

“I May Have to Love Them, But I Don’t Have to Like Them!”

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I have heard the words which form the title to this article a number of times. One cannot help but wonder with such words as, “have to love,” if genuine love is actually even possible. Such a secular perspective of love reveals a lack of understanding of the love required of us as Christians toward one another, and toward the Lord.

Some Christians holding such a view of love might argue, we are *only* required to have an agape love toward one another. They might also note that we are to have an agape love toward our enemies, and that agape love does not require necessarily liking the one whom you agape love.

While it is true that we are to have an agape love toward our enemies (Matt. 5:44), without necessarily liking them, or certainly the things they do and say to us. It is *not* true that we are *only* required to have an agape love toward one another. Consider these inspired words from the apostle Paul:

Let love (agapē) be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (philadelphia); give preference to one another in honor.

Romans 12:9-10 (Words in Parentheses Mine)

There are three Greek words for love to be found in the words which make up these two verses. Two of the words are shown in the parentheses: agapē and philadelphia. Notice that agapē love is to be without hypocrisy. In other words, our agapē love for one another must be genuine, not “have to love.” Philadelphia is made up of philos (friend, friendly), and adelphos (brother). With this word we see that we should strive to be friendly toward one another. Does mean we should actually like one another, as families should love and like one another? Yes!

The third word for love that is used in this verse forms part of the word translated “devoted.” The word of which I speak is the Greek word, storgē. Storgē is not used by itself in the New Testament. This word speaks of the love and affection family members have toward one another. We should have this devoted type of family love toward one another.

All in all, what we have here is Paul instructing us that our love for one another is *not* to be limited to agapē. We are to have genuine care and tender affection for one another. Whether we *like* it or not, that would include actually *liking* each other.

In his Gospel, John repeatedly uses agape and phileo interchangeably. For example, in John 5:20 and 10:17, we see that the Father has a phileo and an agape love for the Son. In John 11:3 and 11:5, we find Jesus having a phileo and agape love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. In John 14:23 and 16:27, we are instructed to have an agape and phileo love for the Lord. Think what these examples tell us about our love as Christians, for the Lord, and for our brethren. Our love is not to be limited to agape!

We are to develop a warm tender affection for one another. Yes, we are to learn to like each other!

Remember how Paul told us that as members of the body we are to have the same care for one another? (1 Cor. 12:25). That requires agapē and phileo. It entails *liking* one another.

As we work with others in the local church, there will be occasions when we will be hurt in some way by a brother or sister. There will even be times when we will be the one doing the hurting. In other words, events will happen that we will not like, which will challenge, not just our love for another, but our ability to like them. Such events can happen both intentionally and unintentionally. Applying agapē, phileo, and storgē love, let us seek to overcome a conditional and weak secular application of love toward one another.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:35