

## Parson to Person

### ROMANS 12 PART 4

*“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:9–21 NKJV).*

The love of God that is placed in our heart—and enabled by the Holy Spirit—is unselfish and others centered. This is the love that seeks not its own benefit, but rather, seeks the benefit of others. Greek students know this love as “*agape*.” The King James version of the Bible translates this love as “charity.”

Our natural propensity in contrast to *agape* is *epithymia* which is most often translated as lust. *Epithymia* is also defined as craving, desire, or covet. Herein we can see that the focus of *epithymia* is self while *agape* is completely others centered. With this in mind we can clearly see that without the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us, we are helpless to “*love without hypocrisy*” (vs .9) as Paul suggests.

In a sense “*brotherly love*” (vs. 10) can be enjoyed in and by the natural man as suggested in the Greek word “*philadelphia*.” Therefore, within verses 10-11 Paul engages the believer in both “*agape*” and “*philadelphia*”—suggesting both the call to unselfish love and the mutually beneficial cooperative love shared between the brothers and sisters in Christ—and at times enjoyed with people who may not share our faith.

Combining these two forms of love—but with emphasis on *agape*—we can begin to understand the expression “*abhor what is evil*.” Evil is harmful and therefore must be rejected—especially by believers. “*Love does no harm to a neighbor*” and therefore, as Paul put it, “*love is the fulfillment of the law*” (Romans 13:10). I have found this to be incredibly helpful when determining right and wrong in the Christian worldview. I can do those things that does not harm a neighbor—brother or sister, etc.—but must refrain from all things that would hurt or harm another. Thus, the filter of Christian behaviors is first and foremost *agape* and secondarily, when at all possible, *philadelphia*. Sadly, at times *philadelphia* is wounded or hindered by *agape*. For example, if a brother or sister wants to do evil and I will not comply with, participate in, or condone it, division occurs and thus brotherly love can be stifled. *Agape* must precede *philadelphia*!

Time permits me no more written comment today. We will discuss this and more today in our services.

I *agape* you all, I *phileo* you too!

Pastor Paul