

Allan Ross - Our Ultimate Objective

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Thank you, Brother Ron and Brother John. Appreciate that, and greetings in the Lord, dear brethren. I bring the love of Sister Kathy and each of our Antioch brethren. I'm sure I'll enjoy this wonderful Salem convention.

And so we're going to be talking today about love specifically, though, agape love, and a simple definition of agape love is that we we love as God loves in a pure, broad, active and vibrant way. We want the best for everyone. But there's a specific quality needed to make our love meet the divine agape standard. We must learn to love in the right way.

That's the essence of agape love. It's broad and unconditional in its application. It's unconditional that we love, but it's conditional as to how we love. We must love according to our relationship to each of the ones we love. It's our objective to love others as our Heavenly Father loves them.

Agape love is divine love, perfect love. God always loves everyone in the right way. He doesn't love his enemies the same way he loves his friends, but he still loves them by seeking to bless them. What are the right ways? We are love.

I'll give some examples. We're to have reverential love for the Father and the Son, appreciative love for the angels of God, brotherly love for the for our brethren merit to love for our spouse family love for our family friendship love for our friends sympathy love for the general groaning creation pity love for the more wicked and depraved of the world of mankind, and this means we want to help them to overcome their existing depravity, to learn to live righteously. We want to teach them the way to eternal life through faith and obedience.

Now, even though we recognize each of these types of love and their proper applications, they're all unique expressions of the broad agape love that our God wants us to learn to apply to mankind. So getting our love right should be our primary objective. In this connection, we're going to examine a profound text of scripture. It's a little jam tucked into instructions that Brother Paul was giving at the beginning of his first epistle to his dear younger brother Timothy. Paul's contrasting the character attributes that we as true Christians are pursuing in our lives compared with the empty pursuits of the world of mankind.

I'll give a translation of our text. That's a compilation of a number of the best translations I could find, along with Brother Russell's rendering of the verse in reprint 2733. Our text is from 1st Timothy 1:5 the ultimate objective of our Christian discipline is to possess agape love, springing from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a genuine faith in our Heavenly Father. We have the great first cause, the ultimate divine source of agape love in His Son. We have the ultimate expression or illustration of agape, and we are to do our best each day to make our expression of agape our ultimate objective in our daily living.

In our text I love the action verb of agape springing out of our heart. That's what we want it to do, to spring into action. Springing is mentioned in several translations, and it speaks to one of the intents of this talk. The intent is that this focus verse will further motivate us to act upon the love that's in our hearts in a positive way, to help others, as Paul exhorts us to do in Galatians 6:10. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

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Then there is also the word discipline in our text. As we strive to put on agape love, we found that it requires a lot of mental and character discipline to love everyone in the right way. This is especially true of those of the world that are doing acts of evil in the world to the degree of depravity of their condition. To that degree we must exercise character character, discipline to love them in the right way, with pity, but with a desire to help them learn a better way to live. Even if we can't do that until the mediation, why even bother?

Because God loves them in the right way. So to be like him in the divine love of agape, we must love them in the right way.

After all, there was a time when he exercised sympathetic or pity love for us, depending on our fallen circumstances.

John 3:16 For God so agaped the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Romans 5:7 and 8 New King James for scarcely for a righteous man will one die yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own agape toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus commends this divine love to us in Luke 6:33 and if you do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye for sinners also do even the same.

We all know that our God is the embodiment of divine love. It began with him. It continues because of Him. It's the primary essence of his character, justice is the foundation of his throne. Wisdom and power do his bidding.

But agape love is the overarching expression of of our magnificent God.

It should be our goal to be like our God and to learn to become always loving, as the Holman Bible renders our focus text of first Timothy 1:5. Now the goal of our instruction is agape that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith, and as Paul emphasizes in Colossians 3:14 CSB above all put on agape, which is the perfect bond of unity.

But although we will be using words to try to describe God's love, I have a disclaimer. The Hebrew, Greek and English words we'll be using today are inadequate to fully describe God's love with our imperfect words in any imperfect language, we can only give approximations of God's perfect love. We can best understand God's love by each one of us considering our Heavenly Father's actions. Actions speak more clearly than words, especially with reference to love. Actions tell us whether love is true.

For instance, we have so many wonderful Old Testament types, pictures and prophecies of Jesus's ransom sacrifice. But it's especially when we meditate upon how he actually died on the cross for us. That's when the full magnitude of the love of the Father and the Son can begin to be known.

First John 4 or 8 to 10 Phillips the man who does not agape cannot know him at all, for God is agape to us. The greatest demonstration of God's agape for us has been his sending his only Son into the world to give his life through him, to give us life through Him. We see real agape not in the fact that we agape God, but that he agapes us and sent His Son to make personal atonement for our sins.

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Now, though we're primarily examining the Greek word agape, I'd like for us to very briefly consider his connection to the Hebrew word *chesed* from Strong's 2617. *chesed* is a wonderful expression of God's love, but agape is a later and in some ways a broader expression of God's love. *Kesed* is a wonderful study in itself. So I'll just state one sentence from Vines that will be but a partial definition of God's love for his covenant people.

Quote in general, one may identify three basic meanings of *chesed*, and these three meanings always interact. Strength, steadfastness, and love.

I'll give just two of the 241 scriptures that speak of *chesed* in the old Testament Psalm 63:3 because thy kissed lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Proverbs 3:3 Let not *chesed* mercy and truth forsake thee Bind them about thy neck write them upon the table of thine heart.

Just as the concept of *chesed* love is perhaps the most powerful and comprehensive form of love expressed in the Hebrew, Hebrew, Old Testament, agape is the most powerful and comprehensive form of love expressed in the Greek New Testament. How might we connect the words *chesed* and agape? To me the connection is that they are both manifestations of divine love. We can see that God's gift of His Son is the ultimate active expression of his *chesed* covenant love and his broad divine agape love for all of mankind.

So as God's people under the grace covenant we have fully witnessed and comprehended God's agape love expressed through the ransom sacrifice of our Lord Jesus that God's *chesed* love could only express as a promise.

We now have with us Christ Jesus, the primary spiritual seed and fulfillment of the Abrahamic *chesed* covenant promise. As Christians, we can now better understand God's agape as the fulfillment of *chesed* within the divine plan of the ages and within our own lives by his shedding forth upon us His Holy Spirit of agape.

Now we might ask some questions. Are we commanded to put on agape or is this a voluntary objective? Isn't our walk a voluntary walk? The King James translation of 1st Timothy 1:5 uses the word commandment, as does John 15:12 and 13. This is my commandment that you agape one another just as I have agape you greater Agape has no one than this that one laid down his life for his friends.

In reprint 3072 brother Russell has given us a clear answer to the word commandment that's used in conjunction with agape and these two scriptures and elsewhere. Quote we answer that the Lord sets before us the standard of love necessary to be attained if we would enjoy the blessings which he purposes to give.

He commands in the sense of laying before us plainly and distinct, distinctly his only terms for life eternal. As previously pointed out, love is a matter of development and begins with a kind of duty. Love, which gradually growing out as we grow in grace and in knowledge, expands into gratitude, then into admiration, and finally ridding itself of all dross and selfishness, becomes pure and fervent love. The Lord is pleased if in our hearts he sees this endeavor to approach in truth the way of life which he has opened through the death of His Son.

He is pleased to note our expansion and development under the light of his favor. He's pleased to grant us the covering of the Lord Jesus's merit, and to reckon to us perfection, and to adopt us from

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the very beginning of our love and consecration, and he will be pleased when we have finished our course, when we have attained the mark, when we have come up to the standard which he has set perfect love to grant us the blessing of life eternal, which he cannot grant upon any other condition, unquote.

The word Commandment in John 15:12 is Strong's 17:85, which denotes an authoritative prescription, Commandment precept.

My personal preference is to use words such as precept, objective, standard, principle, instruction, or law, as Brother Russell uses it in reprint 5755. Instead of using the phrase the end of the commandment, he uses the he entitles the article the ultimate design of the law of God, and he explains God's law of agape as it relates to our walk. He wrote, the apostle speaks here of the end of the commandment. The expression seems somewhat obscure. The thought seems to be this.

The ultimate purpose of the law, that which it is designed to produce, is love, to bring us to the place where we shall be in full harmony with the One who made the law and is who is Himself the embodiment of love. This will be the final result of God's law to all who receive it.

He wishes that those who are perfect shall remain perfect, and that those who are imperfect shall see the proper standard for all Jehovah's creatures to be a just standard, a loving standard, that God is to be obeyed not from compulsion, but from love for him and for the principles of righteousness. It is his ultimate purpose that all his intelligent creatures who will be granted eternal life must be perfect, in full harmony with their Creator, unquote.

So it's the law of the new creation that we put on agape. But we do so willingly, joyfully, not of constraint. Romans 3:10 Agape is the fulfilling of God's law.

It's our law because it should govern our thoughts, words, and deeds. It's what brings stability, peace, and joy into our lives. Our Lord knew this, so this was his instruction to us in John 15:9 as the father has agaped me, I have also agaped you. Remain in my agape now. Agape is an element of character, is an active force.

It's agape in our hearts that will act in obedient harmony with the Divine will throughout our consecrated lives. Agape has also been described as sacrificial love. We see our Lord Jesus loving sacrifice and our objective is to copy that loving sacrifice in our own lives as new creatures. We know God and His agape through the power of God's Holy Spirit.

We experience agape in receiving it and we experience agape in giving it. We know agape and experience it because it's not just a set of principles, but principles acted upon by God to provide all of the experiences in our lives to help us develop agape in our characters.

God's agape is in every one of our experiences, everyone. We just have to understand in what way it's in them.

Our response to God's loving providences is to live our life in God's agape because of our gratitude for our God given life experiences. First John 4, 16 and 17 as we have known and believe the agape God has to us.

God is agape and he that dwells in agape dwells in God and God in him. Herein is agape with us made perfect, completed. That's our goal, to complete this perfection of agape love in our characters. While praying to His Heavenly Father, Lord tells us this in John 17:26 and I have

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declared unto them thy name, and will declare it that the gape wherewith thou has loved me may be in them and I in them.

So we've clearly established our life's objective of acquiring, possessing, but most importantly, expressing agape in our lives to be more godlike.

Now do you know, I think you do, that God has told us in clear, straightforward language exactly what agape is and what it is not. This clear expression of the essential meaning of agape is expressed by our dear brother Paul in First Corinthians, chapter 13, his great discourse on agape love. Verses 4 through 7 of this chapter give us our everyday, practical, living standard of agape. They explain how we can gauge our progress in expressing this love in our daily lives. We can use them as self assessments.

Are we living and doing what agape is and avoiding living and doing what agape is not?

We will not get a perfect score in our assessment. Don't let this discourage you. Accept the test results as motivation to improve, to move closer to our objective.

If we know anything about God's agape and of God's cassette for that matter, we know that as long as we keep trying, he will never give up on us. Never.

He has promised us this as long as we keep faithfully trying our best. Hebrews 13:5 I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, we can take our deficiencies on a report card to the throne of heavenly grace. We can ask forgiveness from our Heavenly Father, the agape source, and strength to continue our agape quest through the merit of Christ, our agape advocate.

We're all very familiar with the beautiful expression of the King James translation of these four verses in First Corinthians 13:4,7. So instead of reading that translation, I've chosen three translations that provide wording in our everyday English. Each give their unique perspectives as to how we should be living and manifesting agape in our daily lives. They tell us how God agapes and how we are to agape.

Beginning with the Weymouth translation of verses 4 through 7 agape is patient and kind, and knows neither envy nor jealousy. It is not forward and self assertive, nor boastful and conceited.

It does not behave unbecomingly, nor seek to aggrandize itself, nor blaze out in passionate anger, nor brood over wrongs. It finds no pleasure in injustice done to others, but joyfully sides with the truth. It knows how to be silent sometimes that takes a lifetime of learning.

It is full of trust, full of hope, full of patient endurance. Agape never fails. Then the Moffat translation of verses 4 to 7 agape is very patient, very kind. It knows no jealousy, makes no parade, gives itself no heirs, is never rude, never selfish, never never irritated, never resentful.

It is never glad when others go wrong it is gladdened by goodness, always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient. Agape never disappears.

Finally, the Phillips translation of verses 4 to 7 this agape of which I speak is slow to lose patience. It looks for a way of being constructive.

It is not possessive, is neither anxious to impress, nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance. It has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy it does not

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keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails. Agape knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope.

It can outlast anything. It is in fact the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.

These words tell us that Paul held agape in highest esteem, ending his discourse with verse 13 in this life we have three great lasting qualities, faith, hope, and agape. But the greatest of them is agape.

So there is so much that we can practice in making these statements about of what agape is and what it isn't our own. There's a lifetime of challenging character work in these verses to make agape a lasting quality of our character. But it's work that's joyful, not at all burdensome. What would you rather be doing with your time? There's nothing more important.

Paul emphatically states in our focus text of 1 Timothy 1:5 that possessing agape is the ultimate objective of our Christian discipline. The ultimate objective of our life's work is to produce and possess agape in ourselves and to help others to possess it. That's the great miracle that we as Christians have experienced in our lives that God has chosen to teach us his agape love. But how do we learn and do this?

During the course of our consecrated lives, we're emptying ourselves of the fallen, worldly, selfish spirit and filling ourselves with God's sanctifying, sacrificing spirit. As we do this, we're developing the foundation elements from which agape springs into our lives. As our focus text tells also tells us we're developing a pure heart, a good conscience and a genuine faith. We can only do this by harnessing the power of God's Holy Spirit influence in our hearts and minds, agape being the essence of the Father and the Son's Holy Spirit. So let's examine more closely these three elements that Paul mentions.

Starting with a pure heart.

Proverbs 4:23 emphasizes how important it is to keep our heart. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

A pure heart means that we have pure intentions and we set our affections upon these pure intentions. This began in earnest at our consecration and spirit beginning. We all started our consecrations with good intentions. We love God. We were sincere in our consecrations, but we needed instruction.

We needed to understand God's agape standard and then try our best to meet that standard. We try with the best of our new creatures ability and with its best intentions to have our human nature will feel agape knowing that we will not be able to do that perfectly, relying on the merit of Christ to cover our human weaknesses and mistakes.

We needed to study God's word and apply its principles to our God given experiences by which the God's Holy Spirit working in our hearts began to change us from the worldly Spirit.

Then we began to bear fruit in the development of our Christian character, our pure heart. In Ephesians 4:31 Paul again tells us of the elements of the worldly spirit we are to put off. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking, be put away from you with all malice.

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In Galatians 5:23, Paul tells us what we are to put on. But the fruit of the Spirit is agape. Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law.

Then the next element Paul names in our focus text is a good conscience. There are good consciences and there are bad consciences. Paul wants us to have a good conscience, one that is educated, adept at knowing what's right and what's wrong. We want to have a conscience rightly regulated by a correct understanding of the moral principles contained in God's word. Not just understanding God's principles, but again, manifesting agape by acting upon God's principles in a way that his love is shown in our thoughts, words and deeds.

Excuse me. The last element Paul mentions is a genuine faith. As our pastor has so wonderfully explained, faith is made up of intellectual assurance and heart reliance. Or to simplify this, we can say that we are to understand God and trust God to the very best of our ability. Our understanding of God and our trust in God must be shown to be genuine by our thoughts, words and deeds.

There are many people that have a great deal of faith in themselves that's actually encouraged nowadays, or in their country or in their bank accounts. None of these, in the end will save them. Only our genuine faith in our Heavenly Father, as expressed in His Holy Word and in his divine plan of the ages, will save us. So to summarize, summarize Paul's three foundational elements from which agape will spring out of our lives. We have a pure heart.

Our pure intentions to glorify God in our lives because of our love for Him. A good conscience are making the right life choices based on God's principles of right and wrong that we love a genuine faith are understanding and trusting the outworking of God's agape in the divine plan of the ages.

Now I want to illustrate the attributes of character that Paul names in First Timothy 1:5 with real life scripture examples and experiences. It's important to provide scriptural examples of agape because agape is not just a concept, as I mentioned, it's also an experience, and the only way we can live or exercise a gap is through our experiences. Yes, we must develop the understanding of it. We must have it in our minds as a resolute intention.

But we must exercise it or we'll atrophy and die. We want it to live and grow within us and to be manifested by our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Now, in thinking of who would give us the best illustrations of these attributes, we would all agree that the life of our Lord Jesus would be the most accurate illustration.

Our Lord being a perfect new creature in a perfect body, always fully manifested agape. In his thoughts, words, and deeds, Our Lord was made flesh and sent to provide the ransom price and to fulfill all the wonderful prophecies and promises of our God. But he also began teaching divine love to mankind, beginning with the Church and eventually to all that would be willing to learn it on the kingdom highway of holiness. The world of mankind can't fully understand agape because of the selfishness that's in their hearts. Nevertheless, Jesus began to teach it early in his ministry.

For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 43 and 45, ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt agape thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, agape your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father, which is in heaven, where he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and send with rain on the just and on the unjust.

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But then realizing that Jesus was a perfect man who always had a perfect heart, I believe it suits us better in this particular case to choose one who had imperfect flesh and had to develop a perfect pure heart. Just as we do, it shows us that a new creature can prevail over imperfect flesh. So I've chosen the experiences of the one who actually wrote first Timothy 1:5. How did Paul's real life measure up? Well, we would all agree that it measured up as well or better than any imperfect human being has ever measured up.

So I've selected a few experiences from Paul's life to illustrate these attributes of a pure heart, a good conscience, and a genuine faith. Knowing that these all work together to produce agape, and agape also produces these attributes. Developing these attributes creates a virtuous circle.

Let's begin by comparing and contrasting Paul with Stephen. Both of them attained agape by taking completely different routes in their lives. Stephen took to it quickly. It took Paul longer. We begin to learn of Stephen in the Book of Acts, Chapter 6, Acts 65 ASV.

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Acts 6:8, 7:1 and Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people. But there arose certain of them that were of the synagogue called the synagogue of the Libertines, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen, and they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake.

Then they suborned men who said, we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God, and they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and came upon him and seized him, and brought him into the council and set up false witnesses, who said, this man ceases not to speak words against this holy place and the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us, and all that sat in the council fastened their eyes on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

And the high priest said, are these things so? At this point Stephen, full of genuine faith, gives his wonderful discourse covering verses 2 through 50 of Acts chapter 7, and this is a beautiful and important summary of the history of Israel relating to Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon. It provides some very important information both in terms of chronology and the history of God's dealings with Israel. He concludes his discourse with Acts 7:51, 53, where he boldly preaches of our Lord Jesus to the high priest and his accusers.

This is a dear brother who spoke his good conscience from a pure agape heart, living his genuine faith until the end.

Then in Acts 7:54, 60, we're told of the result of Steven's discourse.

Now, when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they nashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed upon him with one accord, and they cast him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

And they stoned Stephen, and he calling upon the Lord and saying, lord Jesus, receive my spirit, and he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, lord, lay not this sin to their charge, and when he

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had said this, he fell asleep.

Then we learn that Saul, the future great apostle Paul, looked upon Stephen's angelic face, heard his powerful, spiritual, loving words, and yet consented to his death. A death that is to us as Christlike as any we have ever known.

In Acts 8, 2. 4, we learn of the immediate aftermath of Stephen's murder, and there arose on that day a great persecution against the church, which was in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad through the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles, and devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.

But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house and dragging men and women, committing them to prison.

Now, at this point, let's pause and reflect upon this incredible narrative of our Christian faith. We know that our God had the power to save Stephen and to destroy Saul. So let's back up to where Stephen was alive. Comparing the lives of Stephen and Saul. Who would we then have chosen to be the great apostle to the Gentiles, the one that would eventually write the greater part of the New Testament?

I most certainly would have chosen Stephen. In our Lord's infinite wisdom, he chose Saul. Why?

We don't know all the factors. Only God knows. We just know that it was the right choice because God made it and because we know now know the rest of the story. We know Saul's subsequent life. We know his words.

We know that he came to fully possess agape.

He most certainly did not possess it at the point in his life when he was persecuting the Christians. But God read Saul's heart and saw its potential to crystallize into agape love. Stephen clearly possessed agape. Everything we know of his life points to it. He was full of the Holy Spirit.

He eloquently preached the Gospel and his words. In his life he was full of agape for all, even his enemies. He demonstrated this when he prayed for them with his dying breath.

And yet God allowed Stephen to be taken from us, and he chose Saul to become Paul, the final apostle of the Lamb.

One of the foundations of the New Testament, of the new Jerusalem described in Revelation 21:14 and the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

How did God get Saul to where he wanted him to be? To where, as Paul, he could write 1 Timothy 1:5 and express it in his life as Stephen had done.

Well, let's continue the narrative of Saul's life, beginning with the road to Damascus. The history of Saul's conversion is related twice in the book of Acts. The first account is given in Acts 9:1:9. The second account is given by Paul himself in Acts 22:3 to 21, where he explained his history to the people, because certain Jews had stirred up the people against him, who were beating him and trying to kill him. Just as Saul had taken Christians to Jerusalem to be imprisoned and beaten, so now was in Jerusalem.

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Paul was in Jerusalem being persecuted and beaten by the Jews.

We'll let Paul tell his own story.

I am a Jewish, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, which Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as y'all are this day, and I have persecuted this way unto death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, and also the high priest doth bearing me witness, and all the estate of the elders, with whom also I received letters unto the brethren and journeyed to Damascus to bring them also that were there unto Jerusalem in bonds to be punished, and it came to pass that as I made my journey and drew nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me, and I fell under the ground and heard a voice saying unto me, saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And I answered, who art thou, Lord?

And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

And they that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me, and I said, what shall I do, Lord?

Can we even begin to imagine how utterly crushed Saul must have felt at this moment in his life? Everything he stood for was gone in a moment. As soon as he heard his Lord's voice, he knew he had been wrong. His past life was gone. All he had learned from the Jews, Greeks and Romans would have to be re examined.

He was completely humbled to the dust. If he had been a lesser man, like Judas Iscariot, who he was going to replace as the 12th apostle, he would have hanged himself.

He was going to have to come to terms with what he had said and done to the Christians. He was going to have to come to terms with Stephen's angelic face. I believe he never forgot that face. He was going to have to begin a new life, a life that he did not understand.

But our Lord knew all of this and told him what to do.

And the Lord said unto me, arise and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do, and when I come, when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus, and one Ananias, a devout man, according to the law well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there, came unto me, and standing by me, said unto me, brother Saul, receive thy sight.

And in that very hour I looked up on him, and he said, the God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the righteous one, and to hear a voice from his mouth. For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard, and now why terrest thou arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins calling on his name? And it came to pass that when I had returned to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him, saw him saying unto me, make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not receive of thy testimony concerning me.

And I said, lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee, and when the blood of Stephen, thy witness was shed, I also was standing by

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and consenting, and keeping the garments of them that slew him, and he sent unto me, depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. Unquote. But the Jews that subsequently heard Paul's words could not abide the thought that the Lord would send Paul to preach to the Gentiles.

And they said, away with such a fellow from the earth, and for it does not fit that he should live. Acts 22:22. The Chief Captain of the Roman guard took Paul into custody to save his life. But Paul was undeterred and spent the rest of his life preaching and writing the gospel of Jesus and his agape love. All of Paul's fearless preaching demonstrated his agape for God and man.

But it's his love for his brethren that shows it the best. I love the agape that Paul expressed to his beloved Ephesian brethren, and Acts 20:32,38, when he was saying goodbye to them for the last time, and now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel.

Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me I have showed you all things, and how that soul laboring yet to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive, and when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all, and they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.

And they accompanied him unto the ship he agaped them, and they agaped him unto the end.

In summary, the putting on of agape love is the ultimate objective of our lives, of all our work to be holy. What is the importance of this holy love as it grows within us? It's enough for us to know that it's the essence of a divine being who is absolutely powerful, whose justice is pure and unchanging, whose wisdom encompasses all things. But who's agape? Love is the reason we exist and have an opportunity to put on the divine attributes ourselves into eternity.

Agape's ultimate end is our resurrection, perfection, immortality, and perfectly manifesting the divine attributes of our God. First Corinthians 13:10 when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away. I'll summarize and end this Talk with Ephesians 3, 14 and 19, because these verses sum up what Saul had learned to transform into a crystallized agape character, to become the great Apostle Paul. In this letter he's writing from his Roman prison his final instructions to his beloved Ephesian brethren, and really to us as well. He wrote, for this cause I bow my knees under the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and in earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith that ye, being rooted and grounded in agape, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the agape of Christ, which passes knowledge that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

And I'll close with 2nd Corinthians 13:14. The Kari loving kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the agape of God, and the Kon of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.