The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son …
– Matthew 22:2

Once upon a time there was a family of two mighty Beings. Their relationship of love was so close that They were often known by a single name. One day, They decided that They wanted to share Their love with others. But instead of creating little robots, They made people who, like themselves, had freedom of choice. They made a beautiful home for these people and created marriage to give Their creation a taste of the relationship they were intended to have with Their Creators. The new people were also given one simple rule to follow.

But these people would not follow their Creators' rule. This made the mighty Beings sad, because They knew that the penalty for not obeying this rule was an eternal, final death which would exclude Their creation from being part of Their family. In Their infinite love, one of these Beings promised to come to the world one day and die in their place.

As the years passed and the people increased in multitude, He chose a special people to whom He spoke and whom He loved more fully and purely than the best of husbands loves his wife. He rescued them from flood, fought against their enemies, and freed them from slavery, but they turned away from Him like an unfaithful wife. He was jealous and angry, but He never
stopped loving them. And true to His promise, He did come to their world and took on himself the penalty justice demanded for His people's wrongs. In doing so, He gained the name of Son and the Being who sent Him became known as the Father.

The first marriage the Son had made with His people, the marriage to which they had been unfaithful, ended with His death. But the love that these Beings had for their creation did not end. His Father brought Him back to life and gave back the power He had before coming to the world They had created. They offered Their creation a new marriage agreement which was faultless and eternal. They offered redemption and an opportunity to live forever with Them as the Son's beloved bride.

Some people did not believe anyone would dare to die for them. Some did not believe that anyone needed to die for them. But there were others who realized what the Son had done and were so in awe of Him that they devoted their lives to making themselves ready for this marriage. They knew that the One who loved them enough to die for them would return to bring them into His Father's house as His bride.

It felt as if they waited a long time. But just as He had delivered His people from perils in the past, so did He powerfully aid His bride for the time that she had to be away from Him. And finally, in a triumphal victory over evil and death, He returned to claim the bride who had made herself ready for him.

The wedding feast was grander than anything ever imagined. The family, finally grown according to the plan these Beings envisioned when They first made creation, overflowed with love.

And They lived happily ever after.

When I was growing up in the Church, I don't recall hearing the Bible called a story of love. Even though we acknowledged that “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8-16), many people I met seemed to read that statement as so simple that they could move on to something else, like prophecy. Yet, in essence, the entire Bible is about the Father preparing a Bride for His Son. I find it a great comfort and encouragement to think of my Savior as a loving redeemer-husband Who longs for me, and all His people, to marry Him and become part of the God-family.

There are several reasons I use the word “story” to describe the Biblical account. People
often equate the word “story” with the idea of untruth. However, the original, and now obscure, use of this word referred to true narratives and “the most frequent application was to passages of Bible history and legends of saints.”¹ Even today, the modern idea of “story” includes truth as well as fiction, a use often seen when someone talks about the story of their life.²

As human beings, we use stories to explain the mysterious, pass on knowledge to our children, and share our inner thoughts. People gravitate towards stories, whether fictional or to share a real experience. We tell or hear stories every time we communicate with another person, and many of us compulsively search out more stories in film, writing, or music. Storytelling is a captivating, and necessary, art.

One reason we gravitate towards tales of heroism, rescue, and love is that there is a basic need in our souls for a relationship with God and His Son. Stories where the handsome prince rides up and rescues the fair princess speak to our longing to know the Prince of Peace, Who laid His life down to rescue His bride from captivity to sin. Jesus Christ is the most powerful, most loving, and most perfect hero-lover to ever exist, far surpassing even the most ambitious human attempts to fashion a story's hero. The Bible is a living, dynamic book that includes instruction, history, prophecy, and a revelation of the plan of God which reads like a story. My personal theory as to why the Bible reads like a story is because our idea of what makes a good story comes from the sequential narrative God uses to reveal His plan.

**What Is A Hero?**

My favorite English professor at university had an interesting definition for hero. If Marissa runs out in front of a truck to rescue Little Timmy, he said in class, and gets killed saving Timmy's life, I'll feel very bad about that but she won't be a hero because saving Timmy was a split-second decision. A hero is someone who has time to think about their actions and who understands what their heroism will cost. How many of you, he asked the class, would run into a burning building to save Little Timmy if you knew for a fact that 1) you would die, but 2) you would save Timmy's life? In the both classes where he used this example, not one person raised their hand.

Jesus Christ is that hero. 1 Peter 1:19-20 tells us that we were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was

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² “story, n.” L4.a and e. OED Online.
foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.” Even before the world was formed, Jesus Christ knew that He would have to die to redeem the people He and His Father were creating. He had thousands of years to think about His actions and knew full well what His sacrifice would entail. Even at the last minute, He could have changed his mind. He said, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Mat. 26:53-54).

His sacrifice was the most conscious decision ever made. No one forced Jesus Christ to die in our place but, knowing He was the only One Who could, He gave Himself willingly. That is what makes it a story of love. “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).
Chapter 2 – God in the Old Testament

I can't count how many times I have heard people say that the God of the Old Testament was an angry, vengeful God and the God of the New Testament is peaceful and loving. We often like to think of Jesus Christ taking away the harshness of the Old Testament when He took the penalty for our sins upon Himself. But though that might sound nice, we know that God is unchanging. Part of what makes Him God is that He is not fickle.

James tells us there “is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” in the Father (Jam. 1:17). God is Who He is – that is how He defines Himself (Ex. 3:14). So how did a God who ordered death by stoning for crimes including witchcraft, adultery, and murder change so drastically that when He came in the flesh, He stopped the Pharisees from executing a woman caught “in the very act” of adultery (Jon. 8:4)?

The answer, of course, is that God did not change. Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). The problem is in misreading the Bible. To portray God in the New Testament as only defined by peace and love is to ignore verses talking about His just recompense for sin. He not only knows “how to deliver the godly out of temptations,” but He will also “reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet. 2:9). In Hebrews, we are warned, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31).

God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), but He is also justice and judgment. The apostle Paul says that because God is righteous, He will judge the world (Rom. 3:6). In fact, a large portion of the first three chapters of Romans is devoted to a discussion of God's righteous judgment against those who persist in sin. The fact that God is love demands that He is also a God of justice, which includes punishment for sin. This fact did not change between the Old Testament and the New. God is consistently multi-dimensional, and in the Old Testament He is a God of love as much as He is a God of judgment.

Love has always been integral to God's relationship with His people. The commandments Christ called greatest (Mat. 22:37-39; Mar. 12:29-31) are contained in the the law delivered to Moses: “thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” and “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Deu. 6:5; Lev. 19:5).

God's conversation with the Israelites about love was not limited to instructions on how they were to love Him and others. He also declared His great love for them.
For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

“The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the LORD loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

− Deuteronomy 7:6-8

This emphasis on love makes perfect sense when you realized that the God who spoke with Israel was the same being who came to this world as Jesus Christ. John 1:1-3 tells us that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” The Greek word here is logos, which represents Christ “as the Second Person of the Godhead who is the eternal expression of the divine intelligence and the disclosure of the divine essence.”

As the Word, Jesus Christ is the One who dealt with the children of Israel and spoke with His chosen people. In addition to His role as the expression of the Godhead's thoughts, Jesus Christ was personally involved in the creation of mankind. In Revelation 3:14, He is called “the beginning of the creation of God,” which “literally refers to Him as the originator or cause of creation.” In Colossians, we are told that Jesus is

the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.

Colossians 1:15-17

Reading these verses, it makes sense that the Person of the Godhead who performed the act of creation is the same being who entered into a marriage covenant with the Children of Israel and later died to create the New Covenant and save His bride from captivity to sin. That level of personal involvement as God With Us (Mat. 1:23) demonstrates an unending, unchanging love throughout the entire history of mankind, and even sometime before that.

4 Additional evidence of this can be found in 1 Cor. 10:4, 9 and John 8:56-58.
God's Love, Old Testament Style

Once I started reading the Old Testament seeking the God of love, I was surprised how many passionate declarations the Lord God makes of His love for His chosen people. I used to think the Old Testament was boring. It was filled with lists of who begat whom, mind-numbing instructions for constructing buildings which no longer exist, and obscure prophecies. There were some good stories, and I liked Psalms and Proverbs, but other than that reading the Old Testament was something I did because I thought I should, not because wanted to. Then, something akin to the proverbial light bulb came on.

Instead of reading the Old Testament as a collection of lists, dry instruction, and prophecies I couldn't understand, I started reading God's words and trying to see Him. I knew if what the New Testament says about God's unchangeability is true, then the God who I loved in the New Testament was the same God I felt distant from in the Old Testament. With prayer and study, I started to realize that the incredible love story God is writing for us started long before the New Testament, and it is more wonderful than I had imagined.

In the next chapter, I will spend more time talking about what Paul called “a great mystery” – the parallels between human marriage and the Lord's relationship with His people. For now, I just want to touch on one aspect of this relationship that awed me when I first began this study.

In the books of prophecy, the Lord God talks to His people Israel, reminding them of the covenant they made when the Ten Commandments were delivered in Exodus. He compares the Israelites' unfaithfulness with a wife who “treacherously departeth from her husband” (Jer. 3:20). As part of the judgment He promised to those who were disobedient, He said, “I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy” (Ezk. 16:38). For breaking His covenant, the Israelites deserved death on a spiritual level, just as physical adultery was punished by physical death. But instead of condemning them, God promised to redeem His people from their sins and marry them again, establishing a New Covenant.

Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy

6 “And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Lev. 20:10).
land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah and thy
land Beulah for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as
a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the
bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.

Isaiah 62:3-5

Can there be anything more beautiful than these promises? God is often accused of being
unfairly harsh in His judgments, but how many human beings whose spouse was unfaithful
would be as merciful towards them as the Lord is toward His unfaithful people? Israel went “up
upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot” (Jer.
3:6), yet even after Israel's public dismissal of God, He says, “I will allure her, and bring her into
the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. ... And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD,
that thou shalt call Me Ishi [husband]; and shalt call Me no more Baali [master]” (Hos. 2:14,16).

And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in
righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will
even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD. And it
shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, ... and I will have
mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were
not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

Hosea 2:19-21, 23

God did not change when the switch was made from the Old to the New Covenant. The
loving God clearly seen in the New Testament is the same as He is in the Old Testament. Jesus
simply revealed more clearly who God has always been.
Chapter 3 – A Great Mystery

That human marriage is supposed to model Jesus Christ's relationship with His church is a point well established in scripture. Trying to more fully understand what this means has fascinated me for several years, and will undoubtedly continue through many more Bible studies.

From the first chapter of Genesis, God's focus was on building family relationships. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” and as God created each part of the heavens and earth He pronounced “it was good” (Gen. 1:1, 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Yet after creating man, the pinnacle of His creation, “the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Though Man was the part of God's creation made in His own image, Man was “not good” by himself. The solution to this dilemma was the creation of woman.

In the King James Version, God's decision to create woman is expressed, “I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen 1:26; 2:18). The word “help” comes from the Hebrew word 'èzer. It means helper, one who gives “aid or assistance,” “whether material or immaterial,” and is often used of the Lord's help for His people and for “the woman created as Adam's complementary helper.”

“Meet for him” is from neged, a preposition meaning, in this case, “corresponding to,” indicating “Eve's likeness to Adam.” Eve was created as a helper to complete Adam, who was not good by himself. Marriage was the first human relationship God established as part of His creative process, after which He could say “every thing that He had made ... was very good” (Gen. 1:31). As the first relationship God established between people, marriage is far more than simply a solution for loneliness.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians concerning marriage, he quoted Genesis 2 in saying, men are to love their wives

> even as the Lord the church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

 Ephesians 5:29-32

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The relationship between Christ and the Church is given as a reason for the institution of marriage. Just as Eve was formed from a part of Adam's body – a rib – so is the Church the body of Christ. Just as a man and wife should become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24), so is the Church to be at one with Christ.

At One As the Body of Christ

In His prayer before His betrayal, Jesus Christ showed His love for the people He was about to die for. The prayer begins with a request that the Father glorify Him, and speaks of having been given “power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him” (Joh. 17:2). He then defines eternal life as a relationship: “this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (Joh. 17:3). When Jesus Christ and His Father offer us eternal life, They are offering us a personal relationship with Them.

In this final prayer, Christ's focus was not on Himself. His prayer was for His disciples. He asked, “Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (Joh. 17:11). A little later, He expanded this prayer to include, not just the disciples who were with Him as the time, but also those

which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.

John 17:21-23

There is a lot said in these three short verses. When Jesus Christ was approaching His crucifixion, He prayed for us. He said that He gave the glory that His father gave to Him to those who believe, in order that we could share God's oneness. He said the Father loves us as He loves His own son.

I think that last point bears repeating. Jesus Christ said the Father loves us with the same love that He has towards His Son. In fact, He said this twice, adding at the end of this prayer, “I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (Joh. 17:26). We've been spending quite a bit of time talking about how much Christ loves His church, but the Father also has that kind of endless love for the
people He will wed to His Son. Both members of the Godhead want very much for us to be part of Their family.

The connection between this incredible love and marriage is clarified in Ephesians:

The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

Ephesians 5:23-30

We are called to be part of the church that belongs to Jesus Christ. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:12-13). The church is a body of believers gathered by God to become part of His family as His Son's wife. So we could fill that role, Jesus gave His life to sanctify us and make us like Him.

The Lord's Marriage to Israel

Use of marriage as a symbol of the relationship between the Lord and His people continues through both the Old and New Testaments. As the Word who was “in the beginning with God,” the One Who became Jesus Christ established the Old Covenant with ancient Israel (John 1:2; 1Cor. 10:4). The Ten Commandments were a type of wedding vows, to which Israel said, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). As we saw in Chapter 2, this covenant relationship is mentioned repeatedly, particularly concerning Israel's unfaithfulness.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people

Jeremiah 31:31-33
Though Israel forsook the Lord like an unfaithful wife, He is a divinely loving husband and did not cast her off entirely. Instead, He promised to redeem her and establish a new marriage covenant. The people of the Lord are to “fear not,” and He promised they “shalt not be put to shame” because

thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall He be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.

Isaiah 54:5-8

Similarities between human marriages and the relationship between Christ and His church are not confined to the kind of love we are to share. Parallels that could easily be lost on modern readers can be seen in the Jewish marriage customs. Unlike an engagement in the Western world, betrothal carried the legal weight of marriage, although the couple did not live together until after the marriage ceremony was performed.\(^\text{10}\) During the betrothal period, the bride was considered “consecrated or sanctified, set apart exclusively for her bridegroom.”\(^\text{11}\) Ending a betrothal required divorce, and unfaithfulness was punishable as adultery (Matt. 1:19).\(^\text{12}\)

In much the same manner, Paul speaks of the church being espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). In Hosea, the Lord says unto His people “I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD” (Hos 2:19-20). Though we still wait for the time when our Lord will return to take the Church as His bride, we are betrothed to Him now, and should be living as set apart exclusively for Him.

It is clear from scripture that Christ “hath purchased with His own blood” the Church whom He will marry (Acts 20:28). In keeping with the idea of a purchased, redeemed, bride, traditional Jewish marriage customs often included the concept of a bride price. “The prospective bridegroom would travel from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride” where he would negotiate with her father and settle the price he must “pay to purchase his bride.”\(^\text{13}\) In the


\(^{13}\) Showers, Renald. “Jewish Marriage Customs.”
interim between paying of the bride price – marking an official betrothal wherein the bride belongs to the bridegroom – and the culmination of the marriage, the groom would prepare a home for his new bride and the bride would make preparations for being a wife.

“I go to prepare a place for you,” Christ told His disciples the night He was betrayed, “[a]nd if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself” (John 14:2-3). This is a love-filled promise that He will not abandon His bride in a dangerous world. He will return to rescue her. In the mean time, our Lord has not forgotten us, but promises, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5).

According to Messianic teacher Glenn Kay, the betrothal period typically lasted about a year, and did not conclude until the groom's father had deemed his preparations complete and given permission for the groom to retrieve his bride. As both our Heavenly Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, God is the one who decides when His Son will return to claim His bride. “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mar. 13:32; Mat. 24:36).

In keeping with our ignorance concerning the exact time of Christ's return, both Glenn Kay and Renald Showers agree that the bride did not know the exact time of the bridegroom's coming and was always supposed to be ready for him to come and claim her. Likewise, we are promised that our Redeemer will come for us. Even though we don't know when, that assurance should be enough while we focus on making ready to marry Christ.

He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.

Isaiah 25:8-9

14 “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 6:16-17).
Chapter 4 – Kinsman Redeemer

When talking about God's love in the Old Testament, I left out one of my favorite passages so I could use it to open this chapter.

But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

Isaiah 43:1-4

Throughout the Bible, the Lord God's love for His people is declared in ransoming and redeeming them from captivity. Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14). There can be no love more zealous than that of Christ, Who died to reconcile with the wife who forsook Him and Who now lives to defend, protect, and bring her to Himself. This relationship is part of “the joy that was set before Him” for which Christ Jesus “endured the cross” (Heb 12:2).

A Kinsman Redeemer

The story of Ruth is one of my favorites. There was a famine in Israel, so a man named Elimelech and his wife Naomi took their two sons and moved to Moab. The sons married women named Orpah and Ruth. Several years passed. Elimelech and his sons both died, and Naomi decided to return to Israel. She tried to convince her daughters-in-law to return to their own families, but Ruth clung to her mother-in-law and said,

intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

Ruth 1:16-17

Impressed by Ruth's devotion, Naomi allowed her daughter-in-law to journey with her and they arrived in the city of Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest. In Leviticus, God had set in place a law instructing the Israelites to leave the gleanings of their own harvest for “the poor and stranger” (19:10). With no other means of support, Ruth turned to this law for hers and
Naomi's sustenance. Ruth happened upon the field belonging to Boaz, a kinsman of her deceased father-in-law. When Boaz learned who was gleaning in his field, he told Ruth to remain with his workers during the harvest and promised he would protect her while she worked there.

When Ruth returned to Naomi and told her about Boaz's kindness, Naomi said, “Blessed be he of the LORD, Who hath not left off His kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen” (Ruth 2:20). Strong's Bible Dictionary says the word translated “next kinsman” is the Hebrew ga’al, which means “to redeem (according to the Oriental law of kinship), that is, to be the next of kin (and as such to buy back a relative's property, marry his widow, etc.).” It can also be translated “avenger, deliver,” or redeemer. Recognizing Boaz as the man whom God's law appointed as the legal redeemer for her family, Naomi counseled Ruth to ask Boaz to do the part of a kinsman.

As her mother-in-law instructed, Ruth went to Boaz at night and lay down at his feet. When he wondered why, she boldly asked him to marry her and do the part of a kinsman redeemer. He blessed her for her kindness and virtue, and promised to care for her. In his commentary on Ruth, Matthew Henry says, “This may encourage us to lay ourselves by faith at the feet of Christ, that he is our near kinsman; having taken our nature upon him, he is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.” As Matthew Henry points out, the story of Ruth is more than a beautiful love story between two people. It is an allegory of the redeeming love Christ shows for His church.

The rights contained in the role of ga’al include several related aspects. A kinsman could redeem a possession that was sold (Lev. 25-26), purchase the freedom of one who was enslaved (Lev. 25:48-49), and avenge murder (Num. 35:19). In His redemptive work, our God accomplishes all these. The first redemption of God's people was accomplished when He freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Exodus 6:6-7

Jesus Christ, the Lord God, is a passionate redeemer-husband to His people. His great love for his espoused bride makes Him a "jealous God" (Ex. 34:14, Deut. 4:24) Who says "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5). Just as Israel of the Old Testament was redeemed from Egypt. Spiritual Israel was redeemed from sin, purchased with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Redemption from Sin

In the New Testament, there are four words translated “redeem.” The first is agorazo. It means to buy, as a transaction which gives the buyer “the right of possession. In the redemptive work of Christ the idea is that Christ, by offering Himself for us a due satisfaction, freed us from our liability in paying it ourselves.”\(^{17}\) It is used in verses such as:

> What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”
> ‒ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.
> ‒ Revelation 5:9-10

The second word, exagorazo, is derived from the first. It means, “To buy out of, redeem from. Used of our redemption by Christ from the curse and yoke of the Law. ... The word generally means to buy up, to buy all that is anywhere to be bought, and not to allow the suitable moment to pass by unheeded but to make it one's own.”\(^{18}\)

> But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.
> ‒ Galatians 4:4-5

The final two words are closely related linguistically. The first, lutron, means a “Ransom or price paid for redeeming captives, loosing them from their bonds and setting them at liberty.”\(^{19}\) It appears in only two verses: “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mar. 10:45; Mat. 20:28).

The second word, lutroo, means “To bring forward a ransom ... to release on receipt of a

\(^{17}\) “59. ἀγοράζω” Zodhiates.

\(^{18}\) “1805. ἐξαγοράζω” Zodhiates.

\(^{19}\) “3083. λύτρον” Zodhiates.
ransom, to redeem ...[and] denotes that aspect of the Savior's work wherein He appears as the Redeemer of mankind from bondage.\textsuperscript{20}

our Saviour Jesus Christ ... gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

\textit{Titus 2:13-14}

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

\textit{1 Peter 1:18-19}

These two words are both derived from \textit{lutrōsis}. Though it is not translated “redeemed,” it has a similar meaning – “to release on receipt of a ransom. The act of freeing or releasing, deliverance.”\textsuperscript{21}

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

\textit{Hebrews 9:11-12}

Our savior personally offered Himself to buy us out of sin. With His life, he paid the price to redeem us from bondage. He ransomed us by sacrificing Himself. His is the only hero who can both die for His beloved bride, and live to protect, defend, and return for her. That is reason enough to love Him passionately, exuberantly, and consumingly.

\textsuperscript{20} “3084. λυτρόω” Zodhiates. λυτρόω appears a total of three times. The third use is Luke 24:21

\textsuperscript{21} “3085. λύτρωσις” Zodhiates. λύτρωσις appears three times. The two other uses are in Luke 1:68 and 2:38.
Chapter 5 – Falling In Love With Christ

As a church, we spend quite a bit of time discussing how insignificant we are in comparison to God. And rightly so, for

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29

However, I think sometimes we are too ready to overlook what a high value our Father and Christ place on the people They have redeemed. We don't deserve any of the good gifts They have given us – They gave us these gifts because They wanted to. Because They love us.

The Song of Solomon has become one of my favorite passages in scripture. This book of Hebrew poetry has been variously interpreted as an allegory of God's love for His people, “a drama about Solomon and his bride,” a poem making use of Solomon's name but really concerned with “a pair of rustic lovers,” or “a sequence of nuptial songs celebrating the week of wedding festivities.”

I favor the allegory interpretation, mostly because I doubt God would have included it in His Bible without a reason. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” and the Song is no exception (2 Tim. 3:16).

The Song of Solomon contains some of the most beautiful expressions of love in the entire Bible. The woman, in this allegory representative of the Church, is fully assured of the strength of her lover's devotion. He calls her, “O thou fairest among women” and “my beloved” (Son. 1:8, 16). She replies, “I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. ... His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. (Son. 2:3-4, 6).

Just as Christ can say to the church He has cleansed with His blood, the lover says, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee” (Son. 4:7). He continues, “Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck” (Son. 4:9). In the words of Matthew Henry,

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No expressions of love can be more passionate than these here, in which Christ manifests his affection to his church; and yet that great proof of his love, his dying for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, goes far beyond them all. A spouse so dearly bought and paid for could not but be dearly loved. Such a price being given for her, a high value must needs be put upon her accordingly.23

The Lord our God not only loves us, but wants us to belong to Him and be with Him. As a result of this love and the redemptive process, God the Father has adopted us into His family that He might raise and fashion a fitting wife for His Son (Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 8:15; Eph. 1:5). Just as Adam and Eve were both children of God, so are Christ — the second Adam — and His Church brethren of the same Father (1Cor. 15:45). Frequently in The Song of Solomon, the beloved is referred to as “sister,” “spouse,” and “bride.” I used to think it odd that the bride is called both “sister” and “spouse,” but the sister-spouse relationship is not unlawful if the sister is adopted. In addition, Matthew Henry comments, "because no one relation among men is sufficient to set forth Christ's love to his church, and to show that all this must be understood spiritually, he owns her in two relations, which among men are incompatible."24

What an incredible gift it is that Jesus Christ wants to acknowledge our relation to Him. We can say, with the woman in Song of Solomon, “he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend.” “I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine,” and “his desire is toward me” (Son. 5:16; 6:3; 7:10).

More Love

In the Greek language, there are four basic words for love: *eros*, *storge*, *philos*, and *agape*.25 Only forms of *agape* and *philos* appear in the New Testament. *Agape* is commonly defined as the highest form of love, and we will examine it more closely in a later chapter. But for now, I want to focus on the words derived from *philos*.

*Philos* is translated as “friend” or “friends” in the KJV. It means “loved, dear, befriended ... with the meaning of companion.”26 It is used in the regular sense of people having friends, but also of a relationship between God and select individuals. In James 2:23, Abraham is called “the Friend of God.” Christ applies this word to His disciples, calling them them “My friends” in Luke 12:4. In the following passage, the words “love” are from *agape* and *agapeo*,

24 Henry, Matthew. *Song of Solomon* 4:8-13, I.
26 “5384. φίλος.” Zodhiates.
but “friends” is philos.

This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you.

John 15:12-15

When the word “love” is not translated from a form of agape, it comes from a form of philos with only one exception. The most commonly used of these words is phileo. It means “to love .. to have affection for someone ... Specifically, to kiss.” There is no easy distinction between the usage of agape and phileo, because both are used of man's love towards God, God's love towards man, and inappropriate attachment to earthly things. Zodhiates writes that, in general, agape involves perceiving the needs of the one being loved and meeting that need, “not according to the object's concept of need, but that of the one who loves.” Phileo implies having common interests and a friendship with the object of one's love.

While agape is a higher kind of love, I think there is something amazing in recognizing that it is not the only love God has towards us. Before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that after His resurrection, “ye shall ask in My name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.” (Joh. 16:26-27). The Father has phileo for those who have phileo for His son. This means the Father Himself has common interests and friendship with those who love and believe in His Son. In this context, it is certainly not a lesser love than agape. Philos is an incredible kind of love to share with the creator of the universe.

Jesus Christ also has this love for His people and because He loves us, He asks us to repent and open our hearts to a relationship with Him.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Revelation 3:19-21

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27 In Mark 12:38, “Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing,” the word is thelo, which could be translated “chose or prefer ... to wish ... be inclined to.” “G2309 θελω, ἐθελω.” Strong, “Greek Dictionary-Index to the New Testament.”
28 “5368. φιλεω.” Zodhiates.
29 “5368. φιλεω.” Zodhiates.
Phileo is a love that is a little easier for us to identify with because it is the kind of love we naturally feel for our closest friends. That is how we should feel towards our Savior. Once we realize even a small part of what He has done for us, it should be impossible not to have a strong attachment to Him.

In his closing comments on the first epistle to the Corinthian church, Paul wrote, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (16:22). The word “anathema” means “excommunicated ... accursed,” and “maranatha” is “an exclamation of approaching divine judgment.” 30 If we do not have phileo for Jesus Christ, loving Him with more affection than we feel for our closest friends, we are in danger of being divinely judged as accursed. “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” (Mat. 10:37).

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30 “331 ἀναθημα” and “3134 μαρανήθα.” Strong, “Greek Dictionay-Index to the NewTestament.”
Chapter 6 – Making Ready to Marry

We touched on this in Chapter 4, but I want to take some time to reexamine the Old Covenant. The New Testament, particularly the book of Hebrews, establishes that the Old Covenant prefigured a “better covenant” mediated by Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:6). Both covenants included the idea of a marriage agreement, and in the Old Testament this agreement is briefly outlined in Exodus 19. When the Lord God spoke to Moses before giving the Ten Commandments, He reminds the children of Israel that God had delivered them from Egypt and brought them unto Himself (Ex. 19:4). As a result, He says,

Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

Exodus 19:5-6

Under the Old, as well as the New, Covenant, obedience to God's commandments and faithfulness to His covenant are expected from those who belong to Him. “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people … which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

As is fitting in a covenant, including marriage arrangements, the terms of the agreement were laid before the people. They answered with one voice, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). “Thus they strike the bargain,” as Matthew Henry says, “accepting the Lord to be to them a God, and giving up themselves to be to him a people.”31 In other words, when asked if they would take the Lord as their husband, the people said “I do.”

The next few verses in Exodus 19 concern the topic of this chapter. The people did not simply agree to this covenant and then walk up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. There was preparation involved, particularly a sanctification process. Before they could meet with God and receive His Ten Commandments, the people had to make themselves ready.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. ...

And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day

Exodus 19:10-11, 14-15

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As discussed in Chapter 4, the parallels between marriage and God's plan for enlarging His family involve the bride's preparation for her marriage. The instructions given in Exodus concerning Israel's sanctification is in keeping with the Jewish tradition where the bride readied herself for the marriage while the groom prepared a home for them to share. The church's process of sanctification and readying herself is mentioned frequently throughout the Bible. In Revelation 19:7, when “the marriage of the Lamb” is announced, it is said that “His wife hath made herself ready.”

The Bible contains specific instructions for how to live our lives as we make ourselves ready to marry Jesus Christ, including the type of character God wants to shape in His people. Not surprisingly, parallels for many of these instructions can be found in the wording of traditional, Christian wedding vows.

**Obedience**

Obedience is not a popular concept in today's society. Particularly in the western world, there is a sense that obedience to anything or anyone infringes upon our fundamental right of freedom. For centuries, Christian wedding vows included the bride promising “to love, honor, and obey” her husband, as found in the Booke of Common Prayer. Antipathy towards the “obey” part reached the point that in 1922, the Episcopal Church voted to remove the word. In the years since, this trend has not reversed, but is still talked about. One of the headlines for the royal wedding between Kate Middleton and Prince William concerned the exclusion of obey. The article noted that she was “following in the footsteps of his mother in departing from the ancient church formulations of the wedding service. Unlike earlier generations, few brides today would use the term, and the word does not appear in the wedding service.”

Unlike brides in this world, the church gets no option to remove obedience from their agreement with Christ. He said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Joh. 14:15), the implication being that we cannot love Christ if we are not obeying Him. The idea of loving God and keeping His commandments is paired at least eleven times in the Old Testament and nine times in the New Testament. Keeping His commandments is vital to having a relationship with God.
Him, and learning obedience is a first step in making ready to be His bride.

**Purity and Faithfulness**

When we are called “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:9), the word “holy” is translated from the same Greek word used to refer to us as “saints” throughout the new Testament. This word is *hagios*, and it means “sanctified ... ceremonially or morally clean ... consecrated, devoted, sacred, holy, meaning set apart from a common to a sacred use.” As we have already seen in Ephesians 5:26, being clean has to do with Christ's sacrifice. He gave Himself to save us from sin and set us apart as a people who belong to Him. Commitment to purity on both a physical and spiritual level is an essential part of our sanctification, as well as of our obedience to God's law.

Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:15-17

As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:20, “you are bought with a price,” and should “therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” Because we belong to God and Christ, disobedience and unfaithfulness to Them is the spiritual equivalent to frequenting a brothel. We have an obligation to honor Them in every aspect of our lives.

One of most pressing concerns Paul voiced to the Corinthians in his second letter concerned their commitment to Christ. He uses the familiar example of espousal to remind the church of the importance of remaining faithful:

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3

Closely related to obedience, faithfulness involves a commitment to live by Christ's words and keep our hearts, minds, and bodies for Him. We are to keep ourselves pure on a moral, spiritual and physical level because that honors the One we are called to eventually marry.

36 “ἀγιος” Zodhiates.
For Better, For Worse

When I was counseling for baptism, the first place the minister directed me was the “count the cost” passages in Luke:

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

A commitment to follow Jesus Christ is not to be taken lightly. There was a reason the disciples were told “that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). It is not easy to follow Christ, and He wants us to understand that a high level of commitment is necessary.

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

These passages are not to discourage us, but to prevent people from lightly embarking on a life of walking with Christ. There will be times when Christians are making themselves ready that seem hard or discouraging but, in the end, the 'better' will certainly outweigh the 'worse'. Our process of making ready to marry Christ must include a life-long commitment to following Him, no matter what. Like Paul, our viewpoint should be, “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).
“I can of mine own self do nothing”

A large part of making ourselves ready is an acknowledgment that we cannot become perfect by ourselves. When Jesus Christ was in His human body on the earth, He said “I can of mine own self do nothing” (John 5:30). If the only human being who has never sinned – God in the flesh – said He could do nothing apart from the Father (John 5:19), then surely the same applies to us. Indeed, at His last Passover, Christ told the disciples, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). At first, this appears to contradict the idea that the Bride can make herself ready. However, a verse in Philippians helps to clarify.

Following the well-known instruction to “let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), Paul instructs his readers to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13). These two verses pair our responsibility to prepare ourselves with a promise that God will also work in us. We must be working towards our own salvation, but it is impossible for a human being to earn salvation on their own (Gal. 2:16). That is why we must abide in Christ. We can do nothing apart from Him, just as He could do nothing apart from His Father.

If we live in Jesus Christ and develop a close relationship with Him and Our Father, we will be making ourselves ready. It is impossible that a genuine love for Them will not be paired with a desire to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). If we continue in Him, we will succeed, for “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).
Chapter 7 – Unending Love

I could open this chapter with a dictionary definition of *agapē*. Instead, I will start with what may very well be the most exhaustive definition the Bible gives for a single word.

Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth ... And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8,13

This kind of love is not the world's concept of a feel-good, fleeting emotion that someone "falls into." Forms of the word “love” or “charity” appear 674 times in a search of the King James Version. Of those, 356 are in the New Testament, and 320 of those are translated from the Greek word *agapaō* or one of its derivatives. This word indicates “a direction of the will and finding one's joy in something or someone,” as well as having a moral component, “i.e. love that expresses compassion.”

A related word, *agapē*, means “love, affectionate regard, goodwill, benevolence. With reference to God's love, it ... involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires.” This is the kind of love of which God is the author and source, and it involves an active interest in the well-being of the one loved.

Perhaps the reason such a lengthy definition for *agapē* is given in 1 Corinthians is because it is a word used to define God. Twice in 1 John, we find the phrase “God is love” embedded in a discussion of why we are supposed to love other people.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and

37 Throughout this passage, and subsequent quotations, I have replaced the King James translation of ἀγάπη as “charity” with the word “love.”
38 The numbers are according to a word search performed using e-Sword version 10.1.0, copyright Rick Meyers.
39 “25. ἀγαπάω” Zodhiates.
40 “26. ἀγάπη” Zodhiates.
he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love Him, because He first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

\[1\text{ John 4:8-21}\]

This is a sobering passage. If we do not love other people with the same kind of love that God has shown to us, then we cannot claim to love God. Without \textit{agapē}, our Christianity is a lie. This does not mean we have to have warm fuzzy feelings towards everyone, but it does mean we must have an outgoing interest in their well being. We are not commanded to have friendly, brotherly love towards our enemies, but we are commanded to have \textit{agapē} towards them.\footnote{1}{1 John 4:8-21}

The importance of this kind of love is reinforced by Christ's words to His disciples on the night of His betrayal. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Joh. 13:34-35).\footnote{2}{1 Corinthians 13:1-3} This love is vitally important because people are supposed to recognize us as Christ's disciples from our \textit{agapē}. If we are striving to emulate the character of God and Christ, we need to be developing Their love in us.

\textbf{1 Corinthians 13:1-3}

Prophesy, understanding, knowledge, faith, generosity, and self-sacrifice are important, yet without love they would be meaningless. Love is a necessity for all who would walk in the footsteps of Christ.

\textbf{Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his}

\footnote{3}{“Love your enemies” in Mat. 5:44, Luke 6:27, and Luke 6:35 are translated from \textit{ἀγαπάω}.}

\footnote{4}{In verse 35, the words are from \textit{ἀγαπάω}. In verse 36, love is translated from \textit{ἀγάπη}.}
neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. 
Romans 13:8-10

_ Ağapê_ is the single most important trait that we need to have as a Christian. By loving others, we fulfill the law of God. This kind of love, and all that it contains is the character that God wants to see in us. God is love, and to become like God, we need to become love as well. This love should be displayed in our lives so that when people look at us, they see we are Jesus Christ's disciples.

### Conclusion

The Bible is the story of perfect love. The God-family brought us into existence because They wanted more family members, even knowing that the Word would have to give up His life to save us from our sin. Though They share the closest, most perfect relationship in the entire universe, the Father was willing to give up His Son and the Son was willing to lay down His life so we could be part of Their relationship.

From the moment of creation, They have never stopped acting out of love. Through a covenant with Abraham, the giving of the Ten Commandments, and even when Israel was unfaithful, God never ceased to love. And when Jesus Christ came to establish the New Covenant and allowed Himself to be tortured to death, He proved forever the depth of love He has for His future bride.

The gift of eternal life is an offer of complete and perfect love shared in a relationship with God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. If we will accept the offer of marriage to the Son and let Him cleanse us with His own blood, we can be part of the greatest love story every told.
Works Cited

Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotations are from The King James Version of the Bible. When personal pronouns referring to God are not capitalized in the original KJV text, I have added the capital letter. Capitalization has also been normalized when quoting several verses to avoid capital letters in the middle of a sentence when the verse changes. In addition, when an added word appears in italics, I have changed that to normal type to avoid emphasis confusion.

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