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# **Agape Grace: A New Commandment**

**#1351-A**

**Series: God's Amazing Grace**

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## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

*Our loving God, we come again into Your presence acknowledging that apart from You we can do nothing, but that we can do all things through Christ who lives in us and strengthens us. It is that grace, that supernatural enabling power that we come to You and ask for. You are the only One who can teach us, Father, yet Your heart's desire is not just to give us information, but transformation. To renew us in the renewing of our minds, and to cause us to be transformed from one degree of glory to another into Your likeness that our lives may progressively be sensitive to sin, aware of Your awesome nature and wonderfully surrendered to Your living through us.*

*So, we come again, Father, acknowledging that You are the only One who can, but that we really can't. So, all the boulders that the enemy has placed in our way to prevent us from growing and maturing and walking in the light, may they be dissolved under the miracle of Your transforming grace, as we seek, Father, by Your wonderful power, to be changed.*

*We ask that, Father, in the arena of love, that You would teach us and then that You would change us, that the world about us might see in us something supernatural, and that by this, all men might know that we are Your disciples. Thank You for Your love.*

*In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Jenny, it seems, is obnoxious. Every word she says sort of grates on your nerves. Maybe you have met someone like her. She represents to you everything you consider objectionable in life. She has few or no friends. She is terribly insecure and she masks her insecurity with insensitive behavior. When she walks in a room, everyone immediately looks for the exits. She is very difficult to love.

Mark is an ingrate. The more you do for him, the less he appreciates it. People say he was raised with a silver spoon in his

mouth, and his acquaintances seem to wish he had choked on it. He always has to have the last word, but when he does, it doesn't seem to be significant. He uses people to get what he wants and then dumps them like disposable discards. If you were to have a meeting with all the people who say they love Mark, you could hold it in a phone booth and have room left over.

Jean and Sam are a difficult couple to work with and to spend time with. They pretend to have all the answers spiritually, but inwardly are a pair of walking time bombs. They want to be in charge, but are not yet in charge of their own lives. They have all of the spiritual vocabulary, but the meaning of the words has not made it down into the heart where they live. No one wants to spend time with them. You say, "Does anybody love them?" Maybe their parents.

Frieda is a difficult wife. She seems to have as her goal in life to make her husband's life impossible. She berates him. She says he doesn't make enough money. He doesn't spend time with the kids and isn't spiritual enough. The harder he tries it seems, the more she belittles him. Does he love her? He wants to, but he's hanging on for dear life.

What do all these people have in common? Several things:

- 1- They are all people for whom Christ died.
- 2- They are by human standards, difficult, if not impossible, to love.
- 3- They are all people you and I were commanded by God to love.

And it's that strange paradox that we are going to explore in this and our next lesson as we look at the miracle of agape grace. It brings about two questions:

- 1- How can God command us to love someone?
- 2- What if I've tried, and I just don't feel any love?

This is the paradox that Satan has keyed on to bring about the demise of the family in our generation, and it's the same paradox the church has allowed to confuse both its definition and its mission where love is concerned. Love has been redefined by Satan and taken to one of two opposite extremes until the church has confused the true issue of love and grace, and where the two collide in the heart of God.

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

We are going to ask God for the grace to understand and appropriate His love in precisely the way He intended. To do that, we must go back and look at the subject from a Scriptural perspective. We're going to ask God who we are supposed to love and how we're supposed to do it.

It isn't difficult for most of us to see that Jesus came to earth to demonstrate the love of God. It also isn't difficult to see that He seemed to devote the bulk of His time to loving those we, and society call "unlovable." He went to the poor, the downcast, the lame, the leper, the prisoner. The thief on the cross he loved enough to usher into paradise. He loved a lame man by the pool enough to heal him and set him free. He loved a demented man enough to cast out demons that made him the laughingstock of society. He chose out the twelve and demonstrated the love of God to them. They were common fishermen, tax collectors, people that society looked down upon for their status or were just considered castoffs or unimportant.

His very imprint on planet earth was noted by the footprint of a man who laid aside robes of royalty and became a slave to demonstrate the way love was supposed to work. Yet, even as He spoke those words and lived that life, those closest to Him seemed to miss the impact of it. They knew this love He spoke of was something new, something overpowering, and yet they couldn't quite get it.

And then came Calvary. Then came that moment in time when God died so man could live. Then came that instant in history when the veil of the temple was torn asunder and the way to the Father was open to all who would come by the Son. Then came reality to those words:

For God so loved the world He gave... (John 3:16 NKJV)

Suddenly, the pieces began to fit together. God loved. God gave Himself away totally. He gave the best He had for the least deserving with no expectation of personal gain. It was called grace—God taking His own nature and imputing it to fallen man by paying the total price for his salvation. Man was guilty as charged. The Righteous Judge issued the sentence.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, (Hebrews 9:27 NKJV)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23 NKJV)

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

The verdict was in. Now for the sentencing stage of the trial. And here came the shocker. The Judge stepped down, took off His robes, laid them aside, and said, "I'll serve his sentence. I'll serve her sentence. I'll set them free. The sentence is death by crucifixion. I will go to that cross, and then they will understand grace."

So, He did, and you and I, because He did, now stand in His presence faultless, holy, and without blemish. We cannot be tried again. The trial is over. The verdict is in. The price has been paid. We are no longer under the cloud of sin's stain. We are redeemed. We are free. And it's all because of His love.

Love. How would you define it? A million different ways if you ask a million different people. Love is the essence of God's being. Remember, God does not *possess* love. God *is* love. That means that everything God does issues forth from what He is, and He is love; therefore, everything He does and everything He says is a reflection of love. We have already looked at the two-fold expression of that love: His mercy, which withholds the punishment we deserve, and the grace, which gives us the blessings or the enabling power we do not deserve.

All of you are familiar with the fact that there is more than one Greek word translated "love" in your Bible. We are only focusing on that one word, *agape*. It is the word that defines the nature of God, and only a Christian can possess it, because unless the Holy Spirit inhabits you, you cannot possess the attributes of God. But, as a Christian, God not only allows you to love the way He loves, He commands you to.

Once again, we are back where we were and where we have been in this series, finding ourselves struggling. We just can't do it, can we? The very people we are told to love are the people we don't want to love, don't feel any love for, have tried to love and couldn't.

Somehow, we know don't we, that God isn't playing tricks on us. The Scripture says, He cannot be tempted by sin, neither does He tempt any man (James 1:13). So, if God tells us to love someone, it means that not only is it possible, it is essential. So, I ask you, who has God told you to love, and are you willing to leave this place, this Sunday, and for the next seven days are willing to love everyone God tells you to love? Can I see your hand? Never mind.

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

Well, who are we to love?

1- We are to love our neighbor, whoever that is, with the same intensity and duration and patience of love that we have for ourselves. That's what it says. Mark 12:30-31. You know the verse; you can repeat it back to me, but do you *know* the verse? That's the key.\_

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:30,31 NKJV)

Now, what in the world does that mean? The word, πλησιον plesion {play-see'-on} translated neighbor, means:

- a) a friend,
- b) any person, or where two are concerned, the other person; according to the Jews, any member of the Hebrew nation or commonwealth,
- c) but, according to Christ, your concordance will go on, any other person irrespective of nation or religion with whom we live or whom we chance to meet.

Uh-oh. What that means is God expects us, as Christians, to demonstrate His love to everyone we meet, not just those who deserve it, not just those who return it, and not only those who are lovable. In fact, the less lovable they are, we are going to find, the more we are supposed to love them, because the more grace it requires to love them. And the more grace, the more glory to God. We are to love every single person God sends across our path today, tomorrow, and the next day, with exactly the same love God has for us; and to put it in terms and a perspective we can understand, we are to be willing to give to them anything we would take for ourselves.

Now, think about that. That means in a given situation, if you would excuse yourself for certain behavior, you are to forgive the most unappealing person you know for the same behavior. Otherwise, you are not loving them as much as you love yourself. If you think you deserve something based on your worth, your works, or your status, be careful because you must impute to everyone you meet the same standard that leaves room for the

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

same boundaries. Loving your neighbor is something we tend to pass off because we've heard the phrase so many times. But, beloved, don't do it. The truth of the matter is, we are to love everyone God sends across our path.

You say, "Well, I don't think God meant that. That's too hard. And surely, He doesn't expect us to take it literally." Then why did He say:

There is no other commandment greater than these?

(Mark 12:31b NKJV)

We need to know why He said that loving our neighbor as ourselves—or literally loving everyone we meet as much as we love ourselves—could be likened in importance to loving God. Well, your answer might be something like "thiseth."

You may be saying, "But I don't love that clerk behind the counter at the drug store that I went to this week. He was rude to me. My baby was sick; I was in a hurry, and he was in no hurry whatsoever. He ignored me and then when he talked to me, he was rude to me. I don't have to love him." Shall we vote on it? Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been rude to anyone? Of course not. Have you ever refused to listen to someone, maybe someone who was demanding their way? Have you ever made anyone wait? You say, "Well, that was different." I don't think so.

If you were willing to forgive yourself or give yourself that much latitude, you owe that much latitude to them. You say, "Okay, I was rude to a couple people this week, but that was different. I had a headache." Then, you're saying, a headache justifies rudeness if you are the headache-ee. Right? How do you know what was going on in the druggist's life? Maybe his wife had left him. Maybe his child was sick. Maybe he had a headache. And maybe he was not a believer. How is he going to see the love of Christ in you if you can't overlook his rudeness and return his rudeness with love?

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

Does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; (I Corinthians 13:4,5 NKJV)

Well, what do you do? Suppose you were accidentally for the first time in your life, rude this week. What should you do about it? You say, "Could we keep this thing from being this practical?"



Probably not.

1- You should confess it to God as sin. We have reached a stage, many of us as Christians, that we have justified our behavior and are no longer becoming increasingly sensitive to sin. But, rather, we have become less sensitive to sin because we figure God hasn't zapped us for it in the past; it must be okay. Tell God about it. Tell Him you want to see that behavior the way He sees it. Tell Him what you did, but then tell Him what you thought. Because, you see, God looks on the heart and He knows what you were thinking. Maybe you didn't do anything, but maybe your thoughts were angry enough to start a forest fire. Tell God about it.

Tell God, that person needed to see the love of Christ in you, and God allowed it to test your ability to appropriate His love. You blocked His love by not letting it flow. You missed an opportunity to see God in you, love a seemingly unlovable person. You missed an opportunity to see that person see Jesus in you. Beloved, that is a grievous offense. You justify it based on the fact that he deserved it. "In my opinion, he deserved it." God is not concerned with our opinion, because we were called to judge not, lest we be judged (Matthew 7:1). We are not the judges; He is, and He told us to love that druggist.

2- You should ask God if He wants you to make restitution or ask forgiveness. Now, often He won't. Sometimes He will. He may simply want you to go back to that druggist and say, "Sir, yesterday when I was here, I was rude to you. I snapped back at you because I was in a hurry. I am a Christian, and that is not what God would have me to do. Would you forgive me?" After he drops a few vials of penicillin, he may respond in one of several ways. How he responds is not the issue. That you are obedient is the issue; that you obeyed God. If he didn't know you were rude, if it was all in your heart, then maybe you just confess it to God and that's it. But you stay alone with God, until you know.

You say, "If I do that, I'll stay alone with God all day long the way I behave." Ah, now you're getting it. It's not a bad place to be. You see, if God has you go back and apologize to that druggist, chances are the next time you start to behave that way, a little red flag will go up, and oh, maybe that's the only reason He'll have you go back.

The general rule that serves as a foundation for the other

commandments on love is this one: *You are to love everyone who crosses your path; everyone you meet the way God does; and you are to forgive them of anything you expect God to forgive you of.* Uh-oh. To do anything less is to violate a commandment of God where He said, “There is no commandment more important than this one.” Then, to make His point, God got specific so we wouldn’t justify our behavior and eliminate the people we are supposed to love the most. You can see now why we locked the doors in this class, but it works.

3- You are especially to love the people who mistreat you. Scripture calls them your enemies. Sometimes that doesn’t work for us because we have a picture of who our enemies are, and we misunderstand what it means. Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor [there’s our word again] and hate your enemy.” [You say, I can live with that. Jesus said, Oh no, you can’t.]

But I say to you, love your enemies, [then He defines who they are and what we are supposed to do] bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, [big deal—loose translation] what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [Not the republicans, the publicans.]

And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48 NKJV)

You were ready to give in on the druggist, right? You were willing to do that, but what about your sister-in-law? She never liked you. When your husband’s mother died, she came after you like a barracuda. She tells lies about you, tries to turn your husband against you, spreads rumors about you. She looks for ways to hurt you. And when you have nothing else to do in your mind, you fantasize about ways to get even with her. You pray for her, but you really pray that God will see that she gets hers. Right? You delight every time you hear that one of her kids is in trouble or her husband is angry, even though you know that Scripture says that love:

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;  
Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures  
all things  
(I Corinthians 13:6,7 NKJV)

Not only are you to love her, the Scripture says, you are to bless her, do good things for her, and pray for her welfare rather than her punishment. You say, “Wait a minute. I can’t do that and I’m not going to do that. She doesn’t love me.” Oh, okay. But the Scripture just said, if you only love those who love you, what kind of big deal is that? Even unbelievers can do that. That’s what Jesus said in verse 46. If you only love other believers, how are you any different than they are? That’s what verse 47 says. You are to love as God loves, because He lives in you. As He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), He sent shockwaves into our spirits by demonstrating how God loves when you are misused, abused, and refused. He loves. Otherwise, you would still be lost and on your way to hell. It’s so easy for us as Christians to quote, “What can separate us from the love of God? Not tribulation or famine or peril or the sword. No, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us (Romans 8:35). Amen. Nothing will separate us. Then what should separate your sister-in-law from the love of Christ in you?

What does it mean to “bless” someone anyway? Your friendly concordance will use the word, εὐλογέω (2127) eulogō {yoo-log-eh’-o}. It means to invoke a blessing. To praise. To ask God’s blessing on someone or something and to cause to prosper or bestow blessings on. It means that you ask God to cause that person to prosper, to be favored, to be blessed with the presence of God, and exposed to the love of God. That’s what it means. If you bless someone, you are expected to be willing to be part of the blessing.

The same word is used to describe what Jesus did for us.

To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.  
(Acts 3:26 NKJV)

It’s the same word. In James, chapter three, we get a specific use of the word and how hypocrisy causes us to misuse and abuse it. It talks about the tongue.

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

With it [and here is your word again] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?

Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

(James 3:8-12 NKJV)

In other words, he is saying, you can have a wonderful quiet time, sing praises to God, then leave the house and lash out at someone else, be it that rude druggist, your sister-in-law, or just some insensitive clod who cuts out in front of you on the interstate. And you are a fool and a hypocrite. That's what it says. God made that druggist for you to love. When you curse him even in your heart or rail at him, you are, in effect, railing at God. It's the same mouth. It's the same heart. It's the same fountain, and you don't get sweet and bitter water out of the same fountain any more than a fig tree can bear figs and then olives. How you treat that druggist is how you are treating God, no matter what you did in your quiet time.

One more commandment—you didn't want another one, but you'll get it—and we will try to draw some conclusions. Hopefully, in our next study, we will get a little more specific. This one only involves about half of you, so the rest of you can take a deep breath.

4- Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and are not to become bitter toward them, no matter what.

Scripture says; you know the passage. You ladies have memorized it, I trust.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother [because of the portrait involved] and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:25-33 NKJV)

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be bitter toward them. (Colossians 3:19)

We won't deal with the wife's commandment in this lesson. It's a different word entirely. This is for the husband. He plays the role of Christ in the drama of eternity being acted out on the stage of life for the purpose of demonstrating the love of God. How does God love? God loves unconditionally. And we love the fact that He does, don't we? He gives and gives, and He forgives and forgives. Again, we have that definition of love. He loved the church and gave Himself for it.

That's your definition of love: God giving Himself away without regard for the worth or response of the recipient. That's love. Love expressed is mercy and grace. Forgiving and giving. And the reason we are to love our wives like that is because Christ loves us like that. And the very treatment you expect from God, you owe to her. Now ladies, you can say, "Amen," if you would like to. But no elbowing, okay? Our purpose in loving our wives that way is the same as God's, to nurture her in such a way that she responds to our love and becomes increasingly holy. And if she doesn't? You keep on loving her just the same, just as God does you.

You say, "But wait a minute. That's a two-way street. I'll love her when she loves me. I'll show her." No, beloved. Men, you are the initiator; she is the responder. You play the role of Christ; she plays the role of the church. You love her whether she loves you or not. You honor her whether you think she is worthy of honor or not. If you don't, don't expect a good prayer life.

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding,

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.  
(I Peter 3:7 NKJV)

So, husband, your job is to love your wife no matter what, because as you do, you are demonstrating this incredible grace of love to a wife, a family, and a world that doesn't deserve it. But then you didn't deserve God's love. While you were yet in sin, He died for you. It was not by works of righteousness, which you had done, but according to His mercy, hath he saved you (Titus 3:5). Remember?

Some of you guys are going to say—or at least mutter under your breath, and I trust you won't say it out loud—"I've tried. And tried. And tried. And I'm about to give up. Good idea. Give up. Then let God fill your heart with agape love. You see, He will do it through you, supernaturally, when you realize you can't do it naturally. That's grace. That's a definition of grace. And if you'll spend time in His presence asking Him to, and then when He begins to, don't interfere with the process and don't quench the Spirit, you can love her like that. You can. You can love your enemies like that. You can love your druggist like that. You can love your sister-in-law like that. No, I take it back. Not only can you, you must. It's a commandment.

Jesus reinforced it in these verses:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.  
(John 13:34 NKJV)

These things I command you, that you love one another.  
(John 15:17 NKJV)

A new commandment. That's what it was. It was a commandment that was now possible because God was going to make it possible. Grace would move into our lives and give us the supernatural capacity to love that Christ had when He walked this earth. It was a love so encompassing that He excluded no one. God so loved the world. It was a love so deep it would reach to the needs of the most unlovable and the most needy. He would touch lepers, outcasts, prisoners. He would reach out and touch the aged, the handicapped, the lonely, the grieving.

And He would say, "As I have loved you, you are commanded to love one another." Don't ignore that. Don't just say that's a generalization. Jesus went on:

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35 NKJV)

It doesn't say they will know you are a Christian by what church you attend, by how many bumper stickers you have on your car, or whether or not you say grace in a crowded restaurant, or how you dress or what Bible you carry. They will know you are a Christian by the way you love.

By this shall *all men*—it's universal—know that you are a discipleship. You can memorize 14 verses a day, carry a Bible under each arm, attend 12 Bible studies a week, teach Sunday School three Sundays a month and if you still can't love that rude druggist or that obnoxious sister-in-law or your less-than-perfect wife, you have missed it. The world will never know—I don't care how many badges you wear—that you are a Christian.

Do you want them to know? Then let the love of God flow through you. Anything less than that won't cut it. That is His proof to a lost world, and not only that, it is His assurance to you.

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. (I John 3:11,14 NKJV)

Suffice it to say, this thing of loving one another is not an add-on in the Christian life. It's the proof of our relationship with God. To John, it was even a valid reason to question your salvation.

You say, "Okay. Love is crucial, and love is a commandment. I can accept those two things. But I have tried to love my sister-in-law, and I have tried loving rude clerks, and I have tried loving an unresponsive wife, and I can't do it."

Correct. You can't. And don't ever for one minute think you can. Which, of course, brings us back to the premise of this whole series. One of three things is true.

1- Either God didn't mean it when He said we are to love one another as Christ loved us.

2- He meant it, but He knew we couldn't do it and He just wanted to tease us a little, or

3- He meant it, but He never intended for *us* to do it. He

## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

intended for us to fall down before His face and ask for His grace to flow through us and to supernaturally give us the power minute-by-minute to do supernaturally, what we could not do naturally. And that is, love the unlovable. Love those who don't love us back. Love those who don't appreciate our love. Love those who nobody else loves.

I think you know where we are heading. We've been there before. Love is a gift. It was given to us when Christ came into our lives, and only His Spirit in us can love through us the way He needs to love. But He commanded us to let it happen. The key is understanding minute-by-minute, the choice is ours. The power is His. The responsibility to ask is ours. The responsibility to love is His. It is all grace. We don't deserve it. We can't earn it. We can't pay Him back for it, but *we can have it*. The question is, don't you want to? Don't you want to be that different?

The Scripture is clear:

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5 NKJV)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, [it expresses itself in] joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22 NKJV)

Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. (II Thessalonians 3:5 NKJV)

It is a gift. The Holy Spirit broadcasts the love of God in our hearts. That's what it says. It is a fruit produced by Him, not by us. The Lord will direct our hearts into His love as we wait for it to happen. Study Paul's prayers.

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, [think about what Paul prayed for you and for me] to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height —

To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

(Ephesians 3:16-19 NKJV)



## Agape Grace: A New Commandment

Isn't that what you want? Is that how you pray for people? Is that how you want people to pray for you? That Christ might be so at home in your heart that His love would permeate your every thought, your every word, your every response? My friend, the Christian life is not just a journey through doctrine. It is a glorious walk through the real world, watching God love people through you that you can't love, with a love you can't have apart from Him. The question is, do you want it? Are you willing to pay the price to have it? It is a series of love-related miracles in which you watch a holy God love unholy people through the unholy vessel of all, you. And as you do, stand amazed that not only could He use you, but that He could love you.

The key is grace. The key is that coming to the end of yourself and realizing that unless something supernatural happens to you, you'll never have the quality of marriage God wants you to have. You'll never have the kind of responses to people that God expects you to have. You'll never have the capacity to be compassionate that God wants you to have. And the world, looking at you, may never know that God lives in you.

But, by grace, they'll know. If you become convinced that biblically, that's what God expects; that it's His commandment and it hasn't been revoked. If you can come to realize that apart from Him you are impotent to make it happen, you can begin to appropriate the ability to love as He loves. You cry out to Him tomorrow in desperation that He would give you the supernatural capacity to demonstrate the love of God to everyone who crosses your path, and the miracles will begin to happen.

So, I'll give you an assignment. I love to look at your faces when I say that. I don't know why. Get alone with God and ask Him for one week—I dare you, ask Him for one week—to give you the grace to love everyone that comes across your path. Tell Him how helpless you are apart from Him. Name the people you know you need to love, but can't. Maybe it's your boss. Maybe it's that guy who wronged you and took advantage of you. Confess your thoughts. Confess your responses. Ask Him to cleanse you. Spend one week meditating on John 13:34,35 and Mark 12:30,31 and I Corinthians 13. Spend time this week worshipping Him for the love He revealed at Calvary. Then I'm going to ask you to do one last thing. Ask Him to send you, this week, people to love that you couldn't love apart from Him. It's a dangerous prayer.

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But, let me tell you, you pray and mean it. Then hold on to your hats. The doors will open and there will walk into your life people you've never been able to love, and your path will cross that of people who have never really been loved. And at that moment, you will need to cry out to God, "Love them through me."

When you have done that, beloved, get ready for a miracle. That's the business God is in, and that's what grace is. You will find yourself loving them with the same love with which Christ loves you, but you'll take no credit for it. It won't be you. It will all be of grace. God will be giving His life away, and your life will be the vessel He's using.

Isn't that amazing? We call it, amazing grace.

### Amazing Grace

Amazing grace, how sweet it is!  
A gift from God above  
That fills us with His precious power,  
And fills us with his love.

It takes our selfish, sinful hearts  
And if, by grace, we pray,  
Allows His love to flow through us  
And give that love away.

Amazing grace and nothing else  
As at His feet we fall,  
Can love through us the very ones  
We naught would love at all.

Amazing grace, dear God, I pray  
I'll set your Spirit free  
To love my neighbor as myself,  
That they see Christ in me.

Let's pray.

*Our Father and our God, what a miracle it will take, but what a miracle-working God You are. By Your grace, this week, we want to see You love through us, our neighbor as ourselves. And by Your grace, as it happens, may we fall on our faces in awe and admiration. We couldn't do it, but You did.*

*To Jesus, the giver of grace, be praise and honor and glory. Amen.*

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### For Further Study

1- Write out Mark 12:30,31 in your own words. Look up each key word and cross-reference it. Find out what each word means. How many times in Scripture does God repeat these commandments?

2- Read Matthew 5:43-48 again. Define “enemies.” Using that definition, who are your enemies? Do others hate you, persecute you, or spitefully use you? Why does God allow that? What is He expecting of us when it happens? How can you “bless” someone you hate? How can you love someone who does not love you?

3- Read Ephesians 5:25-33 and Colossians 3:19 again. What does that mean? What is the wife to do? Is the husband’s love predicated on the wife’s response? If not, why not?

### For Further Application

1- Make a list of the people you know that you have not shown love to over the past week. They may be loved ones, acquaintances, or simply people who have crossed your path. Ask yourself, “Why did I not respond to them in love?” What rights have you claimed for yourself that you have refused to give to them?

2- Take that list before God. Ask His forgiveness. Ask Him to bring other people and incidents to your mind that need to be confessed. Ask Him to cleanse you of those, as well.

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3- Take your list of “enemies” before the Lord. Pray for them, one by one. Ask God to bring blessing into their lives, and then volunteer to be the container in which those blessings are delivered. Ask God for the grace to love them as Christ loves you.

4- This week ask God to bring into your life people who need to be loved, *especially those who may be unloveable, or unloved*. Ask Him to perform a miracle in your life that will change your perspective of love forever. Ask Him to love them through you, *supernaturally*. Ask Him for the faith to expect it to happen, and then for the grace to make it happen. Praise Him in advance for His amazing grace.

### For Scripture Memory

Memorize John 13:34,35.

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