

The "Agape" Factor

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Amen. One day that's going to happen, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord unto either their condemnation or unto their glorification. I'm glad by grace I'm of the last group.

Hebrews 10. Let's look at verses 24, well, verses, let's look at verse 24, alright? Ah, let me just give you this background. Paul, I believe, is the author of Hebrews, we can't be dogmatic about that, and he's writing to something of a mixed multitude. There are a lot of folks out of the Jewish economy, the Jewish religion, who've come over to Christianity to embrace it but many of them were also, um, tempted and prone to also embrace the law, and as time went on many of them began to diminish their confidence in the Christian Gospel and in Christ and turn back to the law, so he's dealing with a good number of a, a, a good bit of falling away, if you will, a good percentage of false professors among the church and so in the context he says a lot of things but when we get to chapter 10, verse 24, he says,

24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love [that's the Greek agape] and good deeds,

I call this unpacking the exegesis of this text, "The 'Agape' Factor." It is the most wondrous, most encouraging, most marvelous truth, the agape factor. It, the agape factor is something you can't get over it. It's with you always once you have it, it's eternal. You can't get around it. It lives in you. It's always there and once you taste it and walk in it to some degree, well, it won't be perfect down here but once you taste the agape factor and walk in it in some degree you can't live without it. It's the sixth sense but it's far more than just that. The agape factor or this, what I call the sixth sense is far more important than the other five senses put together. It's not natural. This sixth sense was not in you when you were born naturally. You had the other five, you had seeing and smelling and hearing and tasting and touching, but you didn't have this one. It's not natural. It, in fact, is the product of the new birth, the spiritual new birth when you became a child of God. It is something that was given to us, even more, it's someone living in us.

The Bible says God is love. Again, the Greek word there is agape. God is agape and agape means God's in us. You can't really separate the two. God lives in us by the person of the Holy Spirit so this unique special love of Christendom is in us and it's God in us.

Christians, therefore, love one another in an added dimension. It is true and it is right that we love one another the way natural men love one another. We get to liking this about each other, we have this in common or that in common. We like this personality or that personality. We like that hairstyle. It's a million and one things that we can like and even love about one another like the world loves one another, but we have an extra added dimension, an agape factor that only the assembly of the saints has together. No one else has this. It's a supernatural love that only we possess.

The Bible tells us God is love, that's agape again. The Bible tells us love or agape love, that love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5 when the apostle lists the fruit of the Spirit, what does he list first? Love, agape, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, because agape is the foundation stone, it's the core that all the others come out from. It's the main thing and here's what I think we miss so often in Christendom today: agape is not only in us as individual Christians, the agape factor is in complete if we, if it is not shared corporately. Agape wasn't meant for you just to have it and go be-bopping through the world and if you come upon another Christian, hey, you fellowship in, in agape love for one another and that's the way. No, that's not the way it works. That is good but God has wisdom to have organized us into local assemblies, local churches, and there agape thrives, is shared, it's a corporate reality and it's meant to be that. Listen to me, without that a great part of God's great wisdom and plan is vacated, it's missed. Local church assemblies are essential. You say, "Pastor, we can't assemble right now." I know but this is only gonna be for a while then we're gonna get back to an essential component of what it means to be a Christian and that's to bring us all together. But, but, but nothing's more important when we get together than the strengthening and the sharing of agape among us.

Now listen, when local churches are fellowshiping in the flow of agape, at no other time and in no other way is God more seen and glorified than at that time. Now Satan constantly substitutes and counterfeits here. There are countless professing Christian assemblies where far too often agape, true agape fellowship is way over here on the side and what they're calling the love of God is more what the world calls love. It's not true agape fellowship. It's not bad, it's just way out of balance. They may have phileo, that's the Greek word for I call it familial love and its, has the broad idea of when, when you have something in common with somebody, you just kinda feel bonded to them. We love the same team. We love the same hobbies. We love the same whatever it is and so we just feel bound, we love, "Boy, I just love them." It's not wrong, it's just not important in the church unless agape is under it supporting it, giving it its right definition.

So we come to this thing called the agape factor and it's gonna flavor all that we're gonna say and that's the word here in, in, in Hebrews 10:24 when he says, "I want you to consider how to stimulate one another unto agape," not phileo, that's not the word here, not eros, that's romantic love, that's the Greek word, that's not here. Matter of fact, eros does not occur in the Greek New Testament. But agape, that's very very very very very important that you begin to grasp, "Okay, what's this unique kind of love I'm to be stirring one another up about, strengthening in the fellowship?"

Well, let's unpack it. How do we, then, come to the assembly of believers? 1. Come to the assembly focused on your brother's need. Now his need defined by God through his word, not his need defined by your emotions or your investigative powers. Come focused on his needs. The verse says here in verse 24 come consider, consider how. When you come together, come considering how. The word "consider" there means "to get your mind attentively fixed." It's an emphatic. God is saying, "Take special consideration over the spiritual condition of those in your local assembly." It reminds me of a, a, of my rifle and the scope on my rifle, and I've got a lot of guns, but on a number of my guns I have scopes. Now it's one thing to aim the rifle in the right direction but that's almost worthless, matter of fact, it pretty much is worthless if the scope is not focused in. That's the idea here. Ah, the point is do you come to church assemblies? That's good. That's aiming the rifle. Do you go to your small group where you can really interact with one another and fellowship in the body? Yes. That's aiming the rifle. But here's the question: are you getting in focus according to God's word how you can, or where a brother's need is and how you can help him? Now that's different and that's the key.

Now I don't want to diminish this aspect and for many of us this is the, this is the primary way we're involved and that is by being there, by showing your love for the word, your love for the brethren, your love for the will of God and the church of God, that in itself is, is getting, is helping people. So that is getting a good focus but there are times when we have to go beyond that. We'll unpack that a little bit more. So my point is don't just be pointing the gun by attending faithfully and yet be out of focus. Point the gun and then get focused in, "What's her need? Where is she spiritually? Where is he spiritually? How can I help and encourage God's work in their life right now?" You know what this is, are you listening brother and sister out there in cyberland? Do you go to church lazy? Do you go to church just kinda, "Ah, here we go. Hope the preacher's, I hope the preacher's excited this morning. I hope, I hope Brother Tom's got something good to sing this week, something, something to get me kinda up." Look, you're upside down. You're to be considering, you're to be putting some work in focusing on, "What's my brother or sister's need in spiritually speaking and how can I meet it?"

Now he uses the word "how, consider how." It has the idea of we need to study the Scriptures and study the brethren to discern how we are to minister to them. I've got four quick thoughts here. I don't know if this will be on the outline but four quick thoughts that I think will be helpful, and I mentioned some of these before and I will say these have made an impact on my own life.

1. Die to self every day. If you're gonna learn to focus in on meeting a brother and sister's needs, it means you've got to get over you. "Here's what I want. Here's what I want to get. I wanna go be blessed. I want, I want..." Look, the way you get blessed in church is when you die to yourself and focus on, "Who can I minister to according to the word of God and for God's glory in through their lives?" Die to self every day, especially get up on Sunday morning purposing, "Lord, I'm going to church today dying to self," and you watch how much more joy you get out of the worship service and your small group time when you do that. Die to self every day.

Secondly, start your focusing on Saturday night. I don't think it's any coincidence that the world throws out some of the most exciting and interesting junk to capture our attention on Saturday nights but years ago, well, to be honest with you, 40 years ago, that's when I started preaching, I began the discipline of pulling myself aside on Saturday nights to get in the word, study and pray. That, that's getting you in the flow of what the Spirit of God is doing so that you're more able when you go to church on Sunday morning to meet that brother's need.

Die to self every day. Start your focus on Saturday night. Pray for wisdom. "God, give me wisdom as I go to my small group this week. Where, where is someone that I could help meet a need?" By the way, this doesn't exclude, um, ah, natural physical needs. Some of that may be there, but it always goes back to the agape factor, the spiritual need is the foundation stone. Look for opportunities, pray for wisdom.

So we want to study the brethren, we want to get wisdom from the word to know how to meet that need. All that's involved in focus on a brother's need. All that's involved in Paul's word here "considering how." When I was, ah, years ago, I was speaking at a, the Hindustan Bible Institute in India, actually I was lecturing there all week and they had 90 something church planters in this group, 90 different guys who were going out in all these villages and towns and there's a billion of them in India, it seems like, planting churches, and I was teaching and preaching on the importance of organizing a church into small groups so that real body life can take place, and I'll never forget their leader stood up and he wasn't disrespectful but he challenged me. He said, "You, you can't do that in India. You can't organize these churches into small groups." Well, he was quite clear, he was quite firm, he wasn't disrespectful so I thought, "How? I need wisdom here. How am I gonna respond to this?" And then I said, "Why do you say that?" And he said, "Because when we go and, and get folks converted and we organize a church and we put some key men in charge of certain families, almost always those men break off and start their own churches with their little group." I said, "Brother, the small group principle is not your problem, it's the leadership principle that's your problem. Those churches were not ready. They didn't have the maturity among the men to be organized into small groups." I think that's a good example of how you study a situation, "Hey, what's the spiritual need here and how I can, how can I fix this or how can I help that?"

So you come to the assembly focused on a brother or sister's need, "How can I work with God in their lives this Sunday?" 2. You come to church, a step beyond that, active in helping him or her change. Active. I'm gonna be active about that, and that's, that's what Paul brings out here in verse 24, "let us consider," then the phrase, "how to stimulate." How to stimulate. Now "stimulate" is a word that is, is, is translated often "provoke." It's even translated "contention." It's kinda like sandpaper. Now I have to throw out a balancing statement here because some of you wake up every morning determined to be sandpaper to somebody. You wake up in the morning looking for somebody you're gonna rub the wrong way and, and maybe you don't mean it, it's just kinda the way you're geared. You know what you need to do? You need to re-gear. Some of you just, you're just a challenger. You're just, you're just confront, that's just what you do and that could

be a great gift but it's gotta be brought under control. Some of you are like so much sandpaper, we need to call you Sandy.

In Acts 15:39, we have an example of this word that Paul translates, or, or our translators translate "stimulate" here and in 15:39 it says, "And there occurred such a sharp disagreement," that's the word, a sharp, a contention, a rubbing, "that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and they sailed away to Cyprus." So here Barnabas and Paul are having a dispute, a contention, provoking one another to some degree about, "Should Mark go along with us after he fell out on us a while back?" Paul, ah, disagreed with Barnabas and Barnabas took Mark and they went their separate ways.

Literally the scholars tell us this word "stimulate" here comes from a root adjective which means "sharp" and a root noun which can be translated "vinegar." When Jesus was dying on the cross, the root word was used when they said, "They gave him sour vinegar to drink." Ah, what does vinegar do? Vinegar provokes you. I'm fairly fond of vinegar and salt potato chips and I don't know, about the third bite of vinegar and salt potato chips and it provokes me. It, it stimulates me. It, it, it's got a pop to it and for me it, it provokes me or stimulates me to drink Diet Coke. It, it gets a reaction out of me.

That's what Paul is saying here. When you go to church, you're kinda, you're kinda prodding a little bit, you're kinda pushing a little bit, you're kinda sandpapering a little bit to get a person to go take the next step in where they need to be and to being pleasing and obedient to the Lord. Now here again, be balanced. Ah, again, some of you hit the doors with a, with you got a list. "I'm gonna get this one and this one," and that's not what he's talking about but he is talking about this: we come to church to help each other be more in the flow of God's will and God's word.

You know, um, it, it's good to eat ice cream. Can I say that? Is that okay? I think it's good to eat ice cream. I like eating ice, but sometimes you need a little vinegar too and there's far too much notion in professing churches today that we gonna make this thing about 97% ice cream around here and cotton candy. Cotton candy is alright but God says through Paul here when you come to church, be determined with meekness and humility to be some vinegar, have some sharpness from time to time and help a brother or sister along in their journey with God.

Now certainly as I pointed out, there can be a provoking that's always negative and wrong and sinful, but this is a righteous and good provoking and stirring up. Some, ah, examples of, ah, the way we want to be is, um, Jacob the Bible says in Genesis 35 was provoked to put away strange gods. In Judges 2, the children of Israel were provoked to sacrifice unto the Lord. William Gow, who I believe wrote the best commentary on Hebrews says, quote, "By such provocations, those who provoke others show more respect to the spiritual good of their soul than to please them in their corrupt state." Again, agape is the root. We're gonna bring this out again in just a moment, but it's that love that God's put in our hearts that's special and unique. We want them to do well but more than that we want them to glorify God. It, look, your provoking, correcting, exhorting, whatever you want to call it, is not about you, it's about them and God's glory.

It's not about, "Boy, I got this one and I got that one, and boy, I straightened her out and I got him fixed today." I'm gonna tell you what's the problem in that whole thing is you. This is, that's about you. A biblical godly provoking and correcting is, is humble and full of self-introspection and meekness, though at times, and God's word points this out, that's often more the role of the pastor or the elder in the church, there has to be a sharp rebuke. You see, it is sin to leave a brother in a sinful state, so Paul tells these Hebrew folks who are prone to have some falling away among them, some folks who are falling out on them, he said, "Those of you that are solid, get to church. Assemble together. When you get there, focus on who's got a spiritual need to keep them strong and I want to be an active agent in God's hands to help them get on track with God."

Now very very often what God intends to happen, I would say the majority of the time is you take the preached word and you follow it up, you follow the truths of the preached word, and, and follow it on through. The word of God is preached at length, small groups follows up, and then does the proper provoking of one another, or, or stirring of one another unto love and good deeds, we'll get to in just a moment.

I remember when we did our, our first membership update here at Grace Life Church. It wasn't a few years after I became your senior pastor that I realized this is dishonoring to God and a disservice to people to have these hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people's names on the membership roll who never come to church. And again, I thought everybody would think that was a wonderful thing to do, and so I preached on it thoroughly, there's not, look, we're not gonna do anything, we're not gonna reform a church on anything but what's very very clear in the Bible, alright? And secondly, we found out very very clear in church history. So, so we preached on it at, at length and then we commissioned the small groups to try to call, contact, visit, and despite their best efforts, of course it was so many people at that time, it's almost impossible to get in touch with them, so we sent out letters and tried to be kind and tried to be gracious in tone, but told them, "You know, we want you to be back in church. Is there a need we can meet? Is there a problem we can discuss with you? Have you become providentially hindered? Let us know. We want to care about you because we want to know who truly ought to be on the membership roll and if you can't come, if there's a reason, we wanna try to fix it."

Well, when those letters went out, I'm gonna tell you, it provoked some people. It splashed vinegar on some people. Ah, some people were, I remember some, some older moms, moms of adult men who, who had basically abandoned the church for decades were just very upset that we were gonna take their baby's name off the roll, and I thought, "Boy, how did we get the rolls mixed up?" The important roll is the roll in heaven, that's the salvation roll, the roll of the church is the service roll until you get home to heaven, and all who are on salvation's roll ought to be on the service roll, and if you're not showing up in serving, then you don't need to be on that roll, and it probably means you're not on the other roll either. But it stirred some people up. To some, some it provoked them to repent and come back and be faithful and that's what, that's a good thing, that's what we're talking about here, but for some it provoked them to rebellion and forsaking.

Peter talks about this ministry we have one to another like this where we're active in helping one another change. 2 Peter, um, 1:12-13, "Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling," as long as I'm humanly here with you, "to stir you up by way of reminder." Same concept. Stir up. That's what the assembly is for. You see, some of you have been out there away from the assembly, it's not your fault, we're trying to honor and colabor with our government in doing good during this pandemic, but right now there's some of you, matter of fact, could it be true including Jeff Noblit all of us need to get back together again and splash some vinegar around? Stirring us up again? You know why? Because we're weak. We need the assembly of one another together.

I, ah, remember reading the story of D. L. Moody. D. L. Moody, what 100-150 years ago was the most famed evangelist in America. He was friends with Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He wasn't, ah, brilliant in the Queen's English. He was pretty blunt and crash, crass rather, and, and, and, and pointed in his preaching but a lot of people were converted under his preaching. But D. L. Moody grew up in a troubled home and D. L. Moody was a very shy introvuted boy and in those days Sunday schools was only for reaching children whose parents didn't go to church. That's generally the way Sunday school started and so they had Sunday schools for little boys, little girls, a wonderful thing, and, and this, ah, this man had D. L. Moody enrolled in his Sunday school and he learned very quickly that little D. L. Moody was not gonna keep coming because he was embarrassed. He didn't know his Bible. He didn't know the books of the Bible. He just didn't know anything. I can, I understand that. That's the way I came to church the first time. But this Sunday school teacher took him aside before the Sunday school lesson every week and showed him where those books of the Bible were and underlined the verses they would be looking at so D. L. Moody would be prepared. Now that's studying and considering and helping him come along. That's the kind of thing we need to be about in the church.

III. We come to the assembly resolved to stay in the arena. So first of all he said consider, focus, get in focus what a brother's need is, consider. Then he said stimulate, be active in it. There's a time to be active. And now he says to who? I mean, are you just, are we just as Christians supposed to go out into the world and if we bounce into a Bible study at the coffee shop or Fellowship of Christian Athletes at the school and a Christian organization or fellowship at work? That's all wonderful and good. I'm glad you're in those things but that's not, I can't find a verse on any of that but I can find an abundance of verses on the organized local church. That's the primary and that's what he means when he says one another here. That's the arena that you're primarily responsible for. Through the years I've had people ask me, "Pastor, should I get involved in this ministry and that ministry?" And I think some of those are very very good but here's what I always say, "Now you've already got an obligation when God added you to this church. Now you fulfill that first, everything else gets left over energy."

That's the arena, one another. You see, we are not here as Christians to make the world a better world. Let me say that again: we are not here as Christians to make the world a

better world, we are here to build his church in the world and when we do that well, it's the best anyone can do to make the world a better world. Did you get that? There's a lot in so-called liberal Christianity today that has basically adopted what the world calls social work and social justice and, and meeting needs and there's good in that and so many in Christendom have abandoned the Gospel, have abandoned the true church and dumbed down Christianity to just being in the league with the worldly of trying to help those who need help. Well, we always want to help those who need help. We always want to help those who have special needs etc., but the best way we can do that is by keeping our arena in focus, that is, the local church and building it up. When the church is most truly the church, then it is most truly the salt and light that helps the community the best. Always in that order. I make no apologies for that. Certainly the church should be involved in all kinds of issues of social need and social justice, absolutely, but as an overflow of our primary devotion to build his church. We're not here to make the world a better world. Satan's the god of this world and I don't want a little better Satan controlled world. I'm here to build God's church in the world which is the best thing I can do to help the world be a better place.

So this one another here speaks of that special concern and devotion I have for fellow members of God's local church family. Again, Galatians 6:10 which is what, what we call our benevolence ministry that goes beyond the doors of the church, goes beyond the family of the church. "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people," absolutely, but there's a balance here, "and especially to those who are the household of the faith." You have a priority but do your best to love and care for all. You see, what we have together as Christians, we have the agape factor. I'm gonna talk more about that in just a minute. What we have together as Christians infinitely exceeds what any other collectivity enjoys. It's just, it's not, we're just not a little different, we're just not, we are not just a little more compassionate version of the average guy out there, we're just not a little more loving version of the average man in the world. No, we have something radically different, we have this agape factor, we have God in us, and that's the one another. Get with those who have also the agape factor in local church settings. There's a oneness in the local church family. It, indeed – now listen to me – it is indeed a creation of God. Not only are you a new creature in Christ Jesus, the church itself is a great creation. He's creating a collectivity, a people out of the world and at this point still within the world but not of the world.

Those who are of the spiritual new birth have the seed, or as the Puritan fathers used to say, the germ of the special sympathy one toward another in the church. Here's a verse that amplifies that thought, Romans 12:15-16, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation." So our devotion is to one another. Now the converse of that also is implied here, that is, we do not want to be a disservice to one another or do evil ever to one another in the body of Christ. We must never be like King Saul who in his excessive jealousy considered David, but how did Saul consider David? He considered him in a way that he might destroy him. You see him in 1 Samuel 18:17 talking about how he would get David involved in the army and let the army bring David to his death. We don't want to be like the jealous

administrators in Babylon who considered Daniel but not for his good, they considered, "How can we get rid of this guy?" Remember they set up a, to entrap David or Daniel rather. We don't want to be like the Pharisees who considered Christ, they considered him alright but how did they consider him? They considered how they might entrap him and ruin him. This must never exist in the church. We must be the antithesis of that. The church and the assembly of the church is the place where we wanna walk in love and in wisdom one toward another, seeking out the spiritual good of the brethren because that's what we are. We all have been radically affected by this agape principle.

So let's get to that. IV. We come to church embracing our foremost objective. We come to church embracing our foremost objective. He says in verse 24, well, let's back it all, let's get the, the run, the view of it, let's consider how to stimulate, get in focus your brother's need, get active meeting it, under love and good deeds. One another was the local assembly, now the fourth thing, to love and good deeds, the agape. Now agape that exists in us as Christians is the primary grace. It's a course of affections and of actions that everything else builds upon.

Now William Gow says that the word "agape" comes from two other words: one word means rest, and one word means greatly. Think about that, to rest greatly. Agape means you've come to rest greatly in someone or in something. So we rest in what we love so that we are distressed in parting with it. We've all heard the testimony, some of you have lived the reality of being a mom whose adult son has gone away to the war and your soul is in anxiety, there's no rest until he's back sitting at your kitchen table and sleeping in his own bed. The rest comes then. This love, this love that means to rest greatly or greatly to rest is so wonderfully present in God. It's so magnificently true in God, the Bible even says God is love. Now think about it. God has now come to the point where he rests in us because of the merits of his Son on our behalf. That's a beautiful picture that God says, "I have whole, wondrous, restful satisfaction in you because of what My Son has accomplished on your behalf." Greatly at rest. Powerful truth. It's a powerful picture.

Now the Bible says in Matthew 22:37, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind." Now here's the problem: we don't do that. We can't do that. We can only begin to grasp and do that when the agape gets in us because that word there is agape.

Hebrews 10:16 reminds us and this is in the context, of course, of 10:24 that we're looking at. Look at Hebrews 10:16, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord." Now just stop right there. What he doesn't say here is, "I'm gonna tell them do it this way, do it this way, do it this way. Put this on, put this on." No, he doesn't say that, does he? "I will put My laws upon their heart. I'm gonna change the inside of them," that's the agape factor, "and on their minds I will write them." So he says, "I'm gonna change them," that's what we call the new birth, "I'm gonna change them on the inside and coming in when I come in is this agape love, and they're gonna be the only folks that have it," and that's why they have to get together because there's something about agape in the heart that makes me want to be with you and you with me and I feel incomplete, I feel lonely, even perhaps desolate if I can't get with the people of

God. And I hope you're longing for some of that now. Matter of fact, if you're out there and this thing of listening to a sermon once a week over the internet at your convenience and you're saying, "This is kinda pretty good church thing right here," I want to tell you something, you don't have agape. Something's missing in your heart and you need to ask God this morning, this day, whenever you hear this, "God, what's missing in there? Have I got the changed heart?"

I've told you many times before, I've been preaching here for going on 40 years and, um, I, I get weary in the work and sometimes I say I just got to have a break, and by the way, any pastor that's worth his salt and is putting energy into preaching better take some breaks or he's not gonna be good long. But then when I take a break, going into the second week, you know what's in me? I've gotta preach. I want to preach. I want to get back to church. Well, there's agape in there and I want to be with the agape people.

I've heard that there are support groups for people who have had open heart surgery. There's something about that that's just, it has a unique, ah, ah, complex recovery to it and, and it's good and I think it's a good thing that they'll form these groups so they can get together and share about what they're going through and, um, I thought, well, that's what the church is. We've all had heart transplants and we need to get together to say, "What's this all mean?" I, and it is kinda mysterious, we can't really put our finger on exactly what it is, but we know it is.

The preacher one time, somebody asked the preacher and said, "Do you know what the unction is when you're preaching?" And he said, "I'm not sure what it is but I do know when it ain't." Well, I'm not sure what it is but I can get with brothers and sisters in Christ and I can't define what it is but it's special. I later referred to it in my notes as a magnet. There's a special magnet we have one for another.

So this command in this text to stimulate one another unto agape concerns stimulating, getting activated this unique love placed in us by God at the new birth, this special love for God and special love for God's children. That's where he's going with this. We come to church because Tom Clay leaks that love, Matt Fowler leaks that love and Jeff Noblit leaks that love. I just called them because that's the only people that's here. We leak that agape a little bit and we need to get it fueled back up and somehow when we get together and we open the Bible in small groups and we open the Bible and hear the preaching of the word, it gets stimulated and stirred and provoked back up again and the love of the brethren comes back up higher in my heart again. I need the assembly of God's church and so do you, and if you're not going to a church that really is intentional about agape stirring, you need to pray for that church. They don't have really a reason to meet if that's not the foundation of what they're about. "Yeah, but we do this and we do that, we do this, so much fun." I don't care what you do, the world does all of that. The only thing we've got the world doesn't have is agape because that's God in us.

Now I won't go into it but 1 Thessalonians 4:9 gives you phileo, the love that's common in the word, brotherly love, familiar kind of love, and it gives agape, this God love. 1 Thessalonians 4:9, "Now as to the love," phileo, "of the brethren, you have need for no

one to write to you." I think what he's saying is you know, that's natural. You grew up with that kind of love. You loved your brothers and sisters. You love your mom, your grandmother. You loved your friend down the street. That's natural. Nobody has to teach you that but there's a supernatural part of you, last part of 1 Thessalonians 4:9, "for you yourselves are taught by God to agape one another." You see, agape produces phileo for other believers but it always flows in that direction. We bear the image of the earthly or we used to bear the image of the earthly and we love the earthly. Now we bear the image of the heavenly and we are learning to love those who bear this heavenly image.

So in an outline form just briefly. Agape, 1, its origin is in God. The origin of agape is in God. Love is from God, 1 John 4:7 says. Now of course, all kinds of love is from God as he originally created us but there's this special Christian love, it's a unique, ah, part of God's forming us when he forms us in the new birth.

Secondly, it is mysterious. There is some mystery to it. It's, it's part of the new birth and is not the new birth mysterious? He says everyone who loves is born of God. He doesn't say everyone who loves has learned some seminar to learn how to love this way, he said, "No, it's not just something learned, there is a learning to understanding it and exhibiting it, but it's something God did. It's mysterious."

3. It's unique to Christians. It's unique to Christians. John 17:26, "I have made Your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." Now he's only talking about believers there. There's a special reality, God's in us and his love is agape is in us.

And then the last one, it's fruitful or it produces the other fruit. Agape's the main thing, then there's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. Agape's the main thing, then there's rebukes and reproofs and exhortations. Agape's the main thing and then there is encouraging and compassion and care. It all flows out of agape.

Phileo, that love that's common to mankind, we get the name Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love from that Greek phileo, but all men have that and we have it too as Christians and it's not wrong, it just needs to stay in its place. The phileo flows on top of the agape. The agape gives it its flavor and defines phileo. There's times when you can feel the deepest sentiment, brotherly kindness, compassion for someone, and you need to step back into agape and say, "Yeah, but is that right?" Because they might not need deep compassion right now, they might need firm rebuke right now according to agape, according to God's wisdom. You see, agape defines how to function in phileo, brotherly love. It's the fountain the others flow from. It flavors all of our works and phileo is weak and even sometimes wicked apart from being managed by the agape in us.

So as we get the landing field and close, we're to come to the assembly focused on a brother's need. Consider. You come, that's point the gun, now get in focus, what is needed here? Secondly, you gonna be active. You're gonna stimulate, Paul says here, provoke, throw a little vinegar on it, get them to change. Thirdly, you gonna be resolved to stay in the arena. I know my primary duty and responsibility is the local church, the

assembly I belong to. Fourthly, you're going to embrace the foremost objective and that is to stir up the agape that's in us.

Now remember I said William Gow defines agape from two root words, to rest greatly? So to help us better define this, let's close with these, what, four thoughts.

1. When you have agape, you're learning to rest greatly in God. Wow, that's just good stuff. I wish I was all the way there. When they say there's a pandemic and it's natural and normal for us to have some anxiety and some fear, but that challenges us to stir up the agape and rest more fully and greatly in God. So when we come to church every Sunday – now listen to me – Paul says here writing to a church with fickleness and falling away happening, he said, "The rest of you get there and keep stirring up in one another's hearts let's find our full confidence in God, that means in His word." So let's open the book – now listen – let's judge our feelings, our emotions, our fears, our anxieties by the book and help all of us stir up the agape to rest fully in God again this week. Some of us need to be back to so badly because you need to restimulate the resting in God in your soul and God's ordained you need the body of Christ to help you get there. Isn't God wise? He didn't have to do it that way but I'm thrilled the way he did it.

Then God, secondly, this is natural in God's will. Now that always means God's word, God's word is God's will. So we come together to help one another rest in the will of God. That means, ah, for these particular Jewish professing converts, some of them were slipping back to the law, slipping back to the world, and the brothers are supposed to sit down with them in a sense and say, "Wait, brother, let's, let's rest in God's will, what the book says, not what your feelings are thinking right now."

Resting in God's will is always resting in God's word, thirdly, in God's people. Is it not possible you can get kinda hunky-dory at rest hanging out with folks who are not full of agape and you need to be reprovoked, you need to be restirred to say, "God, grow me so that I genuinely actually am at great rest with the people of God who are striving to do the will of God." Is that not beautiful stuff? It's just beautiful. God's word's so good. Man, I, I want to go to a church where there's enough agape people that they help me to joy in them. I mean, if people just forsake the assembly, don't get together, this just gets diminished, diminished, diminished, but I'm here to tell you can't go, if you're really his, you can't go too long, you gotta go get another hit of vinegar, you gotta go get around them again.

I was somewhere a long time ago and I have good fellowship with most of the people who used to go to church here with us. Many of them love the Lord and just God's using them somewhere else, whatever it is, but we just met in a restaurant, I mean, we're talking small talk and he said, "You know, I've been through this and been through that." He said, "Brother Jeff, I, I need some Jeff Noblit preaching." I think I know what he meant. I just need that the word of God again just pounding in my soul again to stir me back up afresh. He was, he was yearning to rest again within and with God's people.

I bet you could guess the last one: all for the glory of God. All this glorifies God because this is God's wisdom and we do God's work, God's way, according to God's wisdom, in this text it's the local church and how we help each other, then it shows God's wisdom to the world because I'm gonna tell you, I don't know what the world's gonna do, I don't know where the world's going, I don't know what's gonna happen to the world but I do know God's church is gonna make it. God's church is gonna make it. It's all gonna be about him and about his glory.

Well, that's the agape factor. That's the way you come to church and I hope and pray we get to all come soon. I love you as your pastor, Jesus loves you, the Father loves you. You be safe and by the way, though we can't meet together and that's the primary means, there is ways to minister to one another even though we're separate and you're doing, I hear so many good reports. Keep on keeping on doing it.