



The Cross of Obedience

Text: Hebrews 4:12-13

There are sacred moments in life when you learn something when God saves you. This night we learn about what it means to love.

Love has many meanings. There is brotherly or sisterly love which comes from the Greek word – *philos*. This love is a caring concern for others with whom we're related – a friendship if you will. We know this love from our sister city in Pennsylvania – Philadelphia – also known as the City of Brotherly Love. It's a relationship that's social, casual, but meaningful for us.

Then, there is the Greek word *eros* – from which the word erotic is derived. This love is found in the emotional response to beauty that is often described as lust. The Apostle Paul describes this form of love as passions of the flesh.

Romantic love could be described as partially *philos* and partially *eros*. Romantic love intermingles friendship with passion – at times becoming obsessive in its domination of our emotions, and in its need to possess what is beautiful.

Most love that's depicted by our entertainment industry falls into the romantic type of love category. In fact, romance so dominates our cultural understanding of love that marriages are held to this standard by wives and husbands as a benchmark for measuring the success of their relationship. When romance slips away, couples come to pastors seeking pastoral support saying, "We've fallen out of love."

Which leads many to ask, were they ever in love?



Their love isn't love Christians remember tonight on the Cross. The love Jesus shows on the Cross is the greatest form of love – the true form of love that endures all things, hopes all things, believes all things: Love that never ends.

This type of love isn't found in romance, although over time, romance can grow into this mature form of love. This type of love can be expressed in brotherly love. But is never found in erotic love. This type of love is translated from the Greek word *agape* in the Bible. *Agape* love is what Christ shows on the Cross for the world.

Love, in its true sense, is sacrificial in nature. From this font of genuine, sincere identification with others, love offers itself for the good of others – like Jesus did on the Cross. *Agape* is the love that's selfless, gracious, and complete. It does not vanish or die. It's the eternal gift of self-sacrifice that keeps on giving.

Agape has qualities that make it especially difficult. As the highest form of love, its self-less sacrifice isn't made with conditions. Jesus' offering of Himself on the Cross is unconditional. He offers love without expecting love in return. He offers Himself without expecting appreciation for what He has done.

To love unconditionally, to offer yourself sacrificially for another person without any expectation of a reward in return, is the most difficult type of love to embrace. Humans can offer love sacrificially. It happens every day. A husband and a wife make self-less sacrifices for each other. A parent makes sacrifices for his or her children for their benefit. Parents teach children to make sacrifices for each other and for parents.



A soldier dies on the field of battle for a nation's benefit. But people make sacrifices for others with some sense that it will be reciprocated. They don't sacrifice for others expecting others to acknowledge their sacrifices. But there is that unconscious sense that the sacrifice they make will be so self-evident, so compelling, so important to the other that it will lead others to show proper honor for their sacrificial love.

Unfortunately, the capacity of people to sin is so great, that all too many times *agape* goes unnoticed. The capacity of people to receive a sacrificial gift without appreciating their receipt of it can lead to disdain.

Jesus mounted the Cross knowing that the gift of *agape* that He had been teaching His followers, was unappreciated. His followers routinely misunderstood His purpose. They showed they wanted something in return for being His follower. Whether it was greatness, or receiving Jesus' admiration or respect, they did not appreciate the sacrificial love He was teaching and modeling for them.

When He showed them His greatest act of love from the Cross, the vast majority fled. Peter denied his association with Jesus. Jesus' mother, Mary, was left alone at the foot of the Cross with the disciple Jesus' loved. She understood what her son was doing. She would not abandon her son in His greatest hour of love.

So why did Jesus offer His love to the world in the sacrifice of Himself? Was it simply because He was the greatest altruist that ever lived?

The motivation for Jesus' *agape*, was His love in obedience to His Father in heaven. Jesus obeyed His Father's wishes, unconditionally.



The unconditional love that Jesus offers sinners came from His unconditional love for the Father. The Father directed Jesus to accept the Cross for the salvation of the world and Jesus obeyed.

Whenever Jesus' followers obey the Father to the degree that Jesus did on the Cross, they offer love unconditionally. Their offering is made from their obedience to the Father.

Their love for our heavenly Father is great, respectful, honorable, obedient. They follow His will to the very end of their lives, offering love without any conditions.

Loving those who sin without expectation of appreciation is the obedience of the Cross. Loving those who sin without anticipating their gratitude is the obedience of the Cross.

Only through such obedience are sinners brought to shame and repentance. Only through such obedience are sinners cleansed of their ingratitude and drawn to a greater sense of obedience themselves.

The Cross of Obedience is Christian love. Christ didn't His obey His Father in Heaven out of a sense of duty. His obedience was love for the Father. Jesus' love for the Father He offers to the world.

The Cross of Obedience teaches the unrepentant, the self-indulgent, the self-sufficient sinner how to love. Once they see Jesus on the Cross of Obedience they know true love. They take the step to love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Amen.