

Simple Glories

Grace, Mercy, and Love



Destroying the platitudes that surround God's grace, mercy, and love and inspiring a hunger for more.

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Eph. 2:4-5, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved"

The purpose of this study is to do nothing more than to magnify God with a look at 3 things that pertain to His interaction with humankind.

Too often, certain topics and concepts of incredible consequence and glorious promise lose their wonder simply because of familiarity and regular usage. Unfortunately, it seems as though some of the deep things of God have become platitudes - they have become common and elementary due to repetition and acquaintance. This study will take a look at three of some of Christendom's most precious truths: the grace, mercy, and love of God.

The goal of this study is to present a Biblical understanding of each, that will destroy any platitudes that surround these incredible topics, and bring life-giving insight toward God's grace, mercy and love. The prayer for this study is that it awakens your hunger for the Lord and leaves you with an insatiable thirst for more.

Grace:

Grace! What is grace? What exactly does the Bible say about it? How can we regain a reverence for this incredible topic?

Look at this quote from Oswald Chambers, "The gospel of the grace of God awakens an intense longing in human souls and an equally intense resentment, because the truth that it reveals is not palatable or easy to swallow. There is a certain pride in people that causes them to give and give, but to come and accept a gift is another thing. I will give my life to martyrdom; I will dedicate my life to service I will do anything. But do not humiliate me to the level of the most hell-deserving sinner and tell me that all I have to do is accept the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ." Wow! What an incredible reverence and stirring understanding of God's grace! But what is it? How can Chambers arrive at this profound understanding of God's grace?

One acceptable definition of grace is "unmerited favor." Theopedia and Biblestudytools.com (as well as a number of other dictionaries) confirm that "unmerited favor" is a Biblically acceptable definition. However, there is so much more to grace than just that. A look at the Testaments demonstrate an intensely radical understanding of grace.

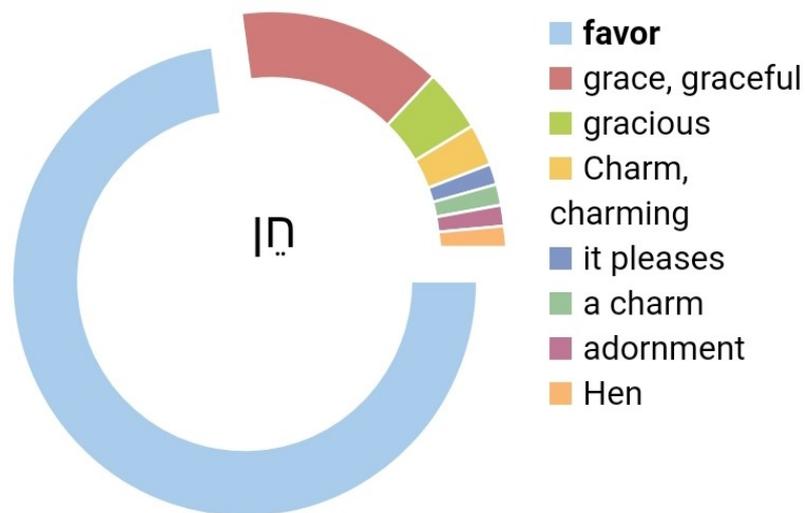
We see from the Hebrew word for Grace (חֵן - *chen*) (used 69 times in the OT) that it is frequently used/translated favor. 53 of the 69 times it is found in the Old Testament, it is translated "favor" (ESV). Over and over again in the Old Testament, people found favor with God.

One of the most profound examples of grace being understood as unmerited favor is seen in Exodus 33:12-23. Over the span of several verses, Moses is seen to beseech Yahweh's חֵן (favor/grace). Moses pleads with God to "show me your glory" so that it may be known that he and God's people "have found חֵן (favor)" in Yahweh's sight. God responds in the affirmative declaring that He will do as Moses asked. "But" God continues that He would not allow Moses to see His face, for "man shall not see me and live" (vs. 20). In both cases, it was grace that allowed Moses to see the Glory of God, and it was grace that denied Moses the opportunity to see God's face (otherwise Moses would have died). This is truly a great example of how grace can be understood as unmerited favor. In fact, prior to this interaction between God and Moses, Moses questions God proving himself unworthy, and without merit, of the God's favor!

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In the New Testament, also, we see that grace can be understood as unmerited favor. Jesus, as He was growing up, is said to have "increased in wisdom and in stature and **in favor** (χάρις - *charis*: grace) with God and man" (Luke 2:40, 52). Then, grace as being define as "unmerited favor" is an acceptable definition. **However, it cannot be limited to this understanding!** We can note a *SHIFT* in the understanding, or revelation, of grace from the Old Testament to the New (see graphs below). As Messiah was revealed to humanity and His inaugural work of the Kingdom was established, there is now a greater realization of grace that needs to be addressed.

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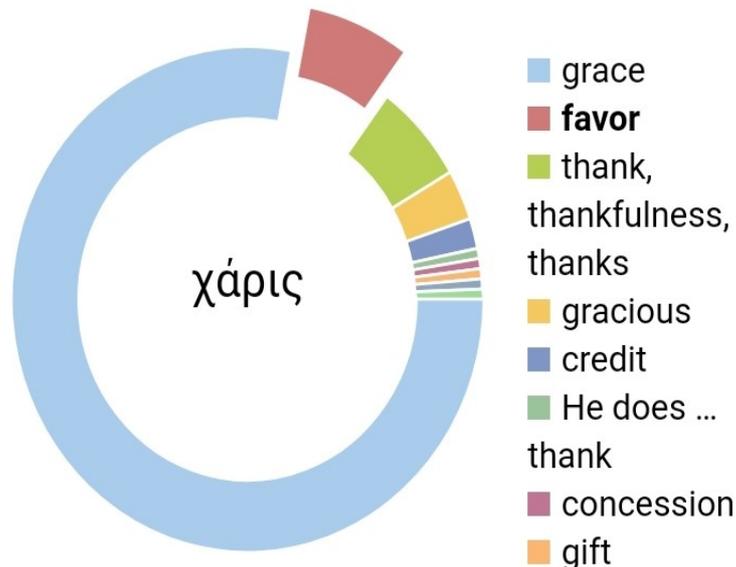


favor

Ge 6:8

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

▼ TRANSLATION | NASB95



favor

Lk 1:30

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found

John 1:16-17 states that in the "fullness" of Jesus Christ, "we have all received grace upon grace" (exponentially more) because "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The establishment of the New Covenant brought about a HUGE shift in the revelation of God's grace. Here is where it starts to get exciting! Grace, with the expanded New Testament inspiration, has become much more than just favor. Note the numerous ways the New Testament demonstrates grace.

The New Testament describes grace in the following ways:

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- 1) Grace describes the nature and effect of the Gospel (John 1:16-17; Acts 20:24; Col. 1:5-6)*
- 2) Grace describes the sum total of all the blessings received by the Believer (Eph. 1:3,7)*
- 3) Grace describes the Work of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11)*
- 4) Grace is the means of salvation (Eph. 2:7-9)*
- 5) Grace describes the eschatological glorification of the saints at Christ's return (1 Peter 1:13)*
- 6) Grace is the verdict of Justification (Rom. 3:23-24)*
- 7) Grace is the work of sanctification (1 Peter 1:2; Acts 20:32)*
- 8) Grace is the testimony and wisdom of the Christian (2 Cor. 1:12)*
- 9) Grace is the cause of Thanksgiving (2 Cor. 4:15)*
- 10) Grace is the ground of victory (Rom. 16:20)*
- 11) Grace is comfort and hope to the Believer (2 Thess. 2:16)*
- 12) Grace describes "the act" of giving (2 Cor. 8:3-7)*
- 13) Grace is a description of God's Soteriological purpose (2 Tim. 1:9)*
- 14) Grace is the gifts ("graces") given to believers for the edification of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:7; Rom. 12:6)*

- 15) Grace is an experience (2 Cor. 1:15)*
- 16) Grace is a synonym for power and strength (1 Peter 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:1)*
- 17) Grace is a metonym for God (Eph. 1:6)*
- 18) Grace is an anthropomorphism For the Holy Spirit (Heb. 10:29)*

Grace, it seems, is everything! From looking at the New Testament revelation, we see that God's grace completely encompasses the lives of Believers. With this understanding, it becomes very difficult to define! From the means of salvation, to the grace-gifts given to the believers, to the future glorification of the saints, it may better be understood as the divine influence to, and through, the Christian. Grace is the expression of love by which God interacts with mankind. As noted from the above list of different usages, God's grace is so overarching it is difficult to define more specifically.

In the world of theology, theologians have even attempted to categorize the different expressions of grace in the following ways: common grace, free grace, prevenient grace, irresistible/particular grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace, serving grace, etc. It seems to me that even in our best attempts to simplify and categorize the different expressions of grace, it still falls short of the magnanimity of the complete picture of God's grace toward mankind. In the end, it seems that grace is much more magnificent and glorious than can even receive a definition. For now, however, it may be best to define grace as the **divine influence to, and through, the Believer**, and simply keep in mind that *grace is the overarching expression of love by which God interacts with mankind!*

What an incredible understanding of grace! God was so motivated by love that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world that all who would believe in Him would receive the action of grace to save their soul and give them purpose.

Bonus:

Grace sustains our life in Christ:

- 1) Personally sustains
- 2) Corporately sustains

Mercy:

Mercy is regularly defined as follows: "compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy, or other person in one's power; compassion or pity... the disposition to be compassionate or forbearing" (dictionary.com). While this definition is biblically acceptable, it does not, however, give the full picture! It may be the concept of mercy has lost its impact because we have heard it mentioned so often. Mercy may be one of the most profound realities in the Bible, and yet it seems to have become common and ordinary. In fact, mercy may be one of those Biblical topic we breeze over in order "to get to the important things" or "the deeper topics of the Bible." On the contrary, Mercy may be one of the deepest and most profound themes in all Scripture.

So what is mercy, and where does one begin on this topic? Great question. The study of mercy starts with God. Mercy is an attribute, or characteristic, of God that drives His interaction with mankind. From as early as His interaction with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:21) to His eschatological patience (2 Peter 3:9-10), God is merciful. God cannot change, and neither can He be untrue to Who He is. God is merciful, and His activity toward humankind is consistent with His character.

Therein, it is important to note that mercy is not some ethereal force. Mercy is not some spiritual state of mind which can only be obtained through extravagant spiritual exercises. Rather, God owns mercy (Ps. 116:5 - וַיֵּאֱלֹהֵינוּ מִרְחָם:). He, alone, is its sole provider. Thankfully, this means that mercy cannot be earned, but it is received from God directly. God is compassionate, and He is driven to move all of humankind toward His final, merciful redemptive plan (insofar as it is received as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ {Eph. 2:4,8}). Philip H. Towner, of Bakers Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, writes this, "the promises of God all derive logically from the constellation of divine qualities that includes mercy. God's ability to provide, protect, and sustain a people finds its channel and direction through his gracious mercy acted out in historical contexts." In other words, God is merciful in character, and He expresses mercy in acts of love toward all that would receive Him by faith. Mercy must not be separated from, or received apart from, God.

Furthermore, being that mercy is to be considered a free gift that cannot be earned, it may be stated that God's mercy is inexhaustible. Once God's mercy is applied to our lives through the faith in Jesus Christ, the depth and breadth of divine mercy is truly inexhaustible (2 Cor. 1:3; James 5:11; Eph. 2:4; 2 Cor. 4:1; etc.). From the fountain of relationship flows the relentless stream of mercy. It can be understood that once the individual enters into a faith relationship with God, and abides therein, God continuously expresses His love for the Believer through regular acts of mercy. Every time we fall into sin, God declares His mercy over us. He is continuously and inexhaustibly merciful to believers because the sacrifice of our Messiah was sufficient "once and for all" (Heb. 9:12, 10:10). Along with many others, Jude 1:2 communicates the regular accessibility of God's mercy by saying, "May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you." (The parsing of "be multiplied" - aorist optative passive - further demonstrates the intensity of God's desire/mood/wish for the individual to continuously receive mercy). How glorious to know that God's mercy drives His interaction with us, and He offers, to all who would accept it, an endless supply. (Needless to say, this does not give the Christian the freedom to continuously sin; it gives the Christian the freedom to faithfully walk in obedience.)

Let us, now, look at mercy from the contexts of the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the understanding of mercy is tied to the Hebrew word חֶסֶד ("hesed"), which is translated "steadfast love" or "lovingkindness." This helps us to understand that there is more to mercy than a passive compassion or pity. This affords us the understanding that mercy is an active expression of love. This is seen clearly in God's mercy in the covenants. "Mercy as the Foundation of God's Covenant. [sic] Mercy and hesed[חֶסֶד], God's covenant love, are integrally related. So close is the relationship that hesed[חֶסֶד] sometimes is to be viewed in terms of mercy. In this relationship, mercy then comes to be seen as the quality in God that directs him to forge a relationship with people who absolutely do not deserve to be in relationship with him... it is neither theory nor principle... God's mercy is a driving force in leading him to create a relationship with Israel" (Philip H. Towner). This Old Testament understanding is important. It emphasizes the fact of God's undying loyalty toward those with whom He has entered into covenant (For more on covenants, [click here.](#))

Biblestudytools.com confirms this by declaring, "its [mercy] meaning through *hesed* [חֶסֶד] extends to that of loyalty based on merciful love, a loyalty that maintains the covenant despite Israel's own resistance (Psalm 25:6; 40:11; 69:17; Isa. 63:7; Jer. 16:5; 42:12; Hosea 2:19; Joel 2:13; Zech. 7:9)." This is important, because it further demonstrates the grandeur of mercy. It is not only that God looks with compassion on those created in His image; He expresses His merciful lovingkindness through relentless loyalty to those in covenant with Him

Mercy in the New Testament is similar. In the New Testament, divine mercy (ἐλεέω - eleeō) is dramatically displayed through the life and ministry of Messiah, and it is understood as the "foundation of salvation." We can see from the inspired writings of the Apostle Paul that the Old Testament understanding of mercy is carried over into the New Covenant. "The same divine commitment of mercy to undeserving people in the Old Testament [is linked] with God's stubborn pursuit of Israel in and through Christ in the New Testament era and its extension to the Gentiles" (Towner). It is nothing less than glorious. Jesus' salvific work in establishing the New Covenant is the ultimate example of mercy. God, being merciful by nature, "desires none to perish" and that "all would be saved" (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Ezek. 18:32). This being at the very core of God's desire for mankind, He extended the invitation of mercy to the world through His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17; 1 John 2:2). Not only was His invitation merciful, but the means for receiving salvation was merciful by design; God required nothing more than faith as being the prerequisite for receiving the gift of salvation. The invitation was merciful. The application of salvation was merciful. Mercy is freely given to any, and all, who would believe.

Finally, there is another aspect of mercy that must be discussed. God gives new mercies to His people every day. Similar to the above understanding of God's mercy being inexhaustible, this deals with the fact of mercy being given in accordance with our circumstances and needs (Jude 1:2; Lam. 3:22-23; 2 Cor. 1:3; Rom. 12:1; etc.). Towner states that even in "judgement and discipline God's mercy can be seen and hoped for (2 Sam 24:14; Psalm 57:1; Isa 55:7; Isa 60:10; Jer. 31:20; Hab. 3:2; cf. Tobit 6:17). "In situations of affliction and discomfort, God distributes His mercy to the benefit and comfort of the believer" (2 Cor. 1: 3-4). Also, God's mercy is noted as motivating, and being given daily for, the service and ministry of the Christian (2 Cor. 4:1; Rom. 12:1). In the end, "it is part of the basic disposition of love toward His people, and it directs His actions ultimately in ways that benefit His people" (Philip Towner). While mercy is soteriological inexhaustible (as discussed above), it is also viewed as being the loyal expression of love to help God's people as the needs arise.

Bonus Quote:

"it is not exaggerating to say that life in Christ gives birth in believers' hearts to a consciousness not only of being recipients of God's mercy in one gift of salvation, but also of being daily recipients of fresh 'mercies' of God, emblems of his ownership of us and care for us (Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:3; all of the greetings cf.; Lam. 3:22-23)" (Philip H. Towner).

Love:

God's Love colors the hearts of its recipients with wonder and amazement. And rightly so. It is, truly, one of the most breathtaking and life-changing realities in the Bible. God's love is a deep well. It provides a never-ending supply of refreshing to all who would dip their hearts into it.

But what is it exactly?! Well... The common, or popular, Biblical definition of God's love (ἀγάπη - agape) is that of "unconditional love." This is Scripturally acceptable. However, it can be viewed only as a partially appropriate understanding. Love characterizes God's nature and drives His interactions with humankind. So loving is God, He unconditionally "loved the world" so as to send His Christ to die a sacrificial death that "whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16-17). Being that "God is love," human merit and effort does not appropriate or necessitate the Love of God (1 John 4:8). Insofar as God is love and it is extended to everyone, it is unconditional. However, it cannot be left there. There is so much packed into the understanding of God's Love, and it reveals the magnanimity of God! Only an infinitely great God can contain such an infinitely wonderful love.

To begin this journey through the love (ἀγάπη - agape) of God, we must note it's very special, and unique, usage. The sacredness of this word is seen in two aspects. Firstly, it used for the sacred celebrations of God's people – specifically the love feasts (Jude 12). This is described by Bakers Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology as being the revered, holy celebration of communion, where believers ceremonially partake of the symbols of Christ. One of Christendom's most sacred rites. Secondly, this (agape) love is seen as being uniquely assigned to God. According to A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament, Love agape) is "a word that is exclusively Biblical." That is to say, It is found almost exclusively within Biblical context of divine revelation. It is found so few times outside of the Bible, many consider it "to have been virtually a Christian invention—a new word for a new thing (apart from about twenty occurrences in the Greek version of the Old Testament, it is almost non-existent before the New Testament). Agape draws its meaning directly from the revelation of God in Christ" (bible.org). Together, these illustrate the reverential attitude toward God's agape love. This helps draw out the sacred understanding of the word.

It was practically invented by God's people to demonstrate their reverence for, and celebration of, God's love. No other earthly designation for love would suffice. A heavenly, supernatural construct was needed to portray the love of God - and so agape was "born."

Can this special kind of love be understood more fully? Yes. It can. However, in order to identify its elaborate meaning, we must look at some of the other Greek words for "love." While some would offer that there are up to eight different Greek words for love, we will (for this study) look only at the main four. While in the English we have only one word for love, the Greek has four main words to describe the different "types" of love.

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The following list contains the Greek words for, and their descriptions of, "love:" Φιλέω (Phileō) is the word for love that describes a brotherly love or affection. It carries with it a sense of comradeship or loyalty. "It is a love that is called out of one's heart as a response to the pleasure one takes in a person or object." (Kenneth Wuest). Also, Phileō is said to describe "a love that responds to kindness, appreciation, or love. It involves giving as well as receiving; but when it is greatly strained, it can collapse in a crisis" (citation). Next, Στοργή (Storgē) describes the inherent nurturing love of a parent for a child (the Bible only uses its negative form). This love can be understood as the natural love that rests within one's character or will. "It is a natural movement of the soul for husband, wife, child or dog" (citation). Within the context of a parent for a child, this can be understood as an unconditional love. The word Ερως (Eros) describes the conditional love of passion. It is a sexual or intimate love that develops with contemplation and is seen in "an appreciation of the beauty within that person, or even becomes appreciation of beauty itself" (citation). It communicates a satisfaction that is derived from the value of another. And lastly, Ἀγάπη or Ἀγαπάω (Agapē or Agapaō) describes the unconditional love of God. More fully, it "is called out of one's heart by the preciousness of the object loved. It is a love of esteem, of evaluation. It has the idea of prizing. It is the noblest word for love in the Greek language. Agapē is not kindled by the merit or worth of its object, but it originates in its own God-given nature" (citation). Agape can be simply defined as a love of choice or will (Thomas Aquinas).

Bonus:

Origin and Etymology of AGAPE

borrowed from Late Latin *agapē*, borrowed from Greek *agápē* "brotherly love," back-formation from *agapân* "to regard with affection, be fond of, be contented (with)" or *agapázein* "to welcome warmly," perhaps from a base **aga-pā-* "lavish protection, attention or affection (on)," literally, "protect greatly," going back to Indo-European **m̥ǵh₂-* "large, great" + **peh₂-* "protect" — more at [1_MUCH](#), [1_FUR](#)

(source Merriam-Webster)

The reason these other Greek words for love are important to this study, is because it has been postulated that agape is intertwined with each of these other "loves." While each are special and distinct to themselves, there appears to be some crossover from Φιλέω (Phileō), Στοργή (Storgē), and Ερως (Eros) with ἀγάπη (agape). This overlap can be seen fairly clearly. Phileō love is offered by Blueletterbible.com to be at the root of Ἀγαπάω (Agapaō). Both Phileō and agape provide an understanding of affection and love based on a friendship-like loyalty and affection. While the Bible only uses its negative form, Storgē can be seen in agape as it represents the paternal heart of God in His love for His children. It, also, demonstrates a loyal and unconditional love that is attached to God's very nature and character. Lastly, even Eros has been suggested as having a bit of overlap. This can be illustrated in the intimacy and passion that describes the love of God for His church – the Bride of Christ. According to the Encyclopedia of the Bible, "The NT distinctions are blurred in actual usage so that the meanings of each overlap. It is in the imprecise usage that the true meanings of love, particularly of agapé and eros, appear in Biblical thought. Any rigid categorization or definition of agapé and eros, in which the one excludes the other, distorts the Biblical meaning of each as well as their peculiar relationship..."

The clue to the validity of eros, and of its relationship with agapé, is found in the freedom of God to express and share Himself as agapé in creation, election, covenant-making, and redemption. Eros is an expression of the freedom of God to desire to create a world and to take delight in that which He has created... It is agapé plus eros which comes to expression in that freedom of the divine good-pleasure to create and redeem, and to find and take delight in what is created and redeemed" (Biblegateway).

From this, we are afforded a deeper understanding of God's love. The aforementioned overlap of these main, Greek words for love demonstrate a heavenly insight into God's heart. We can note a love that is loyal, intimate, nurturing, and active toward mankind. We know from 1 John 4:8 that "God is love" – love is at the core of God's nature. From this we can identify that "God does not merely love; he is love. Everything that God does flows from his love" (Glenn E. Schaefer; Bakers Evangelical Dictionary of Bible Theology).

This undying, loyal, intimate, nurturing, and active love is as freely given to mankind as the gift of salvation. Romans 5:1-5 states, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God... and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." This incredible Scripture highlights the lavish and ravishing free gift of love. It is given to all who would come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. God does not withhold His love from anyone. It is available to all. It is not only that God "desires all to be saved" and that "none should perish," But God desires all to partake of His relentless and undying love (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 2:9; Ezek. 18:32). At the heart of God is love, and God desires to give His heart to all who would receive it by faith. This is all part of God's design. Agape illustrates a choice from the will of God to offer good to all who would receive it.

From this, we can understand that it is neither perfectly unconditional nor perfectly conditional. While God possess love as His essential nature and like Him it is immutable, it is gifted to the hearts of man only once they come to faith in Jesus Christ. Rom. 3:23-24 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Faith (not works or merit) in Jesus is the singular vessel through which agape is poured into human hearts - by the grace of God. Perhaps the dispensing of God's love to our hearts is part of the restoration back to the "glory of God." Nonetheless, we cannot imitate the example of Christ effectively without having partaken of God's agape/love. 1 John 4:16 states, "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."

This divine generosity to provide the spark of God's love to the kindling of our souls, is intended to motivate and drive our thoughts and actions – just as it did Christ. Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" and His life exemplifies the love of God; we are to behold the life of Jesus as the ultimate revelation and demonstration of love (2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3; Eph. 5:1-2). It is toward His example that we are to strive! The overarching goal of the believer is to "live up to what we have already attained" - we have attained the righteousness and the love of God (Phil. 3:16). Likewise, Ephesians 5:1-2 communicates the directive of the Believer to love as Christ did. It says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Being created in the image of God, it should be no surprise that commands for the believer are summed up in love. Jesus declares, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 27:37-40).

Bonus:

Scripture also illustrates love within the Trinity. "John emphasizes repeatedly that God the Father loves the Son (John 5:20; John 17:23; John 17:26) and that the Son loves the Father (John 14:31). Because the Father loves the Son, he made his will known to him. Jesus in turn demonstrated his love to the Father through his submission and obedience" (Glenn E. Schaefer). While the concept of the Trinity is a difficult truth, it stands as the Biblical prescription for understanding the God – as a Triune God. The fact that we see the love of God in and toward each member of the Trinity reveals that love was, and is, and will always be at the core of God's nature. God is eternal and infinite, and so is His love. It seems as though He is always seeking an object upon whom His love can rest.

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