



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The quality that distinctively sets apart believers as followers of Jesus is not a pithy bumper sticker or a fish emblem dangling from a necklace or a gilded dove pinned on the lapel. These are only symbols of our faith. The true mark of a Christian is love.

Arthur Pink, in his commentary on John, said it well:

Love is the *badge* of Christian discipleship. It is not knowledge, nor orthodoxy, nor fleshly activities, but (supremely) *love* which identifies a follower of the Lord Jesus. As the disciples of the Pharisees were known by their phylacteries, as the disciples of John were known by their baptism, and every school by its particular shibboleth, so the mark of a true Christian is *love*; and that, a genuine, active love, not in words but in deeds.¹

In John 13, Jesus gave His eleven true disciples a mandate that added a new dimension to the meaning of love. And this new dimension not only changes lives but, in a compelling way, shows the world we belong to Jesus.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Our love for others flows from the spring of Christ's sacrificial love for us. Take a few moments to meditate on Paul's prayer, and then write your own prayer, inviting Jesus to reveal the depths of His love to you through this study.

May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (Ephesians 3:18–19)

Quotable

*Jesus' love was
one massive
crescendo that
never diminished.
He loved to the
end, the Lover
of my soul.*

— Charles R. Swindoll





Observation: Divine versus Human Love

Let's make some initial observations of John 13:31–38. When observing, we zoom in on each word, looking for repetition, contrasts, tense, emphasis, and key definitions. Read the text and, in the space below, write down words or phrases that stand out to you.

During observation we also widen the lens to examine the flow of thought. Read the text again, and this time look at the passage in sections, keeping in mind the overall theme of *sacrificial love*. What do you see in verses 31–32 about the Father and Son's relationship?

How did Jesus want His love to be passed on to His followers according to verses 33–35?

In verses 36–38, how did Peter exemplify the shortcomings of even the most noble human love?





Searching the Scriptures Tip

Observation is one of the four central components of inductive Bible study:

Observation: observe the text of Scripture.

Interpretation: probe the meaning of Scripture.

Correlation: compare the truths of Scripture.

Application: apply the wisdom of Scripture.

Now let's discover the meaning of the text as we dig a little deeper to interpret Jesus' teaching.



Interpretation: The Meaning of *Agapē* Love

Interpretation, like a seedling, should always grow from the soil of the context in which it was planted. John 13:31–38 follows two significant events that directly impacted the meaning of Jesus' words regarding His departure and His command.

His Departure

What event occurred to prompt Jesus to say, “The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory” (John 13:31)? To find the answer, read John 13:26–30.

When Judas rejected Jesus' final appeal of love and Satan entered him, Judas set in motion a series of events that would culminate in Jesus' death. However, instead of Jesus saying, “The time has come for the Son of Man to die,” He said, “to enter into His glory” (13:31, emphasis added). How can Jesus' death be His glory?



Commentator William Barclay helps us understand the connection:

The glory of Jesus has come; and that glory is the Cross. The tension is gone; any doubts that remained have been finally removed. Judas has gone out, and the Cross is a certainty. Here we are face to face with something which is of the very warp and woof of life. The greatest glory in life is the glory which comes from sacrifice. In any warfare the supreme glory belongs not to those who survive but to those who lay down their lives.²

Jesus also said, “God will be glorified because of him” (John 13:31). How did Jesus’ sacrifice glorify God?

Read John 17:4–5. How did God respond to Jesus’ sacrifice by glorifying Jesus?

Sometimes hard words are the most loving words. What three hard facts did Jesus give His faithful disciples, His “dear children,” in John 13:33?

There was a distinct finality in Jesus’ words, which posed an enormous problem for His disciples: How would they go on? With their Master gone, along with their connection to Him, what would be their identity?



His Command

Anticipating His followers' insecurity, Jesus set their drifting ship on a new course and filled their sails with fresh wind:

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”
(John 13:34–35)

Our Savior's great mandate to His followers included a dynamic internal power, His divine love for them, and an impact in the world that still exists today.

The Dynamic—Divine Love

The dynamic is love, but not just any love. The Greek word John used for “love” is *agapē*, which essentially means to seek the highest good of another. Although the Mosaic Law commanded God's people to love one another (Leviticus 19:18), there was something about Jesus' command to love one another that made it *new*—that is, fresh, unprecedented, or unique. What was that something? For help with this answer, read Constable's notes on John 13:34 at lumina.bible.org.

Jesus' new command would be an outcome of the new covenant He would establish through His atoning sacrifice and the filling of the Spirit. Jesus set Himself as the ever-flowing river of love out of which His followers would forever draw their love for one another. He was telling His disciples—including us—to base their love for one another on His example and indwelling power. Jesus was telling them, in so many words:

“I left the splendors and comforts of heaven because I loved you, even when you were stubborn and closed-minded, I corrected you when you stepped out of line. I washed your feet on the way to My death. All this was for your highest good. My interest was not in Myself but in you. Now, you love each other as unselfishly as that.”

Could this kind of love really make an impact in the Roman world in which the disciples lived?



The Impact—Proof to the World

In his commentary, *Insights on John*, Chuck Swindoll explains the way Christian love impacted the first-century world as early Christians branded the term *agapē*.

The Greek word *agapē* is rarely found outside the Bible. The Greek language celebrated *erōs*, an intoxicating, impulsive love between men and women, and honored *philia*, the warm, noble affection of deep friendship. But *agapē* remained pitifully undeveloped as a term. The human authors of the New Testament needed a Greek word to express the kind of love taught by Christ and commanded by Him in the upper room, but the most common Greek terms wouldn't suffice. Fortunately, *agapē* was relatively unknown and largely undefined, so it perfectly suited their purposes. . . .

While believers began to adopt this new kind of love, their secular contemporaries decried the steady loss of virtue in Roman society. More and more, their peers exchanged venerable *philia* for fleeting *erōs*. As the two cultures moved in opposite directions, the contrast could not have been more absolute.³

What new understanding about the word *agapē* and Jesus' command do you glean from Chuck's explanation of the social context?

His Prediction

In contrast to the resilient love of Jesus, who loved His disciples “to the very end” (John 13:1), Peter's love, which was human to the core, would shatter when placed in fear's furnace later that night. Read John 13:36–38 and the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction in John 18:15–18, 25–27. What did Jesus mean by telling Peter, “you will follow me later”? Read John 21:18–19 for the answer.



Jesus' prediction of Peter's denials must have stung Peter's pride. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to tell Peter the harsh truth . . . for Peter's sake and for the other disciples' sake?



Correlation: *Agapē* Explained

Before applying what we've observed and interpreted, let's analyze the word, *agapē*, in light of another New Testament passage. What definitions did Paul list in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 to add color and contrast to the meaning of *agapē*?

With the words from Jesus' great command lingering in the air, let's transport His message from the Upper Room into the rooms of life where we live.



Application: Authentic Love

This study teaches three truths about how we should express Christ's love to others.

- *Authentic love is unconditional in its expression.* There are no *ifs* attached to authentic love, no manipulation, and no hesitation. *Agapē*, the true love of Jesus, flows over the most impenetrable barriers and into the most hardened hearts with no concern for love in return.
- *Authentic love is unselfish in its motive.* Christ's love isn't self-focused. It isn't concerned about getting a return on investment. It doesn't exclusively look after number one but always looks after number two. True love gives—with no thought of getting anything in return.
- *Authentic love is unlimited in its benefits.* When we love unconditionally and unselfishly, we always walk away a winner, even though that's not our aim. It just happens! Not only are others encouraged, but our hearts are filled with Christ's presence!



Which of these applications is the Holy Spirit pointing your heart toward? Real, authentic, vulnerable *agapē* is the hardest thing in the world to carry out. You can't do it without the Spirit's power. In the space below, write down your desire to love, and then pray for the Spirit to pour Christ's love into your heart so it can overflow to others.

Now, close in prayer by thinking back to your prayer at the beginning of this study. Drink deeply from the great ocean of Christ's love for you as you pray.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, please equip me today to be a dispenser of authentic love by loving others as Your Son, Jesus, loves me. Thank You for broadening my life with the magnificent words of Jesus and for opening my heart to a new commandment that will prove with actions what I say with words. I place myself before You as a living sacrifice of love to be poured out to a needy world. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Arthur Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 341.
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 148.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 4 (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 260.



FOLLOWING CHRIST . . . THE MAN OF GOD

Agapē . . . Authentic Love

John 13:31–38

SEARCHING
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STUDY



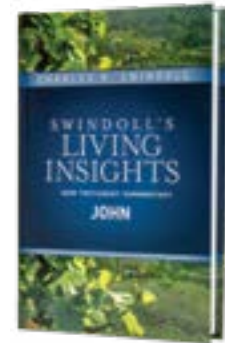
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For the 2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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