

A New Kind of Love

Scripture Reading — 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son ...
—John 3:16—

The ancient Greeks had many words for love. They had a word for the love of lovers, one for the love of friends, another for the love of country, and another for the love of beauty. Yet another word for love was seldom used: agape. In classical Greek agape is used only four times, and in each case it has an anemic translation: “goodwill.”

But Bible writers grabbed agape and poured gospel meaning into it. They used it to describe God’s love for us and for the kind of love God gives us for the people we know—and even for those we don’t. Agape refers to a set of our mind, a determination of our heart. Agape means to seek another person’s highest good, even if it demands putting that person’s good ahead of our own. This is the kind of love Jesus meant when he said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

Philosopher Immanuel Kant read Jesus’ words and dismissed them as absurd. You can’t command love, he said. And in talking about the feeling kind of love, he was right. But it is possible to love your enemies in the sense of seeking their best interests.

We can determine to never return evil for evil or seek revenge (Romans 12:17, 19). We can even pray for those who cause us trouble. We can, by God’s grace, love like he does.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the love you put in our hearts be-cause of your Son, Jesus. May we love like you, because you first loved us. Amen.

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