What is love? If we look at Scripture we see that it’s very clear, *“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”* 1 John 4:8 & *“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”* 1 John 4:16. To better understand love, is to better understand God.

There are generally three words for love, but all three words have a different meaning. However, the English translation always puts “love”. Understanding the difference of the three words in their original language takes us a long way to better understanding what the Bible was trying to say in each instance.

1. PHILOS - brotherly love / love of friends. We see this with David & Jonathan;
   1. Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan **loved** him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father’s house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he **loved** him as his own soul. 1 Sam 18:1-2
2. EROS - sexual love, usually speaking of arousal. Eros was the Greek god of love, the Romans called him Cupid. No explanation needed.
3. AGAPE – Godly love. The love of 1 Cor 13 – Love is patient and kind. Not jealous, boastful, proud or rude. Doesn’t demand its own way. Not irritable & keeps no record of being wronged, does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, & endures through every circumstance.

Looking at agape love we see an image of how Christ feels about us. Isn’t the very thing we find comfort in through our salvation listed there? Keeping no record of being wronged, never gives up – it’s never too late until we die, never loses faith – He is always waiting on us to return. In agape love we find grace.

How should we as Christians love one another? The answer is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, John 13:34 & 1 John 4:12, among others.

- But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 1Thes 4:9

- A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, but you also love one another. Jn 13:34

- No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love has been perfected in us. 1 Jn 4:12

Do we want to be loved, or feel loved? Most of us would say be loved, but why then do we get so upset when we are loved. If Jesus is love and He loved everyone the same, then why did some of them want Him dead? The answer is simple, we have a great misunderstanding of what true love is. The same agape love that caused Jesus to want to die on the cross for us, is the same agape love that causes us to be chastised.

For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scorches every son whom He receives. – Heb 12:6

For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights. – Prov 3:12

The truest answer is; true love is not always what we consider it to be; nice. True love is honest and does what is best for us, even if it doesn’t feel like it. True love is when we love enough to risk everything to better someone else. To point out sin, as Jesus, which may infuriate the other person to the point they seek your death, as Jesus. Now I’m not saying that your friends will seek to kill you, but generally human beings do not take well when somebody points out, even lovingly, their faults or failures. To feel loved would be what many in today’s culture believe to be “being loved”. The feeling of someone being there, no matter what is going on, & agreeing with you, or making you feel as if you are right in every circumstance. When someone is there for you to lean on, but not correct you. This is what we see as love today. And maybe that’s why we have so many interpersonal relationship problems. So again, we need to decide, do we want to be loved, or do we want to feel loved. When you can answer that question against every relationship, then you know what to expect & you’re ready for criticism if you choose to be loved.

The answer above goes with my other question, “What has society and our culture taught us about being loved & loving others?”. Once we understand what it means to be loved, we can accept criticism as long as it is given lovingly. Now a person just being critical is not love, and you probably won’t want to be around them anyway.

How do we learn to love? “We love Him because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19.

Learning to love is hard & takes time. The first step is actually on us, excepting the person for who they are or what they are. Now I’m not talking in context of today’s male-female debate on choosing a gender. I’m speaking in context of all of us having different strengths and weaknesses in understanding how to be used by God, or allowing the other person to be used by God for us. Peter actually gives us a blueprint for reaching love, agape – true love.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. – 2 Peter 1:5-7

In the above passage we find a path to agape love, much like starting your car. If you remove the ignition from your car you can’t turn it on. Before that, if you don’t have the key the ignition isn’t any good; no fuel no start & so on. What Peter is speaking about is something that follows a concrete and necessary path to get to agape love. So let’s take a deeper look at what he’s saying.

We start with faith – the hope for something unseen, the belief that Jesus will save us. In interpersonal relations it’s the hope that the person will not hurt us.

After faith we move to virtue. Virtue is defined as “conforming to a standard of right, or a particular moral excellence”. In our Christian walk this would be holding to God’s laws, doing our best out of love for Him. In interpersonal relations – we don’t violate the other person’s trust, they see that we are doing things for their betterment & they don’t violate ours.

After virtue comes knowledge. Knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association. We could do an entire study on knowledge as it applies in the Bible, but let’s just say it is the lowest form of intelligence or learning in the Bible. Knowledge equals you give me facts & when you ask a question I can spew those back at you, even if I don’t know why they are what they are. In interpersonal relations it’s us not violating their trust & that has now moved into them knowing they can come to us with their problems. It’s the “I’ll come to you with something little to see how you handle it, or if I can trust you with bigger problems.”

After knowledge we gain self-control. Self-control is defined as restraint exercised over one’s own impulses, emotions or desires. Here we have begun to learn that following God’s will is making us a better person. This would be akin to “understanding” in the biblical learning scale. I can no longer just spew facts back at you when you ask me a question, but I understand how to get those facts and how they work together. In the interpersonal relations area – I now feel comfortable with you, this is where people start worrying about what the other person might think about them. They start to think about what it would be like to lose them; they are now an important part of their life, if you will.

After self-control comes perseverance. Perseverance is to persist in a state, enterprise or undertaking in spite of counter influences, opposition or discouragement. In our Christian walk this is when we start getting attacked by Satan or his forces and we stand strong. Or, when Christians face persecution to governments or terrorists & they don’t denounce their faith in Christ, & accept the result of that acknowledgment of Christ as their Savior, regardless of the consequence. In interpersonal relations this is about the time we will start to stand up for somebody. When people start picking on our now friend we won’t allow it, we may not take physical abuse, but we will take ridicule.

From perseverance we move to godliness. Godliness is being devoted to a pursuit, belief or mode of behavior. In our Christian walk godliness is truly when people start to realize you are not going to bend for your beliefs. This is where some of our old friends start getting uncomfortable, because we won’t do the things we used to do or they want us to do. This is where we start getting the moniker of ‘holy roller’. This is also where we are choosing God above our self because we want to, not because we believe we should.

From godliness we find brotherly kindness. The word brotherly kindness here is the root word PHILOS or brotherly love. This is where the name of the city of Philadelphia comes from ADELPHOS or PHILLY. In Old Testament time when a fellow Jew was taken as a slave they could only be taken until the Jubilee, or for seven years maximum. On the Jubilee year, the end of the seven year cycle, they were to be set free and all land restored. If they decided, of their own volition, to remain a slave of their current owner they could be marked. This process consisted of the owner taking a large awl & hammer, while the slave laid his ear on a rock or other hard surface, they would then make an oath or confirm his lifelong servitude to his master. At which point the master using the awl & hammer would put a hole in his earlobe. This would signify his dedication to his master, something that could not be taken back. When we are saved by the Holy Spirit we know that we are sealed on our forehead with an invisible mark that only the spiritual realm can see. I’m not saying this step is where you would be saved, just an example. Here we have finally chosen Christ to rule our life and our decisions and allowed Him to change our life. In interpersonal relations – here is where we see one willing to die for another, or butt stroke a threat in the head with a shotgun for our loved one. This is friends like family, or actually family. It is only when we can be so honest with our friends & loved ones understanding and knowing that they will not turn on us for our criticism that we found brotherly love.

From brotherly kindness we move to agape love. The definition for agape love is “the love received from or shown by God”. By definition we can only receive this, we can’t give it, it is beyond us.

Now that we know all that, where do we go? We are now equipped with knowledge maybe even understanding, but we need to move to wisdom. Wisdom is how we apply our understanding of understanding in any circumstance to the greatest benefit possible. Here’s where we have to learn what the battle plan of the enemy is. If we know our enemies battle plan, we can develop tactics to resist, thwart or counter attack. If we resist, we merely allow the attack to continue but don’t move; we don’t fall from God. If we thwart the attack we are able to continue to move forward because the attack is over. But if we counterattack we put the enemy on defense. When we use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God – the Bible, while resisting the attack, the enemy flees. Only when the enemy flees can we take ground, save souls through power of Christ. Hence, “resist the devil and he will flee from you.” – James 4:7.

Knowing that, why would we ever resist or thwart, why not always counterattack? The answer is simple; to resist we merely need enough faith to quench the fiery darts of the devil. To thwart the attack we require a deeper understanding of how they attack. Understanding that, we can use the sword of the Spirit to stop the attack. The difference here is we stop the attack, they don’t just run out of arrows. Then the counterattack requires us to be willing to use the sword of the Spirit & armor at great personal loss, knowing that Jesus will take care of us. Only then can we risk it all and take the fight to the devil, only then can we save others through Christ.

The entire paragraph above and I didn’t even answer my first question, what is the battle plan of the enemy? The battle plan of the enemy has been to pervert or destroy love. If you have cable, a radio, the Internet, or people coming into a salon telling their problems to their hairdresser, you will understand. We’ve reached a place where it is easier to break people down then to build them up. When we believe no one is around, or no one of consequence regarding the situation, we can say whatever we want to tear people down. Even around others we can “crack” on friends, flip them off, call them all sorts of mean and nasty names, and yet everyone just laughs and goes about their business; it’s completely acceptable! But if I say just one thing, if I use just four letters, I can clear a room, or at least make people backup. Why is it that if I say “I love you”, in its true meaning, everyone wants to get as far away from me as possible? If I were to say I love you, deep down within people want to move away, it makes us uneasy. Even reading the words coming from someone can make us uneasy. To drive this point home, if send a text to you one day including the words “I love you”, how would you feel? Yet, as long as I don’t use that word everything is good. I can look at you, or anyone, and tell them, “If a terrorist comes through this door, I’ll take a bullet for you. I will do everything in my power to make sure you get out alive, I will give my life to make sure you live.” Is that not love? Then why can I not say I love you? The answer is EROS. The only love we experience through our culture, the only love the media drives; is sexual. Thus, the minute you hear “I love you” from anybody, your mind immediately goes to the sexual, with the exception of your parents, siblings (family) & God. This is what the enemy has done to us. Outside of those situations where we are completely safe and it’s “ok”, where Satan has been unable to pervert all love into sexual love. That’s why we flee from the word love. Until we face the perversion of the word love, we are under the attack, standing there with the shield of faith doing nothing but catching fiery arrows. Not until we explain, or use the word love to others and to each other, will that start to go away. I’m not saying walk up to everybody you know, or into the next covenant group meeting and say “I love you” or to every person you come across. But I am saying, in the right context, even when it makes us uncomfortable, we should. The same desensitization tactics used to pervert love can be used to re-empower love.

In closing, do not flee from love, do not allow the perversion of the word love – agape or philos, continue. Follow the train from faith to agape with Christ, understand where you are with every person in your life between faith & brotherly love then we can thwart the attack that is coming, the uncomfortableness that we get from expressing emotions. I don’t believe females are as bad as men when it comes to love or emotions, but I do believe they hold grudges & wounds much longer, and these wounds are the seat of addictive and self-destructive acts. The only way we can begin to heal our wounds & grudges, is love. Let those with brotherly love help us heal our wounds, because we will have to be open enough to expose them, in order to be fixed.

Amen.