

## Why the incarnation?

### Unnatural Love

Novelists and poets have always delved into the mystery of love. Why are people attracted to one another? Why do people become best friends? A comedian described love as a sea of emotions entirely surrounded by expenses. Plato described love as “a grave mental disease”. Someone else said love is blind, it’s marriage that is the real eye opener. It is the only fire for which there is no insurance. It is something which combines the two greatest powers on earth—war and peace. Love is the crocodile in the river of desire. Whatever it is, the love spouses have for one another transcends their differences, and the love parents have for their children is a powerful force. Still, these types of love have their limitations. Divorce, family squabbles, and wayward children are a reality. In English, there is just one word we use for every facet of love; whether we speak of brotherly love, romantic love, sexual love, or even the passion for things, we use the one word---love. In the original language of the New Testament which was Greek, there were many different words for love. “phileo” was usually used for brotherly love, and “eros” was used for romantic or sexual love. “Agape” love is a love unnatural to human nature. It is a godly love that loves undeserving and unlovable people. This is the way Jesus loved us. We all know John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”, but did you ever stop to analyze what kind of love this was? We tend to want to think the best about ourselves therefore our inclination is to think, “Yes I can understand why God did this because His lovable children here on earth needed some help. It is only to be expected that since He created us, He would want to help us”. Wrong, this is not at all the way the Bible explains it, and not at all the way of agape love. Paul said in Romans 5:8, “God demonstrates His love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”. Again in Ephesians 2:1-3 we are told of our spiritual condition without Christ, “you were dead in your sins” without any hope at all, “indulging in the desires of the flesh, but God because of His great love even when we were dead spiritually, made us alive in Christ.”

If you still cling to any prideful hope in the human condition before Christ, it is crushed by Rom. 3:10, “There is none righteous, not even one...there is none who does good, not even one”. Keep in mind the Bible’s definition of good is different from man’s. If Jack the Ripper or anybody gave me the winning lottery ticket, I would call that a truly good deed; but good and righteous is here defined as doing things that are good within the created purpose of God. God created us to have a loving relationship with Him and to serve and glorify Him. Anything outside of that or independent of that may please other men greatly, but not God. That is why Jesus said of the Pharisees’ gifts in Matt.6:2 that they have their only reward here now from men, because they gave “that they may be honored by men”.

The fact is that Jesus’ only motivation to sacrifice for us was pure agape love, because there was nothing in us that merited His favor. If we are to properly respond to this love of God, we need to fully understand the richness and fullness of it as well as our own undeserving lack of merit. Otherwise we will not fully appreciate what has been done for us, and we will not respond as we should.

### A New Command

Jesus had previously given teaching about the importance of love, so when at the very end in the Upper Room Discourse He said, “a new command I give you that you love one another as I loved you”, they may have been perplexed by why it was “new”. What Jesus meant was that it had never been practiced before. To love with a godly love would be to love unlovable people. They had loved friends and family, but when they came into contact with unlovable Samaritans their response was, “shall we call fire down from Heaven on them?” It is unnatural to love undeserving, ugly, unlovable enemies. All the contemporary teachers had taught the disciples previously to love your friends and hate your enemies, so Jesus’ teaching was new and revolutionary. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told them, “you have heard it said (taught), love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you (a new teaching), love your enemies”.

In fact, the Bible depicts all people as being enemies of God, alienated by sin. Therefore Jesus is the perfect example of God loving His enemies by being born in humiliation, and raised in a humble state. His ministry was to sinners, “I have come to save sinners, not the righteous (self righteous)”. Falsely accused and convicted, while being led to the worst kind of death, Jesus said, “Father forgive them”. This kind of love is unnatural to the human race, it is godly love.

### The New Love Ethic

This new love was declared by Jesus in Luke 6:27-31. Some people think this sermon was the same as the Sermon on the Mount in Matt.5, but it was given at a different time and place. All preachers repeat themselves in different sermons, often given for different purposes to different audiences and occasions. This sermon is similar to Matt.5, but it was taught “on a level place”, not a mount. Jesus looked at His newly called disciples and said, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you”. Of course the word for love Jesus used here was “agape”. Brotherly and romantic love does not love enemies, and does not do good to those who hate you---only God can do this.

God’s love supersedes what people deserve, and exists in spite of people’s selfishness, pride, and hate. It is deliberate love rooted in God’s will, God simply chooses to love rebellious sinners.

### What Should We Then Do ?

There are four commands here in Luke 6:27-31. First, we are called to do unnatural deeds, “do good to those who hate you”. When confronted with a nasty person who dislikes us, our natural inclination is to attack, criticize, or get revenge. Jesus is commanding the unnatural godly reaction of doing something nice to them.

Secondly, we are to speak unnatural words, “bless those who curse you”. I remember in my early days of real estate a confrontation between two other principals in which I was an interested bystander (as a broker). One of the men said, “You no good dirty liar, I hope you bleeping bleep bleep bleep (words omitted to protect the innocent)”. The other guy responded, “I appreciate your candor. I’m sorry you are unhappy and I would like to do anything I can to repair the situation.” The angry guy’s countenance changed to embarrassment and shame. He unclenched his fists, and at that moment realized his part in this misunderstanding. That was the first time I ever witnessed the possible effect of Jesus’ teaching.

Thirdly, we are to make unnatural prayers, “pray for those who mistreat you”. Can you pray for someone and hate them at the same time? No, if you do you are not actually praying “for” them. Again, this love requires an act of your will to lay aside your grievances and sincerely pray for them. In time we will realize they are sinners in need of God’s grace just as we are, and our natural anger will be softened by God’s unnatural love.

### Unnatural Response

In Luke 6:29-31 Jesus taught what our response should be to insults, challenges, and indignities. These are particularly difficult since they involve basic human pride which wants to manifest itself by a punch in the mouth or some kind of response in kind. Historically for Israel, the response had been limited by the Mosaic law of lex talionis. This law limited retaliation to a punishment that matched the crime. This is why Jesus quoted Exodus 21:24 in the Sermon on the Mount, “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”. This was a fair penalty that kept the peace and limited revenge and feuds. Nevertheless, Jesus went way beyond this in His call to turn the other cheek and give to people in need. Jesus was not calling us to give up self defense or our rights to private property. Jesus was calling for a loving attitude towards rude insulting people, and an attitude of generosity even to people we don’t like. A slap to the cheek was an insult and a provocation to fight. Jesus was saying to not be provoked into a fight, but instead have a loving attitude. Agape love is unconditional so it is ready to give and it is ready to have things taken away, yet still love.

### The Ultimate Expression of Love

The ultimate expression of these four commands is called the GOLDEN RULE—“Do unto others as you would have them do to you (v.31). Is this agape love which is unnatural, unconventional, and unconditional even possible? If you are wise you are admitting that it is not possible without God’s help. This is why God gave us the inspired revelation, this is why God gave us the perfect example in His Son, and this is why God gave us His Spirit to indwell us so that He might “give spiritual life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”.

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