

1 CORINTHIANS 13 | *Agape: the Most Excellent Way*

The Excellence of Agape

31 And I am showing (δείκνυμι, pres.) you a still more excellent way (ὑπερβολὴν ὁδὸν).

The Necessity of Agape

1 If (ἐάν) [hypothetically] I speak in the languages (γλώσσαις) of men and of angels, but have not agape (ἀγάπη), I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophecy (προφητεία) and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not agape, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up (παραδίδωμι, aor.) my body to be burned, but have not agape, I accomplish (ὠφελέω) nothing.

The Practice of Agape

4 Agape (Ἡ ἀγάπη) is patient (μακροθυμέω) and kind (χρηστεύομαι). Agape does not envy (ζηλώω) or boast (περπερεύομαι). It is not arrogant (φυσιώω) 5 or rude (ἀσχημονέω). It does not insist (ζητέω) on its own way. It is not irritable (παροξύνω), nor does it keep a record (λογίζομαι) of wrongs. 6 It does not rejoice at unrighteousness, but co-rejoices (συγχαίρω) with the truth (τῇ ἀληθείᾳ). 7 It endures (στέγω) all things, believes (πιστεύω) all things, hopes (ἐλπίζω) all things, endures (ὑπομένω) all things.

The Permanence of Agape

8 Agape never falls (πίπτω). As for prophecies (προφητεῖαι), they will pass away (καταργέω, fut. pass.). As for [speaking foreign] languages (γλῶσσαι), they will cease of themselves (παύω, fut. mid.). As for knowledge, it will pass away (καταργέω, fut. pass.). 9 For we know (γινώσκω) in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect (τὸ τέλειον) comes, the partial will pass away (καταργέω, fut. pass.). 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know (γινώσκω, pres.) in part. Then I shall know fully (ἐπιγινώσκω, fut.), even as I was fully known (ἐπιγινώσκω, aor.).

The Preeminence of Agape

13 So now abides (μένω, pres.) faith, hope, and agape (πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη), these three. But the greatest of these is agape (ἡ ἀγάπη).

Commentary

1. Big Questions.

- a. What is our aim in life? Given we were created in the image of God, what was our original purpose, and can we get back to it?
- b. What does Christian maturity look like? What does it look like when we've "arrived"?

2. The Excellence of *Agape* (1 Co 12:31).

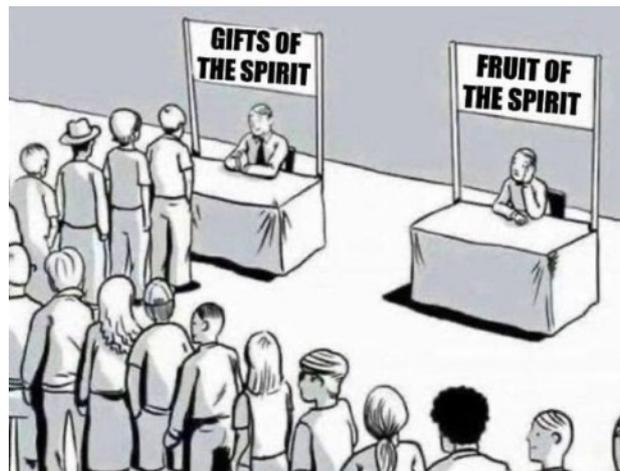
- a. **1 Co 12:31** 31 And I am showing (δείκνυμι, pres.) you a still more excellent way (ὑπερβολὴν ὁδὸν).
- b. Interrupting the topic of spiritual gifts, Paul focuses the Corinthians' attention on ἀγάπη love, which he describes as "the most excellent way" (v. 31).
 - (1) ὑπερβολὴν: "state of exceeding to an extraordinary degree a point on a scale of extent (the context indicating whether in a good or a bad sense), *excess, extraordinary quality/character*" (BDAG, 1032).
- c. Let's use the term *agape* to distinguish the type of love we're talking about.
 - (1) *Agape* is to desire and act for the ultimate good of the beloved.
 - (2) The KJV translates *agape* as "charity."
 - (3) *Agape* is the circulatory system of the body of Messiah. It provides the oxygen necessary for each member of the body to function optimally. *Agape* is to be the prime motivation in all our actions.¹
 - (4) *Agape* involves both giving and receiving. See C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*.
 - (5) *Agape* is a fruit of the Spirit, but it is also a decision of the will.
- d. *Agape* is more important than any spiritual gift.
 - (1) We are to major in *agape* with a minor in X, with X being our gift/ministry/impact portfolio.
 - (2) We are not to disregard spiritual gifts. But we are to prioritise love.
 - (a) For different personality types (Ds and Cs), this may be more challenging.
 - (b) "People before projects."
 - (c) "People are the mission."

3. The Necessity of *Agape* (1 Co 13:1-3).

- a. **1 Co 13:1-3** 1 If (ἐάν) [hypothetically] I speak in the languages (γλώσσαις) of men and of angels, but have not love (ἀγάπη), I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophecy (προφητεία) and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up (παραδίδωμι, aor.) my body to be burned, but have not love, I accomplish (ὠφελέω) nothing.
- b. Without love:
 - (1) Speaking in angelic or human languages is just noise (v. 1).
 - (a) Paul mentions tongues last in 1 Co 12:28 and first in 1 Co 13:1. He is definitely wants to calm down the Corinthians' over-enthusiasm about tongues.

¹ John Calvin.

- (b) Paul regards tongues as actual languages. Mention of “the tongues of angels” is a way to heighten the hyperbole.
 - (c) Gongs and cymbals were used in popular pagan cults in Corinth.
 - (d) Illustration: have a teenager makes some noise with music instruments, or several members of the audience speak in a foreign language all at once.
 - (e) Without love, there is no melody, no harmony in the body of Christ.
- (2) The highest degree of prophecy is nothing (v. 2a).
 - (3) The highest degree of knowledge is nothing (v. 2b).
 - (4) The highest degree of faith is nothing (v. 2c).
 - (5) The highest degree of poverty is nothing (v. 3a).
 - (6) The highest degree of martyrdom is nothing (v. 3b).
- (a) All of these great religious accomplishments are spoken of with hyperbole.
 - (b) There is no reward for the greatest of religious acts if not done with *agape* motivation.
 - 1) “The most lavish exercise of spiritual gifts cannot compensate for lack of love.”²
- (7) The fruit of the Spirit, *agape*, is far more important than any gift of the Spirit.
 - (a) “Who we are is more important than what we do.”³
 - (b) In a megachurch, you can identify gifted people, but you know nothing about their character, whether their motivation is *agape*.



4. The Practice of *Agape* (1 Co 13:4-7).

- a. **1 Co 13:4-8** 4 *Agape* (ἡ ἀγάπη) is patient (μακροθυμέω) and kind (χρηστεύομαι). *Agape* does not envy (ζηλόω) or boast (περπερεύομαι). It is not arrogant (φυσιώω) 5 or rude (ἀσχημονέω). It does not insist (ζητέω) on its own way. It is not irritable (παροξύνω), nor does it keep a record (λογίζομαι) of wrong. 6 It does not rejoice at unrighteousness, but co-rejoices (συγχαίρω) with the truth (τῇ ἀληθείᾳ). 7 It endures (στέγω) all things, believes (πιστεύω) all things, hopes (ἐλπίζω) all things, endures (ὑπομένω) all things.
- b. *Agape*:

² F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 124.

³ Tim Keller.

- (a) Seven qualities are positive; seven are negative.
- (b) Replace Jesus with the word *agape*. Then replace your name with *agape*. The *agape* life is God's will for our lives.
- (c) Jesus is the root, *agape* is the fruit.
- (2) Is patient (μακροθυμέω)(v. 4a).
 - (a) μακροθυμέω: "to bear up under provocation without complaint, *be patient, forbearing*" (BDAG, 612).
 - (b) **1 Th 5:14** 14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be *patient* with them all.
 - (c) **2 Pe 3:9** 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is *patient* toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.
- (3) Kind (χρηστεύομαι) (v. 4b).
 - (a) χρηστεύομαι: "kind, loving, merciful" (BDAG, 1089).
 - (b) **Ga 5:22** 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...*
- (4) Does not envy (ζηλόω) (v. 4c).
 - (a) "[T]o have intense negative feelings over another's achievements or success, *be filled w. jealousy, envy*" (BDAG, 427).
 - (b) **Ac 7:9** 9 And the patriarchs, *jealous* of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him.
- (5) Does not boast/gloat (περπερεύομαι) (v. 4d).
 - (a) περπερεύομαι: "to hear praise on oneself, *behave as a braggart, windbag*..." (BDAG, 808).
- (6) Is not arrogant (φυσιώω) (v. 4e).
 - (a) φυσιώω: "lit. 'blow up, inflate' fr. φῦσα (orig. 'pair of bellows', then var. 'wind, blast', etc.) fig. to cause to have an exaggerated self-conception, *puff up, make proud*" (BDAG, 1069).
 - (b) **1 Co 8:1** 1 Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that all of us possess gnosis. This gnosis *puffs up* (φυσιώω), but *agape* builds up.
- (7) Is not rude (ἀσχημονέω) (v. 5a).
 - (a) ἀσχημονέω: "the noun σχῆμα refers to someth. that has a pattern or form, freq. of a type that the public considers standard or laudable; to act contrary to the standard=*behave disgracefully, dishonorably, indecently*" (BDAG, 147).
- (8) Does not insist (ζητέω) on its own way/strive for the upper hand (v. 5b).
 - (a) ζητέω: "to devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective, *strive for, aim (at), try to obtain, desire, wish (for)...**wish for, aim at...strive for one's own advantage*" (BDAG, 428).
 - (b) **1 Co 10:24** 24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour.
 - (c) **Php 2:4** 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
 - (d) **Php 2:21** 21 For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Messiah.
 - (e) These first five negatives really characterise the Corinthians.
- (9) Is not irritable (παροξύνω) (v. 5c).
 - (a) παροξύνω: "to cause a state of inward arousal, *urge on, stimulate, esp. provoke to wrath, irritate*" (BDAG, 780).

- (10) Does not keep a record (λογίζομαι) of wrongs (v. 5d).
- (a) λογίζομαι: “to determine by mathematical process, *reckon, calculate*, freq. in a transf. sense...*count, take into account* τὶ *some*th. ἡ ἀγάπη οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακὸν *love keeps no score of wrongs*” (BDAG, 597).
 - (b) *Agape* doesn’t gossip or talk behind others’ backs.
 - (c) *Agape* speaks up for the absent.
- (11) Does not rejoice at unrighteousness (v. 6a).
- (a) *Agape* doesn’t smile at everything.
 - (b) *Agape* is not a container in which we are allowed to pour anything we want (i.e, the LGBTQ movement).
 - (c) *Agape* is not glad when others fall.
- (12) Co-rejoices (συγχαίρω) with the truth (τῆ ἀληθείᾳ) (v. 6b).
- (a) *Agape* is courageous enough to face the truth and speak the truth.
 - (b) *Agape* is full of joy when truth prevails.
 - (c) *Agape* is an ally of the truth. This includes philosophic truth, scientific truth, and moral truth. Remember truth is defined by the biblical worldview.
 - (d) **Eph 4:15-16** 15 Rather, speaking the *truth* in *love*, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Messiah....
- (13) Passes over in silence (στέγω) all things (v. 7a).
- (a) στέγω: “[T]o keep confidential, *cover, pass over in silence*..., so perh. ἡ ἀγάπη πάντα στέγει 1 Cor 13:7 of love that throws a cloak of silence over what is displeasing in another person...to bear up against difficulties, *bear, stand, endure*... ‘Love Springs No Leak’...” (BDAG, 942).
 - (b) *Agape* “throws a kindly mantle” over others’ faults.
 - (c) *Agape* puts up with idiosyncrasies.
 - (d) *Agape* covers over unworthy things.
 - (e) *Agape* takes people off to the side to correct them.
 - (f) **Pr 10:12** 12 Hatred stirs up strife, but *love* covers all offences.
- (14) Believes (πιστεύω) all things (v. 7b).
- (a) *Agape* gives others, including enemies, the benefit of the doubt.
 - (b) *Agape* believes the best about others, including one’s enemies.
 - (c) *Agape* puts a favourable light on others’ actions.
 - (d) *Agape* is ready to make excuses for others.
- (15) Hopes (ἐλπίζω) all things (v. 7c).
- (a) ἐλπίζω: to look forward to *some*th., with implication of confidence about *some*th. coming to pass, *hope, hope for*” (BDAG, 319).
 - (b) *Agape* is optimistic about the future, including whether people will be saved, or whether one’s nation will turn to biblical Christianity.
 - (c) *Agape* doesn’t give up on people.
- (16) Endures (ὑπομένω) all things (v. 7d).
- (a) ὑπομένω: “to maintain a belief or course of action in the face of opposition, *stand one’s ground, hold out, endure*” (BDAG, 1039).
- c. Comments.
- (1) *Agape*’s activity is multifaceted.
 - (2) *Agape* differs greatly from Greco-Roman stoicism.

- (3) The world recognises that agape “works.” It does win hearts and minds.
Consider Dale Carnegie’s nine principles:
 - (a) PRINCIPLE 1 Begin with praise and honest appreciation.
 - (b) PRINCIPLE 2 Call attention to people’s mistakes indirectly.
 - (c) PRINCIPLE 3 Talk about your own mistakes before criticising the other person.
 - (d) PRINCIPLE 4 Ask questions instead of giving direct orders.
 - (e) PRINCIPLE 5 Let the other person save face.
 - (f) PRINCIPLE 6 Praise the slightest improvement and praise every improvement.
 - (g) PRINCIPLE 7 Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to.
 - (h) PRINCIPLE 8 Use encouragement. Make the fault seem easy to correct.
 - (i) PRINCIPLE 9 Make the other person happy about doing the thing you suggest.⁴
- (4) The Christian life is a supernatural way of life that demands a supernatural way of execution.

5. The Permanence of *Agape* (1 Co 13:8-12).

- a. **1 Co 12:8-12** 8 As for prophecies (προφητεῖαι), they will pass away (καταργέω). As for [speaking foreign] languages (γλῶσσαι), they will cease (παύω). As for knowledge, it will pass away (καταργέω). 9 For we know (γινώσκω) in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect (τὸ τέλειον) comes, the partial will pass away (καταργέω). 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know (γινώσκω, pres.) in part. Then I shall know fully (ἐπιγινώσκω, fut.), even as I was fully known (ἐπιγινώσκω, aor.).
- b. Compared to ἀγάπη, which never falls (v. 8a):
 - (1) Prophecies will be brought to an end (καταργέω, fut. pass.) (v. 8b).
 - (a) καταργέω: “to cause someth. to come to an end or to be no longer in existence, abolish, wipe out, set aside” (BDAG, 525).
 - (b) Is it the activity of prophecy or the content of prophecy that will be brought to an end?
 - (2) Foreign languages will cease of themselves (παύω, fut. mid.) (v. 8c).
 - (a) παύω: “to cease doing someth., stop (oneself), cease, mid.” (BDAG, 790).
 - (b) Foreign languages will fade away before prophecies and knowledge are brought to an end.
 - (c) Paul doesn’t discuss foreign languages for the remainder of the chapter, unlike prophecy and knowledge.
 - (d) Church history records foreign languages did peter out after the apostolic age.
 - (3) Knowledge will be brought to an end (καταργέω, fut. pass.) (v. 8d).
 - (a) Is it the activity of knowledge or the content of knowledge that will be brought to an end?
- c. These phenomena are only temporary, when we know and prophecy in part (v. 9).

⁴ Dale Carnegie, *How To Win Friends and Influence People*, 268-269.

- (1) The gifts (or content) of knowledge and prophecy is temporary, as compared to *agape*, which never falls.



- d. When the perfect (τὸ τέλειον) comes, prophecy and knowledge will be brought to an end (καταργέω, fut. pass.) (v. 10).
- (1) “The perfect” could be:
- (a) The completed canon of Scripture.
 - 1) **Jud 3 3** Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.
 - (b) When believers see Jesus face to face physically.
 - 1) “The final thing to be said about the new humanity in Jesus and in us is that it is doxological humanity that both receives and reflects the glory of the one true God. When our little mirrors are trained and focused on his great mirror which is the light of the world, they in turn become brilliant with his reflected glory. Upward toward God in joyful worship, outward to the world in in beaming of the Gospel of love they SHINE.”⁵
 - 2) “We reflect his glory when we love, not when we chase after gifts for our glory. One day we will reflect his glory, not as we do now, poorly. But until then should we not try and do a better job. I wonder if this does not reflect better the argument of Chapter 13 than most interpretations. The revelation gifts will one day end when they are no longer needed, because the full revelation have been completed. The sign gifts that support this revelation will cease because they will have done their job. Paul does not know when that will be on the timeline. We need to grow up and becomes adults in the faith and not continue to like little child still playing with the toys. Adults in the faith reflect the glory of God, in love towards God, in love towards God’s people, and in love towards those that God wants to save. One day we will do that perfectly. Until then Pauls calls us on.”⁶
 - (c) Corporate or individual maturity, the full realisation of *agape* (when believers see Jesus face to face spiritually).
- (2) Option (c) is preferable:

⁵ Thomas Smail.

⁶ Steve Reardon.

- (a) There is a close connection between *agape* and maturity.
- 1) ἀγάπη = τελειότης = ἐπίγνωσις.
- (b) τέλειος: “pert. to meeting the highest standard...*perfect*...of persons who are fully up to standard in a certain respect and not satisfied with half-way measures *perfect, complete, expert*...pert. to being mature, full-grown, mature, adult...pert. to being a cult initiate, *initiated*. As a t.t. of the mystery religions, τέλειος refers to one initiated into mystic rites...pert. to being fully developed in a moral sense...of humans *perfect, fully developed*...” (BDAG, 995-996).
- 1) **1 Co 2:6** 6 Yet among the *mature* (τέλειος) we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.
 - 2) **1 Co 14:20** 20 Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be *mature* (τέλειος).
 - 3) **Mt 5:43-48** 43 You have heard that it was said, You shall *agape* your neighbour and hate your enemy. 44 But I say to you, *Agape* your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is 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. 46 For if you *agape* those who *agape* you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be *mature* (τέλειος), as your heavenly Father is *mature* (τέλειος).
 - 4) **Eph 4:13** 13 ...Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the *knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις) of the Son of God, to *mature* (τέλειος) adulthood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Messiah....”
 - 5) **Php 3:15** 15 Let those of us who are *mature* (τέλειος) think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.
 - 6) **Col 1:28** 28 [Jesus] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone *mature* (τέλειος) in Messiah.
- (c) τελειότης: “*perfection, completeness*...Of *maturity* in contrast to the stage of elementary knowledge...” (BDAG, 996).
- 1) **Col 3:14** 14 And above all these put on *agape*, which is the uniting bond of *maturity* (σύνδεσμος τῆς ἁγιότητος).
 - a) σύνδεσμος: “of the fastenings that hold the various ships together; ... *ligaments* of the body” (BDAG, 966).
 - 2) **Heb 6:1** 1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Messiah and go on to *maturity* (τελειότης), not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God....
- e. As an illustration, when we are children, we speak, think, and reason like a child, but when we become a man we give up childish ways (v. 11).
- (1) Children preoccupy themselves with things of temporal value. It’s cute, for awhile, but we wouldn’t want them to remain in their childhood forever.
 - (2) Spiritual gifts are children’s toys compared to faith, hope, and *agape*, which are the concerns of adults.

- (3) When a building is being constructed, the scaffolding is necessary. When the building is completed, the scaffolding is removed.
- (4) Illustration: duplos, legos, and real building materials at Mitre 10.
- f. Now (in our immaturity) we see in a mirror dimly, but then (in our maturity) we will see [Jesus] face to face (spiritually) (v. 12a).
- (1) When is then? Whenever we attain *agape-teleiotes-epignosis*, whether in this life or the next.
- (a) **2 Co 3:16-18** 16 But when one turns to the Lord [Jesus], the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord [Jesus], are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.* For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
- (b) **Jn 14:21** 21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who *agapes* me. And he who *agapes* me will be *agaped* by my Father, and I will *agape* him and *manifest myself to him*.
- g. Now (in our immaturity) we know (γινώσκω, pres.) in part, but then (in our maturity) we shall fully know (ἐπιγινώσκω, fut.) as we were fully known (ἐπιγινώσκω, aor.) (v. 12b).
- (1) Three options:
- (a) The church has partial knowledge until the canon of Scripture is completed. When the canon is complete, the church will fully know (though still not exhaustively).
- (b) We know in part until Jesus' second coming. When he comes, we will know fully.
- (c) As immature believers, we have γνῶσις of God, which is partial. But as mature believers, who have learned to *agape* as he *agapes*, we have ἐπίγνωσις of God, just as God has ἐπίγνωσις of us.
- (2) Option (c) seems best.
- (a) ἐπίγνωσις is superior to γνῶσις.
- 1) γνῶσις: “comprehension or intellectual grasp of someth., *knowledge* as possessed by God...and humans...the content of what is known, *knowledge, what is known*” (BDAG, 203).
- 2) ἐπίγνωσις: “*knowledge, recognition* in our lit. limited to transcendent and moral matters” (BDAG, 369).
- a) **Ro 10:2** 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to *full knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις).
- b) **Eph 1:17** 17 ... That the God of our Lord Jesus Messiah, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the *full knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις) of him....
- c) **Eph 4:13** 13 ...Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the *full knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις) of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Messiah....
- (1) Full knowledge is for every member of the church.
- d) **Php 1:9** 9 And it is my prayer that your *agape* may abound more and more, with *full knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις) and all discernment (αἴσθησις),

10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Messiah....

- e) **Col 1:10** 10 ...So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord [Jesus], fully pleasing to him, producing fruit in every good work and increasing in the *full knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις) of God....
- f) **Col 3:10** 10 ...And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in *full knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις) after the image of its Creator.
- g) **2 Pe 1:2-3** 2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the *full knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις) of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the *full knowledge* (ἐπίγνωσις) of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge (γνώσις), 6 and knowledge (γνώσις) with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection (φιλαδελφία), and brotherly affection (φιλαδελφία) with love (ἀγάπη). 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) of our Lord Jesus Messiah.

3) ἐπιγινώσκω: “gener. ‘know, understand, recognize’ ...to have knowledge of someth. or someone, *know*... with the prep. making its influence felt, *know exactly, completely, through and through* τὶ someth. ...to ascertain or gain information about someth. ...*learn, find out...learn to know*...notice, perceive, learn of, ascertain...to connect present information or awareness with what was known before, *acknowledge acquaintance with, recognize, know again*...to indicate that one values the person of another, *acknowledge, give recognition to*...to come to an understanding of, *understand, know*” (BDAG, 369).

(b) Eternal life is to *know* the Father and Jesus.

1) **Jn 17:3** 3 And this is eternal life, that they *know* (γινώσκω) you, the only true God, and Jesus Messiah whom you have sent.

h. Comments.

(1) *Agape* is permanent. Spiritual gifts are temporary.

(a) The spiritual gifts of prophecy, speaking in foreign languages, and knowledge were always meant to be temporary. Especially speaking in foreign languages.

(b) The gifts of the Spirit are temporary, but the fruit of the Spirit is eternal.

(c) Spiritual gifts are child’s play. The fruit of the Spirit is what adults do.

(2) Currently, the Corinthians are far from ἀγάπη, τελειότης, and ἐπίγνωσις.

(a) **1 Co 3:1-3** 1 But I, brothers and sisters, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Messiah. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet

ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

- (b) **1 Co 13:4-7** Agape does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant.
- (3) We know we've "arrived," when our lives look like 1 Co 13:4-7, when we can substitute our name for the word *agape*.
- (4) In heaven, our primary pursuits will be *agape* and *epignosis*. The exciting thing is we have the opportunity now to attain a certain proficiency in them.
 - (a) **Php 3:10-16** 10 ...That I [Paul] may *know* [Jesus] and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already *mature/perfect* (τέλειος), but I press on to make it my own, because Messiah Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are *mature* (τέλειος) think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.
 - (b) **Eph 4:15-16** 15 Rather, speaking the *truth* in *agape*, we are to *grow up* in every way into him who is the head, into Messiah, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body *grow* so that it *builds itself up* in *agape*.

6. The Preeminence of *Agape* (1 Co 13:13).

- a. **1 Co 13:13** 13 So now remains (μένω, pres.) faith, hope, and agape (πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη), these three. But the greatest of these is agape (ἡ ἀγάπη).
- b. The three theological virtues—faith, hope, and *agape*—abide forever (v. 13a).
 - (1) μένω: "to continue to exist, remain, last, persist, continue to live" (*BDAG*, 631).
 - (2) The four cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, courage, temperance. The three theological virtues are: faith, hope, and *agape*.
 - (a) We often find these three virtues together in the New Testament. See *Verses on Faith, Hope, and Love*.
 - (b) Faith goes with phase one, hope goes with phase three, and *agape* goes with phase two. *Agape*, our primary preoccupation, is bounded by faith and hope.
 - (c) In heaven, the need for *agape* will continue, while the need for faith and hope will diminish.

THREE PHASES OF SALVATION			
Phase Zero	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Condemnation	Adoption	Sanctification	Glorification
Saved from nothing	Saved from the penalty of sin	Saved from the power of sin	Saved from the presence of sin
Life as an unbeliever	Moment of faith in Jesus	Believer's lifetime	Eternity future
	Faith	Agape	Hope

- c. The greatest of the three theological virtues is *agape*. It is truly supreme.
- (1) The two great commandments.
 - (a) **Mt 22:35-40** 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked [Jesus] a question to test him. 36 Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Torah? 37 And he said to him, You shall *agape* the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall *agape* your neighbour as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Torah and the Prophets.
 - (2) The new commandment.
 - (a) **Jn 13:34-35** 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you *agape* one another. Just as I have *agaped* you, you also are to *agape* one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have *agape* for one another.
 - (3) The greatest love.
 - (a) **Jn 15:12-17** 12 This is my commandment, that you *agape* one another as I have *agaped* you. 13 Greater *agape* has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. ...17 These things I command you, so that you will *agape* one another.
 - 1) There is no friendship with Jesus, no maturity, without *agape*.
 - 2) *Agape* is the key to growing a church.
 - (4) The fulfilment of the Torah.
 - (a) **Ro 13:8-10** 8 Owe no one anything, except to *agape* each other, for the one who *agapes* another has fulfilled the Torah. 9 For the commandments, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet, and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: You shall *agape* your neighbour as yourself. 10 *Agape* does no wrong to a neighbour. Therefore *agape* is the fulfilling of the Torah.
 - (5) The fruit of the Spirit.
 - (a) **Ga 5:22-23** 22 ...The fruit of the Spirit is *agape*....
 - (6) God is *agape*. His essential activity is *agape*. We are most like God when we *agape*.
 - (a) **1 John 4:7-12** 7 Beloved, let us *agape* one another, for *agape* is from God, and whoever *agapes* has been born of God and knows (γινώσκω, pres.) God. 8 Anyone who does not *agape* does not know God, because God is *agape*. 9 In this the *agape* of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is *agape*, not that we have *agaped* God but that he *agaped* us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so *agaped* us, we also ought to *agape* one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. If we *agape* one another, God abides in us and his *agape* is *perfected/completed/matured* (τελειόω) in us.
- d. Comments.
- (1) *Agape* is the heart of the biblical worldview. See *Six Dominant Worldviews*.
 - (a) In atheism, there is no such thing as *agape*.
 - (b) In pantheism, there is no real “other” to *agape*.

- (c) In theism, *agape* between God and man, and between men, is possible and desirable.
- (2) *Agape*, not sovereignty, is the chief attribute of the Trinity.
 - (a) In strict monotheism, God has no one to *agape* before he creates the universe.
 - (b) In trinitarian monotheism, the three persons of the Trinity *agape* one another infinitely and eternally with or without a created universe.

7. Application.

- a. Pursue *agape* (1 Co 14:1).
 - (1) **1 Co 14:1** 1 Pursue *agape*....
 - (2) *Agape* is a decision of the will.
- b. Do all in *agape* (1 Co 16:14).
 - (1) **1 Co 16:14** 14 Let all that you do be done in *agape*.
 - (2) Let *agape* be the theme of your life.
- c. Have abundant *agape* for one another (2 Co 2:4).
 - (1) **2 Co 2:4** 4 ...I [Paul] wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you [Corinthians] pain but to let you know the abundant *agape* that I have for you.
- d. See *Love for Man*.