

# ***The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation***

## **Lesson 12. Being Born Again Requires Your Love**

(De-Hellenizing Mental Muck)

*Please prayerfully take your time going through each section of this lesson and consider both the information and the questions. Your heartfelt responsiveness and determination matter to our Lord, so don't try to complete an entire lesson at once. Also, you'll reap greater benefit if you go through each lesson with others close to you.*

### **Section 1**

***“Love (ahav) the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.***

***These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts...”***

(Deuteronomy 6:5,6; see also 11:13).

Love can take on various meanings, so let's see what kind of love is referred to here in a personalized context of you:

- The Hebrew word for love, *ahav* (ah-HAHV), is an intense feeling of heartfelt affection, a passionate zeal to cherish and to be in the presence of *someone you're devoted to*.
- Inherent within *ahav* is a wholehearted devotion to apply God's commandments to your life. “*To be upon your heart*” reinforces the ardent, deeply compelled zeal and diligence to make God's commands *your way of life* as Scripture always calls for. King David, “*a man after God's own heart*” (Acts 13:22), understood the vital connectedness of obedience emanating from the heart: “*I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You* (Psalm 119:11). David was also commended by God for walking before Him “*in integrity of heart and uprightness... doing all He commanded him*” (1Kings 9:4).

Our God intended that *love for Him* be the Israelites' motive to keep His commands and instill them in their children (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). Through *love intertwined with obedience* He wanted to reveal Himself and His character to an unbelieving world (Deuteronomy 4:6) and to evidence that He is the ONLY God Who is

love, compassion, power, and holiness.

An anecdote we wrote in our January 1997 Newsletter, *Orthodoxy vs. Orthopraxy*, may clarify the issue of loving obedience:

### **Two Jewish Farmers**

Suppose you were living in 200 BC and you interviewed two different Jewish farmers, both upholding Leviticus 23:22:

“*When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.*”



If you ask the first farmer, who views God's commands as *rules to keep*, he'd tell you that he obeys the above verse “because God commands it.” Then you go to the second farmer, who *obeys God out of love*. When you ask him why he didn't completely glean his fields, he replies, “My God loves the poor and unfortunate, and I love both Him and them.”

***There's nothing, absolutely nothing, God wants from you if you don't love Him with all you are and have!***

**To love your Lord you must appreciate *and* experience Him as both your Savior and your Lord.**

***“We [agape] love because He first [agape] loved us”*** (1John 4:19).

The word *agape* (ah-GAH-pay) is the Newer Testament equivalent of *ahav*—an intense feeling of heartfelt affection, a wholehearted devotion to apply God's commandments to your life.

We can't emphasize enough that love for our Lord *changes your perspective* of why you earnestly desire to keep His commands. This depth of love can only be birthed and grow based on your *heart response* when you repent of your sins

*if* you wholeheartedly appreciate our Father's love which made a way through His Son for the penalty of your sins to be paid so you could be His child;

*if* you wholeheartedly appreciate the cost to our Lord Jesus of His death and resurrection on your behalf to reconcile you with His Father.

Gratefulness and love for our Lord go hand-in-hand. In fact, they're inseparable! Much depends on how strongly you recognize that you were born sinful and destined for hell *if* it weren't for our loving Father's plan for you to be His child.

An outstanding example of the kind of love-grounded gratefulness such love on HIS part calls for is the account of the woman who humbly washed our Lord Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50). We're told that she had lived a sinful life, but not what her sins were. Does it matter? No, because we are *all* sinners. It's more important for you that your heart be *like hers* so our Lord could say to you, "*your many sins have been forgiven—for you loved much.*" May our Lord never say to you, "*You believed you didn't have much to be forgiven of, so you loved so little.*"

Keep in mind that it only took *one of your sins* to put Jesus on the cross to deliver you from your rebellion and separation from God. The penalty for even that one sin had to be paid for if you were to be forgiven. Gratefully wiping the feet of your Lord Jesus with your hair is a profound heart image to remind yourself of your desperate need for His loving sacri-



rice on your behalf. That picture can help keep you from being presumptuous in failing to appreciate *why* our Lord gave Himself for you, and the grace behind it.

The depth of love that flows out of a thankful heart can't be learned through reading facts or hearing a sermon. You must experience it in *your innermost being.*

Loving thankfulness begins with the conviction that makes you devastatingly aware of your sins, your rebellion, and your depraved inclinations. That love increases as you appreciate the nature of what our Lord did for you. Like the woman who washed Jesus' feet, as you live repentantly, you *love much* because your godly sorrow reminds you that you're *forgiven much.*

As we noted in the Gospel of the Covenant, Lesson 10. "*Being Born Again Is To Know God And Experience Him,*" in biblical Hebrew the word *know* refers primarily to what you acquire by experience.

**Here's a serious thought to consider:**

If you don't really *know*, that is, *experience* the depth of your own sinful depravity, you won't have much heartfelt appreciation for what our Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross for you. As a result:

1. **You'll lack godly sorrow, the grief which brings about true repentance (2Corinthians 7:10).**
2. **You won't love Him as He calls for and deserves (Daniel 9:4; James 1:12).**
3. **Your scant love will be proved in your lukewarmness about making His commands your way of life—they won't be "upon your heart" (see Revelation 3:15,16.)**

- As you look inside yourself, what depth of love do you have for our Lord Jesus and your heavenly Father?
- Would They even feel any love at all from you as such grace has been poured out on you?

- How diligent have you been to respond to the grace of our Lord in making His commands your way of life?
- How would those in your life who are well aware of your faith walk appraise your diligence in loving and obeying your Lord?

## Section 2

**“Love [agape] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love [agape] your neighbor as yourself”**  
(Luke 10:27).

Because the nature of agape love is so intentional in its wholehearted devotion from the heart, it’s no surprise that the apostle John hammers home that *obedience* to God’s commands is *woven together with love* for our Lord:

“Whoever has My commands and **obeys them**, he is the one who [agape] loves Me. He who [agape] loves Me will be [agape] loved by My Father, and I too will [agape] love him and show Myself to him” (John 14:21).

“If you **obey My commands**, you will remain in My [agape] love, just as I have obeyed My

**Father’s commands and remain in His [agape] love”** (John 15:10).

To illustrate the depth and degree of love He cites in Luke 10:27 for both God and for other people, Jesus recounts the parable of the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-37). If you recall, the people of Samaria were despised by most of the Jews as “half-breeds.” So it was all the more astonishing that this outsider would tend to an injured Jew. Both a priest and a religious leader, revolted by the victim in his need, had



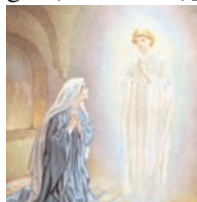
passed by on the other side of the road to avoid contact—and he was one of their own people! Yet the Samaritan treated the man as a cherished neighbor, grieving over his wounds, and loving him to such an extent to make sure all his needs were taken care of. In other words, he showed *sacrificial love in action*.

In like manner, the love our Lord calls for willingly allows itself to be inconvenienced and “put out” in order to serve others. And they don’t have to be someone you like! Consider Jesus’ parameter

### Three Possible Responses to Our Lord’s Commands

**Out of humility and loving obedience you seek His will and apply His commands to your life.**

[typified in the life of Abraham and in Mary’s response to the angel (Luke 1:38)]



You know that *heartfelt love* is **why** you’re applying God’s commands to your life because when you’re asked about your actions, attitudes, or motives, you delightedly respond, “It’s because *I love* my Lord and my fellow man that I make His commands my way of life.” Your reason **why** will always reflect love.

**Out of stubbornness of heart**

**You make His commands a set of rules, and draw attention to *what* you do.**  
[seen in the Pharisees, and in the Judaizers Paul confronted in the letter to the Galatians]



**Or, you’re completely indifferent to them.**  
[seen in the apathy of King Jehoiakim burning Jeremiah’s prophetic warnings (Jeremiah 36)]





of *undeserved love in action* toward an otherwise hated Roman soldier who by law could command you to carry his heavy pack a single mile: “*If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles*” (Matthew 5:41). That extra mile of grace would certainly prompt the soldier to inquire *why* you’d do that!

The responsive love which our Lord is looking for from each of His own *bears the extra load* for others. This Spirit-empowered love isn’t measured by what *you* are willing to do or give, but rather according to what the other person *really needs*. The standard of our Lord’s love calls you to *takes action*:

“*[Agape] Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Luke 10:27; see also Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:10).

“*This is how we know what [agape] love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the [agape] love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not [agape] love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth*” (1John 3:16-18).

- Since many of our Lord’s commands point to how you treat others, can you name at least five of His commands that have altered your conduct toward other people?
- Can others see any humility in you by how you’ve treated them?
- How easily or readily are you inconvenienced by others when they need your help?
- Ask others if they think you’re self-serving or easily irritated or angry when you’re asked to meet an unexpected need. (Proverbs 3:27,28; James 2:14-17). Ask them to be honest!

***“Rejoice with those who rejoice;  
mourn with those who mourn.  
Live in harmony with one another.”***

(Romans 12:15)

We wrote in our previous lesson on Repentance that followers of Jesus do feel sorry for themselves at times. Not every day of belonging to our Lord and walking His pathway is “onward and upward.” During trials and testing, people can be vulnerable to giving in to their sin nature, which is why we’re commanded to

***“Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness”*** (Hebrews 3:13).

Encouragement is a loving, heartfelt motive that compels you to initiate contact! There’s an important reason why people need encouragement daily: without it they may find themselves listening to Satan’s lies and turning to the world’s ways for comfort, giving way to sin’s deceit. The Master Deceiver likes nothing more than to see our Lord’s followers beat themselves up emotionally. Feeling worthless and useless, they neither sense our Lord’s love nor can they extend it.

It’s all too true that so many Christians deceive each other by putting on a bold or carefree front even when they’re hurting inside. Maybe it goes back to Hellenist Stoicism—*enduring pain or hardship without showing feelings or admitting it*. Or, it could be the British influence of “a stiff upper lip.” If you’re ever having a bad day or need encouragement, you could be perceived as not having enough faith. So you put on the “I’m fine!” face of much of western Christendom.

Years ago I [Mike] was a greeter at the front door of a congregation. When I’d ask people how they were doing as they came in, the most common answer was, “Fine.” So after a

few weeks I asked those who responded “fine,” “*On a scale of 0 to 10, how do you define “fine”?* Fine ran from 2 to 8. In essence, “fine” was meaningless!

Encouragement covers a variety of loving things you can do for another person — rejoice with them, mourn with them, give them hope in their trials, even just hug them or listen to them. You’ll find that

**The degree to which you put up a false face is the same degree you’ll neglect encouraging others. Think about it! Your untrue picture of yourself robs others of the authentic encouragement you could be to them, and deprives them of the opportunity to encourage you.**

Christians aren’t used to asking probing questions to encourage others to be openly honest. Transparency is subtly discouraged by clergy who have much they’ve hidden away from public disclosure out of fear of being exposed as “human.” Most clergy are perceived by their congregation as being nearly faultless because of their unique position. And while some clergy are willing to reveal certain aspects of their lives which are less than Christlike, most of their listeners are intimidated by their leader’s perceived holiness and therefore don’t even open up to each other about their struggles in the faith. [Is it any wonder that clergy are among the occupations that lead this nation in divorce? Is it any wonder that pewsitters have a higher divorce rate than unbelievers?]

**The degree to which you’re honest with others when you need emotional support is the same degree you’ll be our Lord’s conduit of loving encouragement to others.**

Our Lord Jesus intentionally asked questions to get people to reveal more about their motives and what was on

their hearts. If you want to be like Him in encouraging others, then *inquire*. Probing, non-accusatory questions are a powerfully loving approach. There’s great value in a “?”. If you really want to display this facet of our Lord’s love, like the Samaritan extend yourself and ask.

- How quickly do you reach out to others who are emotionally hurting?
- Do you find that you avoid people who are down-spirited or have a frown?
- When others are emotionally hurting, do you offer heartfelt support? Or, do you spout glib “Christian” sayings or quote a Bible verse and then move on to another topic?
- Do you hide what’s going on inside you from others when you’re emotionally hurting or have misgivings about yourself?
- Would others describe you as “transparent,” or someone who “holds their cards close to their chest?”
- Do you appropriately ask probing questions to help others open up about themselves, and hold their responses in confidence?

***“For in Christ Jesus....the only thing that counts is trust expressing itself through [agape] love” (Galatians 5:6).***

In our next lesson we’ll discuss our Father’s stipulation to *trust* Him. Isn’t it interesting that according to Paul the only thing that avails in Christ is trust displaying itself through *agape* love? This loving trust results in *responsive action*, and is formed prayerfully from deep within your heart. For example, a prayer that starts our own day may pour forth from your own heart as well:

**“Heavenly Father, I [agape] love you. Please guide my steps this day so that I may reflect the love of Jesus as by Your grace I do Your will for Your glory.”**

If you're born again and increasingly growing in our Lord's love for others because His Spirit is within you, you're His conduit to reveal His love to others. It's not *your* love but rather *His love* that motivates your actions!

This love-based goal, to glorify your heavenly Father, bursts forth from *agape* love for Him. That love isn't some abstract concept; it's evidenced by what you do in obedience to His will. Love for God takes action, and most often those actions are intended by Him to serve other people and point them to Christ.

- Do you cry out to our Father for the guidance and help you need each day to do His will? If not, why not?
- Since *love* is the only thing that counts in our Father's sight, is love the primary motive of your heart? Or, is it self-achievement? Personal comfort? Recognition?

### Section 3

***“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us”*** (Romans 5:5).

The kind of love we're writing about isn't something you can generate on your own. Natural love is more like human kindness compared to the supernaturally-empowered love that's created and poured out by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

*Agape* love stands preeminent above the other character qualities our Lord wants to work out in you. All of 1Corinthians 13 expresses how pivotal *agape* love is if we belong to our Lord.

This empowered love that's produced in those the Holy Spirit indwells is an inner power that transforms your motivations, attitudes, and actions into those that are loving as our Lord's are. As you repent of various sinful behaviors and

attitudes and turn to our Lord Jesus, you discover growing in you the kind of love only His Spirit can give you. This is the main point in our 29-part series, ***Repentance Leads to Christ-like Character***. The prime fruit the Spirit produces in Christ's followers is love, which is then followed by other key character qualities:

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is [agape] love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Nothing in the God's law stands against such things”* (Galatians 5:22,23).

It was Paul's earnest prayer that the followers of Jesus in Ephesus would *deeply* and *intimately experience* the unsurpassible love of Christ:

*“I pray that you, being rooted and established in [agape] love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge”* (Ephesians 3:17,18).

- Does the Spirit-empowered love which surpasses *knowing about* Christ's love encompass you?
- Do others discern in you the Spirit-empowered love which is evidenced through your motives, your attitudes, your actions?
- If not, what do you need to do in your own life for this Spirit-empowered love to overtake you? Repent? Be born again? Ask the Spirit for His power to love that way?

***“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love [agape] Him, who have been called according to His purpose”***

(Romans 8:28)

Do you see the *twofold target* of God's good work? The above promise is directed to those who (1) *love Him* (and there-

fore *obey His commands*), and (2) have been called by Him to *fulfill His purpose* in their lives, which means *fleeing the world's values and becoming more like Jesus through His Spirit*.

While this verse is often misquoted that “all things work for good,” this just isn’t so! Again, the promise of this verse focuses on those who *agape* God and by His grace are actively doing His will and keeping His commands.

- When things aren’t going well for you, have you ever stopped to consider that God may be revealing your lack of *agape* love, and/or that you aren’t fulfilling His purposes?
- Really, have you ever made this connection?
- Are those who are close to you in the faith actively fulfilling God’s purposes? If not, why not?

***“But I tell you: Love [agape] your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).***

The ultimate test of your *agape* love is when you experience mistreatment for your faith, as Jesus forewarns above. For instance, He relates a scenario in which this depth of love would be sorely tried:

***“But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39).***

- Do you readily *and* delightedly pray for those who hassle or ridicule you about your faith?
- Can you “turn the other cheek” when you’re tempted to fight for your perceived rights? If not, why not?

***“Love [agape] keeps no record of wrongs” (1Corinthians 13:5)***

In the various characteristics of *agape* love depicted in 1Corinthians 13 the key aspect of *agape* love stands out. In other

words, love holds nothing against other people, whether they deserve your anger or not. Yet keeping a mental record of past wrongs is so hard for the majority of Christians to relinquish in their hearts.

As you’ll see in a later lesson on forgiving others, *unforgiveness and bitterness* are the most frequent reasons our Father won’t accept those who say they want His forgiveness. By holding a “record of wrongs” against others, they’re not appreciating what our Lord accomplished for them on the cross.

- Do you hold negative feelings toward people who have wronged you?
- If so, you’re nullifying God’s grace toward you. How are these unforgiving emotions affecting your ability to love others in your life (Hebrews 12:15)? Ask those who know you well for feedback.

***“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).***

If loving our God is demonstrated in keeping His commands, and the greatest command is that we love, *love and obedience* are inseparable. The ultimate love, which our Lord Jesus personifies, is summed up by the apostle He especially loved:

***“This is how we know what [agape] love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16).***

- You haven’t truly matured in His love until you’ve completely laid your life down for others, beginning with making others more important than yourself (Philippians 2:3-8). Do those who are close to you in the faith see you as lovingly and willingly sacrificing your own choices and preferences for them?



- If their answer is “No,” do you really want this depth of dead-to-yourself, die-for-others love at all?

***“We can never let ourselves be ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who trusts”***

(paraphrase of Romans 1:16).

Within an increasing number of denominations in recent decades, the Gospel that leads to salvation has been replaced by **“the social gospel.”** The social gospel accepts into fellowship the *unrepentant*, whether ongoing fornicators, domestic abusers, homosexuals, anyone who is actively sinning with no intention of changing their ways. God’s Word is denied so that a culturally acceptable “Christianity” can be “tolerant.”

But here’s God’s stance on that deceit:

***“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?”*** (2Corinthians 6:14,15).

Too often the Gospel that leads to salvation is downplayed, while a **social gospel** emphasis on relieving human suffering overtakes eternal salvation as the deepest “Christian” concern. Although caring for the poor *is* an important part of what our Lord taught, the greater agape love is to be burdened for people’s eternal destiny. Throughout Christendom many denominations and sects have nullified our Lord’s great commission to His people in Matthew 28:19,20. So please prayerfully consider this:

Sharing both the Gospel that leads to salvation *and* compassionate love for our fellow

man don’t have to be mutually exclusive. In fact God’s commands reveal that He expects us to do both. But we can’t *eliminate* the eternal need of people in order to make ourselves publicly acceptable by just focusing on relieving human distress.

The world system is far more likely to accept a person, denomination, or ministry which works to ease human suffering through food and medicine than it is to allow those same individuals to meet eternal need through the Gospel. Meeting human needs probably won’t bring you rejection. But sharing the Gospel with *loving concern for someone’s eternal destination* leaves you open to being rejected and even persecuted. This is where *agape* love is truly demonstrated:

***“There is no fear in (agape) love. But perfect (agape) love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment [or fear of rejection or persecution]. The one who fears is not made perfect in [agape] love”*** (1John 4:18).

- Are your unbelieving friends relationally closer to you than your Christian friends are?
- Are you in a faith community in which there is little or no emphasis on repentance?
- Is your fellowship family more focused on aspects of the social gospel, on the Gospel that leads to salvation, or on both?
- Do you carry in your heart our Lord’s burden for unbelievers you know?
- Do you readily speak about Him as Someone you deeply love? Or, are you plagued by fear of speaking about our Lord Jesus among unbelievers?
- In your Christian walk, do you disdain unbelievers, looking down on them because you see them as sinful?
- Is your love for our Lord causing you to actively help the less fortunate around you with more than your wallet?



Seek feedback. Ask your spouse or others close to you if they see the sacrificial love of Jesus lived out through you.

Until the same kind of loving devotion to our Lord that Paul lived out represents your own heart devotion to our Lord, you've still got some growing to do:

*“I have been crucified with Christ and **I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.** The life I live in the body, **I live by trust in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me**” (Galatians 2:20).*