

he'd disavowed all the feelings of "agape". A few years have gone by and the telephone rang on Thursday, revealing the broken heart which always comes when eroticism is the love which exists in the home.

Now, there's only one power which can take all of these things we call "love" and so transform them and change them that they come under a discipline that is creative and that builds the family; and that power is a power that God alone has--the power to prove to a man that He feels toward him in "agape" and to cause a man to turn toward his God in the same feeling and really mean "agape" when he says, "I love my God." This is the first thing. There will be many tensions that will arise because of all the other manifestations; but if we only know what the "agape" is and have it, we've done more for the family than anything else we could do. What is it? Well, one finds in reading the Old Testament and the New that it's quite the same, that this thing we call the "agape" of God - God's love - is person-to-person not body-to-body. For God is person and each of us is person, using a body to express ourselves. The body may be strong or it may be weak, it may be beautiful or it may be ugly, and what paganism we have succumbed to when we measure the desirability of a marriage by the way the person looked and Christian people asking such humorous questions that are tragic: "How did she ever marry a man who looked like that?" The "eros" is concerned with the body, the "eros" is generated by the body; and the body changes, it weakens, it becomes ugly, it becomes impotent; and when the "eros" is no longer generated, the family which depended upon that is shocked to discover that the man or the woman comes in and says "I don't love him any more." Now "agape" is person-to-person no matter what scars may come to the body, no matter what changes, no matter what disabilities toward illnesses, the person within the body is loved and loves.

That's what you learn about "agape" in the Bible, that it's very selective. God loved all people but Israel came to feel that He loved them as though they were the only people in all the world. That's the greatness of the love of God, it is selective; and when an individual possesses it in his heart, he knows how to look with love on all people and yet to cause those who are closest to him to know that he loves them as though they were the only people in all the world.

"Agape" is voluntary. God never loves any of us because we look so good to Him that we are irresistible; but God loves us for the creative work He can accomplish in us and with us, and it's God's voluntary love toward us, it isn't dependent upon how good we are to Him. "Agape" in the family is the same way. A man doesn't love people for what they do for him, he loves them for what he can do

with and through them and in their behalf. So when the person comes and says: "I'm through. What am I getting out of all of this?"--that's the erotic person. And the "agape" person says: "Isn't there some other way, something else I can do to show the love that is always eager for what it can do with and through others and not for one's self?"

Now you see what Jesus is talking about. If we want strong families, then we must begin not with the family, but we must begin with the love a person has for God and the knowledge of the love God has for us and what happens to a person. For this "agape" is a promise, it's a covenant. God said, "I love you." There isn't anyone who ever thought He would change; and in the solemnity of all that Christianity means by "agape", a man and a woman stand at an altar and they say: "To love and to cherish." That's a covenant and it creates a moral fellowship, for you can always tell from the "agape" of God and God can always tell from that "agape" in a person for Him. But eroticism--no moral fellowship in that.

You see how different it all is--so that when there is genuine love as described by Jesus in what he thought of God and how man could feel toward God, there was place in this love for judgment. This is no blind love that hides its eyes to faults and sins; but this is the purest of love whereby God can pass judgment upon the man he loves and redeem and reclaim by forgiveness, so great is that power. This eroticism upon which so many homes are built knows not how to pass judgment, it knows only how to complain and to bring grievance and distress. It knows nothing of forgiveness for it is not generated by God. But let a man know that God loves him and turn in response to that love and love God in the same way, and the Apostle Paul who understood so little about the family, knew that much, and he wrote: "Look husbands, "agape" not "eros" your wives, for God "agapes" you in Christ." He said the same thing to women about their husbands, and the same thing of parents to children.

Now you want to know what it really means in the Bible? Then re-read the Book of Hosea. Gomer, his wife--and when he looked at the three children in the home, so erotic was the behavior of his wife, the mother of those three children, that he dared not even believe they were his own. So driven by eroticism was Gomer that she actually sold her erotic affections to all who would buy; and one day Hosea stood in the marketplace and there on the auction block was Gomer, erotic Gomer, and looking was Hosea, who in all the tortures of his soul had learned what the love of God really is. In "agape" he passed judgment, forgave, and the family was rebuilt in the love of God as it had been destroyed in the "eros" of man.

All the lesser loves of life are brought into proper relationships and powers, even "eros" used to express in beauty and holiness "agape" itself, when a man first of all knows this and a woman first of all knows this: if I am to be husband, if I am to be wife, if I am to be father and mother, I must first of all love my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength; and all the things men call "love" will be creative in one who has learned to love in this way at the Cross of Jesus Christ where "agape" was first fully made known, in that while we were all yet sinners, God so loved us that He gave Himself for us all.