, I have met some of them in some of my visions in the spirit realm.

The bonding of the will together is based on a choice to work together for the same goals and objectives. There is a certain bonding that takes place when we have worked together with others on the same goals. Sometimes when we meet people for the first time physically but with whom we share a common goal, there is a mutual bonding that has already taken place. This is a bond of *phileo* love in the soul realm of the will.

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Usually, *phileo* love is a bonding of all the three realms of the soul to different degrees. David and Jonathan shared a deep and enriching relationship in phileo love (1 Samuel 18:3, 4; 2 Samuel 1:26). The experience of having more brothers, sisters, mothers and children in the spiritual sense is a development of *phileo* love (Mark 10:30). It is the *phileo* love of God which is placed in the hearts of people so that they are as close to us as our natural families. I thank God for the many Moms, Dads, brothers and sisters whom He has blessed us with all over the world.

Understanding Agape Love

Agape love is the highest kind of love. All the other forms of love are based upon a mutual exchange and upon set conditions. *Agape* love is unconditional love. This is the type of love that God wants all of His believers to share. We either attach conditions to our love or we do not. To the extent that we attach conditions to our love, we do not really love with *agape* love. We are only offering an exchange, not a gift. True *agape* love must and is always a gift.

When God showed His *agape* love for us, we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). There was nothing that we could give to God in exchange for His gift of love. Neither did we deserve His love shown to us through the dying of Jesus for our sins. There was nothing lovable about us in our fallen state. In fact, we deserved the righteous judgment and wrath of God. Yet God so loved us that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

In the following chapters we will see more aspects of *agape* love. When we use the word ‘love’ in the following chapters, unless it is specified, we are referring to *agape* love.

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CHAPTER 2
THE LOVE OF GOD

The Bible records three times what the attributes of God are: God is holy, God is light and God is love (1 Peter 1:15; 1 John 1:5; 4:16). These three attributes of God are related. The love of God is holy and full of light. Today when human beings talk about love, they confuse *agape* love with *eros* love or *phileo* love. Agape love is holy. It is in harmony with all the righteous commandments in the Bible. We need to understand the love of God so that we would be enabled to love in the same manner and to the same degree that God loves.

The Tenderness of God's Love

God loves us so much to the extent that He feels and understands all of our experiences in this life. As the Righteous Lawgiver of the universe, God would have to mete out judgment whenever it is rightful. However, when God brings judgment, He does it with grief in His heart. He was grieved by the condition of the world in Noah's time when judgment had to be passed on the world (Genesis 6:6).

As the Creator and Guardian of the whole universe, God had to bring judgment. Just imagine what human society would be like if there were no punishment for those who break the law. A society can only exist when law and order are kept. If lawlessness is condoned by the lack of judgment, the whole infrastructure of society will deteriorate. Therefore, God as the Ruler of the universe has a responsibility to bring judgment whenever it is due. However, God does not take pleasure in judgment. All of us parents know that when we have to discipline our children for wrongdoing, we do it with a heavy heart. We do not enjoy doing it but we know that it is necessary for their good. Multiply this millions of times and you will understand how the Father feels when He has to bring judgment.

Moreover, even when God is angry, His anger is governed by His Word and His laws. When humans get angry, they do things which are unlawful. God's anger is limited by His Word and His righteous laws. Moses understood this fact and when God was angered at the Israelites, He appealed to the covenant of God with Abraham - His promised Word (Exodus 32:13). Moses knew that deep in God's heart, He loved His people and He would keep His Word. David knew that God has a great tender love for His people. When he transgressed by numbering the Israelites and angered God, he chose to be judged by God's hand because he knew God's mercies are great (2 Samuel 24:14). All the men of God who walked closely

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with the Lord knew that in His heart of hearts, God has a tender love towards His people.

I experienced the love of God in an unforgettable way in the early hours of the morning on January 18th 1986. A ball of light came into my room and stood opposite me across the room. The presence of God filled the whole room. It remained stationary until I said, 'Lord, I know that it is you. I love you." Immediately, the ball of light spread out to form four words 'Holiness unto the Lord.' The brilliant words made out of light started moving closer to me until it touched my forehead. When the light touched me, I was taken into the spirit world.

It seemed as if I were suspended in space and looking at the world. I felt as if I was one with God - God was in me and I was in Him looking at the world. Pulsating through my whole being was the liquid love of God. For the first time I felt what God felt towards the world. Every time something happened on the earth which was not in the Will of God, I felt a tremendous grief and sorrow. Even if a sparrow were to drop from the sky and die, the grief could be felt. All the evil and everything taking place on the earth that was not in God's Will was causing grief to God. I cried and cried until I could cry no longer. I never realized the great grief and sorrow that God was experiencing through all the imperfect things happening in the world.

The grief of God will only cease when all things are brought to His perfect plan and His Will is done on earth as it is done in heaven. Sometimes when we see a sick person, we feel the compassion of God for them. Multiply this a billion times and you will understand the love that God has for the world. When I finally came back into my room, I was no longer the same. I have felt the heartbeat of God for this world. Until my last breath on earth, I must seek to do and to bring the perfect Will of God on earth.

The Vision of God's Love

Human love is based on what is known of a person's past and present but God's love is based on what He sees that we can be. As a result, human love is limited and comes to an end. People give up on others quickly. If they do not see any good in a person, they will write off a person. They see only what the person has been and evaluates accordingly. Their relationships with others are based upon what they see of others. Sometimes a relationship could be good but when some unpleasant event occurs, they withhold their love and friendship.

On the other hand, God's love is perpetual and eternal. No matter what we do or what has happened, He continues to love us in the same degree. He

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may not like what we do but He continues to love us. Nothing in heaven or on earth can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39). The reason why God can continue loving is because He still sees worth in our lives although man cannot see it. He knows what we can be because He is the One who created us. He has a wonderful plan for each life. God's love is based upon our future whereas human love is based upon the past and the present.

Based on His vision of our future, God patiently continues working in our lives. People like the apostle Paul would have been given up by most Christians when he was a blasphemer and a persecutor (1 Timothy 1:13). When he was converted, nobody believed him at first except Barnabas (Acts 9:26, 27). Some self-righteous Christians would probably pray for judgment to come on Paul.

Many Christians correct others out of anger or pride. They think that the ability to see what is wrong is sufficient ground for correction. Before we correct another person, we must not only see the wrong that a person has done but we must also see the plan of God for the person. If we only see the wrong, we are only seeing the past and present of the person. This is not God's love. To flow in God's love, we must also be able to see what God's plan and Will for a person is.

In this manner, we are not only able to stop the error of a person but we will also be able to direct the person to the right path for him. This is positive and brings encouragement. This is true correction by the Spirit of God's love. We are not only to speak the truth, we are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). The task of correction must be tempered by the love of God and be conducted in a Spirit of meekness and humility rather than by pride (2 Timothy 2:25).

The Unconditional Love of God

It is an art to learn to love with God's unconditional love. Most of the training of our past and most of the love that we have received in life is conditional love. I remember, when I was still a kid in school, how my father expressed his love for me. As I was studying for an important examination, my father told me that if I failed, I must get out of the house. Within me, I understood him as saying that if you fail, I will not love you anymore. It put me into a state of tension - I must pass or else it was the end. This is conditional love. If I studied hard for fear of failure, it would have been based on the negative motivational force of fear.

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If only he knew that he would have helped me study better by putting it in a different way. He could have said, “Son, I want you to know that it is my will for you to pass the examinations. I want you to succeed. I want you to pass. I do not want you to fail nor would I like it. But I want you to know that I would still love you if you fail.”

If he had said that, I would be even more motivated to pass because I want to please him. I could study being at ease that I do not have to win his love. I am loved no matter what happens. I would still be motivated to pass but it would be more positive. Many parents today give out conditional love. They tell the children, “If you are good, I will love you.” This implies that if they are bad, they will not be loved.

Such statements amount to the dishing out of conditional love. We should communicate to the children that we love them all the time no matter what happens. We can reward and punish according to their actions but we must continually assure them that they will be loved with unconditional love. The love of God for our lives cannot be bought, exchanged or displaced. He continually loves us, both the unrighteous and the just (Matthew 5:45).

God does not set conditions for being loved by Him. He loves each one of us equally. When I was a young Christian, I thought that God had one favourite Son - Jesus Christ. As I grew in the Lord and read His Word, I came across the verse in John chapter seventeen where Jesus prayed that the world may know that the Father has loved us as He has loved Jesus (John 17:23). I realized that God does not have just one favourite Son but when Jesus came, He brought all of us to His privileged position (Ephesians 2:6; Romans 8:17). God loves us as much as He loved Jesus.

We Are His Beloved

Although our Heavenly Father may love each of us equally, we are not always equally conscious of His love. Our ability to walk in great faith and great grace depends on the greatness of our confidence in God's love; which results in the greatness of our love for God and others (1 John 4:16, 19). Jesus when He was physically manifested on earth had twelve apostles, hundreds of other disciples and thousands of followers. I am sure that He loved all equally, yet only one disciple wrote that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20, 24).

What right had John to call himself *the disciple whom Jesus loved?* Didn't he know that Jesus loved all equally? Of course, Jesus loved all the disciples but it was *only* John who *treasured* the fact the Jesus loved him and made it his supreme consciousness. He felt special to be loved by Jesus; he felt

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unique to be loved by Jesus; he knew that God was love and that Jesus was the personification of this special love that God has for us.

Peter's attempts to earn God's love

Contrast that with Peter. He was always *trying* to impress Jesus instead of just *resting* in the love of God through Jesus. Even though Andrew had introduced him to Jesus earlier (John 1:40-41), he continually felt unworthy of the love of Jesus. When Jesus used his boat and gave him a miraculous catch of fish, his first words were 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man' (Luke 5:8). It is never God who shuts us from His love. It is we who through our own fear and doubts shut ourselves from His love.

Peter kept swaying in accepting the unmerited favour and love of God for himself. He was the type of person who was bold to risk everything and quick to act (Matthew 14:28). When Jesus blessed him for his willingness to confess Him as Christ the Son of the Living God, instead of resting in His love for him, He started *trying* to control and impress Jesus and received a rebuke (Matthew 16:23). When Jesus, who loved all and knew all things, told Peter that He had prayed for him because he was going to experience a test, Peter was confident in himself and boasted that he was ready to go to prison and to even die for Jesus (Luke 22:33).

God is not interested in what we can prove to Him; rather He is interested in whether our Christian-living-and-ministry confidence comes from the consciousness of His love for us or does it come from our own self-confidence. We always fail when we are confident in our own abilities. We only succeed when that confidence comes from a deep assurance of God's love for us and His ability to enable us to do what He wants us to do. Thus we tap upon His ability in us.

When Peter was tested and he failed miserably in denying the Lord; when the rooster crowed, the Lord turned and His eyes met Peter's eyes. Peter must have been overwhelmed by the fact that in spite of all that he had done, the Lord still loved him and he wept bitterly (Luke 22:61-62). It was the Lord's prayer for Peter that sustained him through this experience and not Peter's own ability. The Lord had prayed that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). Faith in what? Faith in whom? Faith in the love of Jesus for him which would result in faith for everything else! For faith is energised by love (Galatians 5:6 - the word 'working' is the Greek word '*energes*').

After His resurrection, Jesus sought to restore Peter's confidence in His love by asking him three times whether he loved Him. The Greek words showed that Jesus was asking Peter two times whether he had '*agape*' love

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to which Peter only could respond with '*phileo*' love. On the third occasion, Jesus came down to Peter's level and asked whether he had '*phileo*' love - Peter still struggled with raising his level of love from '*phileo*' level to '*agape*' level (John 21:15-19). In fact, he seemed concerned when Jesus revealed that he was to die for Him, about whether John was having a different (maybe better in his mind?) treatment (John 21:18-21). Behind it all, his struggle was the struggle as to whether God and Jesus loved him as much as John. Later in the book of Acts, we see Peter working closely with John - he would have definitely realised by then that God loved him as much as John and everybody else (Acts 3:1). Since our ability to love God is directly proportional to God's love for us (1 John 4:19), this test of Jesus on Peter was ultimately a test of whether he was confident in God's love for him.

God So Loved Us in Christ

All of the devil's works and all the trials, temptations and tribulations serve only one purpose - to make us doubt whether God loves us. All our doubts and fears are always centred on one thing - whether God loves us enough to take care of us. All our human efforts and fleshly efforts are based on only one premise - trying to earn God's love or be good enough to be loved by God.

Let it sink into our consciousness once and for all - God loves us! He loves us as much as He loved Jesus (John 17:23). And He loved us while we were enemies of God (Romans 5:8-11). And Jesus loved us and laid His life down for us that we might *know love* (1 John 3:16). The secret to your daily victory is your confidence that God loves you. The secret to your success in your ministry and profession is that God loves you.

Knowing the God loves you enables you to overcome tribulations, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword (Romans 8:35). It makes you more than a conqueror through *Him who loved us.* Confidence in God's love for us - not just our love for Him. Death or life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come - *nothing* can stop you from becoming more than a conqueror in Christ when you have faith in God's love for you (Romans 8:37-38). The rest of our lives and ministries are purely the discovery of the width, length, depth and height of God's great love for all of us (Ephesians 3:18-21).

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CHAPTER 3
THE POWER OF GOD'S LOVE

There is in the heart of every human being a vacuum for God's love to fill. We are born with a need to be loved. If love is deprived from us in our growing stages, our personalities will develop peculiar characteristics. Many people have been told in their childhood that they are no good; that they will never amount to anything, that they are basically unlovable. Some of these develop a poor self-image and end up having inferiority complexes. Others try to get love and attention by a 'macho' life style. In all the types of peculiar behaviour that people have developed, many of them are just symptoms of a greater problem for the need of love and attention.

The Healing Power of God's Love

Every problem in the soul of man can be healed by a revelation of the love of God. Our souls can never be stabilized and function perfectly until we have known the true acceptance and healing of God's love. All of us have received wounds in one way or another in our souls. Only God's love can wash and heal all these wounds. Some people have received so many wounds that they can never be normal again until they are touched by the love of God.

The love of God is powerful in its life changing ability. Many hardened criminals have never been changed by imprisonment or by rehabilitation. Thousands of dollars, hours of work and many re-education programs have not transformed them. But with one touch from the love of God, they changed from criminals to saints. They began to love others where they used to kill others; to treasure others where they devalued others. Why does this happen? It is because the love of God has healed their inward soul. They do not have to react against society nor try to gain attention or acceptance. The love of God changes them when they discover that they are already accepted in Christ (Ephesians 1:6).

Many of the sicknesses of humanity are linked to a problem in the soul. Natural remedies have not healed them; but when the power of God's love reached into the depths of their soul, physical healing resulted. For this reason, the healing ministry is not just a channelling of power but it is also a channelling of the love of God. It is in God's healing love that miracles take place.

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The apostle Paul was a proud, self-righteous, religious Pharisee. He cruelly imprisoned Christians and persecuted them (Acts 9:1, 2). When the love of God touched him, he became a different man. He became self-sacrificing and giving. He suffered beatings, whippings, stoning, shipwrecks, perils, imprisonments, weariness, toil, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold and nakedness for the sake of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). He said that it was the love of Christ that constrained him to do all these things (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Unless we know the healing power of God's love, our personalities can never reach the heights of usefulness that God has intended us to reach. The greatest force in the universe is the force of love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Until we know the fullness of being loved unconditionally by God, we will continue to walk in fear - fear of rejection. Without the fear of rejection, we can be what God has meant us to be. Only when perfect love comes can fear be completely cast out (1 John 4:18). Fear cripples the potential that God has placed in our lives. Be set free by the love of God to be the person God made you to be.

Love - the Highest Objective

Every invention of men has set conditions for its optimum function. To obtain the best performance for the car, we must warm up the car engine by driving slowly in low gear when we first start it up especially on winter mornings. If we constantly strain the engine, we will wear out a car much faster. If we put adulterated petrol into the car, we will ruin the engine. When God created man, He set optimum conditions for him to bring all the attributes of his spirit, soul and body to their fullest potential. Men were made to function in love.

When we allow unloving thoughts and actions to dominate our lives, our physical bodies wear out faster under the strain. We become prone to sicknesses and diseases. Our minds cannot think as clearly when we are filled with hate or anger. Educators have discovered that the atmosphere most conducive for rapid learning is an atmosphere of love, peace and joy. Children learn faster and absorb more knowledge when they are loved. The dull-witted child is sometimes a symptom of a lack of love.

Everyone who lives on this earth has set goals and objectives. Some of them set their life principles on pleasure. Others set it on wealth or fame. All these will not receive the fullest satisfaction in life. Only those who have set their life principles to love both God and man will have fulfilment in this life. Jesus said that these are the greatest commandments of all (Matthew 22:37-40). We should set our life principles to love God and to love all men.

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Jesus was not only asking us to keep these commandments when He spoke to the Pharisees about how these two commandments summarized all of the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:40). He came to bring these two commandments to us in a different light. He told His disciples to love one another as He loved them (John 13:34). In the New Covenant, we are not only told to love each other as our neighbour but we are to love each other as Jesus loves us. This goes beyond loving each other with neighbourly love, it means being willing to lay down our lives for each other (1 John 3:16).

I don't think many Christians can honestly say that they would lay down their lives for their brethren. Each of us is usually too busy building our own lives to be thinking of laying down our lives for others. Yet it is in this area that the Lord tells us that unless a man loses his own life for His sake, He will not find it (Matthew 16:25). Unless our motivation and goals are for the betterment and good of our fellow men, we will not be able to find our place in God's Will. God's Will for each human life has always been for the good of each one. This is God's love shown to each of us. The same love of God must permeate our lives such that we will have the same goals as God has for each of His creatures.

The Power of His Presence

God manifested His love before He manifested His power. The Bible tells us how God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). When Jesus came, He demonstrated the love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit in healing the sick and the oppressed. Behind all the demonstrations of His power was the heartbeat of God's love. God's power follows God's love and not vice versa.

Whenever God manifests His presence, it will always be a presence of His love because God is love. The fullness of God's love will be the fullness of God's presence and power. Whenever we are filled with God's love, we are filled with the presence of God (Ephesians 3:17-19). And in His presence, His power is demonstrated. The love of God is not weak, it is all powerful.

As creatures made by the love of God, we must live out God's love to live life to the optimum. All of our spirits, souls and bodies function at their optimum when we walk in God's love. We will be much healthier and wealthier when we walk in God's love. We will be able to experience the fullness of God's power only when we experience the fullness of His love.

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CHAPTER 4
UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF GOD

The love of God encompasses all the fruit of the Holy Spirit listed in Galatians. Each of the fruit is a product and an aspect of love. They can be compared as follows:

THE LOVE OF GOD (1 Corinthians 13)	FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (Galatians 5)
1. The Love of God	1. The fruit of love
2. Does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in truth	2. The fruit of joy
3. Does not envy, does not parade itself is not puffed up	3. The fruit of peace
4. Love suffers long	4. The fruit of longsuffering
5. Love is kind	5. The fruit of kindness
6. Thinks no evil	6. The fruit of goodness
7. Bears all things, believes all things Hopes all things, endures all things	7. The fruit of faithfulness
8. Does not behave rudely	8. The fruit of gentleness
9. Does not seek its own, is not provoked	9. The fruit of self-control

The fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of love. It is the different facets of the love of God. In First Corinthians chapter thirteen, Paul describes in greater detail what the fruit of the Holy Spirit does. For example, in describing joy, he said that it is a joy that will not participate nor be gleeful over evil but rather it will celebrate when truth prevails. The love of God must even affect the way we think. Some people have the impression that the love of God is just changing the way we feel about people. However, Paul says that love thinks no evil (1 Corinthians 13:5). As long as we harbor evil thoughts against others, the love of God has not been fully exercised in our lives. Because of His great love for us, God's thoughts towards us are not evil but good (Jeremiah 29:11).

We should always have good thoughts towards others. We should project loving thoughts to people wherever we go. This is made possible by seeing people with the eyes of God. Seeing them as God sees them. The truth of salvation in Jesus Christ should bring a twofold revelation. We should have a revelation of God as our Father, our Eternal Lover. Secondly, we should

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have a revelation of our fellow men. We must through the gospel see all men with the eyes of God's love.

Being led by Love

When Paul was teaching the Galatians about the fruit of the Spirit, his purpose was to show them how to be led by the Holy Spirit. He wanted them to learn how to walk and be led by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 18, 25). It was in this context that he taught them about the fruit of the Spirit. There is a direct relationship between being led by the Holy Spirit and being led by the love of God. To be led by the Holy Spirit is to be led by love.

Many times when the Bible records the healing ministry of Jesus, it mentions that He was moved by compassion (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 18:27). Whenever the Holy Spirit wants us to do something, He always fills our hearts with His love. All the leadings of the Holy Spirit are always accompanied by the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts. All the works of God are always in line with His nature; and His nature is love. By this we can discern what is of God and what is not of God.

The Amplified Bible translates Colossians as 'the peace of God will umpire in your hearts' (Col. 3:15). An umpire is one who has authority to decide between two parties. The peace of God helps us to discern whether we are in the Spirit or in the flesh. As seen above, the peace of God is an aspect of the love of God. Every Christian must learn to understand the working of the love of God in our hearts in order to walk in the fullness of God's perfect Will.

Loving by Faith

The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts when we were born again (Romans 5:5). Every believer has the love of God in his life whether he feels it or not. We have been born of the same love nature of God (1 John 4:7). It is not a question of whether we have or do not have the love of God in our lives but it is a question of whether we have learnt to release the love of God in our lives.

The love of God that is in our hearts is released through a decision and not through our emotions. It is not based on whether we feel like loving or not. Rather, we choose to love because of what the Word of God says. It is an action based on the Word of God and not on human experience. *Eros* love, *storge* love and *phileo* love have an emotional base but *agape* love is a decision to be benevolent and loving no matter what we feel or what the circumstances are.

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It is only with this kind of love that we can choose to love our enemies although the natural reaction is retaliation (Matthew 5:44). Jesus came to bring a revelation of love which was yet unknown to man. A love that reaches beyond the boundaries of the human emotions; that reaches beyond friendly territories, that crosses every known barrier to man. A love that can cause one to love and die for an enemy. We were all lost and we were all enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Yet God so loved us that He sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins (Romans 5:8). It is this same love that we are now to bring to this world.

The test of our true love for God is in how much we love others. If anyone says that he loves God but hates his brother, the apostle John said that he is a liar (1 John 4:20). The apostle John was saying that the true measurement of our vertical relationship with God is in our horizontal relationship with men. If any person claims to know God, he would certainly know the love of God for God is love. Let us not be deceived in false spirituality, if we truly love God it will be seen in our love for others.

Peace can be increased and multiplied through the knowledge of God which comes through the Word of God (2 Peter 1:2, 4). Since peace is an attribute of love, the love of God in our lives can be increased through meditation in the Word of God. The Word of God contains the life of God. The Bible says that the Word of God is living and powerful (Hebrews 4:12). The word 'living' is from the word 'zoe' which means the life of God. When we receive more of the word of God, we receive a greater measure of God's spirit and life working in us. This produces a greater measure of the nature of God to be manifested in our lives, which is the manifested love of God.

The love of God can also be increased by prayer. The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of love (2 Timothy 1:7). Paul prayed for the Ephesians to be strengthened in the inner man by the Holy Spirit that they may be rooted and grounded in the love of God (Ephesians 3:16,17). The Ephesians were already born again but they could have the love of God increased in their lives. Prayer in the Spirit can build us up and keep us in the love of God (Jude 20, 21).

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CHAPTER 5
THE REVIVAL OF LOVE

There have been many prophecies about the last day revival of the Holy Spirit. Men of God have pointed to the importance of the Word of God and of prayer in this last day revival. There has been much talk about the signs and wonders that will take place in the last day revival. All these are good and true. However, the goal and the purpose of this last day revival is to bring us to the place of oneness in the love of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus' prayer that the church may be perfected in love (John 17:23). At the final consummation of the ages, the love which was in the Father and in Jesus will be perfectly in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:26).

The Revival in the Book of Acts

Mighty signs and wonders took place in the book of Acts. Sometimes as we read through the book of Acts, we see so much of the glory and power of God that we forget that there was also a revival of love taking place. There was nobody in the church who had lack because those who possessed houses and lands sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles (Acts 4:34). These were then taken and distributed to the people as anyone had need (Acts 4:35). The bondage of selfishness was totally broken in the revival in the book of Acts. The people were of one heart and one soul and did not say that any of the things he possessed was his own (Acts 4:32). This was a miracle of agape love.

When a famine was prophesied, the natural reaction of the church of Antioch was to take up an offering to help those who would be stricken by the famine (Acts 11:29). Apparently the showing of love was a common practice (Galatians 2:10; James 1:27). Paul included in his instructions to the Corinthians a command to collect an offering for the distribution to those in need (2 Corinthians 8:14). We can give without loving but we can't love without giving. Love seeks expression in the benevolent care of others, seeking only their highest good.

The Last Move of the Spirit

The last move of the Holy Spirit will also be a mighty move of the love of God. There will be outpourings of the Holy Spirit in signs and wonders. Preceding this would be a great move of prayer and fasting. All the mantles of the past generations will be present in manifestation in one generation. There would be a complete restoration of all the fivefold ministries. Many new things in the ministry will be manifested. New methods will be

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developed, new ways of doing things and new insights into the Word of God. However, the most exciting result will be the total eradication of selfishness from the church of Jesus Christ. The church will manifest the answer to Jesus prayer in John chapter seventeen. The love of God will be so prevalent in the church that people will know that we are His by our love.

The bride of Jesus Christ will be completely filled with the love of God thereby being filled with the fullness of the presence of God. We will know the width, the length, the depth and the height of God's love. Finally, the church will comprehend the totality of the love of God for His people. It will be like heaven on earth in the church of Jesus Christ. Heaven's atmosphere oozes with the love of God.

Growing into the Depths of God's Love

There are three levels of expressing love. At the first level of love, we must learn to love our own family members. Those who are closest to us are not necessarily the easiest to love especially when we have seen their bad points. There are three stages in a love relationship between couples: seeing the good points in each other and accepting one another, seeing the weak points in each other and trying to accommodate them in the relationship, seeing both the good points and the weak points and still choosing to continue the relationship of love. It is only at the third stage that true love develops. At the second stage, usually there are a lot of disagreements and misunderstandings. Whether with our parents, children, brothers, sisters or husbands or wives, we must learn to accept and love those closest to us.

Secondly, we must learn to love those whom we relate to outside our family members. We learn to form friendships and share the agape love of God to those whom we have come into acquaintance with; whether at work, in school or in church. We remain discreet in our relationship with them, preserving the integrity of our witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, after being established in His Word, we learn to love our enemies. Those who would seek to do us harm and are rewarded with our benevolent love. Without being established in the Word of God, we will not be able to walk in love when we are persecuted. It is God's Word that gives us the stability we need when adversity blows. By this stage, we have learned to see people with the eyes of God's love. We will not judge them by their actions but rather we will keep seeing the good that God can bring out of their lives. Jesus prayed for His persecutors saying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Forgiveness is not based upon feelings but upon choice. We choose to see beyond the evil that people do and see the potential that God has on their lives.

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There are two primary keys to developing the love of God in our lives. The first is by meditation on the Word of God. We should take the Scriptures on love and meditate on them until they become a part of our lives. A sample is provided in the little booklet 'God's Meditation Food Volume 1.' As these Scriptures take root in our spirits, the love of God will increase in our lives. Jesus said that if we love Him, we will love His Word (John 14:23). Jesus will then manifest Himself to us. The manifestation of God's presence will always be a manifestation of the love of God. We will thus grow more in His love.

The second key to deepen our walk in the love of God is to pray in tongues. Praying in tongues keeps us in the love of God (1 Corinthians 14:14; Jude 20, 21). Although the Corinthian Christians had the ability to pray in tongues, they were not making use of it in their homes but were abusing it publicly. We should pray much in tongues for it is a vital key to the development of the spirit man. It strengthens the spirit man. The measure of love we are rooted and grounded in is proportional to the strength in our inner man (Ephesians 3:16).

May God grant that we, the church of Jesus Christ, demonstrate the fullness of His love as His coming draws near. When we all stand before God in heaven, we will not be rewarded according to just what we do or how famous we are. We will be rewarded according to what we have done by love on this planet earth. Selfish works perish like dross in His sight. Success in God's eyes is success in learning how to walk in the love of God. Only what is done out of the pure love of God will be rewarded in heaven. All the rest are empty works as far as God is concerned. How important and how urgent it is therefore, for us to teach Christians to walk in love. Otherwise there may be a lot of surprises in heaven for those who have done much but have not done it motivated by the love of God. The greatest is love.

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