

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies  
Systematic Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: TOWARDS AN ADVENTIST DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

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The aim of this study is to develop the foundations of a theology of Christian love. The LORD's command in Lev 19:18 enjoins believers to have love for one's neighbour as they do for themselves—a command affirmed by Jesus Christ in Matt 22:39. The apostle Paul in Eph 3:14-19 prays on behalf of the Christians in Ephesus, that they may be strengthened with might through the Holy Spirit, and for the indwelling of Christ in their hearts through faith. These conditions enable them to be firmly rooted and grounded in love. Paul suggests that this is so that they may corporately comprehend the vast dimensions of the love of Christ, and have an experiential knowledge of the love of Christ which surpasses understanding. This will result in their being filled with the fullness of God. The love of Christ is the basis on which this study establishes the importance of Christian love. The call for Christians to understand the love of Christ recognizes the tension between the limitation of human knowledge, and the infinity of Christ's love, hence the need for Paul to make

this study of Christ's love the subject of prayer. This study attempts to pursue the admonition of Paul to understand the love of Christ which 'passeth all knowledge' through which Christians can experience the fullness of God.

Chapter 1 reveals the emphasis that the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church placed upon an understanding of the love of God upon humanity, and several appeals for that emphasis to constitute a more fundamental part of the Adventist message. Chapter 2 explores the Hebrew terms **אהבה** and **חַסֵּד** from the Old Testament and the Greek definitions of love as *ἔρωσ*, *φίλειν*, and *ἀγάπη* in order to develop an understanding of the love of God as a basis for a doctrine of Christian love. The historical development of the understanding of divine love is surveyed in the works of some thinkers and theologians. The relational considerations of Christian love are set forth in the context of love's supremacy above all virtues, the transformative impact of love, and the role of love in keeping the law. Finally, the relational considerations of Christian love are also presented in the context of the risky—and yet fundamental—need for freedom in order for love to exist.

An analysis of Lev 19:18 and Eph 3:14-19 as Old Testament and New Testament bases for the development of a doctrine of Christian love in chapter 3 reveal that love is a foundational tenet of Christianity and that it plays a pivotal role in the soteriological reality of believers. The attainment of missiological achievements within the SDA church is directly linked to the church's understanding and fervent application of Christian love upon all people with no respect to race, religion, caste, nationality, gender, age, education, or economic standing. The outcomes of Christian love include the believers' exhibition of the sign of love, as well as their observance of the sign of sanctification. The ultimate purpose of the apostle Paul's prayer in Eph 3:14-19 is that Christians attain to spiritual maturity.

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A thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

by

Thabo Mlotshwa

April 2021

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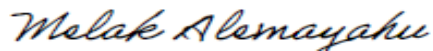
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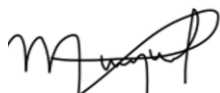
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Dedicated to

My wife Lisa, and our daughters Siân and Iyanla,

all of whose love I am a beneficiary.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACECE	A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians
GC	General Conference
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
SDABC	SDA Bible Commentary
TCW	The Clear Word

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The African philosophy of *Ubuntu* is embedded in the Zulu axiom *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which is loosely translated *I am because we all are*. The progress made by one is a testament to the contribution of many, and the completion of this thesis bears witness to the truth of that philosophy. At the end of an arduous academic journey, it is only fitting to make special mention of those who have sacrificially aided me along the way and made the completion of this study a reality.

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Finally, my gratitude to God—for working out some miracles on my behalf to make this endeavour possible—is summed up by the words of the gifted musician, the late Andraé Crouch: ‘the voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude. All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to Thee—To God be the glory!’

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

God's nature and His law is love.<sup>1</sup> Ellen White underscores the fact of love being God's nature and His law by affirming that "it ever has been; it ever will be."<sup>2</sup> The significance and importance of love in the government of God is also revealed when White advances the view that "the law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principle of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character."<sup>3</sup> It is clear that as long as there is no appreciation for, nor acknowledgement of, and allegiance to, love for God, there can be no harmony with God in His universe because His 'nature and His law is love.'

The Great Controversy motif informs us that Lucifer had made it his purpose that he would compromise the understanding of the love of God by challenging the supremacy of the second Person of the Godhead, God the Son.<sup>4</sup> It became his purpose to distort the loving character of God and to falsify the word of God and to

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 36.

misrepresent God's plan of government, and claimed that God was unfair in imposing laws upon the angels.<sup>5</sup>

When God created human beings, He created them to be “the image and glory of God” (1 Cor 11:7)<sup>6</sup>, and White observes that Adam and Eve “bore in outward resemblance the likeness of their Maker. Nor was this likeness manifest in the physical nature only. Every faculty of mind and soul reflected the Creator's glory.”<sup>7</sup> God's nature of love was reproduced and manifested in the nature of Adam and Eve. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that love also constituted the nature of the first parents of the human family. However, it is noteworthy that after God had created mankind in perfection, Ellen White points out that sin had marred and nearly completely destroyed the image of God in man. Therefore she states that the plan of salvation was instituted in order to restore God's image in human beings, which very well includes His loving nature.<sup>8</sup>

Love is the single most powerful motivation that actuated God to originate the plan of redemption from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8) to save humanity from sin, and the guiding principle that led Him to activate that plan in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4) and give His only Son to die for humanity. Love is foundational to the government of God in heaven and as such, it must be the preoccupation of a corporate church that seeks to abide by the principles of heaven here on earth. Ellen White admonishes that “[l]ove must be the principle of action” and further states that “[l]ove is the underlying principle of God's government in heaven and earth, and it must be

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>6</sup> All Scriptural references are quoted from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 20.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1894), 63.

the foundation of the Christian's character."<sup>9</sup> The apostle John wrote his epistle on the love of God with respect to what having it and not having it in the heart means for the believer, and in that treatise John declared that "[t]he one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8, NASB). Love is here described not as a possession or quality that God has, but rather as something that is integral to His nature, His essence—for it is expressed as what God is, and not what God has.

Anders Nygren argues that love must mark everything in Christianity. He argues that without love, there is nothing that is Christian that can be called Christian. Nygren therefore concludes that love is the basic original idea that belongs to Christianity alone.<sup>10</sup> Christianity without love is as oxymoronic as it is impossible. If God is love (1 John 4:8), and if the plan of salvation was devised to restore the image of God in humanity, then it can be reasoned that love is at the center of Christianity at large and as such, deserves to be studied and understood, practiced and propagated.

In Ellen White's last sermon at the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference Session, she repeatedly called for "Christian perfection in the context of Christlike love."<sup>11</sup> She revealed at that historic conference that the loveless condition of the church was a great concern to her when she confessed that "[t]he worst thing—the most grievous—is the want of love and the want of compassion one for another."<sup>12</sup> Such was the condition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as evaluated by Ellen White in 1888, and such is said to be the condition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the twenty-first century according to George R. Knight. Knight argues that

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<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *A Call to Stand Apart* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London, England: SPCK, 1953), 48.

<sup>11</sup> George R. Knight, *Angry Saints* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 175.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 1:56.

“Adventists have been so concerned with maintaining their distinctive doctrines, their law orientation, and their accomplishment of human righteousness that they have failed too often to open their hearts and minds to the large-scale transformations that God wants to accomplish in His people. This was the case in 1888, and it is so today.”<sup>13</sup> Hence one gets the sense that the issue of Christlike love has not yet been mastered at an organizational or corporate level in the Adventist Church.

In the months leading up to the 2018 General Conference Annual Council in which a vote was to be taken regarding the GC’s Compliance documents and committees, various sectors of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from varied geographic locations across the globe made statements in which they expressed a concern for what they felt was in some way a violation of this fundamental principle of Christian love. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2018, the leadership of the Linköping Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church, in Sweden, issued a statement about the then recent developments in the world church and noted that the compliance committee model “would likely create an atmosphere of distrust, uncertainty and fear, rather than the loving, open and trusting community we are asked to strive for.”<sup>14</sup> They reveal the understanding that love is something that is expected of the Christian community, and anything that is perceived to interfere with the free and genuine expression of Christian love is cause for concern.

A forum known as the AdventNetwork, which is made up of SDA lay church members as well as SDA pastors in the Southern Africa Union Conference of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division of the Adventist world church, also issued a

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<sup>13</sup> Knight, *Angry Saints*, 177.

<sup>14</sup> Alisa Williams, “Adventist Church in Linköping, Sweden Says GC’s Actions are Detrimental to Future of the Church,” accessed 8 October 2018, <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2018/adventist-church-in-linkoping-sweden-says-gc’s-actions-are-detrimental-to-future-of-the-church>

statement in an open letter to the GC regarding the establishment of the GC's Compliance Committees. Their statement is premised on their claim to being faithful members of the Adventist Church who "love and fear God, and understand His character to be one of unconditional love,"<sup>15</sup> and against that backdrop, proceed to discuss how they believe that the compliance documents and committees would work against the unity that they seek to promote since unity cannot be legislated, but must be sought after with different attitudes on the part of all who seek to achieve and maintain unity. AdventNetwork concluded their statement by asserting that unity is best achieved through "humility, gentleness (unselfishness, mildness, meekness), patience, bearing with one another and showing tolerance"<sup>16</sup> for one another in love, as enjoined in Eph 4:2.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Love permeates the doctrines and fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and serves as a solid foundation for Ellen G. White's five-volume *Conflict of the Ages* series. The series begins and ends with the three-word-phrase, "God is love,"<sup>17</sup> which implies that the love of God is the context within which her writings are presented and to be understood. Commenting on the positioning of love in the list of virtues found in Gal 5:22-23, Taylor G. Bunch suggests that "[l]ove is placed first because it is basic and fundamental in character building." He further asserts that "[l]ove is the center and soul of Christianity, the heart-throbbing impulse

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<sup>15</sup> AdventNetwork, "AdventNetwork of Southern Africa Pens Open Letter to General Conference," accessed 8 October 2018, <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2018/adventnetwork-of-southern-africa-pens-open-letter-to-general-conference>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> The first three words of the first chapter of the first volume of the *Conflict of the Ages* series, namely, the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, and the last three words of the fifth volume of the same series, *The Great Controversy*, are the declaration that "God is love."



of genuine religion.”<sup>18</sup> Though love is so central to Christianity, and pivotal in the Adventist worldview of the Great Controversy theme, there is still no formal doctrine or fundamental belief that sets out the Adventist Church’s understanding of biblical Christian love. There was a call from Ellen G. White in 1888 for the church to embrace Christian love and compassion for one another, just as there have been calls and observations from contemporary Adventist authors and scholars for the church to show more Christian love for one another, and yet without a formal statement or teaching on it, the understanding, and perhaps the expression, of Christian love may not get the prominence that it deserves in Adventist theology and lifestyle.

### **The Role of Distinctive Doctrines in Adventism**

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church has some beliefs that it holds in common with other Christian churches. The SDA church also has some teachings that are held exclusively by SDAs. The article entitled ‘Landmarks’ in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* mentions seven distinctive SDA pillars which include (1) the sanctuary, (2) the three angels’ messages of Rev 14, (3) the Second Advent, (4) the millennium, (5) the state of the dead, (6) the seventh day Sabbath, and (7) the Spirit of Prophecy.<sup>19</sup> The *SDAE* notes that “the landmarks are doctrines of such vital importance that they cannot be altered without changing the nature of the SDA church.”<sup>20</sup> In connection with these pillars or landmarks, Ellen White wrote the following:

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor G. Bunch, *Love: A Comprehensive Exposition of 1 Corinthians 13* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1952), 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (SDAE)*, rev. ed., (1996), s.v. “Landmarks.” As SDA doctrines developed, the term ‘landmarks’ came to include other distinctive SDA teachings in addition to the above mentioned.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Let the truths that are the foundation of our faith be kept before the people. Some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. They talk science, and the enemy comes in and gives them an abundance of science; but it is not the science of salvation. It is not the science of humility, of consecration, or of the sanctification of the spirit. We are now to understand what the pillars of our faith are,—the truths that have made us as a people what we are, leading us on step by step.<sup>21</sup>

George R. Knight posits that these landmark doctrines were non-negotiables in Adventist theology because each doctrine had been studied extensively in the Bible by the early Adventist believers, and these doctrines together inadvertently gave those believers their identity.<sup>22</sup> It seems evident that these distinctive doctrines not only set Seventh-day Adventism apart from other Christian churches, but in a special sense, the role of these distinctive doctrines was to provide the church with an identity.

That these distinctive doctrines set the SDA church apart from other Christian churches is an inadvertent reality which naturally results from the other Christian churches not holding the same views on those doctrines. Similarly, the beliefs that are held in common with other Christian churches ought not be understood as being less consequential merely on account of their being believed by other Christian groups. Were all Christendom to accept the doctrinal positions enunciated by the distinctive doctrines of Adventism—those doctrines might lose their quality of distinctiveness by reason of universal acceptance, but they would not lose their validity. Hence a doctrine of Christian love may not fall into the category of distinctive Adventist doctrines *per sé*, nevertheless, I contend that such a doctrine is a vital part of the system of Adventist beliefs and is due to receive significant attention as it has implications on the understanding and practice of some of the distinctive doctrines.

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<sup>21</sup> Ellen G. White, “The Work for This Time,” *The Review and Herald*, May 25, 1905, 17.

<sup>22</sup> George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 27.

## Justification of the Doctrine of Christian Love

The apostle Paul in Eph 3:14-19 prayed that God would grant the Ephesian Christians inner strength so that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith. In Paul's prayer, he desired that the Ephesian Christians, and by extension—the universal Christian church, may be 'rooted and grounded in love' so that they may comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ in order for them to be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:17-19). The SDABC notes that "[l]ove that is 'rooted' goes down deep into the soil of the soul, engaging all the faculties of the mind, while love that is 'grounded' is the firm foundation on which all our relationships exist."<sup>23</sup> Being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ is the basis of Christian love because Christ's love is the source and the foundation of Christian love.

In the same passage of Scripture, Paul confesses that this love of Christ to which he is referring, is actually beyond understanding. In the King James Version it is rendered as "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" and clearly presents the love of Christ as infinitely beyond our intellectual capacities to apprehend. However, the tension of the two realities presented by Paul—the call to comprehend the love of Christ on the one hand; and the infinity of that love which is admittedly beyond comprehension on the other—make the study of Christian love in the context of divine love an arduous but necessary labour. The tension of the two realities mentioned by Paul are what necessitated the prayer that Paul prayed to be prayed at all. The comprehension of the love of Christ calls for a special divine power for such understanding to be attained.

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<sup>23</sup> "In love" [Eph 3:17], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 6:1018.

The abovementioned tension also reveals that while we will not exhaust the study of the love of Christ, we must certainly engage in it. Such a study will have an impact on the relationship between God the Creator and His created beings, as well as within the human family because through the comprehension of Christ's love, Christians can be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:19), which fullness we also know to refer to Christ Himself (Col 2:9). The SDABC confirms that "[l]ove springs directly from the experience of possessing the indwelling Christ, and becomes the rooting and grounding of the unity between God and man, and between man and his fellow man."<sup>24</sup> This suggests that a study of the love of God can counteract the effects that sin has had on the relationship between God and man, and between man and his fellow man, because sin separated man from God (Isa 59:2), and consequently, man from fellow man. Furthermore, the comprehension of the love of Christ is a communal activity, a corporate transaction for "all saints" (Eph 3:18), by the common possession of which all the believers are bound together.

The circumstances that would lead to the birth or the coming into existence of the Seventh-day Adventist church were prophesied in Rev 10 as the apostle John was instructed in vision on the Isle of Patmos. John the Revelator was instructed to take the little book which was open in the hands of the angel and to eat it up. He was forewarned that the book would be in his mouth as sweet as honey, but that in his belly would be bitter (Rev 10:9). When he followed the instructions given, he indeed confirmed that when he had eaten it up, the book was in his mouth as sweet as honey and yet in his belly, bitter. That experience in vision has been interpreted as the experience of the Advent believers who were studying the prophecies in the books of Daniel and Revelation, and believed that the Second Coming would occur in 1843,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

and after recalculation, in 1844. The anticipation for, and fervent belief in, Christ's very imminent return was as sweet as honey in the proverbial mouth of the Advent believers. However, the fact that Christ did not come to earth on October 22, 1844, led to what has come to be known in Adventist history as the Great Disappointment.

In Rev 10:11, after the bitter experience in the belly of John the Revelator, or, by interpretation, the bitter experience of Advent believers in 1844, the angel instructed John to prophesy again. This time, John was to prophesy on a global scale "before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (Rev 10:11). The content of what must be prophesied again is understood as the proclamation of "the message of the third angel, of Rev. 14:9-12."<sup>25</sup> Ellen White then added some clarity to what the gist of the third angel's message is when she wrote that "[s]everal have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, 'It is the third angel's message in verity.'"<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, she noted that righteousness by the faith of the Son of God "is the active principle of love imparted by the Holy Spirit, that alone will make the soul fruitful unto good works."<sup>27</sup>

Other early pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church believed in the importance of the teaching of the love of God as revealed by E. J. Waggoner. Waggoner recorded the experience of his realization of God's love for himself, and how that realization impacted his own Christian experience and marked a turning point in his life. He wrote that one day as he sat in a tent where a servant of the Lord was speaking about God's grace, that "[s]uddenly a light shone about me, and the tent seemed illumined, as though the sun were shining; I saw Christ crucified for me, and

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<sup>25</sup> "Thou must prophesy again" [Rev 10:11], *SDABC*, 7:799.

<sup>26</sup> Ellen G. White, "Repentance A Gift of God," *The Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890, 193.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 467.

to me was revealed for the first time in my life the fact that God loved me, and that Christ gave Himself for me personally.”<sup>28</sup> He noted further that “I knew that this light that came to me was a revelation direct from heaven; therefore I knew that in the Bible I should find the message of God’s love for individual sinners, and I resolved that the rest of my life should be devoted to finding it there, and making it plain to others.”<sup>29</sup> In his own experience, a realization of the love of God for Waggoner served as the foundation from which to share God’s love for humanity with others.

James White noted how for some, Christ was central in the ministry, whilst for others, Christ was not, and White wrote a few months before his death the following:

With some, there is an unutterable yearning of the soul for Christ, and the writer is one of this class. With some of us it has been business, work, and care, giving Christ but little room in the mind and in the affections. With others it has been nearly all theory, dwelling upon the law and the prophets, the nature and destiny of man, and the messages, while destitute, to an alarming degree, of an indwelling Christ.<sup>30</sup>

James White noted that some were preaching the vast array of Adventist doctrines, but leaving out Christ from their minds and affections, as well as leaving out the pivotal teaching about Christ Himself—who is the demonstration of God’s love to humanity (Rom 5:8). Ellen White, writing about the body of doctrines thus far studied and accepted by the church, emphasized their unity and the central object that they were meant to reveal. She wrote that the “truth for this time is broad in its outlines, far reaching, embracing many doctrines; but these doctrines are not detached items, which mean little; they are united by golden threads, forming a complete whole, with Christ as the living center.”<sup>31</sup> The focus on Christ as the center of all

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<sup>28</sup> Ellet J. Waggoner, *The Everlasting Covenant* (London, England: The International Tract Society, 1900), v.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> James S. White, “Eastern Tour,” *The Review and Herald*, February 8, 1881, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 2:87.

doctrines is essentially a focus on the love of God, of which Christ was the complete manifestation.

Furthermore, Ellen White would observe that the church has not presented to the people Christ's righteousness and Christ's love in their significance as they pertain to the plan of salvation. She noted that Christ's love had been left out whilst argumentative sermons were presented instead.<sup>32</sup> She reiterated this sentiment when she stated that “[t]here is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of the Scriptures—Christ and Him crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power corresponding to its relation to this theme.”<sup>33</sup> The suggestion made by Ellen White is that the vitality of other doctrines is based on those doctrines' connectedness to the theme of the love of God in Christ. The General Conference Administrative Committee recorded an official statement in 1997 in which they affirmed that “if, in expounding on what the Bible teaches, Seventh-day Adventists fail to express love to those addressed, we do not exhibit authentic Christianity.”<sup>34</sup>

The doctrine of Christian love is one that is universal in its appeal, because no rational human being naturally abhors love—it is instinctive and yet not innate. Love is an experience that is beneficial to all people. God is the originator of this love, and His love is the standard to be reached, as it is stated in His command for Christians to “love thy neighbour as thyself,” (Lev 19:18) and to “love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13:34). God also set His love for His church as the standard to be reached

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<sup>32</sup> Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 50.

<sup>34</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Communication Department, *Statements, Guidelines, and Other Documents* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 96.

by husbands in loving their wives; as found in Eph 5:25. It then logically follows that if God's love is the standard to be reached, and if God's love is the source and foundation of Christian love, such love must be the subject of study in order that Christians may fulfill the command to love one another as Christ has loved them. A doctrine of Christian love will benefit the church in the following areas:

1. **Theology.** Ellen White noted that doctrines were not meant to stand alone independently from other doctrines, but that they were parts that were to form “a complete whole, with Christ as the living center.”<sup>35</sup> This doctrine is the golden thread that holds all other doctrines together. It enables the church to operate on the same theological understanding of Christian love. When the focus is placed on defining and understanding what Christian love is, it can then be known how to apply it. It is not uncommon in the corporate church for various initiatives to be singled out for the purpose of giving them the prominence they deserve.
2. **Spiritual Growth.** A faithful understanding of Christian love positively impacts other areas of Christian life. The SDABC highlights the fact that the “blessings of God are not parceled out parsimoniously. They lead to an ever-increasing comprehension of the mind of God, to a filling up of the void and empty places in men's lives with spiritual power.”<sup>36</sup> Christian love is a doctrine that is a prerequisite for the practice of many other Christian doctrines and practices, such as commandment keeping (John 14:15; Rom 13:8), exemplifying discipleship (John 13:35), service (Gal 5:13), knowledge of God (1 John 4:7), and transformation of the life as a direct result of the indwelling presence of God in the believer (1 John 4:12).

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<sup>35</sup> White, *Selected Messages*, 2:87.

<sup>36</sup> “Fulness of God” [Eph 3:19], *SDABC*, 6:1018.



3. **Focus.** A summarized doctrine which combines—but is not limited to—aspects of the the love of God and Christian love as they are presented in the context of other fundamental beliefs, makes appreciating its significance a reality. In the exposition of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-Adventist Church, the fundamental belief about the Godhead enumerates the communicable and the incommunicable attributes of God, and lists love as simply one communicable attribute among many.<sup>37</sup> The main point of that fundamental belief is not to extol the virtues of love, and as such has a tendency to obscure the significance of love even though it is presented there as an attribute of God.

In the exposition of the fundamental belief about God the Father, the point is made that “Christ knew that revealing the precious love of His Father was the key to bringing people to repentance (Rom 2:4)”.<sup>38</sup> In the context of that exposition, the focus of that statement is on explaining that God the Father is also a God of love. I am of the view that the depth and import of Christ’s revelation of the Father’s love to humanity would be clearer to see if statements such as these belonged in a section that discusses Christ’s love as a demonstration of what Christian love is.

The exposition on the fundamental belief on Creation illustrates the depth of God’s love which did not prevent Him from creating Adam—though God knew that the hands He was creating would one day abuse Him and nail Him on a cross. Yet that knowledge notwithstanding, this exposition boldly asserts that “[i]ncomprehensible love is the basis of Creation.”<sup>39</sup> Such a profound fact may

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<sup>37</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

easily be overlooked or underestimated unless its profundity is positioned where it may be appreciated with much ease.

4. **Mission.** The doctrine of Christian love is a strong foundation for the mission of the church. The three angels' messages in Rev 14 form the basis of the mission of Seventh-day Adventist church. After the experience of 1844's disappointment, the third angel's message is to be the focus of the church's mission. Also, the experience of E. J. Waggoner is a testament to the missional force that an understanding of this doctrine will have upon the membership of the church. Ellen White appealed to the mission of the church when she wrote that "the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love."<sup>40</sup> The presentation of God's character of love by the church will be catalytic in the fulfilment of the church's mission to the world.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this study is to lay a foundation for developing a biblical theology of Christian love from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective. To that end, this study will examine the foundation, content, essence, and meaning of Christian love as it is commanded, taught, expected and expressed in Lev 19:18 and its related passages, and Eph 3:14-19 and its related passages.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is in that it is intended to help Seventh-day Adventists to be aware of a critical, but in many cases, missing ingredient of Christian love in the experience of some of Adventism's members. It is hoped that this study will also help to break down the proverbial "walls" that keep members separated one

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<sup>40</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 415.

from another due to the “want of love and the want of compassion for one another”<sup>41</sup> spoken of by Ellen G. White at the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference Session. This understanding of biblical love and its demands upon Seventh-day Adventists towards each other as well as towards those of different faiths and those with no formal beliefs at all, will pave the way for God to use the Adventist Church as His conduit of not only His truth, but of His love as well. This study is also focused on contributing towards developing the foundations of the missing Seventh-day Adventist fundamental belief on Christian love.

In a more general sense, the words of Anders Nygren, speaking on the subject of Christian love, ring true when he notes that the notion of love must occupy a central place in Christianity, religiously and ethically, and yet when the treatment the subject of love has received by theologians is assessed, one may observe that it is one of the most neglected studies.<sup>42</sup> This conspicuous neglect of such an integral motif by theologians in Christianity over protracted periods of time motivates the pursuit of such a study. The study is aimed at adding to the body of literary works that seek to address the subject of Christian love.

### **Delimitations**

This study will discuss the subject of the love of God for the purposes of establishing a reference point for the church’s teaching and practice of Christian love. To this end, the study will consider the question of biblical Christian love and its implications upon the Seventh-day Adventist Church in particular without reference to its application or understanding beyond the denominational boundary of Adventism. This study will also make reference to both, the Hebrew terms and the

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<sup>41</sup> White, *Sermons and Talks*, 1:56.

<sup>42</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 27.

Greek terms that convey the idea of love in the Bible. While there are several Greek words in ancient Greek from which different nuances of the term “love” can be explored such as *στοργή*, *φιλαυτία* and *ξενία*, this research will limit its focus to a comparison of the terms *ἔρως*, *φιλία*, and *ἀγάπη*. While there is much that can be gleaned from both the Old and the New Testaments, the discussions about Christian love in this study will be anchored mainly on Lev 19:18 and Eph 3:14-19.

### **Presuppositions**

This research presupposes the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and will therefore not seek to make a case for their inspiration. As a direct consequence of this presupposition, this research accepts the Scriptures as a means of divine revelation and as the authoritative word of God. This research also assumes the unity and internal coherence of the canon so that what the Scriptures assert in one portion of the whole, with a final-form canonical hermeneutic considered,<sup>43</sup> will not be in contradiction with the assertions of the rest of the Scriptures. The research also assumes that the Scriptures that make up the Canon refer to the sixty-six-book collection made up of the thirty-nine Old Testament books, accepted in Judaism and Christianity, and the twenty-seven New Testament books which are recognized and accepted most widely in Christianity

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<sup>43</sup> A final-form canonical hermeneutic refers to the approach that views the canonical text in its extant form(s) due to the lack of access to an original final form. This approach, however, does not exclude the best findings of textual criticism to recover the original text and its meaning.

## **Methodology**

This study will utilize a biblical systematic theological approach by drawing from Old and New Testament references. To this end, this research will utilize a biblical expository approach on Lev 19:18 and Eph 3:14-19 and on relevant supporting texts such as John 13:34 and 1 John 4:8. The research methodology will also include consultation of literary works that have been written on the love of God and on the love of mankind for the purposes of appreciating various perspectives that have historically influenced the thinking regarding divine love. Some exegesis will be done on Eph 3:14-19 and word studies from both, the OT and NT, will be employed to determine the nuances and implications of key words related to love. Theological journals as well as Bible commentaries and theological dictionaries will be referenced in this study. The writings of Ellen G. White will also be used to provide extra-biblical inspired perspectives from a particularly Seventh-day Adventist context on the question of Christian love, and how it must be manifested in the hearts of believers, and what the consequences of its absence from the heart and life might be.

## **Thesis Overview**

This research will consist of four chapters. Chapter 1 will provide the background of the study, which will also set the context for the statement of the problem. Chapter 1 will also address the role of distinctive doctrines in Adventism in relation to the doctrine of Christian love. This chapter will also outline the purpose of the research and its significance in Adventist theology. It will discuss the justifications for why this study seeks to contribute to the development of a doctrine or fundamental belief by examining some writings of the founding pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church organization. The chapter will define the delimitations

that will limit the scope of the study before enumerating some presuppositions held by the researcher. It will also contain the methodology that will be employed in the course of this research as well as a general overview of the whole thesis.

Chapter 2 will be an extensive review of varied forms of theological literature, interpretations of selected biblical texts and terms as understood by various Bible scholars and Bible commentaries. The chapter will analyse some Hebrew word groups relating to God's love and will survey divine love in historical theology before examining John C. Peckham's theology of divine love. This chapter will present what has been written on God's love, and what has been written on the love of humanity and seek to construct a basis upon which to formulate a theology of Christian love. Chapter 3 will present an analysis of Lev 19:18 and Eph 3:14-19 and an exposition by the researcher on the findings of various authors as highlighted in Chapter 2. This chapter's analysis will be based on the Bible and other literature contained in the literature review. Chapter 4 will contain a summary of all that has been dealt with in this study on the subject of Christian love. This chapter of the research will also present the conclusions of this study which will be accompanied by recommendations, as well as areas identified by the researcher for further study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In seeking to develop theological foundations for the development and understanding of a doctrine of Christian love, this chapter aims at demonstrating the prominence of love in several dimensions of Adventist theology, such as the love of God and the significance of love in the cosmic conflict. Therefore this chapter will examine the content, essence, and meaning of the love of God in the OT as well as in historical theology and contrast it with the love of humankind, both, towards God, and towards fellow humankind. This chapter will also explore some of the implications of an understanding of biblical Christian love particularly on personal spiritual growth and transformation, as well as in interpersonal relations of church members with all people.

The Seventh-day Adventist church has a set of 28 Fundamental Beliefs, which the editors of the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*<sup>1</sup> have grouped into six major doctrines. The first five fundamental beliefs, namely, *The Word of God*, *The Godhead*, *God the Father*, *God the Son*, and *God the Holy Spirit* are denominated under the doctrine of God. The next two fundamental beliefs, *Creation* and *The Nature of Man*, are grouped together under the doctrine of man. The doctrine of salvation encompasses the next four fundamental beliefs; *The Great Controversy*, *The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ*, *The Experience of Salvation*, and *Growing in Christ*. The doctrine of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, iii-iv.

church has seven fundamental beliefs which are; *The Church, The Remnant and Its Mission, Unity in the Body of Christ, Baptism, The Lord's Supper, Spiritual Gifts and Ministries, and The Gift of Prophecy*. The next five fundamental beliefs are listed under the doctrine of the Christian life, and these are *The Law of God, The Sabbath, Stewardship, Christian Behaviour, and Marriage and the Family*. Finally the sixth major doctrine is called the doctrine of last things, and it encompasses five fundamental beliefs. These are *Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, The Second Coming of Christ, Death and Resurrection, The Millennium and the End of Sin, and The New Earth*.

It is significant to note that the editors of the aforementioned exposition of 28 Fundamental Beliefs indicate their belief that “every doctrine, every belief, must reveal the love of our Lord.”<sup>2</sup> While it is true that the love of our Lord may not always be expressed by the explicit use of the specific ‘*agapeic*’ term ‘*love*,’ the use of the term aids in discerning God’s love in the doctrine in question. A survey of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs reveals that two out of the five fundamental beliefs under the doctrine of God make some reference to the love of God.<sup>3</sup> One out of the two fundamental beliefs under the doctrine of man speaks of mankind’s duty to love God and to love one another.<sup>4</sup> All four fundamental beliefs under the doctrine of salvation make some mention of God’s love.<sup>5</sup> Two out of the seven fundamental beliefs under the doctrine of the church make mention of the unity of “our hearts in love”<sup>6</sup> as well

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>3</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 162.

<sup>4</sup> *Church Manual*, 164.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 164-166.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 167.



as spiritual gifts which are to be used in “loving ministry”<sup>7</sup> for the benefit of all. Three out of the five fundamental beliefs under the doctrine of the Christian life speak of God’s love, our love for God, and mutual love for one another.<sup>8</sup> The doctrine of last things encompasses five fundamental beliefs, out of which only one belief mentions something about the love of God.<sup>9</sup> In total, thirteen fundamental beliefs expressly say something about love, whilst fifteen fundamental beliefs are silent about how God’s love may be discerned in the context of those specific beliefs. Against this background, this chapter will explore what has been documented about God’s love as this will inform the foundation of a doctrine of Christian love.

God has some incommunicable attributes in His divine nature, which He does not share and has not given to created beings. These incommunicable attributes include His self-existence, His omniscience, His omnipresence, His eternity, His omnipotence, and His immutability.<sup>10</sup> These are attributes that, in a specific and exclusive sense, define and describe God and Him alone; these are some of the attributes that make God God, and thus differentiate Him from His creation, which does not and cannot possess these incommunicable attributes.

God also has some communicable attributes that define who He is, but which attributes He shares with humanity such as love, grace, mercy, patience, holiness, righteousness, justice, and truth.<sup>11</sup> These are attributes of God which define Him, but they also represent standards that humanity can aspire to and experience. This suggests that since God loves, human beings can also love. This fact is also implied

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 168-170.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>10</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

by the injunctions that are found in both, the Old and New Testament Scriptures, where believers are commanded to love, such as we find in Lev 19:18, 34 in the Old Testament, and Matt 22:37, 39 in the New Testament.<sup>12</sup>

It is a reasonable proposition to accept that God would not place a requirement upon humanity of something that was impossible for human beings to achieve, hence love is an important attribute of the essence of God which He shares with the human family, which God also expects every believer to possess, experience, and share with other people. God's love is expressed within the Godhead and also expressed towards humanity as discussed and it is distinguished from the spontaneous love that occurs between members of the same family.

### **The Love of God**

In seeking to establish the foundation of Christian love, by examining the content, essence, and meaning of Christian love in the context of Eph 3:14-19, it is necessary to explore “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of the love of Christ. This section begins that attempt by discussing the love of God as a springboard from which to develop the theology of Christian love. The phrase *the love of God* can be ambiguous in its interpretation because of the three possible meanings of such a benign and innocuous phrase. Catherine Osborne offers the following possible interpretations and explanations of the phrase:

The phrase ‘the love of God’ can mean (a) the love that you or I or anyone might have for God, (b) the love that God might have towards you or me or anything else, and (c) the love given by God, with which you or I or anyone might love me or you or anyone else. These three meanings we may distinguish as (a) love for God, (b) love by God, and (c) love from God.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Other relevant Bible texts include Deut 6:5, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27, John 13:34-35, Rom 13:8-9, Gal 5:14, Eph 5:25, and Jas 2:8.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Clarendon, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 28.

For purposes of the discussion in this sub-section, the term *the love of God* refers to the love that God has, essentially in Himself, and that He has and expresses towards humanity. In terms of the interpretations of the phrase *the love of God* proffered by Osborne, this section will deal with the love *by* God.

In seeking to coin a definition for what the love of God is, Fernando L. Canale is careful to note that God's love cannot be defined by logic from human ideas, but can only be defined by God Himself by means of an act of direct revelation.<sup>14</sup> The Bible reveals that God *is* love (1 John 4:8), it is therefore fitting to examine what the love by God looks like to humanity, and how God expresses His love to the world. Vincent Brümmer notes in reference to the assertion made in 1 John 4:8, that "it is not a mere contingent fact about God that he is *agape*, but a necessary consequence of his essential nature as the superabundant source of all love."<sup>15</sup> I. Howard Marshall comments on the declaration 'God is love' by suggesting that "this statement is simply the clearest expression of a doctrine of the nature of God that is attested throughout its pages."<sup>16</sup> Yves-Jean Harder notes that the God's love for people is shown in the creation by the role that He assigned to them.<sup>17</sup> This view of the love of God sees the creation of humanity and the position that human beings were created to occupy among all creation as the first evidence of God's love for humanity. The very act of the creation of human beings proves God's love for them. Norman Gulley observes that "God's plan to create humans and provide providential care for them

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<sup>14</sup> Fernando L. Canale, "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 111.

<sup>15</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 131.

<sup>16</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 213.

<sup>17</sup> Yves-Jean Harder, "Love," *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology (ECT)* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 1:950.

reveals His love for them.”<sup>18</sup> The very existence of human beings as God’s creation is perpetual evidence of the love of God.

Osborne further observes that in English, “[t]o say that God is love is to say that God is loving, only rather more strongly. In Greek, by contrast, the phrase ‘God is love’ (ὁ θεός ἀγάπη ἐστίν) does not so obviously imply that God is loving; it is usual for the Patristic commentators, both Greek and Latin, to take it in a different sense, namely to refer to God as the source or origin from which all other lovers derive their love.”<sup>19</sup> This view by Osborne strongly favours the understanding that love is the essence of who God is. This means, therefore, that for as long as God is in existence, He is not capable of lacking in love. It suggests that God’s existence is synonymous with the existence of love for not only is love part of His essence, but God is its source. Thomas F. Torrance firmly agrees with Osborne in the assertion that “God does not merely love, for he is love and apart from his Love, God is not at all.”<sup>20</sup> The SDA Bible Commentary (*SDABC*) adds its voice when it states that “If love is absent, Christ is absent.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Thomas Talbott in his comment about 1 John 4:8 holds that “we have an assertion about the very nature (or essence) of God, an assertion to the effect that it is God’s very nature to love.”<sup>22</sup>

However, Dutch Reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck, warns that love alone is insufficient in describing God’s essence because it puts one in the “danger of regarding other attributes of God, such as His righteousness and holiness, as less

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<sup>18</sup> Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 2:293.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 245.

<sup>21</sup> “How?” [1 John 3:17], *SDABC*, 7:655.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Talbott, “The Love of God and the Heresy of Exclusivism,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 27, no. 1 (1997): 112.

real.”<sup>23</sup> Millard J. Erickson sees all of God’s communicable and incommunicable attributes as only attributes rather than His nature or essence. Erickson argues for a balance of all the attributes rather than a singling out of any one attribute such as love, to the exclusion of other equally legitimate attributes of God such as His holiness, or His wrath, or His judgement. Erickson concludes that elevating love as the supreme truth about who God is, above His other attributes, is not “on the basis of the biblical text alone. It is possible that some other factor is bearing on the elevation of this quality.”<sup>24</sup> Stephen Smalley seems to concur with Erickson when he notes that the Bible also reveals that God is light (1 John 1:5), and Spirit (John 4:24), and fire (Heb 12:29) but still concludes that “[H]is essential nature is love.”<sup>25</sup> Norman Gulley’s analysis of the use of the various appellations for God is that though God is identified as light and spirit and love, the term “‘light’ is never personified in Scripture like ‘love’ is personified. Also mention of God’s love is more pervasive in Scripture than mention of His light.”<sup>26</sup>

1 John 3:16 indicates an expression of God’s love to humanity when it declares “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.” The apostle John here reveals how humanity can see the love of God, and he suggests that historically, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross provides compelling evidence and expression for the love of God towards humanity. John Piper appeals to Rom 5:6-8 which puts into perspective the depth of meaning of the death of Christ on the cross.

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<sup>23</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:122.

<sup>24</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?: The Current Controversy over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 213.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 51 (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 239.

<sup>26</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:75.

While it is noted that good persons might consider laying down their lives for their friends, Piper observes that “God’s love surpasses human love at its best (dying for a good man) precisely in this: that it will die for enemies—not converted enemies but those who were *still* enemies when Christ died for them.”<sup>27</sup> Gulley asserts that no greater expression of God’s love exists, beyond Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross for human beings.<sup>28</sup> Canale’s view embraces God’s love “not only as the basis of Creation, but also of salvation.”<sup>29</sup> It is not surprising therefore, for Canale to affirm that “the love of God receives its most astonishing and unexpected manifestation in the life and death of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:39; 1 John 4:10; Rom 5:8).”<sup>30</sup> This is the greatest expression of love that God bestowed upon the human family.

It is fitting at this juncture to examine the various nuances of meaning of the word ‘love.’ It is noted that our contemporary understanding of meaning of the word “love” has been obscured by many different ideas that lend meaning to the word. The *SDABC* clarifies that “The Greeks had three words to convey the ideas that we seek to express by our one word ‘love’: *agapan*, *philein*, and *eran*.”<sup>31</sup> The comparison in meanings of these different words is articulated as follows:

*Philein* in general describes affectionate, sentimental love based on the emotions and feelings. Insofar as it is based on the feelings it is subject to change as the feelings change. *Eran* denotes passionate, sensual ‘love,’ love that operates essentially on the physical plane. Certain forms of infatuation may be classed under this variety of ‘love.’ *Eran* is not used in the NT. In the NT *agapan*, when contrasted with *philein*, describes love from the standpoint of respect and esteem. It adds principle to feeling in such a way that principle controls the feelings. It brings into play the higher powers of the mind and intelligence. Whereas *philein* tends to make us ‘love’ only those who love us,

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<sup>27</sup> John Piper, *Love Your Enemies: Jesus’ Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and the Early Christian Paraenesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 104.

<sup>28</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 4:110.

<sup>29</sup> Canale, “Doctrine of God,” 111.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> “Love” [Matt 5:43], *SDABC*, 5:340.

*agapan* extends love even to those who do not love us. *Agapan* is selfless, whereas *eran* is purely selfish, and even *philein* may, at times, be marred by selfishness.<sup>32</sup>

The term ἀγάπη was once thought to have existed exclusively in Christian writings, however it is now clear that this is not the case:

*Agapē* was formerly thought to be a distinctly Christian term, for no example of it in secular Greek sources had been discovered. Now, however, several unquestioned examples of its use outside of early Christian literature have been found. However, the paucity of such examples, and the frequency of *agapē* in Christian literature, show that Christians especially adopted this term to describe the higher concept of love revealed in the gospel.<sup>33</sup>

Emil Brunner leans towards the sense and wider meaning of the term ἔρωσ as developed by Plato in the *Symposium* where it means “any form of love that is determined by value. According to Plato, *erōs* is an attraction produced in the soul by the value of the ‘beloved,’ a sort of vacuum effect by which the soul is attracted by something that it lacks.”<sup>34</sup> “Ἐρωσ is a kind of love that is motivated by the quality of the object. This, according to Brunner, marks the fundamental difference between ἔρωσ and ἀγάπη. Brunner points out that the object could indeed be anything at all and not only material things. Any object that motivates love because of its own qualities, which represent something that the lover lacks can be termed as ἔρωσ. Therefore in Brunner’s understanding of the Platonic definition of ἔρωσ, it is not necessarily in reference to sexual attraction nor an ‘erotic’ interest.

Ed Wheat explains that ἀγάπη love comes from connectedness with an endless supply of power to operate regardless of circumstances. He demonstrates that ἀγάπη love is not based on the lovability of the other person, but on the deliberate will that is

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (SDABD)*, rev. ed. (1979), s.v. “Love.”

<sup>34</sup> Emil Brunner, *Faith, Hope and Love* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1956), 63.

embraced by the lover.<sup>35</sup> Wheat here speaks of the intentional aspect of ἀγάπη love, which seeks to give love not as a response, but because there exists no condition which precludes the operation of ἀγάπη love.<sup>36</sup> This is what Nygren refers to as “spontaneous and unmotivated”<sup>37</sup> love. He suggests that this is the most striking feature of God’s love. Brunner states that ἀγάπη love “is not love grounded in the value, in the loveableness of the beloved; it is not attraction by the value of the object; it is not completion, and therefore it is not motivated.”<sup>38</sup>

Elsewhere, ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω are seen as signifying “a self-giving attitude that seeks the best for others, even if unlovable.”<sup>39</sup> This understanding of the love of God is consistent with the thought of John 3:16, which records that God loved the world enough to give His only Son for the redemption of all who would believe in Him, even though, as noted by Rom 5:8, they were not worth loving at all. Love actuated the greatest gift upon humanity. It is important to note that the noun form of ἀγάπη is almost exclusively confined to the Bible.<sup>40</sup> The noteworthiness of this is that this is where the love of God is communicated to humanity. The *SDABC* notes the significance of the depth of meaning of ἀγάπη by affirming that:

The *agapē* of the NT is love in its highest and truest form, the love than which there is no greater—love that impels a man to sacrifice himself for others (John 15:13). It implies reverence for God and respect for one’s fellow men. It is a divine principle of thought and action that modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, and ennobles the affections.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ed Wheat, *Love Life for Every Married Couple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 62.

<sup>36</sup> The definitions of the terms *unconditional*, *conditional*, and *foreconditional* are presented in some detail in a later section.

<sup>37</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 75.

<sup>38</sup> Brunner, *Faith, Hope and Love*, 64.

<sup>39</sup> Moises Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDNTTE)*, (2014), s.v. “Agape,”

<sup>40</sup> “Love” [Matt 5:43], *SDABC*, 5:340.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*



The love of God is so indescribably vast that the apostle Paul in Romans identifies some of the most inescapable forces in human experience such as “troubles, hardships, persecutions, hunger, poverty, danger or threat of death,” (Rom 8:35, TCW) to illustrate that even those forces are not capable of interfering with God’s love for humanity. He further appeals to the physical dimensions of space like height and depth to show that the love which God has for humanity is also not affected by any dimensions of space. Hence Ellen G. White writes that “Christ’s death proves God’s great love for man. ... Through the cross, we learn that the heavenly Father loves us with a love that is infinite.”<sup>42</sup> Yves-Jean Harder further suggests that God is in fact “the very event of love such as it is manifested in the Passion and the Resurrection.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore the love of God can be seen as being expressed by the death of Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners. The love of God is also appropriately described as being part of God’s essence because it originates in Him and is not limited by physical dimensions just as God Himself is both, self-existent and is unlimited.

Gerald Bray adopts an explicitly Trinitarian framework within which to examine and define the love of God.<sup>44</sup> Bray’s interpretation of what divine love means to the Christian is consistent with the implications presented in this research. However, his understanding of the constituent character of divine love has some controversial implications. He understands love as being intrinsic to the nature of the Trinity and suggests that it characterizes the manner in which the members of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 209-210.

<sup>43</sup> Harder, “Love,” *ECT*, 1:952

<sup>44</sup> Gerald Bray, *God Has Spoken: A History of Christian Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 17.

Godhead relate to each other.<sup>45</sup> He argues that “Love is the expression of a relationship and cannot exist if there is only one subject. Of course it is true that there is only one God, and it would be blasphemous to suggest that he made the world because he needed to have something to love.”<sup>46</sup> He further explains that “God’s love must be perfect within Himself because he is perfect, and his love for the creation can only be an extension of the love that subsists in him. God’s love can therefore only be self-love.”<sup>47</sup> However, the Trinitarian framework adopted by Bray is founded upon the assumptions of the *filioque* doctrine,<sup>48</sup> from which he states that “the one self-existent person (who is the Father, of course) can generate another person who is his equal, and must do so if his own personhood is to be fulfilled” because “love cannot be entirely self-centered but must be directed to another being if it is to be truly itself.”<sup>49</sup>

As a result of the Son ostensibly proceeding from the Father, Bray suggests that “The Son’s love for the Father is secondary in the sense that it is a response to the Father’s love for him, but it is in no way inferior.”<sup>50</sup> He further asserts that the Son’s love for the Father is equal, and therefore identical, to the Father’s love for the Son and is in that sense, perfect. “Furthermore, since each of these loves is perfect, they are in fact one love, and this one love is the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of love tying

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<sup>45</sup> Gerald Bray, *God is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 176.

<sup>46</sup> Bray, *God Has Spoken*, 681.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> The controversy known as the *Filioque* centered on the Latin theological doctrine expressed in the Nicene Creed: *qui ex patre filioque procedit*, referring to the Holy Spirit ‘which proceeds from the Father and from the Son.’—Yves-Jean Lacoste, “Filioque,” *ECT*, 1:581.

<sup>49</sup> Bray, *God Has Spoken*, 710.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 682.

the Trinity together.”<sup>51</sup> Bray accedes to the thought in Richard of St. Victor’s *De Trinitate* by reasoning that:

A third person must be related to the other two in a different way. The logic of love between two persons suggests that a third person is necessary in order to prevent the mutual love of the two from becoming selfish and unproductive. Only when a third person appears, whom the other two love equally, is the perfection of their mutual love assured. But while that third person must share their perfection in order to be worthy of their perfect love, he must also be sufficiently different from them to be distinguishable and therefore lovable in his own right.<sup>52</sup>

This view of the intra-Trinitarian love is problematic in that it assumes a beginning of the existence of the Son brought about by the Father, and a subsequent beginning of the Holy Spirit resulting from both—Father and Son. The inescapable logical conclusion is that before the moment when the Son began to exist—the nature of God’s love, if it can be called that, is nebulous. By the same token, that the Holy Spirit Himself is identified as the love itself between Father and Son inadvertently implies that before He (the Holy Spirit) was caused to exist by the Father and Son, there was no love between the Father and the Son. The suggestion that on the one hand, the love between Father and Son is regarded to be perfect love; and on the other hand, a third person (who is subsequently generated by Father and Son) is necessary for that love to be perfect seems incongruous.

### **The Love of God in the Old Testament**

This section seeks to provide a canonical understanding of God’s love as a basis for formulating an Adventist perspective on Christian love. To that end, this section will briefly analyse two Hebrew terms that provide some insight into, and demonstrate the dimensions of, divine love.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 683.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 710.

## Analysis of the אהב Word Group

The OT word that is generally translated ‘love’ is אהב from which the verb אהב is derived. The verb root אהב appears 215 times in 200 verses, and the noun form אהבה appears 37 times in 34 verses. The meaning of these terms is broad in scope as they are used to describe God’s love for the righteous (Ps 146:8), human love for God (Deut 11:1; Ps 116:1), the spontaneous love of people belonging to the same family, and the spontaneous love of friends (Gen 22:2, 24:67; Lev 19:18). The term אהב frequently appears in reference to the feeling of affection within kinship relationships, such as that of parent-child (Gen 22:2), and between husband and wife (Gen 29:18, 20, 30). In the context of friendship love, it may at times portray fervent emotional attachment (1 Sam 18:1, 3; 20:17; 2 Sam 1:26). אהב also depicts romantic affection, passion, and desire (Cant 1:3–4, 7; 2:4, 5, 7; 3:1–5, 10; 7:6; 8:4).

John Peckham suggests that אהב also includes the aspect of volitionality on the part of human beings as well as in the context of divine אהב. Peckham observes that the fact that אהב can be divinely commanded suggests a level of volition by which human beings can either comply with the command or reject it. He argues that:

Considerable emphasis has been placed on the volitional aspect of אהב, and there is a great deal of support for such a view. Indeed, the fact that human אהב is often commanded (toward neighbors, strangers, and even toward God) assumes a volitional element though not necessarily to the exclusion of emotion. Likewise, divine אהב has an apparent volitional aspect. The preference and volition of divine אהב is perhaps clearest in those passages that relate to election.<sup>53</sup>

The divine אהב for human beings, along with divine אהב for justice and righteousness, constitutes the grounds of divine beneficent action (Pss 11:7; 33:5;

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<sup>53</sup> John C. Peckham, “The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship” (PhD Dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 2012), 225-226.

37:28) and election (Deut 4:37, 7:7-8), though not necessarily identical to divine beneficence. Norman H. Snaith concludes incorrectly when he views אהב as election love on the basis that God “loved Israel—that is, he preferred her before all other peoples. She is his elected people.”<sup>54</sup> Eugene H. Merrill concurs with Snaith’s proposition by suggesting that the terms ‘election’ and ‘love’ are practically synonymous for “‘to love’ is to choose, and ‘to choose’ is to love.”<sup>55</sup> Alexander To Ha Luc does not accept the synonymy proposed by Snaith and Merrill and others, but rather, sees אהב as the basis of election—and therefore, correctly and logically thinks it impossible for the basis to be equivalent to that for which it is the basis.<sup>56</sup> Carl Henry also recognized אהב as the basis of election rather than as an equivalent of, or as synonymous with, election.<sup>57</sup>

Preferential אהב occurs frequently with human agency. In family contexts, it occurs where Isaac “loved” Esau his son, but Rebekah “loved” Jacob her son (Gen 25:28). In the next generation, Israel “loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age” (Gen 37:3-4) and Benjamin was in the same way preferred (Gen 44:20), both as a result of Jacob’s preferential love for Rachel, their mother. This preferential אהב is seen as evaluative because Isaac loves Esau particularly because of Esau’s hunting skill as well as Jacob’s affinity for game meat (Gen 25:28),

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<sup>54</sup> Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London, UK: Epworth Press, 1962), 134.

<sup>55</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 132.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander To Ha Luc, “The Meaning of *’hb* in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD dissertation, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI, 1982).

<sup>57</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word Books Inc., 1976-1983), 2:347.

and Jacob's love for Joseph and Benjamin is particularly predicated on them being the children of the beloved Rachel (Gen 37:3).

It must be noted that אהב does not necessarily last forever. At one time Saul loved David greatly (1 Sam 16:21) but his love did not continue when David rose to prominence. אהב was used to cause David to believe that the king (Saul) delighted in him and that all the king's servants loved (אהבו) him (1 Sam 18:22), suggesting that אהב can be used deceptively. The term אהב is used to portray Amnon's licentious desire for his half-sister—feelings that later turned into intense hatred after having sexually abused her (2 Sam 13:1, 4, 15). Gerhard Wallis suggests that this indicates the emotive aspect of אהב since “indeed, love can suddenly be turned to hate.”<sup>58</sup>

Peckham points out a misconception that often takes place, wherein “undeserved” or “unmerited” love (Deut 7:7, 9:4-5) is misunderstood to mean that “אהב is altogether unconditional, predicated on the unilateral divine will.”<sup>59</sup> This misconception is in tension with the conditionality and contingency that is sometimes apparent with אהב (Deut 7:12-13, Ps 146:8, Prov 15:9). However, such tension is done away with once the relationships between conditionality, unconditionality and foreconditionality are reconciled in a later section.<sup>60</sup>

### **Analysis of the אהב Word Group**

The term אהב is one of the most significant expressions of God's character in the entire Canon and it is a very relational term. אהב occurs 251 times in 245 verses.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Gerhard Wallis, “אהב,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 1:102.

<sup>59</sup> Peckham, “The Concept of Divine Love” 229.

<sup>60</sup> These terms will be discussed briefly in the section entitled *The Love of God in Peckham's Theology*, and discussed a little more in-depth in a subsequent section entitled *The Foreconditionality and Unconditionality of the Love of God*.

<sup>61</sup> Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “אהב,” *TDOT*, 5:45.

Hans-Jürgen Zobel notes that the occurrence of  $\text{חסד}$  in 63 of the 245 verses is within the context of the divine-human relationship.<sup>62</sup> The love that God has for His people in the context of the covenant is often expressed by the term  $\text{חסד}$ , which refers to God's "steadfast love."<sup>63</sup> Karl Donfried notes that "God's steadfast love is a sign of his fidelity."<sup>64</sup> John Gammie further asserts that the Hebrew term  $\text{חסד}$  "which is rendered by the KJV as 'loving-kindness' (30 times), as 'kindness' (38 times), and as mercy (145 times), is translated in the RSV chiefly as 'steadfast love' (182 times) and 'kindness' (21 times), but occasionally as 'great kindness' (Gen. 19:19) or loyal love (1 Sam. 20:14)."<sup>65</sup>

Gammie suggests that the term  $\text{חסד}$  contains the idea of devotion, loyalty, and covenant faithfulness—whose richness the English renderings only approximate.

Gordon R. Clark emphasizes the idea of faithfulness to the covenant contained in  $\text{חסד}$  by concluding about the relationship between God and the children of Israel that had they remained faithful to Yahweh, Yahweh would be faithful to them and to the covenant, and would go on loving them by keeping the promises He made to their forefathers.<sup>66</sup> As such a relational term, Peckham points out that:

Divine  $\text{חסד}$  is responsive and expects appropriate response. Specifically God's  $\text{חסד}$  is often in response to a pre-existing relationship and/or various actions of human beings including fidelity and supplication. As such, the divine-human  $\text{חסד}$  assumes a reciprocal, though unequal, relationship. However, divine  $\text{חסד}$  is consistently presented as voluntary and free.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Karl Paul Donfried, "Love," *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (THCBD)*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996), 625.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> John G. Gammie, "Loving-kindness," *THCBD*, 627.

<sup>66</sup> Gordon R. Clark, "The Word *Hesed* in the Hebrew Bible," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 1:283.

<sup>67</sup> Peckham, "The Concept of Divine Love" 355.

The term  $\text{חסד}$  portrays the love of God as resolute, unchanging, loyal, faithful, in a way that refers chiefly, though not exclusively, to God. While it is noted that the term  $\text{חסד}$  is often used in the context of a covenantal relationship, several theologians suggest that  $\text{חסד}$  is not always limited to a covenant context.

That  $\text{חסד}$  emphasizes the idea of faithfulness to the covenant is shown in the Exodus narrative wherein God tells the emancipated Israelites that even though He will visit iniquity to the third and fourth generations, the divine  $\text{חסד}$  will be bestowed upon thousands that love Him and observe His commandments (Exod 20:5-6; Deut 5:2-3, 8-10). In the narrative of the golden calf (Exod 32) divine  $\text{חסד}$  is bestowed upon people who have forfeited their covenantal privileges by their rejection of Yahweh. God goes beyond His covenantal responsibilities by continuing to bestow divine  $\text{חסד}$  to a stiff-necked, rebellious and unworthy people. After Israel's apostasy, God reveals Himself as "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Exod 34:6, NASB). The God "who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin" is the same God who "will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Exod 34:7, NASB). Hence Robert C. Dentan holds that the passage is a uniquely balanced assertion on the two most basic aspects of God's character—His love and His justice. He further notes that God's love holds the primary place between the two.<sup>68</sup> In this passage it is clear that "the key elements of grace and justice are present with a similar contrast between God's grace which endures for 'thousands (of generations)' and justice or punishment that lasts

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<sup>68</sup> Robert C. Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 36.



only to the ‘third and fourth generation.’”<sup>69</sup> This is an indication that the picture of God that is portrayed in the NT is the same as that in the OT.<sup>70</sup>

Some scholars see an evaluative as well as emotional aspect in the term *חסד*. Leon Morris argues that “*Hesedh*, then, implies relationship and indicates a deep, lasting affection.”<sup>71</sup> Peckham notes that “*חסד* is closely associated and collocates significantly with all the divine virtues including his [God’s] love (*אהב*), compassion (*רחם*), and goodness (*טוב*), which are manifested in his voluntary association with humanity.”<sup>72</sup> Clark speaks of *חסד* as an emotion that causes actions that subsequently benefit the receiver of those actions.<sup>73</sup>

### **The Love of God in Historical Theology**

This section will present a brief survey of a small but representative number of thinkers whose ideas of God and philosophies of divine love shaped and influenced the historical theology of the love of God. The section briefly summarizes the thought and contribution of Aristotle who developed his concept of love as a nuanced departure from Plato’s classical philosophy. Augustine’s contribution to the view of Christian love being axiomatic with Christianity justifies his inclusion in this section. Thomas Aquinas’s contribution is examined on the basis that he is considered as “the most influential theologian in history other than Augustine.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Exod 34:5-9, *Andrews Study Bible* ed. Jon L. Dybdahl (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 118.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 68.

<sup>72</sup> Peckham, “The Concept of Divine Love” 357.

<sup>73</sup> Clark, “The Word *Hesed*,” 267.

<sup>74</sup> John C. Peckham, *The Doctrine of God: Introducing the Big Questions* (London, UK: T. & T. Clark, 2020), 12.

Anders Nygren's treatment of ἀγάπη had an impact on Christian ethical reflection in the twentieth century, evidenced by the abundant references to his work by various scholars and theologians—either for or against his assertions on the subject of divine love, and hence his inclusion here. This section also examines the thinking of Plato who held that a proper understanding of the divine nature was essential to human virtue and happiness, and whose philosophical thinking was far reaching in the classical theological concept of divine love. Irving Singer suggests that any discussion about the love of God must recognize the impact of Greek philosophy upon the history of the study of divine love and he suggests that “In the philosophy of love... every discussion must start with Plato.”<sup>75</sup>

## **Plato**

Much of Plato's assertions about love are found in the *Symposium* where Plato uses the characters of the guests at a banquet hosted by Agathon (who is himself one of the characters) as vehicles of dialogue to express his own views. Through the character Socrates, Plato suggests that love (which he refers to as *eros*) is the desire for something that one either does not have, or the desire to never lose possession, in the future, of the thing that one possesses in the present.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, by *Platonic* definition, love is always poor and desires to possess that which it lacks. Catherine Osborne observes that “It seems that for Plato love is primarily a desire for something that you lack and need and hope to gain.”<sup>77</sup>

This *Platonic* definition of love necessarily suggests one of two possibilities about the divine. In Socrates' recital of the dialogue he had with Diotima of

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<sup>75</sup> Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1:47.

<sup>76</sup> Plato *Symposium* (trans. Lamb, LCL, 166:203).

<sup>77</sup> Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, 54.

Mantineia, he presents Diotima's question to himself, "How... could he that is without a share in the beautiful and good things be a god?"<sup>78</sup> as suggesting that a deity either lacks nothing (which is the first possibility); or that if the deity does indeed lack anything that it desires, that desire brings into question the very deity that is claimed by that being (which is the second possibility). Based on the influence of classical theism,<sup>79</sup> Plato's understanding of God's love stems from the view of God's perfection as implying that God has all the love that God needs and therefore, God does not desire love from anywhere for He lacks nothing in Himself. Plato's concept of God's immutability in relation to love is that if God loves, then He changes from having lacked something (which concurrently implies inherent imperfection), and transforms upon possessing that which He desires, into One who no longer lacks. Plato's view is that if God loves, that is itself evidence of His lack of that which He desires, and that would undermine His deity and divinity at once. Therefore, in order to preserve the classical concept of God's divine ontology, the existence of His love is sacrificed.

Nygren criticized Plato's concept of love when noting that the inescapable result is that love must necessarily die away at the point when the desired object is in one's possession.<sup>80</sup> Brümmer is more tolerant of Platonic ἔρως when he asserts that ἔρως does not seek its own advantage at the expense of other people, but that personal good, communal good, and universal good are all intimately connected. Hence the acquisition of good by one contributes to the acquisition of good by all.<sup>81</sup> Singer

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<sup>78</sup> Plato *Symposium* 166:202.

<sup>79</sup> John Peckham notes that "traditional classical theism holds that God, as the perfect being, is necessarily existent, self-sufficient, simple, eternal, immutable, impassible, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent." See John Peckham, *The Doctrine of God: Introducing the Big Questions* (London, UK: T. & T. Clark, 2020), 5.

<sup>80</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 176.

<sup>81</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 115.

rightly notes that the “highly sophisticated conclusion of Plato’s erotic philosophy [is]: ‘Love is desire for the perpetual possession of the good.’”<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, it is apparent to me that Plato’s understanding of divine ontology in respect to perfection and immutability precludes divine love.

## **Aristotle**

Aristotle was a student of Plato and some of his ideas bear the marks of Plato’s influence. However, as a departure from the Platonic tradition, Aristotle makes distinctions between three kinds of loves or friendships by claiming that “the object of love is always useful, pleasant, and/or good.”<sup>83</sup> In friendships based on usefulness or utility, Aristotle claims that the individuals concerned are each interested only in their own welfare and do not necessarily care for each other. This kind of friendship is governed by a self-interest in which each participant only loves the other to the extent that they personally derive some benefit from them. The second kind of love or friendship distinguished by Aristotle is much like the first; where participants in this kind of friendship love each other for the sake of the pleasure that they derive from each other. The third category of love is that of persons who love each other for who they are as individuals, rather than what they can do for each other, or how much pleasure they bring. This third category of friendship is what Aristotle calls “perfect friendship.” In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle encapsulates his categorization as follows:

Those who love because of utility love because of what is good for themselves, and those who love because of pleasure do so because of what is pleasant to themselves, and not in so far as the person loved is the man he is, but in so far as he is useful or pleasant. And thus these friendships are only

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<sup>82</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, 53.

<sup>83</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, 88.

incidental; for it is not as being the man he is that the loved person is loved, but as providing some good or pleasure.<sup>84</sup>

He then defines what he calls ‘perfect friendship’ as “the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these men wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they are so disposed by reason of the friends themselves, and not incidentally.”<sup>85</sup> This perfect friendship represents a higher kind of love for Aristotle because it is based on a higher and nobler virtue rather than the lower, inferior forms of love that are based on utility and pleasure.

While the perfect friendship may bring some utility and/or pleasure to the participants of that friendship, utility and pleasure are not the basis of this kind of friendship. Peckham observes that even though the perfect friendship is superior to the utilitarian and pleasure-driven loves, that it remains unambiguously based on the merit of the recipient. He notes that its so called “perfection” is centred on bestowing love to that which is higher and more meritorious than that which possesses less merit.<sup>86</sup> Singer concurs with Peckham’s assessment of Aristotle’s concept of love when noting that “for him (Aristotle), it is always a response to external merit.”<sup>87</sup> Singer correctly concludes that for Aristotle, just as for Plato, “love remains the search for an objective goodness in the object.”<sup>88</sup> I therefore reason that even though Aristotle developed his own concepts and philosophies, he still belongs to Plato’s ἔρωσ school of thought. Singer also notes that for Aristotle and Plato the notion of

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<sup>84</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.3 (trans. Rackham, LCL, 73:1156a 14-19).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Peckham, “The Concept of Divine Love” 65.

<sup>87</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, 97.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

mutual love between God and man is sacrilegious.<sup>89</sup> Aristotle elevates the significance of love in the context of perfect friendship and concedes that “No one would choose all good things on condition of being alone, since man is a civic creature and one whose nature is to live with others.”<sup>90</sup> This view is in contrast to his view about such a need in the divine when he asserts “for us, well-being is by relation to another, but for him, he is himself his own well-being.”<sup>91</sup> Carl Henry’s assessment is that Aristotle is opposed to the idea of God loving the world because God is perfect and is in need of nothing. Therefore, if God loved the world, that would inadvertently reveal some inner defect in God.<sup>92</sup> Aristotle’s concept of love is founded on his understanding of human love based on classical philosophy, from which he constructs his concept of divine love. Consequently, Aristotle’s classically influenced divine love cannot love humanity—an assertion which directly opposes the claims of Scripture, that God loved the world (John 3:16; 1 John 4:19).

### **Augustine**

One of Augustine of Hippo’s most significant contributions has been in the area of Christian love. Thomas Oord correctly observes that love is at the center of Christianity as far as Augustine is concerned, and that it is in large part because of Augustine, that Christianity is considered as a religion of love, both, in Catholicism, and in Evangelical Christianity.<sup>93</sup> Osborne understands the prominence of the phrase ‘the love of God’ in Augustine as being at least partially responsible “for the importance of love in Post-Reformation Western theology, though there are probably

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 107

<sup>90</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8.

<sup>91</sup> Aristotle *Eudemian Ethics* 7.12. (trans. Rackham, LCL, 285:1245b 18-19).

<sup>92</sup> Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:343.

other reasons why the loving attitude of God has been stressed in twentieth century particularly.”<sup>94</sup> Lewis Ayres points out that for Augustine, love is not just an activity of God but it is His ontological essence, therefore “love is God.”<sup>95</sup> Augustine’s concept of God bears the marks of Platonic influence when he speaks of God as One whose perfection is both consummate and immutable, and therefore can neither gain nor lose.<sup>96</sup> Therefore God has no desires because of His self-sufficiency.

Brümmer contends that Augustine thought of love from a eudaemonistic perspective, where love is fundamentally the aspiration for ultimate happiness.<sup>97</sup> The significant difference in the thought of Augustine and Plato is in the content of what constitutes that ultimate happiness. Brümmer argues that ultimate happiness in the understanding of Plato comprises in knowing the Good; whilst for Augustine ultimate happiness lies in enjoying God.<sup>98</sup> Singer supports this assertion in his observation that “nothing but God can be the proper object of an ultimate love since he alone is worth enjoying for his own sake.”<sup>99</sup> In Augustine’s understanding, all other loves that are not directed to God are not only subordinate to that ultimate love, but the objects of those lesser loves are merely means to an end—the end being to experience ultimate love, love for God.

Singer questions if such a paradigm does not falsify the love between persons since no one can be truly cherished and fully appreciated other than by the ultimate

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas J. Oord, “Matching Theology and Piety: An Evangelical Process Theology of Love” (PhD Dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA, 1999), 120.

<sup>94</sup> Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, 27-28.

<sup>95</sup> Lewis Ayres, “Augustine, Christology, and God As Love: An Introduction to the Homilies on 1 John,” in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 86.

<sup>96</sup> Augustine *Confessions* (NPNF 1/01. 444, trans. J. G. Cunningham).

<sup>97</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 118.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, 345.

object, who is God. If that be the case, what then is made of the injunction to love our neighbour as ourselves if our neighbour is an instrumentality used by us to achieve something higher? Singer reasons that the injunction regarding “loving another as yourself would make no sense if you were both mere instruments and only God could be loved as an end.”<sup>100</sup> As such, my view is that Augustine’s understanding does great injustice to the spirit of neighbourly love.

In classical ontology, God’s perfection and immutability and self-sufficiency inherently preclude Him from any capacity to love the world. That classical ontology notwithstanding, Augustine breaks from that classical construct and concedes that God does love human beings because if God had not loved them, He would not have had any reason to come down to earth from heaven.<sup>101</sup> He further claims that not only does God love sinners, but He enters into a friendship with them wherein He calls them His friends.<sup>102</sup> However, as a result of the classical ontology (perfection, immutability, self-sufficiency) from which Augustine emanates, the divine love that he seems to propose is in tense conflict with classical ontology and must seek to be reconstructed to eliminate the tension. The apparent solution to this conflict is that divine love for humanity is defined by Augustine as being the unilateral beneficence from God to mankind, which excludes a reciprocal and mutual relationship. Peckham encapsulates Augustine’s view of divine love to humanity by observing that for Augustine, God confers gracious love towards humanity, after which human beings then love God as the Good. According to Augustine, God receives no benefit from that human love because it is, itself, the product of divine bestowal.<sup>103</sup> Divine love,

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<sup>100</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, 347.

<sup>101</sup> Augustine *Tractates* 49.5 (NPNF 1/07:452, trans. Gibb and Innes).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 704-5.

<sup>103</sup> Peckham, “The Concept of Divine Love” 79.



therefore, is neither acquisitive nor evaluative because God need not acquire anything (due to His perfect self-sufficiency), and gains no value from human love because He “neither gains nor loses”<sup>104</sup> (due to His perfect immutability). Therefore, while Augustine’s version of divine love benefits human beings by way of the unilateral beneficence from God, it falls short of affecting God in any way which, again, is in direct conflict with the canonical assertions in which divine love responds to human state of affairs (Ps 146:8; Prov 15:19; Hos 9:15).

### **Thomas Aquinas**

Peckham notes compellingly, that “Apart from Scripture, Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) is the most influential theologian in history other than Augustine (354-430).”<sup>105</sup> Aquinas synthesized elements of Aristotle’s philosophical framework with Augustine’s tradition of Christian theology and produced what is considered by many classical theists to be the most prolific Christian systematic theology ever produced; the *Summa Theologiae* (or the *Summa Theologica*). Aquinas maintained the Augustinian premise of divine love and the classical divine ontology in which God is completely self-sufficient, absolutely perfect, utterly immutable, and he subscribed to the Aristotelian philosophy in which God is referred to as the unmoved mover. Consequently, Aquinas’s divine ontology rules out a mutually impactful relationship between God and the world although he proposes a friendship love between God and human beings.

Aquinas mentions four primary words that relate to different aspects of love, namely *amicitia*, *amor*, *dilectio*, and *caritas*. Aquinas defines *amicitia* (friendship) as a habit, whereas *amor* (love) and *dilectio* (preference) are expressed by way of act or

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<sup>104</sup> Augustine *Confessions* (NPNF 1/01. 444).

<sup>105</sup> Peckham, *Doctrine of God*, 12.

passion.<sup>106</sup> His definition of *caritas* (charity) denotes “in addition to love, a certain perfection of love, in so far as that which is loved is held to be of great price, as the word<sup>107</sup> itself implies.”<sup>108</sup> Liz Carmichael clarifies that Aquinas’s nuances developed within the context of Latin at a time when the language developed distinctions between the Latin words for love. Consequently, the term *amor* was viewed as a sensitive love of the passions, seen as a lower love; whilst the term *dilectio* was understood as a higher, intellectual, willed love. *Amicitia* on the other hand was the mutual association of the lover and the beloved, who both acted from considered choice.<sup>109</sup>

Aquinas views *amor* (love) in human relationships as having two aspects—the good which is the immediate object of desire (*amor concupiscentiae*), and the person for whom that good is desired (*amor amicitiae*). Burnaby notes that “Benevolence, wishing someone well, has a double object—the good which is willed, and the person, whether self or another, for whom it is willed; and Thomas distinguishes these two directions of benevolence by the not very happy pair of terms which he had inherited from his predecessors: *amor concupiscentiae* and *amor amicitiae*.”<sup>110</sup> Burnaby further elucidates that “since the good desired is desired for the sake of the recipient, *amor concupiscentiae* must be regarded as secondary to *amor amicitiae*. It is the latter only which is love simpliciter, in which the object is loved ‘for itself’ and not ‘for the sake

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, UK: Burns, Oates & Washburne, 1920), 2.1.26.3.

<sup>107</sup> The Latin word *caritas* is derived from the word *carus* which means ‘dear.’

<sup>108</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.1.26.3.

<sup>109</sup> Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (New York, NY: T. & T. Clark International, 2004), 106.

<sup>110</sup> John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1938), 266-267.

of anything else.”<sup>111</sup> Thus Carmichael concludes in the words of Aquinas, that “*caritas* is the same as *amicitia*.”<sup>112</sup> Carmichael further suggests that for Aquinas, *caritas* and *amicitia* “must be identical because they show love at its greatest.”<sup>113</sup> Aquinas states that “*caritas* signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with Him.”<sup>114</sup> However, Aquinas clarifies that even though *caritas* is equated with *amicitia*, that God essentially does not love with *amor amicitiae* (friendship love), but rather, that He loves with a desire for the good of others—*amor concupiscintiae* (which Burnaby ironically considers as being secondary to *amor amicitiae*). Aquinas maintains, however, that God does not love human beings with the love of friendship, but that He loves them with the love of desire.<sup>115</sup>

This understanding of the possibility of friendship with God by Aquinas is a departure from the Aristotelian ontology in which God is too far removed from humanity for there to be some friendship between human beings and God. Hence Carmichael observes that according to Aquinas, God is not that distant from human beings such that friendship with them is impossible. He argues that God is available to all things and that He loves all His creatures by willing their good to them.<sup>116</sup> While Aquinas holds that *caritas* implies “a certain mutual return of love, together with mutual communion,”<sup>117</sup> this does not suggest an equal or symmetrical love between God and humanity. Carmichael quotes Aquinas in asserting the view that “We were not... friends in the active sense (*amantes*) but... friends in the passive

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<sup>111</sup> Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 267.

<sup>112</sup> Carmichael, *Friendship*, 105.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>114</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.1.65.5.

<sup>115</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.1.20.2.3

<sup>116</sup> Carmichael, *Friendship*, 107.

<sup>117</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.1.65.5.

sense of those who he loved (*amanti*).”<sup>118</sup> Singer adds that “that very celestial love by which we love each other is not only from God, but also is God.”<sup>119</sup> It appears that even though the concept of divine love gains new dimensions in the thought of different theologians, it does not break free from the limitations that are imposed by a classical ontology framework.

### **Anders Nygren**

The Swedish Lutheran theologian, Anders Nygren, who was the bishop of Lund in the church of Sweden, authored a treatise whose title consists of two Greek terms for the English word ‘love,’ namely ἀγάπη and ἔρωσ. In that volume, *Agape and Eros*, Nygren focused on the meanings of the Greek terms ἔρωσ, φιλία, and ἀγάπη. In his discussion about ἀγάπη, Nygren saw ἀγάπη as the attitude of God that causes Him to stoop down to humanity in order to save them—without which salvation, humanity could never be reconciled to God. He concludes that there is therefore no means by which man may come to God, but only a means by which God can come down to man, and Nygren identifies that means as the way of divine love, the way of ἀγάπη.<sup>120</sup>

Max Scheler is in harmony with Nygren’s proposition when he explains the difference between ἔρωσ and ἀγάπη in terms of human attitudes. Scheler argues that Christianity does not embrace the Greek axiom in which love is viewed as an aspiration of the lower toward the higher, but rather, he holds that love is viewed as the refined stooping down towards the unrefined, and the healthy gravitating towards the ill, and the wealthy towards the meagre, the pleasant towards the unpleasant, the

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<sup>118</sup> Carmichael, *Friendship*, 109.

<sup>119</sup> Singer, *Nature of Love*, 321.

decent and virtuous towards the indecent and iniquitous.<sup>121</sup> In this explanation is seen the love of God as infinite grace stooping down to save a hopelessly sinful human population. Vincent Brümmer summarizes Nygren’s contrast of ἔρως and ἀγάπη by suggesting that ἔρως is a need-love which is driven by the need for what it lacks, whilst ἀγάπη is a gift-love which occurs extemporaneously from the abundance of its own self.<sup>122</sup> Hence, according to Brümmer, the love of God is not ἔρως for He lacks nothing, but it is pure ἀγάπη, for His love is infinitely abundant. Nygren proposes that “*agapē* is the center of Christianity, the Christian fundamental motif *par excellence*.”<sup>123</sup>

Nygren sees ἔρως and ἀγάπη as opposite poles that represent egocentrism and theocentrism respectively. He argues that ἔρως and ἀγάπη are akin to two tributaries flowing through the entire course of religion throughout history, opposing and interweaving with each another. He concludes that ἔρως stands for the egocentric attitude in religion, whilst ἀγάπη stands for the theocentric attitude in religion.<sup>124</sup> Therefore, Nygren differentiates ἀγάπη from ἔρως and defines it as (1) Spontaneous and unmotivated; (2) Indifferent to the value; (3) Creative; and (4) the Initiator of fellowship with God.

**Spontaneous and unmotivated.** Nygren points out the vanity of searching for an explanation of God’s love in the character of the object of His love. He further describes the spontaneous character of God’s love as being groundless—though not in the sense that there are no grounds for it, but instead “our purpose is to emphasize that

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<sup>120</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 80-81.

<sup>121</sup> Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. William W. Holdheim (New York, NY: Schocken Publishers, 1961), 86.

<sup>122</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 128.

<sup>123</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 48.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

there are no *extrinsic* grounds for it. The only ground for it is to be found in God Himself.”<sup>125</sup> This love is unmotivated in that “it does not look for anything in man that could be adduced as motivation for it.”<sup>126</sup>

**Indifferent to value.** This element of ἀγάπη is intended to add clarity to the first one. The principal idea that this element of ἀγάπη seeks to account for is that “any thought of valuation whatsoever is out of place in connection with fellowship with God.”<sup>127</sup> In other words, God’s love for the righteous and God’s love for the unrighteous depends not upon the value of the righteous and the unrighteous, and the distinctions between the righteous and the unrighteous set no limits to the reach that God’s love extends to.

**Creative love.** Nygren notes that since ἀγάπη is divine love, it shares in the creativeness that characterizes God. This means that God does not bestow His love upon what is considered love-worthy, but that which is intrinsically worthless in itself then obtains worth when it becomes the object of the love of God.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, ἀγάπη does not recognize value—but creates value by subjecting the object of its love to its love. Nygren suggests that the idea of some infinite intrinsic value being placed upon a human soul (exclusive of ἀγάπη) is problematic in that it gives traction to the thought that it is this inestimable value on which God’s love is based. If there is any truth in the idea of infinite intrinsic human value, Nygren concludes that injury is done to the spontaneous and unmotivated character of ἀγάπη which he proffers.

**The initiator of fellowship with God.** This element of ἀγάπη means that in the relationship between God and humanity, the initiative that establishes fellowship

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 75-76

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 78.

between God and human beings is found in ἀγάπη. Nygren posits that this revolutionary perspective of fellowship with God is antithetical to the popularly held view that fellowship was a way by which man could come to God. On the contrary, if there exists fellowship between God and man, it must be reasoned that it can only be due to God's own action.<sup>129</sup>

While Nygren's contribution to the study of divine love has been enormous, it has not been without criticism for the various elements that he proffers in his motifs. He has faced criticism over the sharp dichotomy that he has suggested exists between ἔρως and ἀγάπη. Other scholars see ἔρως and ἀγάπη not in contradiction to each other but as complementary motifs. Martin D'Arcy, in direct contrast to Nygren's dichotomy, proposes that "Eros and Agape are not enemies, but friends."<sup>130</sup> Paul Tillich is even more assertive in his view that "if *eros* and *agape* cannot be united, *agape* toward God is impossible."<sup>131</sup> Thomas Oord disagrees with the notion of ἀγάπη being the only authentically Christian love.<sup>132</sup> He comments that the very thesis that proffers ἀγάπη as the only authentic Christian love—to the exclusion of all other loves—cannot stand under a proper examination of the Bible because it is not supported by the Scriptures, which Nygren claims as the primary foundation for his postulations.<sup>133</sup>

Hence, while Nygren's contribution to the study of God's love has been seminal and useful, and his influence widespread in this area of study, additional study has unearthed biblical truths that his work neglects to address, such as the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>130</sup> Martin C. D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love: A Study in Eros and Agape* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), 304.

<sup>131</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1951), 1:281.

<sup>132</sup> Oord, "Matching Theology and Piety" 114.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 123.

numerous occasions in which the bestowal of divine love is presented in Scripture as being based upon the fulfilment of certain conditions on the part of human beings (John 10:17, 14:21, 31, 15:10, 16:27; 2 Cor 9:7). Nygren does not reconcile God's unconditional love and His conditional and foreconditional love. The Love of God in Peckham's Theology

This section will explore the understanding of John Peckham's theology as it relates to the love of God for the purpose of examining a canonical and systematic model of the love of God in the context of a God-world relationship. This section will also briefly examine Peckham's five primary aspects of the canonical and systematic model of divine love in relation to the world which represent a significant portion of Peckham's contribution to the study of divine love. The five primary aspects of divine love present God's love as being (1) volitional, (2) evaluative, (3) emotional, (4) foreconditional, and (5) multilaterally relational. Peckham indicates that these five aspects are basic to understanding the God-world relationship and are interrelated in such a manner that they each contribute to a wider view of divine love.<sup>134</sup>

The terms *universally relational* and *particularly relational* will be used to qualify the term "love" and must therefore be understood and remembered. According to Peckham, the *universally relational love* of God refers to God's initiating love which is both, unprompted and undeserved, that God confers on every human being before any human response. On the other hand, the *particularly relational love* of God refers to the particular, special and intimate variety of love that God bestows upon persons who respond to God's *universally relational love* and enter into a reciprocal love relationship with Him.<sup>135</sup> The universally relational love of God is

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<sup>134</sup> Peckham, "The Concept of Divine Love" 586.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 586-587.



bestowed towards humanity before any human response and is therefore the basis of the possibility of reciprocal love. Human beings are then free to respond either positively or negatively to God's universally relational love towards them, and their response determines whether or not God will enter into a particularly relational love relationship with them which amounts to a reciprocal relationship with God.

### **Volitional Aspect of God's Love**

The volitionality of God's love means that God's love for human beings is voluntary. Peckham suggests that before the creation of the world, the love of God sufficiently existed between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (cf. John 17:24). Be that as it was, God still decided to create the world and, accordingly, confer His love on created beings.<sup>136</sup> God did not need to create the world, and having created it, did not have to love it, and it is here that the volitional aspect of God's love to the world is portrayed. Peckham emphasizes that the creation of other beings was not necessary. He argues that God could have been satisfied with the love relationship within the Trinity for all eternity. On that basis, the love of God towards human beings is consequently voluntary, but not necessary.<sup>137</sup>

The volitionality of divine love extends to beyond just the creation of the world to even the fall of humankind into sin. When human sin began, which would result in eternal death, God chose to repair the fractured relationship between His creation and Himself when He was under no obligation to do so. God then chose a people through whom He would reach and bless all the nations of the world and entered into a covenant relationship with them (cf. Gen 12:3; 18:18). The Old Testament repeatedly shows God's chosen people rebelling against God and His love,

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 591.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 600.

and God voluntarily persisting in His love for them. Peckham observes that “Numerous other examples of God’s volitional love appear throughout Scripture, perhaps the most explicit of which is found in his declaration: ‘I will love them freely’ (Hos 14:4 [5]). On the basis of his love, God chose Israel above all peoples, though they did not merit such election (cf. Deut 7:6–7, 14; 10:15).”<sup>138</sup> He further notes that “God’s commitment to love humans reaches its apex in Christ himself who manifested the depth and height of God’s love by willingly giving himself up for humans (Rom 5:8; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:25).”<sup>139</sup>

### **Evaluative Aspect of God’s Love**

The evaluative aspect of God’s love is in reference to “the appraisal, appreciation, and/or reception of value from external agents.”<sup>140</sup> In contrast to the classical theistic view of God, the canonical model portrays God taking delight in, and enjoying His creatures. Peckham makes this observation:

Indeed, “the Lord takes pleasure in His people” (Ps 149:4) who are precious and valuable in his sight (Exod 19:5–6; Deut 26:18; Isa 43:4; Matt 10:31; 12:12; Luke 12:27, 24). On the other hand, God may also be displeased, vexed, and grieved by humans. God’s evaluative love is further evident in that he loves the righteous (Ps 146:8; cf. Prov 11:20; 12:2, 22) and the “cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7 cf. Heb 13:16) but hates those who do iniquity (Ps 5:5 [6]; cf. 11:5; Prov 11:20; Rev 2:6). Indeed, the “way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but He loves one who pursues righteousness” (Prov 15:8–9).<sup>141</sup>

The fact that there are biblical texts that indicate that God loves all people (cf. John 3:16), the texts listed above suggest that God loves the righteous and the cheerful giver in a particular, evaluative sense. This means that divine pleasure or

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 593.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 594.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 602.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

displeasure in human beings is at least partially contingent upon human disposition or action. The term stems from the idea that human disposition or action is evaluated or appraised and God's pleasure or displeasure results from that evaluation. In a sense, Peckham suggests that God's love may be increased or decreased in relation to human disposition and action. From this perspective, God's positive and negative acts towards human beings are not merely acts but responses to human disposition, and are therefore not arbitrary but responsive. It is important to note, however, that Peckham concedes that it is possible for God to simultaneously 'hate' in one sense, and 'love' in another sense, the very same object.

God may (temporarily) love and hate the same object(s) simultaneously. For example, God may come to hate his people evaluatively but still continue to long for a particular, love relationship with them and accordingly work to draw them to himself in the meantime. This corresponds to the subjective, universally relational, and foreconditional aspects of his love, which itself relates to the temporary and partial suspension of evaluative judgment... Nevertheless, in the meantime there is considerable complexity due to the sinfulness of the human objects of God's love such that God might truly love and hate the same object, in different ways, at the same time.<sup>142</sup>

This view stems from an understanding of the *universally relational love* of God that He bestows upon all people, and the *particularly relational love* of God which is reciprocal and partially dependent on the human response to the *universally relational love*. Hence Carl Henry states that "It is the God who regards sin solemnly who is the God of holy love—and none other."<sup>143</sup> His hatred of sin and love for the sinner are simultaneous. Another observation by Peckham is that there is a sense in which sinful human beings can bring value and joy to God, not of themselves however, but through the drawing action of the mediation of Jesus Christ.<sup>144</sup> This

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 604

<sup>143</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Notes on the Doctrine of God* (Boston, MA: Wilde, 1948), 110.

<sup>144</sup> Peckham, "The Concept of Divine Love" 611.

concept of joy that God receives from human beings is rejected by classical divine ontology as contradictory.

### **Emotional Aspect of God's Love**

The emotional aspect of God's love is very closely linked with the previously discussed volitional and evaluative aspects of divine love. The term "emotion" as used by Peckham refers to "any feeling(s) that may be affected by external stimulation. Yet, emotions are not necessarily determined by external stimulus to the exclusion of other mental factors, including volition, evaluation, etc."<sup>145</sup> Peckham here suggests that God is emotionally involved and invested in the goings on in the world and may be affected by humans in ways that please Him and bring Him joy, or in ways that cause Him to experience sorrow, pain, and intense anger.

God's love has been symbolized by the passionate and joyous love of the prodigal son's father over his son's return (Luke 15:20). In the Incarnation, Jesus manifested emotional love whenever He encountered people in need—He would be moved with compassion for them (cf. Matt 9:36, 14:14; Mark 1:41, 6:34, 10:21; Luke 7:14). God's love is further shown in His passion when He describes Himself as a "jealous God," which Peckham suggests portrays Him as "the passionate lover of his people (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9; cf. 34:14; 4:24; 6:15; Josh 24:19; Nah 1:2)."<sup>146</sup> He points out that this "jealousy" lacks the negative connotations of human jealousy such as envy and includes the wholly appropriate and virtuous aspects of divine love.<sup>147</sup>

Peckham points out that in many instances, God has responded to supplication and has been moved to compassion to the extent that he relents from executing

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 612.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 617.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

judgment in response to human entreaty. It must be noted however that God's response to human entreaty is not automatic—God may also chose not to relent (1 Sam 15:29; Jer 4:28, 15:6). Therefore, Peckham cautions that the compassion and mercy of God may also have a limit beyond which they will not be exercised. He argues that God's compassion is conditional within real and historically significant relationship. Peckham believes that it is possible for the people of God to so assiduously reject Him that God may withdraw His lovingkindness and compassion from them.<sup>148</sup> This withdrawal of lovingkindness and compassion is not arbitrary but always in response to human infidelity and evil.

### **Foreconditional Aspect of God's Love**

That God's love is foreconditional means that it is prior to conditions. This is particularly in relation to God's universally relational love. It is bestowed upon every human being prior to their response to His love, and thus before any conditions have been pronounced or met. This divine love is bestowed prior to any human action, and is prior to human love. Peckham adds that God's universally relational love is voluntarily bestowed upon every human being with the purpose of subsequently entering into a particularly relational love relationship with all who will positively respond to His universally relational love and, ultimately, reciprocate the love of God.<sup>149</sup> God's love is ontologically and chronologically prior to any other love and Peckham states that it holds sole primacy.<sup>150</sup>

The foreconditionality of divine love is closely linked with its essential nature that Scripture personifies it as being. It is so because it is part of God's essence and as

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 615. Cf. Jer 16:5; Isa 9:17, 27:11, 63:15; Jer 11:15, 14:10; Ezek 5:11; Hos 9:15; Ps 89:49.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 625.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 625.

such, is the basis for human love. Peckham observes the essential aspect of divine love as well as its causal role in human love when he notes that:

Indeed, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16) and the “God of love” (2 Cor 13:11) who so loved the world that he gave his beloved Son (cf. John 3:16). On the other hand, “love is from God” (1 John 4:7) and “we love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19; cf. John 15:16; 1 John 3:1; 4:9–10). God thus draws humans toward himself in his love and kindness (cf. Jer 31:3; Rom 2:4). However, human response is not unilaterally effected by God’s initiative nor does it bypass human agency. That is, God’s love is prior to all other love, and itself enables other beings to freely love.<sup>151</sup>

A discussion about the foreconditional aspect of divine love opens the discussion on the conditionality and unconditionality of God’s love which will be discussed after the next subsection, the multilaterally relational aspect of God’s love.

### **Multilaterally Relational Aspect of God’s Love**

The nomenclature of this section suggests that God’s love is not unilaterally relational, nor it is bilaterally relational, but is beyond both. Peckham explains that this aspect of divine love called multilaterally relational is rooted in the fact that God seeks a relationship of reciprocal love at a universal level, but only enters into a particular, special and intimate relationship only with those who will respond positively.<sup>152</sup> The impact of that positive response extends to what are described as multilateral relationships. The various metaphors that are used to depict God’s love indicate God’s desire for a reciprocal and responsive relationship. The marriage metaphor used in Scripture, such as in Hosea, indicates the give-and-take that is involved in the divine-human relationship. The parent-child adoption metaphor also points to God’s desire for a reciprocal love from His children whose love must be given to God freely.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 626.

That the love of God is not unilaterally relational means that the reciprocal love relationship that God seeks does not naturally occur merely as a result of God having chosen to create the world and having voluntarily bestowed His love on His creation.<sup>153</sup> There is a volitional element that is part of the relational matrix. The relationship that God desires with human beings is characterized by volitionality on the part of the human objects and their responsiveness to His initial love. There must be volitional freedom both, from God, and from His creatures. Peckham clarifies that even though this quintessential divine-human relationship should be reciprocal, that does not suggest that it is therefore symmetrical nor equal. Therefore, whilst the relationship between God and human beings is mutual, it is not equal.<sup>154</sup>

The multilaterally relational element of divine love consists of a multirelational circle of love which includes (1) love between all the members of the Trinity, (2) love from God to human beings, (3) reciprocal or responsive love from human beings to God, and (4) love from believers to one another.<sup>155</sup> Love from believers to one another indirectly amounts to an expression of human love to God. The love that God bestows upon human beings imposes a moral duty on them to bestow love upon one another. Peckham contends that the phrasing of 1 John 4:11 which says “we also ought [ὀφείλω] to love one another” implies that such love is not just the spontaneous outcome of love for God or election by God. He proposes that ὀφείλω never refers to some ontological duty in the NT but instead refers to a moral duty, that which must be fulfilled.<sup>156</sup> This suggests the exertion of effort on the part of

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 638.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 640.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 641.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 643.

those who recognize God's love for them in the fulfillment of that moral obligation to others.

### **The Foreconditionality and Unconditionality of the Love of God**

The terms foreconditionality and unconditionality, and by extension or implication—conditionality, in reference to divine love are presented by Peckham as having some distinctions between them. These distinctions help to reconcile those canonical assertions that depict God's love as being unconditional and those that depict His love as being conditional. The foreconditionality of God's love has been discussed briefly in a previous section but will be presented here in contrast to the unconditionality of God's love.

Several texts indicate an element of conditionality in the love of God such as when God promises lovingkindness to those who love Him (Exod 20:6), or where He promises love and blessing because they listen to, and keep His judgements (Deut 7:12-13). In the NT, Jesus promises the Father's love upon those who love Jesus (John 14:23), and He states that "the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me" (John 16:27). The love of God the Father for God the Son is also presented as being conditional when Christ says "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again" (John 10:17). Peckham reconciles the apparent tension between conditionality and foreconditionality by focusing on how God's particular love for those people who respond to His Son is not afforded to those of the world assiduously whose response amounts to non-response or the rejection of God's Son. Therefore, God's love is not only prior to human love, but is also responsive to, and predicated upon, human love for God that is a response to God's



initial love.”<sup>157</sup> William Hendriksen rhetorically asks “Why cannot God’s love *both* precede and follow ours? That is exactly what it does, and that is the beauty of it: first, by *preceding* our love, it creates in us the eager desire to keep Christ’s precepts; then, by *following* our love, it rewards us for keeping them!”<sup>158</sup>

Peckham provides some clarity when he states that though the universally relational love of God is foreconditional, but not unconditional, the subjective love of God is unconditional.<sup>159</sup> God’s foreconditional love is bestowed prior to any conditions being set and then when those conditions are instituted, they are either met or not met. This is the love that is bestowed on all human beings. What is often regarded as unconditional love is this foreconditional love that is given before any conditions have been stipulated. That this love is not unconditional is hinted upon by the very term ‘foreconditional.’ It merely suggests that chronologically speaking, this love is bestowed simply before any and all conditions are effected—but there is a point along the stream of time at which certain conditions will be stipulated. Therefore, conditional love is what was once regarded as foreconditional love. What Peckham considers to be truly unconditional love is God’s subjective love—love that He has in Himself as the subject, love that is impervious to any external state of affairs.

God’s subjective love must be understood in contrast to His objective love, and both have some correspondance, to different degrees, to God’s universally relational love and to His particularly relational love respectively. God’s objective love in many ways corresponds to God’s particularly relational love. God’s objective

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>158</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: The Gospel according to John*, Baker’s New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953), 2:281-282

<sup>159</sup> Peckham, “The Concept of Divine Love” 634.

love is that love that is directed towards some specific or particular object (hence the correspondance with God's particularly relational love). Also, it must be noted that just as conditional love is what was foreconditional love at some point in the past, God's particularly relational love is the outcome of a positive human response to God's universally relational love which was bestowed at some point in the past—or at least at some point prior to the experience of the particularly relational love.

God's subjective love is the basis for God's universally relational love which is bestowed upon all human beings foreconditionally. However, God's subjective love and His universally relational love are not identical. God's subjective love prompts His universally relational love which is bestowed with the aim of initiating a volitionally free reciprocal love relationship between humans and God. All the five aspects of God's love are found in God's objective love while only the volitional aspect and the emotional aspect are found in His subjective love. Peckham explains that the "five aspects correspond to God's objective love since they all refer to God's love in relation to the world while God's subjective love is prior to, and the ground of, God's relationship to the world and thus prompts His universally relational love that reaches out toward the ideal of particularly relational love."<sup>160</sup>

### **The Wrath of God**

In a discourse about the love of God, it would seem, before deeper contemplation, that the mention of the wrath of God is out of place when something as lofty as God's love is the matter under discussion. However, Peckham notes that the wrath of God is never capricious but that it is the outcome of human incitement. He points out that the wrath of God is always the proper response to sin and

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 636.

suffering.<sup>161</sup> This discussion seeks to examine the broad spectrum of the content of God’s love to avoid the risk of romanticizing it by portraying only the pleasant dimensions of divine love. D. A. Carson contends that “most people seem to have little difficulty believing in the love of God; they have far more difficulty believing in the justice of God, the wrath of God, and the non-contradictory truthfulness of an omniscient God.”<sup>162</sup> This section aims to demonstrate that if God’s love is the foundation and pattern after which Christian love must be fashioned, the meaning of Christian love must embrace as full a dimension of God’s love as much as can be done by human beings, and transcend the view of Christian love as being peripheral, pedestrian, weak and permissive.

In the view of some dispensationalist<sup>163</sup> Christians, the variety who favour one of the Testaments of the Bible to the neglect of the other Testament, the God that is portrayed in the OT is presumably different from the God that is presented in the NT. The God of the OT is viewed as an angry and harsh God who, almost arbitrarily, visits judgement upon evil-doers, while the God of the NT is the long-suffering God who lavishes His grace upon a sinful world. However, Skip MacCarty points out that “God’s love overwhelmed the Old Testament believer even as it does the New Testament believer.”<sup>164</sup> Canale asserts that God’s divine love and divine wrath “both

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 619.

<sup>162</sup> Donald A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 12.

<sup>163</sup> The word ‘dispensation’ is translated from the Greek word *oikonomia*, which is a scriptural term (cf. Luke 16:2-4; 1 Cor 9:17; Eph 1:10, 3:2, 9; Col 1:25; 1 Tim 1:4) and refers to administration of a household or estate, or stewardship. However it is here used in its un-Scriptural sense to indicate distinctions between periods of time, distinctions which are often times arbitrary and at times overlap. Some dispensationalists speak of the dispensation of promise, others—the dispensation of law, others—the dispensation of grace. Some distinguish between the periods of the OT and NT as different dispensations as well and it is in this usage that is applied here.

<sup>164</sup> Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?: What the old and new Covenants reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2007), 147.

belong to God without contradiction.”<sup>165</sup> He asserts that “the biblical conception of God’s wrath is not contradictory to or incompatible with His loving nature.”<sup>166</sup> This union of God’s love and His wrath is adequately established by God in Exod 34:6-7 when He revealed His glory to Moses and explained that He is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (Exod 34:6-7, NASB, emphasis mine).

Norman Gulley cautions against the danger of considering God’s love purely from a human understanding of what love is and is not. Gulley suggests that “God’s love cannot be measured by fickle human love. God’s love is the standard against which human love should be measured. His love and anger are never selfish. He loves the unlovely. He punishes but not with human emotion. The God who loves the world (John 3:16) also ‘takes vengeance on his foes and vents his wrath against his enemies.’”<sup>167</sup> Tony Lane suggests that it is possible to view God’s “wrath against a particular sinner as demanded by his love for that particular sinner,”<sup>168</sup> hence there is no contradiction between His love and His wrath. Gerald Bray even argues that God’s wrath is an expression of His love for us. He posits that:

For God to be angry is not out of character for him but an expression of his nature in relation to particular circumstances. The God who loves us as his creatures also hates us as sinners who have rebelled against him, because he cannot tolerate us in that condition. The paradox is that he hates us because he

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<sup>165</sup> Canale, “Doctrine of God,” 110.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>167</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:47.

<sup>168</sup> Tony Lane, “The Wrath of God as an Aspect of the Love of God,” in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 164.

loves us; if he did not care one way or the other, he might easily be indifferent to us and either do nothing or (more probably) destroy us without giving the matter a second thought.<sup>169</sup>

The danger of misunderstanding God's love lies in using finite human love as the standard for measuring and seeking to understand God's infinite love. God's loving nature does not contradict His wrath. His loving nature is the basis of His redemptive initiative to save all humanity. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 states that "God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:9, NASB). The Scriptures further state that the Lord "is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9, NASB). However, God has also given humanity the irrevocable gift of the freedom of choice, which is discussed further in the section entitled *Love and Freedom*, by means of which human beings have the moral freedom to choose according to their individual conscience and will. God's wrath, therefore, can be averted through freely choosing repentance. Canale notes that:

[T]he wrath of God can be deflected if humans accept the will of God (His law) and forgiveness, freely offered to all in Jesus Christ. However, by willfully and persistently rejecting God's will and His loving gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, sinners grow stubborn in their opposition to God, thereby becoming God's enemies.<sup>170</sup>

It is clear that the wrath of God only comes as a final consequence after one's failure to freely respond to His love expressed through His sacrificial death to save sinners. Gulley concludes that "[t]here is no love for the converted if there is no punishment for the unconverted. If God treats them alike, love has no meaning."<sup>171</sup> Watson suggests that God cannot be a God of love unless He, with intense disgust,

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<sup>169</sup> Bray, *God is Love*, 140.

<sup>170</sup> Canale, "Doctrine of God," 111-112.

<sup>171</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:48.

detests evil and sin.<sup>172</sup> Daniel D. Williams confirms that whenever the wrath of God and His punishments are unleashed—unlike His subjective love and His universally relational love—these never occur unmotivated.<sup>173</sup>

Joel N. Musvosvi, in his seminal work on ‘The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation in its Old Testament and Near Eastern Context’ examines the concept of the wrath of God from the perspective of God’s execution of judgement upon those who have perpetrated injustice on God’s people. Musvosvi’s analysis is in tandem with Norman Gulley’s understanding of God’s vengeance. Musvosvi notes that “in the scenes of rejoicing at the execution of vengeance and in the associated doxologies, there is an evident absence of a vindictive attitude. The rejoicings and the doxologies are theocentric, not anthropocentric, and they reveal a juridical/liturgical focus.”<sup>174</sup> This view confirms Canale’s assertion that both, divine love and divine wrath, belong to God without contradiction. That the rejoicings which attend God’s execution of vengeance are not anthropocentric underscores the assertion that God’s wrath cannot and must not be viewed through the lens of human emotions. Hence it can be concluded that the wrath of God is as much a part of His love as is His mercy.

### **The Love for God**

A doctrine of Christian love must of necessity be modelled after the love that Christ reveals, and this section explores Christ’s love for God the Father. The reason for which this section seeks to explore Christ’s love for God the Father is so that His

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<sup>172</sup> David C. K. Watson, *My God is Real* (London, UK: Falcon, 1970), 39.

<sup>173</sup> Daniel D. Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1968), 22.

<sup>174</sup> Joel N. Musvosvi, “The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation in its Old Testament and Near Eastern Context” (PhD Dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1987), 278.

love can be appreciated as a template to aid in the development of a theology of Christian love, which must encompass love for God the Father. The admonition in Eph 3:18-19 is for the Ephesian Christians “to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” and the aim of this section is to pursue the knowledge of the love of Christ for God in response.

The love *for* God by God Himself was expressed by Christ when He said to His disciples that even “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you” (John 15:9). God the Father loves God the Son, and in the same way, God the Son, loves the followers of God. Christ proves His love for God the Father when He states that He carries out the commandments of God in order that the world might know that Christ loves the Father (John 14:31). The love relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit stretches back to eternity past. Speaking of Jesus, it is noted that “[f]rom eternity, He had been with His Father and the Spirit. They had lived as coeternal, coexistent in utter self-giving and love for one another. To be together for so long bespeaks the perfect, absolute love that existed within the Godhead.”<sup>175</sup> Hence there is seen a mutual and reciprocal relationship of love between all the Persons of the Godhead. This love, as stated above, is essentially and inherently an expression of who God is. It is a love that does not exist for ulterior motives, but for the benefit of the recipient rather than the giver. Harder further states that “[t]he love of God for man is totally gratuitous because it is not conditioned by the certainty of being accepted. It is [a] pure gift.”<sup>176</sup>

The love *for* God by man can be seen as a response; firstly, to God’s command to “love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and

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<sup>175</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 30.

<sup>176</sup> Harder, “Love,” *ECT*, 1:952.

with all thy might” as enjoined in Deut 6:5, and secondly, as a response to God’s initial love that has been discussed above. Commenting on the command to “love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,” Jeffrey Tigay holds that to do so involves more than just thoughts and intentions but extends to feelings and passions and desires. Tigay asserts that loving God is more than just an act of loyalty and obedience to God, but rather, is an emotional manifestation of human beings’ love for God. Hence he concludes this assertion by noting that “[t]he command to love God may accordingly be understood as requiring one to *act* lovingly and loyally towards Him.”<sup>177</sup> Dennis Olson is in agreement with Tigay when he claims that Israel’s love for God engaged the passions as “obedience and passionate relationship characterize the full love of God.”<sup>178</sup>

1 John 4:20 makes it clear that “We love him, because he first loved us.” Our love for God is a responsive love because it requires some initial love to be bestowed from without, after which it expresses itself in return, or in response to, the initial expression of love. This suggests that in themselves, human beings do not naturally and inherently possess love, especially as it is possessed and expressed by God. This is what led Anders Nygren to classify love into the Greek terms ἔρως, φιλία and ἀγάπη. Nygren suggested that ἔρως and φιλία were the human love; by asserting that ἔρως, which is the erotic or sexual love “has a negative connotation and indicates a desire for personal satisfaction,”<sup>179</sup> and φιλία, which he states refers to the somewhat neutral love between friends and family. Nygren concluded the distinctions of love by suggesting that ἀγάπη was the divine love—a distinction that is rejected by the *New*

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<sup>177</sup> Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1996), 77.

<sup>178</sup> Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 51.

<sup>179</sup> “Agape,” *NIDNTE*, 1:109.



*International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. The rejection of this kind of distinction is based on the fact that in the Septuagint, sexual love is spoken of without the mention of the term ἔρως, and the term ἀγάπη is used to describe love that is less than divine. Therefore, the various kinds of love cannot exclusively be associated only with these specific Greek words.

However, in order to allay any risk of misinterpretation that may attend the process of translation of Nygren's text from its original Swedish to English, translator Philip Watson sought to bring clarity to the meaning of the Greek terms as they are employed in Nygren's text. Watson summarized ἔρως as "an appetite, a yearning desire, which is aroused by the attractive qualities of its object; and in Eros-love man seeks God in order to satisfy his spiritual hunger by the possession and enjoyment of the Divine perfections."<sup>180</sup> It must be noted however, that Nygren differentiates between two kinds of Eros; one of which is denominated as *Vulgar Eros*, and the other is denominated as the *heavenly Eros*. The former is understood as being the more sensual kind of love, while the latter is seen to be a sublimated and spiritualized form which "is the born rival of the idea of Agape."<sup>181</sup>

However, Watson goes on to differentiate this Eros-love of which he speaks, from the love of man for God as it is expressed in the New Testament writings. Watson argues that the love that man has for God as expressed in the New Testament refers to "a wholehearted surrender to God, whereby man becomes God's willing slave, content to be at His disposal, having entire trust and confidence in Him, and desiring that only His will should be done. This love," explains Watson, "is not, like

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<sup>180</sup> Philip Watson, "Translator's Preface," in Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* trans. Philip S. Watson (London, England: SPCK, 1953), viii.

<sup>181</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 51.

Eros, a longing and striving after something man lacks and needs.”<sup>182</sup> Søren Kierkegaard described it by suggesting that “Erotic love is determined by the object; friendship is determined by the object; only love to one’s neighbour is determined by love. Since one’s neighbour is every man, unconditionally every man, all distinctions are indeed removed from the object.”<sup>183</sup> Therefore, human love, or Eros-love, is motivated by some virtue that one seeks to benefit from in the beloved.

On the other hand, in addition to his commentary on the Greek term ἔρωσ as used by Nygren, Watson also elaborates on Nygren’s meaning of the Greek term ἀγάπη. Watson believes that Nygren’s understanding and use of the term agape “has neither the appetitive nature of Eros... it is entirely independent of external stimulus and motivation.” Furthermore, Watson adds that “it is neither kindled by the attractiveness nor quenched by the unattractiveness of its object.”<sup>184</sup> Ἀγάπη love, therefore, is not indebted to any virtues in the object to which that love is expressed, for that would render it as ἔρωσ; it is simply lavished on the object because of the inherent essence of the love that it is.

### **The Love of Man**

The contrast between the qualities of the love of God and the qualities of the love of man necessitated the apostle Paul’s appeal for divine intervention in order for Christian love to be achieved by the believers in Ephesus. The apostle Paul prayed in Eph 3:16-17 that God the Father would strengthen the inner self by His Spirit so that the Ephesian Christians would be rooted and grounded in love. In order to grasp the significance of the prayer offered by Paul for the Christians in Ephesus, it is necessary

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<sup>182</sup> Watson, “Translator’s Preface,” viii.

<sup>183</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses* trans. Howard Vincent Hong and Edna Hatlestad Hong (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1962), 77.

<sup>184</sup> Watson, “Translator’s Preface,” ix.

to understand how the love of human beings is characterized, and hence the reason for the pursuit of Christian love.

Harding, writing on the human expression of love, suggests that “Human beings love themselves in their search of happiness; they love others by inclination, desire, or passion.”<sup>185</sup> This view is consistent with Nygren’s view of human love which is in contrast to the self-sacrificing love of the divine. Nygren argues that human beings’ attitudes are a reflection of whatever they receive, both, from God, and from one’s own neighbour. He posits that “man’s natural attitude is a reflection of his neighbour’s attitude to him: love is met with love, hate with hate.”<sup>186</sup> Therefore, the injunction of Deut 6:5 is necessitated by the inherent inability of human beings to simply love without cause, and without consideration of the collateral benefits of loving. Douglas Cooper argues that God’s love is the only free love that exists in the universe because it is not accompanied by an ‘if’ clause, which renders His love as being available or not available depending on whether the conditions of the clause are met. Cooper advances the view that without God’s love finding expression through human beings, “human love, no matter how professedly pure, no matter how deep the degree of emotion that accompanies it, always has a qualification, an ‘if,’ a price tag attached.”<sup>187</sup>

Augustine of Hippo approaches the concept of the love of man from a eudaemonistic perspective, which is a system of ethics which hold that good actions will likely produces happiness. Therefore, expressing love is understood as having the ultimate result of providing one with happiness. Augustine views love as the desire

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<sup>185</sup> Harder, “Love,” *ECT*, 1:947.

<sup>186</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 97.

<sup>187</sup> Douglas Cooper, *Living God’s Love* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1975), 38.

for ultimate happiness.<sup>188</sup> Brümmer notes that the substance that constitutes that ultimate happiness, according to Augustine, is in one's enjoyment of God.<sup>189</sup>

Vincent Brümmer's views are consonant with the concept of a responsive love, or one that manifests for a particular reason when he notes that Socrates takes the view that the man whose health is compromised loves his physician for the sake of regaining his health. He argues that those who are poor love those who are wealthy for the purpose of gaining material wealth from them, and those who are weak love the strong merely for the sake of benefiting from their strength. In the same way, the ignorant love the knowledgeable for the sake of the benefits that they may derive from them.<sup>190</sup>

In Christ's Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matt 5, Christ introduced a new way of seeing and doing things, and that way extends even to the realm of human love. As previously stated, human love is commonly portrayed as a selfish and somewhat self-serving kind of love, a motivated love—motivated by the perceived benefits of loving the beloved. In Matt 5:43-47, Christ challenges those who are to be citizens of His kingdom to embrace another way of loving. The old way is the one with which they are familiar, where they love their friends and neighbours, are suspicious of strangers, and hate their enemies. However, Christ implies that if people only love those who love them back, or those with whom they are familiar, that they have by so doing done nothing spectacular because even sinners do the same thing. Richard Horsley concludes his discussion on Christ's unusual proposition by suggesting that the "rhetorical questions of Luke 6:32:33 (Matt 5:46-47) clearly invite the conclusion that love of enemies transcends the reciprocity between those who love

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<sup>188</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 118.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 112.

each other.”<sup>191</sup> This implies that the love that Christ expects His followers to exhibit is an unusual kind of love which does not originate with man. D. A. Carson makes the sad observation that “in this twisted and broken world, most people like those who are like them and resent those who are different; they love those who admire them and resent those who criticize them.”<sup>192</sup> Hence the love that Christ requires His followers to exhibit must be antithetical to that which is so often expressed, in the words of Carson, “in this twisted and broken world.”<sup>193</sup>

The love that Christ seeks for His followers to embrace and exhibit to the world is the kind of love that would rightly bring an end to all manner of unkind discrimination of people based on those characteristics that cause people to be divided; such as race, tribe, nationality, socio-economic class, education, religion, and so forth. Unfair discrimination of people on the basis of these criteria should not exist among people of the Christian faith, particularly when the love described by Christ in Matt 5:44 is practised. Those, therefore, who are followers of Christ are called upon to love their enemies—those with whom they are neither comfortable nor familiar, and to bless those who curse them, and to do good to those that hate them, as well as to pray for those who persecute them and spitefully use them. This is the kind of love that should be possessed by the followers of Christ. Gene Outka refers to this kind of love as *ἀγάπη* or neighbour-love, which is defined as “a regard for the neighbour which in crucial respects is independent and unalterable.”<sup>194</sup> By stating that this kind of love is independent and unalterable, it seems to inadvertently suggest that the love

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<sup>191</sup> Richard A. Horsley, “Ethics and Exegesis: ‘Love Your Enemies’ and the Doctrine of Non-Violence,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54, no. 1, (Spring, 1986): 16.

<sup>192</sup> Donald A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 46.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 9.

that comes more naturally to human beings is a love that is dependent on the presence or absence of several factors, and is alterable depending on the presence or absence of various factors.

### **The Love for Man**

Since Christ's love must be the template for Christian love, as alluded to in Paul's desire that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph 3:17), this section looks at humanity's love for fellow human beings with the view of reconstructing that love in line with God's love for humanity as a model. This discussion recognizes that whilst Christian love must include the love that Christians have for God, it cannot neglect the love that Christians must have for other human beings.

God's love for humanity is what caused Him to undergo the mystery of the incarnation for the purposes of reuniting the human family to Himself. Canale notes that "the incarnation and cross of Christ actually reveal that divine love is an act of self-denial for the sake and benefit of another, even the lowly, despised, and underserving."<sup>195</sup> God's boundless love would have been of no benefit to humanity were it never directed towards the inhabitants of the earth. Ellen White notes that God's "[l]ove to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God." She further notes that "[i]t was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us."<sup>196</sup> God's love for mankind is directed toward humanity in order that His love may be implanted in the human heart.

Human beings' love for fellow human beings, is a natural love which falls far beneath the kind of love that Christ calls on His followers to experience and share. God commanded in the Old Testament that believers were to love their neighbours as

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<sup>195</sup> Canale, "Doctrine of God," 111.

<sup>196</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 641.

they loved themselves (Lev 19:18), however in the New Testament, Christ gave a new commandment to the disciples when He instructed them to love one another as He had loved them (John 15:12). If loving their neighbours as much as they loved themselves was a high standard not easy to achieve, loving them as Christ has loved them is an even higher standard of love expected of Christians.

Cooper suggests that a genuine pursuit of ἀγάπη love is one of the most challenging ventures that can be undertaken by a human being. He believes that loving is “an arduous, difficult, even hazardous full-time occupation. It is more like attempting to move a mountain with your bare hands. Loving people is the hardest work in the world.”<sup>197</sup> The difficulty that is spoken of in truly loving lies in the fact that the command issued to believers to love their neighbour implies that one’s neighbour is everybody—including one’s enemies. Kierkegaard takes the view that “he who loves his neighbour also loves his enemy. The distinction *friend or enemy* is a distinction in the object of love, but the object of love to one’s neighbour is without distinction. One’s neighbour is the absolutely unrecognizable distinction between man and man; it is eternal equality before God—enemies, too, have this equality.”<sup>198</sup> Morgan Scott Peck concurs with Cooper because he understands the act of loving as to be extending one’s limits for the benefit of one’s self, or for the benefit of others. Peck further explains that one’s limits are only extended by being exceeded or stretched, which is an exercise that requires effort.<sup>199</sup> He reasons that “when we love someone, our love becomes demonstrable or real only through our exertion—through

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<sup>197</sup> Cooper, *Living God’s Love*, 88.

<sup>198</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 79.

<sup>199</sup> Morgan Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 83.

the fact that for that someone (or for ourself) we take an extra step or walk an extra mile. Love is not effortless. To the contrary, love is effortful.”<sup>200</sup>

Todd Wilson explains that what often hinders Christian love—which he refers to as perfected love, as it is rendered in the writings of the apostle John—from reaching its full potential and accomplishing its goal in our lives is the insecurity that attends such an enterprise. Wilson points out that “we know perfected love can push us into awkward spots and messy situations. We give more than we can afford, involve ourselves in the lives of others in ways that take us out of our comfort zones, or take on a responsibility at significant cost to ourselves or to our family.”<sup>201</sup> Peck, however, cautions against thinking that love is about being reckless and imprudent in giving of one’s self to others. Peck notes that love is not just giving, but that “it is *judicious* giving and *judicious* withholding as well.”<sup>202</sup> The word ‘judicious’ is an indication that giving must be done thoughtfully, that there must be careful judgement in the decision, and perhaps the manner of giving so that the gift does not disadvantage the recipient of the gift. The ultimate good of the recipient must always be kept in view.

In the apostle John’s discussion about love (1 John 4:7-8), the fact that is presented there is that loving one another is given as the evidence of knowing God. The strong suggestion is that “it is impossible to come to a knowledge of God without beginning to love our fellows.”<sup>203</sup> Here, one’s own love for himself is no longer the standard by which to measure love for another, but rather, as Harder understands, “the radical exigency of love consists of giving what one does not have, being for the other

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Todd Wilson, *Real Christian: Bearing the Marks of Authentic Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 157.

<sup>202</sup> Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 111.



as Christ was for His disciples” and “the reciprocity of this love (each other) supposes a community to those who love in Christ.”<sup>204</sup> It is expected or assumed that such love would commonly be found or practised by people of faith to one another, but not limited to themselves alone. This kind of love must be a reality to all people.

Brümmer contends that when one human being has love for another, it is really the manifestation of God’s love through that human being who is merely but a conduit of God’s love. He states that:

Strictly speaking, *agape* cannot be the love of one human being for another. It can only apply to the love of God for human beings whereby he uses one human being as an instrument through which he funnels his *agape* to another. ‘In relation to God and to his neighbour, the Christian can be likened to a tube, which by faith is open upwards, and by love downwards. ... He has nothing of his own to give. He is merely the tube, the channel, through which God’s love flows’. It is therefore not we but God who does all the loving.<sup>205</sup>

Kierkegaard concurs with this understanding when he notes that in Christianity, love is not just a relationship between human beings, but that God Himself is a fundamental participant in Christian love. In Kierkegaard’s view, Christian love is a relationship of man—God—man; God is the middle agent. He concludes by arguing that no matter how “beautiful the love-relationship has been between two or more people, however complete all their enjoyment and all their bliss in mutual devotion and affection have been for them, even if all men have praised their relationship—if God and the relationship to God have been left out, then, Christianly understood, this has not been love but a mutual and enchanting illusion of love.”<sup>206</sup> In order for love for human *by* human to be meaningful, it must be the love of God *through* the human that is conveyed *to* a human.

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<sup>203</sup> “Knoweth Not” [1 John 4:8], *SDABC*, 7:664.

<sup>204</sup> Harder, ‘Love,’ *ECT*, 1:952.

<sup>205</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 136.

<sup>206</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 112.

Christ, in speaking to His disciples, upheld as the greatest expression of love when a man is willing to lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13). There is physically nothing more than one can give another than to give their life for the benefit of a friend—it is the ultimate sacrifice, beyond which, practically and literally, nothing more can be given. Paul is careful to let Christians know, however, that even if they give up their bodies to be burned—once again, making the ultimate sacrifice—that sacrifice is adjudged as worthless and meaningless if the critical component of love is missing from such an ostensibly selfless act of martyrdom. Hence the same act is measured differently depending on whether the elixir called love motivated the sacrifice or not.

### **Love in the Cosmic Controversy Motif**

The reach of Christ’s love extends beyond the earthly realm and encompasses “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph 3:15) which is called by the name of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ’s love, which is the foundation of Christian love, can be traced back to the perfect abode of God in heaven where the mystery of sin began. This section examines the essence and content of love in its pre-Genesis-creation context to reveal the unchangeable quality of divine love as a paradigm for Christial love.

The conundrum of the Great Controversy finds its mysterious beginnings in the heart of Lucifer the exalted angel. Be that as it may, White notes that “[t]he history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God’s unchanging love.”<sup>207</sup> Love characterised the interactions and service of the created beings in heaven to God, as well as their own interactions to

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<sup>207</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 33.

one another. White reveals that “while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish.”<sup>208</sup> She is further mindful when commenting about the motives of Lucifer’s interactions with the angelic host that “[i]nstead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of all created beings, it was his endeavour to secure their service and loyalty to himself.”<sup>209</sup> By so doing, the perfect harmony that had heretofore existed in heaven was breached as Lucifer, now Satan, sought to misrepresent the loving character of God.

The Bible records that Lucifer was perfect from the day that he was created until iniquity was found in him (Ezek 28:15). Satan took advantage of the “loving, loyal trust reposed in him by the holy beings under his command, [and] ... so artfully instilled into their minds his own distrust and discontent that his agency was not discerned.”<sup>210</sup> He distorted the loving character of God and suggested that God was imposing His law, albeit the law of love, merely for the purposes of the exaltation of Himself.<sup>211</sup> The central thesis of Satan’s mischief was to obscure from the clear view of the created beings the nature and law of God, which is love.

The great controversy between good and evil, right and wrong, God and Satan, finds its conclusion in the declaration by Ellen White who speaks of a time when:

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats throughout the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>212</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 678.

Throughout the unfolding ages of the cosmic conflict, all of God's actions have been an expression of His essence, His love. From the beginning of the conflict, God has revealed His love for humanity by doing all that was necessary for the salvation of the human race. In the process, God's infinite love shone in bright contrast to Satan's selfishness. Norman Gulley contrasts God's love and Satan's selfishness when he states that "God's self-sacrificing love exposed selfishness for what it is. God acted through love, not force (sovereign will). Satan acted through force, not love. Calvary was the ultimate revelation of the two principles of selfishness and self-sacrificing love." Gulley concludes; "Satan's selfishness murdered Christ, while Christ's selflessness redeemed humanity."<sup>213</sup>

Gulley observes that "love never forces. Love and force are mutually exclusive. Force is devoid of love."<sup>214</sup> Ellen White notes that God "takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service."<sup>215</sup> The conflict, as it is played out in the hearts and minds of human beings today, is about the dominance of love or selfishness in each individual. Gulley reminds that "Scripture reveals two principles of selfishness and self-sacrificing love at work in the cosmic controversy."<sup>216</sup> These represent the two sides of the cosmic conflict.

### **Relational Considerations of Christian Love**

The apostle Paul reveals that the exercise of examining the content and essence and meaning of Christian love, on the basis of the content and essence and

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<sup>213</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:293.

<sup>214</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 4:114

<sup>215</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 34.

meaning of Christ's love, ought to be done "with all the saints" (Eph 3:18). The exercise of practising Christian love is a communal one because love is a relational activity. This section explores the pre-eminence of love as a virtue and principle, and its role in personal experiences like personal transformation and one's observance of the Law of God, which Law also governs relationships. The relational dimension of love is further examined in the role that love plays in interpersonal interactions such as reproofing people and exposing them to the truth, as well as love's role in the risky enterprise of freedom.

From the beginning of the existence of human beings at creation, Woodrow Whidden II notes that "[h]umanity was made in love to live out our lives in loving relationships."<sup>217</sup> Canale affirms this statement in his own words when he states that "love is a relational reality."<sup>218</sup> Gulley expresses similar thought when he posits that "the cross was the final revelation of the Trinity as a community of love."<sup>219</sup> That the Trinity is a *community of love* implies that love is a relational reality within the Godhead. Whidden further suggests that out of the infinite love of God, there has emerged a new order of beings who can experience the love of God and share it with others made in the image of God. Since the very nature of God and His righteousness is the manifestation of love, Whidden argues that that "which goes contrary to the express law of God goes contrary to the love of God. Thus sin is thinking and acting in not only an unlawful, but in an unloving manner."<sup>220</sup> Thus we find a poignant estimate of the importance of a proper understanding of what love is. To be guilty of

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<sup>216</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:293.

<sup>217</sup> Woodrow W. Whidden II, "God is Love—Trinitarian Love!," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 1 (Spring, 2006): 100.

<sup>218</sup> Canale, "Doctrine of God," 111.

<sup>219</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 4:110.

<sup>220</sup> Whidden II, "God is Love," 100.

what Whidden refers to as “un-love,” which is the contrast of what it means to love, would be, according to Whidden, the same as sin itself.

The paradigm by which Christian love must be studied and understood has its basis in the way that love was and is expressed towards humanity by God, in history, and in contemporary times. In 1 Cor 13, the apostle Paul measures the worth of all other virtues by the presence of love in the motivating circumstances of their fulfilment. He notes in 1 Cor 13:2 that even if he had the gift of prophecy, and understood all mysteries and mastered all knowledge, and possessed all faith, all of that would render him as good as nothing if he did not possess the fundamental and pivotal virtue which is love. Taylor Bunch argues that a lack of love in Christianity is oxymoronic, and that such a lack cannot exist in Christianity. He states that “[l]oveless Christianity is a contradiction of terms.” Bunch further notes that “[i]t is love that ennobles and beautifies all language, character and conduct.”<sup>221</sup> It is therefore clear that love is a chief characteristic in Christian experience and practice, and its lack renders all other Christian virtues meaningless.

### **The Supremacy of Love**

Love is presented in 1 Cor 13:13 as the “summit of Christian excellence, the crowning virtue in character development.”<sup>222</sup> The virtues that are discussed in 1 Cor 13, such as the eloquence in tongues, or the possession of the gift of prophecy and the intellectual capacity to understand all mysteries and knowledge; are presented as being extant for a time, after which they shall come to an end when the gospel accomplishes its mission in the world. However, the permanence of faith, hope and love shall continue to abide beyond the extinction of the other virtues. This trio of

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<sup>221</sup> Bunch, *Love*, 46.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

permanent virtues is further described in terms of priority or supremacy, and love is depicted as being the supreme virtue above faith and hope. Such an assertion does not suggest that faith and hope are in any way unimportant or unnecessary.

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as that substance of everything that the Christian hopes for. Hebrews 11:6 declares that it is not possible to please God without faith. It is therefore through faith that we have access to grace (Eph 2:8) by which we are saved. It is through faith that we are justified (Rom 3:28, 5:1; Gal 2:16, 3:24), and it is also through faith that we are sanctified (Acts 26:18).

Hope is also something that humanity cannot live without for it is through hope that one can metaphorically look ahead and see into a future brighter than whatever present circumstances one might be in. Through hope, we are transported to realms of possibility that do not constitute present reality and in a sense we experience a foretaste of new and better realities. Hope is also pivotal to the Christian experience of salvation. Pertaining to salvation, the apostle Paul wrote that “we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Rom 8:24). Hope is an inescapable and necessary dimension of the human experience. The apostle Paul refers to the abiding presence of Christ in the heart of a believer as being the believer’s *hope of glory* (Col 1:27).

While there can be no debate over the fundamental importance of the role of faith and hope in the life of a Christian, Taylor Bunch makes the following dichotomy between faith and hope on the one hand, and love on the other. Bunch observes that “[f]aith and hope chiefly benefit ourselves, and love flows out in blessings to others and is therefore more unselfish.”<sup>223</sup> Emil Brunner views the relationship of this triad of virtues as representing the dimensions of time in which we exist. Brunner argues

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 126.

that we live life in the past and the future, and the present. Of the past, Brunner suggests that “[w]e live in the past—by memory.... But we live also in the future—by expectation, hoping, fearing, planning.... We live, of course, in the present, but for the most part, we are not aware that this ‘being in the present’ is most problematic.”<sup>224</sup> Brunner proceeds to explain how Christians live in the past and the future and the present, and proposes that Christians “live in the past by faith; we live in the future by hope; we live in the present by love.”<sup>225</sup> Faith, according to Brunner, is how Christians relate to the historic act of God’s love of revelation and redemption for humanity in the past, and hope is how Christians look forward to what God will do in the future. The suggestion by Brunner is that love is how God interacts with human beings in the present and changes the present.

According to Bunch, faith and hope are for the benefit of the believer and the hoper. Harder notes that the greatest of the three virtues is love “not because faith represents an imperfect certainty, but because it is by love that we believe and hope.”<sup>226</sup> The apostle Paul in Gal 5:22 outlines the fruit or result of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a believer, and the first one that he mentions in the list of nine evidences is that of love. Norman Gulley refers to the list of virtues in Gal 5:22 as aspects of love. He notes that a “true Christian will possess every one of the aspects of love imparted by the Spirit. So joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will characterize a Spirit-filled life. These are not optional. One must have all of them to have any of them, for the Spirit within brings all of these with Him.”<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Brunner, *Faith, Hope and Love*, 13.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> Harder, “Love,” *ECT*, 1:951.

<sup>227</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:74.



Brunner distinguishes between the greatness and the importance of these three virtues by arguing that the three virtues are all important—equally important, but that when it comes to greatness, it is only love alone of which it can be said, it is great.

Brunner explains that:

...both faith and hope have their real content in the love of God revealed in Christ. That is what they are about. Faith and hope are about God, about the God of love, about God's love. Therefore they are nothing in themselves; they are something only by their relation to love. That is why Saint Paul says that the greatest among them is love. Not the most important—they are equally important, as we have seen. But love is the real substance of faith and hope. We cannot say, God is faith; we cannot say, God is hope, but we can say, God is love. That is what God is, and that is what faith and hope are about.<sup>228</sup>

### **Love and Transformation**

1 John 4:8 states that God is love. Peter Eldersveld argues that if God is love, and we are made in His image, so should we be characterized by love. He notes that God desires for us to be like Himself, and suggests that this is why God gave us His law which informs us in practical ways what it means to love God and to love fellow-human beings.<sup>229</sup> The qualities of love are then enumerated in 1 Cor 13 in such a way that the very character of God Himself is revealed in those qualities. 1 John 3:2 states that when Christ “shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” There is a transformation of the human family that will take place at the Second Coming of Christ, which the apostle Paul declares will occur “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor 15:52). Through this transformation, those qualities of love alluded to in 1 Cor 13 are going to be perfected in those who follow Christ since John asserts that “we shall be like Him.”

Love also transforms the dynamics of relationships. It is understood that sin has separated humanity from God (Isa 59:1-2), and it was from that separation that

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<sup>228</sup> Brunner, *Faith, Hope and Love*, 77.

God in Christ reconciled humanity to Himself (2 Cor 5:19). 1 John 3:1 suggests that because of the love that the Father has bestowed upon us, we can now be called children of God. That relationship between humanity and God is transformed because of His love towards humanity. Because of love, Ellen White states that in heaven, angels minister not as servants but as sons.<sup>230</sup> Love has so impacted the dynamics of their relationship with God that their service is an expression of their love for God as though there were a familial relationship between the angels and God; as though they were His sons.

E. Stanley Jones addresses the transformative impact of love even on an adversarial relationship when he asserts that “[t]here is no possible way to get rid of an enemy except to turn him into a friend, and there is no possible way to get rid of hate except by love.”<sup>231</sup> Jones further poses the rhetorical challenge to “[n]ame one enemy who was ever reclaimed by treating him as an enemy.”<sup>232</sup> He states two possibilities that may arise from the exercise of treating an enemy as a friend; the enemy may become your friend, and if the enemy does not so respond, you will have become a far finer person in the process. It is important to note that the two possibilities that arise from treating an enemy as a friend are both positive and progressive. In other words, there is nothing to lose by practising Christian love toward all people. Love is the smoothing agent in the dynamics of all relationships.

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<sup>229</sup> Peter H. Eldersveld, *Of Law and Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1954), 75.

<sup>230</sup> Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountainview, CA: Pacific Press, 1955), 161.

<sup>231</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Mount: A Working Philosophy of Life* (New York, NY: The Abingdon Press, 1931), 192.

<sup>232</sup> Jones, *The Christ of the Mount*, 192.

If what Ellen White declared when she wrote that “sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man”<sup>233</sup> is true, it stands to reason that the plan of salvation seeks to restore the image and character of God in humanity. White asserts that “the character of God, whose likeness we are to receive, is benevolence and love.”<sup>234</sup> Elsewhere she notes that Enoch’s character went through transformation as he followed the law of God. She states of Enoch that “by remembering God, and following His counsel, he was transformed in character, and became a godly man, whose ways pleased the Lord.”<sup>235</sup> Ἀγάπη love has the power to transform character as the *SDABC* states when it notes that ἀγάπη “is a divine principle of thought and action that modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, and ennoble the affections.”<sup>236</sup>

### **Love and the Law**

There are some Christian communities who believe that love and law do not operate together; that the presence of one necessarily eliminates the legitimate presence of the other. It is their belief that “love makes law unnecessary.”<sup>237</sup> Alex MacDonald notes that “it is particularly in Christ’s death for sinners that we see the harmony between law and love. It was because God loved the world that He gave His Son (John 3:16) and it was because Christ loved sinners that He died for them (Rom 5:8). Yet, although it was love that was the motivating force, it was not love that

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<sup>233</sup> White, *Christian Education*, 63.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.* 64.

<sup>235</sup> Ellen White, “The Path of Progress,” *Review and Herald*, Feb 21, 1888, par. 13.

<sup>236</sup> “Love” [Matt 5:43], *SDABC*, 5:340.

<sup>237</sup> Miroslav M. Kiš, “Christian Lifestyle and Behaviour,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 685.

demanded the death of Christ. It was law.”<sup>238</sup> Miroslav Kiš cautions that “we must not assume incongruity between God’s loving will (His law) and his loving actions. In fact, when Jesus claims that all the law and prophets depend on love, He counters the assumption that law and love stand in opposition.”<sup>239</sup> Not only do love and the law not stand in opposition against each other, but the law is also an expression of God’s love. The SDA Bible Commentary notes how love is indeed the substratum and foundation of keeping the law, without which it would be impossible to keep the law. It states that:

The Decalogue is the expression not only of holiness but also of love (Matt 22:34-40; John 15:10; Rom 13:8-10; 1 John 2:4). Whatever in service we render to God or man, if it be without love, the law is not fulfilled. It is love that protects us from violating the Ten Commandments, for how could we worship other gods, take His name in vain, and neglect the observance of the Sabbath if we truly love Him? How can we steal that which belongs to our neighbour, testify against him, or covet his possessions if we love him? Love is the root of fidelity toward God, and of honour and respect for the rights of our fellows. It should ever be the great motive that impels us to obedience (John 14:15, 15:10; 2 Cor 5:14; Gal 5:6).<sup>240</sup>

Peter Eldersveld articulates that thought by asserting that “[i]f you love God with all your heart and soul and mind, you will not have other gods, nor make images of God, nor take His name in vain, nor break His Sabbath; and if you love your neighbour as yourself, you will not dishonour your parents, nor kill, nor commit adultery, nor steal, nor bear false witness, nor covet. So there are two kinds of love which God requires of us in His law: love toward Him, and love toward our fellowmen.”<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Alex MacDonald, *Love Minus Zero: Current Issues Tackled from a Christian Perspective* (Houston, TX: Christian Focus Publications, 1989), 56.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> “God spake” [Exod 20:1], *SDABC*, 1:600.

<sup>241</sup> Eldersveld, *Of Law and Love*, 75.

Skip MacCarty makes the point that the book of Deuteronomy is considered by scholars to be the Covenant Book for ancient Israel, which consequently contained the law of God which had been issued on Mount Sinai. MacCarty demonstrates the significance of love in this book of the law by noting that “it is highly significant that in Deuteronomy, the Covenant Book, the word ‘love,’ referring to God’s love for His people or their need to love Him and others, occurs more times than in any other Bible book except Psalms, Hosea, John and 1 John.”<sup>242</sup> B. Davie Napier further calls the love of God “Deuteronomy’s theme song. Over and over again, in a number of different ways, this body of legal materials declares that its justification is love—that it asks what it does because the relationship on which it is built, the relationship between God and man, is one of love.”<sup>243</sup> Napier concludes that “[l]ove is the motivation of the law, not fear, not the promise of reward, although this is certainly present, not even awe.”<sup>244</sup>

According to Bunch, the entire law of God can be summarized in one word, and that word is love. Bunch suggests that “[j]ust as the Decalogue constitutes a summary of the Scriptures, so Love is the Law of God abridged to a single word.”<sup>245</sup> Eldersveld concurs with Taylor Bunch nearly verbatim that “[w]hen the Son of God summarized His Father’s law, the Ten Commandments, He put it in just one word: *Love*. The law of God is the law of love. And we can easily understand why. God is love.”<sup>246</sup> Mario Veloso affirms that “love is the foundational principle of the moral

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<sup>242</sup> MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?*, 145.

<sup>243</sup> B. Davie Napier, “The Law and the Gospel,” *The New Century Leader*, May 1958, 15.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> Bunch, *Love*, 7.

<sup>246</sup> Eldersveld, *Of Law and Love*, 75.

law.”<sup>247</sup> It is therefore upon this foundation that we are to understand how the law is fulfilled. Romans 13:8 urges Christians to “owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.”

Christ linked obedience to His law with His followers’ love for Himself. In John 14:15 Christ stated that the proof of one’s love for Him would be found in one’s willingness to obey His commandments. Ron Du Preez holds that “[t]his precise sequence of ‘love’ preceding obedience is already evident in the Decalogue itself, where God promises to show mercy to those ‘who love Me and keep My commandments’ (Exod 20:6).”<sup>248</sup> Therefore, it can be reasoned that the profession of one’s love for God without any accompanying obedience to His commandments proves such profession to be false. In the same way, obedience to God’s commandments which is not motivated by one’s love for God is just as futile.

White notes that “if we abide in Christ, if the love of God dwells in us, our feelings, our thoughts, our purposes, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God as expressed in the precepts of His holy law.”<sup>249</sup> Harder explains that “all that is done by love accomplishes the law (Rom 13:8).”<sup>250</sup> Bunch further reasons that such “obedience that does not spring from love is always formal, legal, and mechanical; and such religion is loveless, lifeless, and Christless.”<sup>251</sup> A Christless religion cannot under any stretch of the imagination be legitimately referred to as Christianity, for Christ is the center and the content of *Christ-ianity*.

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<sup>247</sup> Mario Veloso, “The Law of God,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 461.

<sup>248</sup> Ron Du Preez, “A Holocaust of Deception: Lying to Save Life and Biblical Morality,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9, no. 1 (1998): 191.

<sup>249</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1956), 61.

<sup>250</sup> Harder, “Love,” *ECT*, 1:954.

<sup>251</sup> Bunch, *Love*, 23.

Ellen White observes the extent to which love was and is the great motivator in the angels' service to God in heaven when she states that "in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. ... Obedience to them is no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy."<sup>252</sup> Love is the foundation on which the government of heaven securely rests.

The apostle John also linked commandment-keeping as an expression of one's love for God and fellow-believers when he declared in 1 John 5:2-3 that "by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." Even the fear of eternal loss is not a good enough motivation to keep the commandments of God because 1 John 4:18 reveals that "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear." While there are several injunctions in Scripture to "fear" God (Eccl 12:13; 1 Pet 2:17; Rev 14:7), Yves-Jean Harder clarifies that the "fear that goes with the love of God is not slavish submission; to fear nothing but God means to have no object of fear on earth."<sup>253</sup> Therefore, love for God must be the motivation for keeping his commandments, and when this is the case, the apostle John lets us know that such commandment-keeping will not be burdensome (1 John 5:3).

When an expert of the law came to inquire of Christ as to which of the commandments in the law was the greatest of them all, Jesus responded in Matt 22:37-40 that "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy

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<sup>252</sup> White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 109.

<sup>253</sup> Harder, "Love," *ECT*, 1:950.

soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The pith of Christ’s response to the lawyer’s inquiry is that love is the epitome of the law. Harder observes in Christ’s response that “love is the essential of the law—in a context in which there is an attempt to test him—Jesus shows that his doctrine is not meant to be original. But he insists on the actualization, in the heart and in practice, of the already well-known sense of the ‘law.’”<sup>254</sup> The first object of humanity’s love is God as reflected in the first four commandments of the Decalogue; and the second object of humanity’s love is fellow-humanity as reflected in the last six commandments of the Decalogue.

Skip MacCarty, in his discussion about the relationship between the old and new covenants, advances the view that “the Old Testament commandments to love and obey God and to love one another (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18), were reiterated in the New Testament as a commandment that wasn’t new, but yet it was.”<sup>255</sup> It was not a new commandment in the sense that in 2 John 1:5-6, the commandment to love one another is referred to as one that “we had from the beginning,” but rather, as MacCarty explains, it was new in the sense that “Jesus lived that love in a way that made the law of love shine with new splendour—almost as though it were a new law.”<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, love and law are linked together in 2 John 1:6 which proffers a definition for what love is, and states that love is walking in obedience to His commandments.

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<sup>254</sup> Harder, “Love,” *ECT*, 1:950.

<sup>255</sup> MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained?*, 59.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* 60.



## Love and Reproof

Love must not be thought to be incapable of issuing reproof or correction. On the contrary, love is the foundational motivator and the necessary ingredient in the process of administering effective reproof and correction. The apostle Paul admonished the Ephesian believers about the import of “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), and he identified such a quality as being necessary in the spiritual growth process of the saints so that they are not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Love must not be devoid of truth and the truth must not be free from the presence of love, but the truth must be accompanied by love. Bunch suggests that “[t]ruth without love tends to make people cold, harsh, rigid, and critical; and love without the balance of truth makes them emotional, fanatical and unreliable. Neither is complete without the other.”<sup>257</sup> Elsewhere, Bunch notes the effect of reproof without the crucial element of love and states that “[i]t is proper to recognize wrongs in others and even to point them out to the wrongdoer, provided the person is benefited and we are made more kind and loving in the process. But if such a procedure produces coldness, severe criticism, and an unlovely spirit, it becomes a curse and gives evidence of selfishness and a lack of the virtue of love.”<sup>258</sup>

Love also demonstrates itself in reproofs as found in the words spoken by Christ in Rev 3:19, which says “as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” Reproof is therefore not antithetical to love, it is not necessarily hostile, but it is made more effective and acceptable and beneficial when it is accompanied by the godly virtue of love.

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<sup>257</sup> Bunch, *Love*, 39.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

## Love and Freedom

Freedom of choice necessarily implies the possibility of any course of action between alternatives. Determinism is a doctrine that argues against the concept of freedom of choice by suggesting that all events, including any course of action that is chosen by human beings, are ultimately determined by forces that are external to the human will. Vincent Brümmer argues against determinism when he contends that “freedom of choice is incompatible with determinism: [because] one cannot choose to do the unavoidable since the unavoidable leaves us no choice but to do it.”<sup>259</sup>

It would appear that one of the greatest risks ever to be taken by God, was to give humanity the freedom of choice, the possibility to opt for any course of action between two basic alternatives. Norman Gulley aptly states that God giving human beings and angels freedom was a risk because of the possibility that some among them could misuse that freedom. However, that risk notwithstanding, God also knew that unless angels and human beings were created with that freedom, neither could love God.<sup>260</sup> Freedom of choice is here presented as a necessary foundation for love to be exercised, even though that freedom possesses the inherent risk that love might not be reciprocated or exercised in return towards the one who gives love and the freedom to love. Whidden confirms this view when asserting that the coming into existence of sin was predicated on the very fundamental nature of the love of God. It must be understood therefore that the basic fact that God’s love demands freedom of choice is what makes it conceivable for sin to come into existence.<sup>261</sup> Moral freedom is the essential consequence and proof of the existence of divine love. Psychologist and psychotherapist Morgan Scott Peck finds that choice is fundamental in the

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<sup>259</sup> Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 45.

<sup>260</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:45.

<sup>261</sup> Whidden II, “God is Love,” 105.

definition of what love itself is when he defines love as “[t]he will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.”<sup>262</sup> The will or the choice to extend one’s self for the benefit of one’s own or another’s growth requires freedom of choice, hence freedom is a fundamental quality in the expression of love. Peck argues that loving is an evolutionary process in that as one extends themselves, inevitably, one grows into a larger state of being.<sup>263</sup> Peck further demonstrates the freedom of love in psychotherapeutic language when he notes that in human relationships, when one romantically claims that they “love” their beloved to the extent that they could not live without them—that that is not love, but parasitism. He argues that:

When you require another individual for your survival, you are a parasite on that individual. There is no choice, no freedom involved in your relationship. It is a matter of necessity rather than love. Love is the free exercise of choice. Two people love each other only when they are quite capable of living without each other but *choose* to live with each other.<sup>264</sup>

Be that as it may, God created humanity and lavished upon them the moral freedom to choose as they freely decided to. Ellen White adds that without freedom of choice “[t]here could have been no development of character. Such a course would have been contrary to God’s plan in dealing with the inhabitants of other worlds.” She further states that such a condition “would have been unworthy of man as an intelligent being, and would have sustained Satan’s charge of God’s arbitrary rule.”<sup>265</sup> Humanity’s obedience to God had to come about as an expression of love and the freedom of choice to opt to obey. The risk of love is that the object of one’s love may not respond to the lover’s love in the manner that the giver of that love might have

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<sup>262</sup> Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 81.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.* 82.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.* 98.

<sup>265</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 49.

hoped, nevertheless, the magnanimity of love does not shrink back from loving in spite of the inherent risks that loving poses. Chris Blake confesses that “love is risky. God’s greatest risk is us, His greatest disappointment is us, His greatest triumph is us.”<sup>266</sup>

Such was the love with which Christ loved Judas, in the full knowledge of what Judas was contemplating doing against Christ Himself. Christ loved Judas enough to give him opportunities to repent, and yet not to subvert his freedom of choice to pursue his plans; hence why it may be considered a risk, since Judas did not respond as Christ had wished for him to respond. Such is the love with which God loved the entire world and made provisions for human beings to be eternally saved, even in the knowledge that some would chose not to benefit from the provisions made by God.

### **Love and Truth**

1 John 4:8 states that God is love, and in John 14:6, Christ personifies truth itself when He identifies Himself as the Truth. If love is the essence of God, and Christ is the content of Truth, it seems logical to conclude that there cannot exist a dichotomy between love and truth. The apostle Paul admonishes the Christians in Ephesus to grow up spiritually and avoid being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, and they are to do this by “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Robert McAfee Brown, commenting on the admonition of the apostle Paul, notes that “speaking the truth, however sharp and cutting a two-edged sword that truth may be, but speaking also in love, remembering that the edge of truth’s sword is dulled if it is

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<sup>266</sup> Chris Blake, *Searching for a God to Love* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999), 116.

flourished in malice, jealousy, spite or hatred.”<sup>267</sup> Brown seems to suggest that being harsh and unloving in one’s exposition of truth does not make the truth more forceful, nor easier to for the hearer of this truth to assimilate it; on the contrary, it dulls the impact that truth would have had if it had been presented in love, and the net effect is that malice and hatred compromise the acceptance of truth. John instructs against loving in word only, but extends the injunction to loving in truth as well (1 John 3:18).

Truth is a frequently used word in the Book of John and can generally be defined as “that which corresponds to fact.”<sup>268</sup> The *SDABC* notes that the word *truth* is frequently used “in a wider sense to denote what is true in things pertaining to God and the duties of man, or in a more restricted sense the facts taught in the Christian religion concerning God and the execution of His purposes through Christ.”<sup>269</sup> From this understanding it can be suggested that the truth refers to the Gospel. Liberty is promised to those who accept the truth in Christ (Gal 5:1).

The role of love in the acceptance of truth also has salvific connotations. Scripture reveals that a simple knowledge of the truth is not sufficient to ensure one’s salvation; rather, a love of the truth is pivotal in differentiating those who know the truth and are saved, from those who know the truth but will be lost (2 Thess 2:10). This proposition is still valid if the truth is personified in terms of John 14:6, in which it is analogous to Christ Himself, or in terms of 1 John 5:6, in which John declares that the Spirit is truth. Without a love for the One who is the Truth, there can be no salvation received. “Final condemnation of sinners will be based on their rejection of

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<sup>267</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, “The Issues Which Divide Us,” in *American Catholics: A Protestant-Jewish View*, ed. Philip Scharper (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward Inc., 1959), 60.

<sup>268</sup> “Truth” [John 8:32], *SDABC*, 5:989.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

Jesus, who is ‘the truth’ (John 14:6). Their refusal to cherish a love for what is true makes them susceptible to being influenced by all that is deceitful, by all the machinations of the wicked one.”<sup>270</sup>

This points to the reality that whilst keeping the law and doing good deeds are noble activities which have their place in the experience of the Christian, salvation is not a reward for law-keeping or good-deed-doing, both of which activities must be founded on one’s love for Christ. On the other hand, it is germane to this discussion to note that the devil “was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44, NASB). The devil is a liar and no truth can be found in him. Ellen White notes that “Satan has an intense hatred for Christ, and the purchase of His blood, and he works with all deceivableness of unrighteousness”<sup>271</sup> to deceive as many as do not love the truth. It appears that not receiving the love for the truth likens one to he of whom it is stated, that there is no truth in him. The value, therefore, of loving the truth cannot be over estimated.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review demonstrates that love is a major element in different aspects of theology which—as the editors of the exposition of 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Adventist faith indicate—must reveal the love of our Lord. It is evident, however, that not every doctrine or fundamental belief does. More than half of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of Adventist theology are silent about how they reveal the love of our Lord. The significance of love in the various dimensions of theology justifies

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<sup>270</sup> “The love of the truth” [2 Thess 2:10], *SDABC*, 7:274.

<sup>271</sup> Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 88.

the importance of Christian love in Adventism and shows the conspicuous lack of a specific doctrine or fundamental belief on Christian love in Adventist theology.

## CHAPTER 3

### OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT BASES FOR DEVELOPING A DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

This chapter will present a textual analysis of Lev 19:18 and Eph 3:14-19, and an exposition of the meaning of the texts. The chapter will also examine the soteriological and missiological dimensions, and the effects and outcomes of Christian love. Leviticus 19:18 is the basis for Christ's reaffirmation in Matt 22:39 of the divine command for each individual Christian to exhibit Christian love. Ephesians 3:14-19 reveals a Pauline prescription for how a corporate body of believers may fulfill that divine imperative.

#### **Analysis of Lev 19:18**

**V. 18a** לֹא-תִקֶּם וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר (Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge). This command recognizes the natural human tendency of seeking to avenge for whatever harm has been inflicted on us, and yet the Bible does not countenance such a course of action. Joel Kaminsky notes interestingly, that “the immediate context of vv.17-18 speaks of the necessity of reproving a neighbour who is acting wrongly even while not taking revenge against him (this perhaps being reserved for deity).”<sup>1</sup> This clarifies that reproof and revenge are mutually exclusive and it is expected that a Christian lovingly reproves (Lev19:17) their neighbour, and yet that Christian ought not take any revenge. It is a human weakness which Paul addresses in Rom 12:19 when he

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<sup>1</sup> Joel S. Kaminsky, “Loving One’s (Israelite) Neighbour: Election and Commandment in Leviticus 19,” *American Theological Library Association Series*, April 2008, 125.



admonishes “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath,” suggesting that the Christian who exercises Christian love should let God’s wrath take its course in God’s own time and way, on behalf of the Christian. The same concern for tactfully reproofing one’s neighbour occurs in the NT in Matt 18:15-20.

**V. 18b** אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ (Against the children of thy people). This phrase indicates the immediate context in which this command was given—that of the Israelite nation. Kaminsky notes that “While both later rabbinic Judaism and classical Christianity understood this verse as applying to all of humanity, the inclusion of the (likely) supplemental passage, Lev 19:33-34, which explicitly applies the same command to the resident alien, strongly indicates that Lev 19:18 addressed relations among Israelites alone.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Kaminsky suggests that the word translated as “neighbour” may be rendered better as “fellow citizen.”<sup>3</sup>

The question of who might be referred to as one’s neighbour is one that is addressed by Christ in Luke 10:29-37, in which individuals of different nationalities are here referred to as neighbours. Hence we find that this command to love one’s neighbour is not limited to just one’s near-dweller; it is extended to all people (Lev 19:33-34) and it “commits one to pragmatic concern for the stranger, widow, orphan, or poor. This and other similar concerns are included in the command to love.”<sup>4</sup>

**V. 18c** וְאַהֲבִיתָ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ, אֲנִי יְהוָה: (But thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD). This command is a summation of the last six commandments

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Richard A. Allbee, “Asymmetrical Continuity of Love and Law Between the Old and New Testaments: Explicating the Implicit Side of a Hermeneutical Bridge, Leviticus 19.11-18,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31.2 (2006): 165.

of the Decalogue. In the OT we find love commanded by God in the center book of the five books of the Pentateuch. “Here is love at the heart of the Pentateuch, which is the foundation of the whole Bible. Jesus recognized that all of God’s law and His will as revealed in the whole OT is based on love, which is God’s character.”<sup>5</sup> The fact that love is commanded demonstrates that it is more than merely a spontaneous feeling, but rather, that it is a principle that governs the treatment of, and interaction with, others. Jesus quoted this OT text (in Matt 22:39, Mark 12:31) as the second greatest of all the commandments in the Scriptures. Hence it is noted that “Aside from loving God, this is the cardinal point of all the laws and personal holiness. It is the corrective to all the previous negative behaviors.”<sup>6</sup>

The Christian love of one’s neighbour is a “foundational social ethic for the people of God.”<sup>7</sup> Christ went further to extend the reach of Christian love to not only stranger, widows, orphans or the poor, but even to enemies as well (Matt 5:43-44). The OT requires that the followers of God must exemplify the universally relational love of God, not based on any quality of the beloved, but based on the will of the bestower as a means for creating the possibility of reciprocal love between the two. While Jesus brought clarity to this command, He also showed that the OT did indeed require that believers be conduits of divine love by bestowing Christian love upon all people.

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<sup>5</sup> Lev 19:18, Andrews Study Bible ed. Jon L. Dybdahl (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 151.

<sup>6</sup> Barry, J. D. et al, *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Lev 19:18 commentary, paragraph 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

## Analysis of Eph 3:14-19

V. 14 *Τούτου χάριν κάμπτω τά γόνατά μου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα,*<sup>8</sup> (For this reason I bend my knees before the Father,). The exact referent of the phrase *τούτου χάριν* is not readily apparent. Arnold, Talbert, and Hoehner have suggested that Paul is referring to his comments in Eph 2:11-22,<sup>9</sup> while Lincoln and Larkin think it inclusively refers to both, the paranthetical material in Eph 3:2-13 immediately preceding the apostle's statement, as well as his comments in chapter 2.<sup>10</sup> O'Brien reasonably notes the close link between Paul's prayer in Eph 1:15-23 and subsequent and interconnected sections like Eph 2:11-22, and suggests that Paul's initial prayer supplements and develops the foundation for subsequent sections.<sup>11</sup> It can be concluded, as does James Rosscup, that the reason for Paul bending his knees before the Father is inclusive of all the material covered from chapters 1-3 because of its interconnectedness.<sup>12</sup>

Benjamin Merkle suggests that the verb *κάμπτω* used with the accusative direct object *τά γόνατά* and the possessive genitive pronoun *μου* is a metonymy that must be understood as substituting the posture of praying for the action of praying

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<sup>8</sup> Some manuscripts add the words *τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (of our Lord Jesus Christ) after *πατέρα*. The shorter reading is preferred because it is supported by the earliest manuscripts containing Ephesians, and according to Ernest Best, the additional words draw attention away from the *πατέρα- πατριὰ* word-play, and limit the scope of reference to God as Father to His Fatherhood of Jesus Christ only, yet Eph 3:15 implies a more universal reference of God's Fatherhood; See Ernest Best, *ACECE*, 337.

<sup>9</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 208; Charles H. Talbert, "Ephesians and Colossians," *Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 102; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 472.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* WBC 42 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 197; William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 60.

<sup>11</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. M. Eerdmans, 1999), 254.

<sup>12</sup> James E. Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame our Communication with God* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2008), 2219.

(Eph 3:14).<sup>13</sup> Best is in agreement with Merkle’s view when noting that “Whatever the contemporary normal posture in prayer, v. 14 refers to mental, not physical, kneeling.”<sup>14</sup> Abbott indicates that “[t]he usual posture in praying was standing: ‘when ye stand praying,’ Mark 11:25; ‘stood and prayed,’ Luke 18:11; ‘the publican standing afar off,’ *ib.* 13. But kneeling is mentioned, 1 Kings 8:54 (Solomon); Dan. 6:10; and, in the N.T., Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60, 20:36, 21:5.”<sup>15</sup> In view of these postures of prayer not being uncommon to believers of Jewish background, Best notes that “had AE<sup>16</sup> spoken of Paul as standing in the Jewish manner, his Gentile readers might have needed an explicit reference to prayer. Probably kneeling conveyed to them a greater sense of humbleness than would standing.”<sup>17</sup>

**V. 15** ἐξ οὗ πᾶσα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ὀνομάζεται, (from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.). The antecedent of the personal pronoun οὗ is πατέρα from v. 14, and Hoehner suggests that Paul makes use of a play on words between πατέρα and πᾶσα πατριὰ, a wordplay that is lost in the English translation.<sup>18</sup> The term πατριὰ is used only on two other occasions in the NT; firstly in Luke 2:4 it is used to refer to “people linked over a relatively long period of time by line of descent to a common progenitor,”<sup>19</sup> and this is translated as a family or clan relationship. Secondly, in Acts 3:25 the term refers to “a relatively large body of

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2016), Eph 3:14 commentary, paragraph 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians (ACECE)* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark International, 1998), 343.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897), 93.

<sup>16</sup> AE is a reference to the Author of Ephesians

<sup>17</sup> Best, *ACECE*, 337.

<sup>18</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 474.

people existing as a totality at a given moment and linked through ancestry and sociopolitical interests,”<sup>20</sup> and is translated as people or nation. Hendriksen and Baugh argue that the translation of *πᾶσα πατριὰ* as “the whole family” is based on the understanding of *ἐν οὐρανοῖς* and *ἐπὶ γῆς* as referring to “the Church Militant on earth and the Church Triumphant in heaven.”<sup>21</sup> F. F. Bruce sees *πατριὰ* as a reference to an abstract concept of the fatherhood of God from which all other fatherhood in the universe is derived.<sup>22</sup>

**V. 16** *ἵνα δῶ ὑμῖν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον,* (that he may give you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inward man,). Central to the first of the apostles two prayer requests is a plea for power on behalf of his readers. The resources necessary for this plea to be answered are found in the phrase *κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ* which is an expression of the limitless supply of power that is available to the believers. Of this supply, O’Brien notes that:

...his giving corresponds to the inexhaustible riches of that glory. It is on a scale commensurate with his glory: he gives as lavishly as only he can. It is not surprising, therefore, that the apostle frequently speaks of ‘fulness,’ ‘riches,’ and ‘abundance’ in his prayers (Rom 15:13; 1 Cor 1:4-5; 2 Thess 1:11; note also Jas 1:5). The one to whom he directed his requests gives richly and generously: ‘And my God will fully meet every need of yours in accordance with his riches in glory in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 4:19). By formulating his prayer along these lines, the apostle assured his readers that the Father was wholly able to meet their needs.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and edited by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “*patria*.”

<sup>20</sup> Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “*patria*.”

<sup>21</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians: New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967), 168-169; S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 267-268

<sup>22</sup> Frederick F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 324.

<sup>23</sup> O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 257.

Bruce makes the point that God's infinity and eternity naturally result in His glory being inexhaustible, and this inexhaustibility provides the abundant measure of God's munificence when He confers His benefactions. Since God's resources are inexhaustible, sharing those resources with his children cannot impoverish Him.<sup>24</sup> Hence Paul's first request is based on the limitlessness of God's riches and glory and serves as the necessary condition for the second prayer request in v. 17.

**V. 17a** *κατοικῆσαι τὸν Χριστὸν διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν*, (that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;). The second prayer request is based on the accomplishment of the first which is located in v. 16. When the believers have been strengthened with might through the Holy Spirit in the inner being, Paul prays that Christ would indwell their hearts through faith. O'Brien notes that the term *κατοικέω* is a strong expression "signifying a permanent indwelling rather than some temporary abode" whose focus is not the initial indwelling of Christ at the point of salvation, "but on His continual presence."<sup>25</sup> Best concludes that "[t]he burden of the prayer is that God's strength should become that of the readers, mediated through the love of Christ in which they are already grounded."<sup>26</sup>

The prepositional phrase *διὰ τῆς πίστεως* is the means of the transformational indwelling and it suggests a progressive experience of drawing closer to God as Christ reigns over every facet of the believers' existence.<sup>27</sup> Carson rightly notes that because changing us takes a great deal of power; a great deal of power is precisely what Paul prays for. Carson notes how Paul petitions God to strengthen us by His power in our inner being so that Jesus Christ may indisputably take up residence

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 326.

<sup>25</sup> O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 259.

<sup>26</sup> Best, *ACECE*, 343.

<sup>27</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 211.

within our hearts. When this happens, we will be transformed into a house that inevitably reflects God’s own character.<sup>28</sup> This is the second of two prayer requests whose outcomes find expression in v. 17b.

**V. 17b** *ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι*, (that you, being firmly rooted and grounded in love,). The second half of v. 17 begins to point out the expected outcomes of the apostle’s prayer requests being answered. The manner in which the prayer is constructed suggests that each subsequent petition of the prayer is dependent on the fulfilment or accomplishment of the former. Paul’s prayer requests are that (1) the believers be strengthened in might through the Holy Spirit in the inward being. The accomplishment of the believers being strengthened is the basis upon which the second request is made, that (2) Christ dwells in the hearts of the believers through faith. In the same manner, the expected consequences of the two prayer requests being answered are that the believers would be “rooted and grounded in love” (v. 17b).

The perfect passive participle *ἐρριζωμένοι* is used only by the apostle Paul, and on only one other occasion in the NT (Col 2:7). The participle is from the verb *ρίζω*, which means to cause to take root,<sup>29</sup> and is a metaphor derived from the domain of agriculture and suggests to cause a person to be thoroughly or firmly grounded. The verb *τεθεμελιόω*, from which the perfect passive participle *τεθεμελιωμένοι* is derived, occurs five times in the NT (Matt 7:25; Eph 3:17; Col 1:23; Heb 1:10; 1 Pet 5:10). The verb *τεθεμελιόω* is an architectural term which means to found, to lay the foundation of.<sup>30</sup> These perfect passive participles indicate

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<sup>28</sup> Donald. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 187.

<sup>29</sup> Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “ρίζω.”

<sup>30</sup> Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “τεθεμελιόω.”

that being firmly rooted in, and being founded upon or grounded in, love, is the basis on which Paul's expectations of the believers are enumerated. They are the foundation without which the next two resultant achievements could never be realized. Hoehner believes that, "[h]aving established this root and foundation, Paul makes his next appeal,"<sup>31</sup> suggesting that Paul's appeals or expectations are indeed based on the believers being firmly rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.

While *ἐν ἀγάπῃ* could reasonably refer to the Father's love, or to Christ's love, or to the believers' love, Bruce suggests that it might be best to understand *ἐν ἀγάπῃ* as referring to "the love of God revealed in Christ and poured into his people's hearts by the Spirit, so that they in turn may show it to one another and to all."<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, the believers' firm rootedness and grounding in love is a consequence of the apostle's two prayer requests, whilst on the other hand, the firm rootedness and grounding in love is also a foundation or a basis from which subsequent accomplishments may be realized. Hoehner notes that "they are rooted and grounded for the purpose of having the ability to comprehend the love of Christ which is mentioned next."<sup>33</sup>

**V. 18** *ἵνα ἐξισχύσητε καταλαβέσθαι σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀγίοις τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μῆκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος,* (that you may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,). The first consequence that is expected by Paul for those believers who are rooted and grounded in the love of Christ is that they will have the ability to comprehend the dimensions of the love of Christ. The aorist active subjunctive second person plural *ἐξισχύσητε* comes from the

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<sup>31</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 484.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 327.

<sup>33</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 484.



verb ἐξισχύω which means “to be fully capable of doing or experiencing something.”<sup>34</sup> That, followed by the complementary infinitive καταλαβέσθαι, which means to grasp, attain, sieze,<sup>35</sup> implies that once the believers are firmly rooted and grounded in the love of God, they are then capacitated to comprehend the dimensions of an object that is not identified in v. 18.

Daniel B. Wallace points out that σὺν with the dative in the prepositional phrase σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀγίοις indicates association.<sup>36</sup> Best rightly points out that “[s]ince we learn from other people, knowledge is generally communal; this is especially true of love whose nature can only be grasped through interaction with others. The true understanding of Christ’s love is not then an individual experience but takes place in the community.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Paul prays that the believers would corporately comprehend something that is described by the four dimensions τὸ πλάτος καὶ μῆκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος that have an explicit object. O’Brien explains that:

...the object of the dimensions is made explicit in the following parallel clause, thereby providing a climactic effect. The conjunction in v. 19a provides a close connection between the two clauses, while the mention of that love as ‘surpassing knowledge’ functions as an equivalent of the four dimensions which draws attention to its magnitude.<sup>38</sup>

Hence the object described by the four dimensions is clearly the love of Christ which is pointed out in v. 19. The clause in v. 18 represents the first expected consequence of being rooted and grounded in love, as appealed for by Paul in v. 17b.

**V. 19a** γινῶναί τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ, (and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,). The second expected

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<sup>34</sup> Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “*exischyō*.”

<sup>35</sup> Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “*katalambanō*.”

<sup>36</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 382.

<sup>37</sup> Best, *ACECE*, 344.

<sup>38</sup> O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 263.

consequence of being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ is to know the love of Christ, which is described as surpassing knowledge. The accusative direct object of the aorist active infinitive *γινῶναι* is *τὴν...ἀγάπην*, which is the object of the believers' divinely empowered comprehension. Wallace suggests that *τοῦ Χριστοῦ* is best understood as a subjective genitive, rather than an objective genitive.<sup>39</sup> It can be concluded therefore that the prayer is not for the believers to love Christ more, but that they may better comprehend His love for them.

The attributive participle *ὑπερβάλλουσαν*, which means 'excelling,' is used to describe the love of Christ together with the genitive of comparison *τῆς γνώσεως*, and is understood to mean 'surpassing knowledge.' This phrasing magnifies the magnitude of Christ's love for all the saints, and emphasizes the inexhaustible character of His love.<sup>40</sup> The vast dimensions of Christ's love that are described in v. 18 help to indicate that this love "in its depth reaches to man's lowest depression and in its height carries him to highest glory."<sup>41</sup> Best correctly notes at this point that "Though empowered by the Spirit and indwelt by Christ the readers still lack something and, as we shall ultimately see, this is not gnosis but love. The ἵνα clause here assumes that of v. 16 and takes it further; though underpinned by love believers need a fuller understanding of that love."<sup>42</sup>

This knowledge of Christ's love must not be limited to just a correct theoretical and theological understanding, but must extend to the very intimate and personal experience of the believer. Carson warns that this love "is not merely to be analysed, understood and adopted into holistic categories of integrated theological

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<sup>39</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 121.

<sup>40</sup> O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 264.

<sup>41</sup> Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible*, 2226.

<sup>42</sup> Best, *ACECE*, 343-344.

thought. It is to be received, to be absorbed, to be felt.”<sup>43</sup> These staggering dimensions of Christ’s love, as well as the apostle’s appeal for power on behalf of the believers, indicate that divine enabling is essential for the feat of comprehending Christ’s love for the believers to be achieved. Best observes that “[b]elievers can only grasp the extent of Christ’s love when they have been strengthened through the Spirit in their inner being, Christ has come to dwell in their hearts and they are underpinned by love.”<sup>44</sup>

**V. 19b** ἵνα πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ. (that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.). The cumulative impact of Paul’s two expected outcomes (vv. 18 and 19a) which are a result of being firmly rooted and grounded in love (v. 17b) produce the condition and experience of being filled with all the fulness of God. Abbott and Carson hold the view that the word ἵνα introduces the climactic purpose of just the second expected consequence (v. 19a) of being firmly rooted and grounded in love<sup>45</sup> (which is knowing the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge). However, Hoehner and Thielman contend that ἵνα introduces the purpose of both expected outcomes expressed in vv. 18 and 19a (which are, comprehending with all the saints the dimensions of Christ’s love, and knowing the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge).<sup>46</sup> The climactic purpose is expressed by the aorist passive subjunctive second person plural πληρωθῆτε, the prepositional phrase εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα, and the subjective genitive τοῦ θεοῦ.

Paul uses the noun πλήρωμα four times in Ephesians (1:10, 23; 3:19; 4:13) and it has the idea of “fullness, completeness, entirety,” and when used with the verb

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<sup>43</sup> Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 80-81.

<sup>44</sup> Best, *ACECE*, 347-348.

<sup>45</sup> Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 101-102; Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 196.

*πληρόω*, it normally has the idea of “completeness, the absence of any lacunae.”<sup>47</sup>

Best is of the view that the content of what fills the believers is not as important as *who* does the filling. Best believes that “[w]hat fills believers will be the same as that which fills God or that with which God fills; the distinction between the active and passive meanings of *pleroma* may be unimportant in this respect, for God will fill with that with which he is full.”<sup>48</sup>

O’Brien suggests that Paul is praying that the believers may “be all that God wants them to be,”<sup>49</sup> while Carson believes that Paul is simply praying for the believers to be spiritually mature.<sup>50</sup> Rosscup argues that the idea contained in Paul’s prayer is that Christians must keep on growing so that their own capacity for fellowship with God and usefulness to Him expands.<sup>51</sup> The purpose of Paul’s prayer appears to be for the divine strengthening of the believers and the indwelling of Christ in their hearts, so that when they have become firmly rooted and grounded in Christ’s love, they may comprehend the dimensions of Christ’s love, which love surpasses knowledge, so that they can achieve and experience spiritual maturity. Best concludes by suggesting that “[t]he nature of God is love; his greatest spiritual gift is love. Probably then we should understand God as able to fill with that love which

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<sup>46</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 490; Also see Frank Theilman, *Ephesians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 237.

<sup>47</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 490.

<sup>48</sup> Best, *ACECE*, 348.

<sup>49</sup> O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 266.

<sup>50</sup> Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 197.

<sup>51</sup> Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible*, 2227.

summarises his own being and to whose fullness AE's<sup>52</sup> readers have not yet attained, but which in itself enables them to move towards their goal."<sup>53</sup>

### **Exposition of Christian Love as a Foundation**

Paul's two prayer requests on behalf of the believers in vv. 16-17a seem to result in them being firmly rooted and grounded in love (v. 17b). Before Paul can contemplate any further development in the process of the growth of these believers, as he does in vv. 18-19a, it is clear that the believers must first be firmly rooted and grounded in love. Being firmly rooted and grounded in Christ's love is foundational to the existence and expression of Christian love because being rooted and grounded comes about as a result of being "strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man" and the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith (vv. 16-17a). Part of the evidence of the Spirit's working in the inner being and the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith is the fruit of the Spirit as enumerated in Gal 5:22-23. Christian love is at the top of that list and is thus proposed as being a foundational tenet of Christianity, from which foundation other virtues spring.

When we consider what is well known about the Seventh-day Adventist church, we find that it has been described as:

[A] conservative Protestant body of evangelical Christians whose faith is grounded in the Bible and centered on Jesus, with stress on His atoning death on the cross, ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, and soon return to redeem His people. They are known for their Sabbath observance, for their emphasis on maintaining good health as part of religious duty, and for their mission activities throughout the world."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> AE is a reference to the Author of Ephesians.

<sup>53</sup> Best, *ACECE*, 348.

<sup>54</sup> Nancy J. Vyhmeister, "Who Are Seventh-day Adventists?," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 1.

While Nancy Vyhmeister presents an accurate and informative exposition of who Seventh-day Adventists are, how they came to be, and some of what they believe—it is clear from her presentation that being firmly rooted and grounded in the love of Christ might not be one of the things for which the church is well known. The church is known for Sabbath observance, though it is not the only religious group that observes the Sabbath, and yet the church stands out as one that is well known for that. The church is also known for its emphasis on maintaining good health, though other groups—religious and nonreligious—also exist who place an emphasis on the same. Hence, while the church does not have a monopoly on these practices, she is certainly well known for them. In the same way, while the church certainly believes in the importance of being rooted and grounded in Christ’s love, from which Christian love stems, the foundational rootedness and grounding in Christ’s love has not been “comprehended with all the saints” to the point that it becomes one of the defining features for which the church is well known.

Christian love as an outcome or fruit of being firmly rooted and grounded in Christ’s love brings into play the higher powers of the will, the mind, and the intelligence, and is so fundamental to Christianity that it may even be proposed as being foundational to Christianity; as being the first goal of the Christian to accomplish. A faithful understanding, experience, and practise of Christian love has an impact on all other areas of Christian life, hence the proposal that it is foundational to Christianity. Christian love is the human expression of God’s love to other people. If God’s love for people is not expressed in the context of relationships, then it can hardly be said to be love at all because love means nothing when it remains unexpressed, and as Douglas Cooper points out, “love is not real—it is of no value—

unless it is expressed.”<sup>55</sup> Peck concludes that “[l]ove is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action.”<sup>56</sup> The intention alone is something that may be possessed by many, but it is not love until the intention is acted upon and expressed in acts of love, only then is love accomplished.

Furthermore, the fact that the will is such a part of the process and expression of love indicates that feelings do not determine love. Love transcends feelings—it is possible to love even when one does not feel like loving. Peck also reveals that “real love often occurs in a context in which the feeling of love is lacking, when we act lovingly despite the fact that we don’t feel loving.”<sup>57</sup> This consistently constant quality of love which is not dependent on feelings is what engenders it to being considered as being a foundational tenet in Christianity. If Christian love referred to the spontaneous love that has previously been described, the romantic love—love based on the virtues of the object, then that would prove to be a very unstable foundation upon which to anchor the Christian faith. In the view of Kierkegaard, Christian love towers above every other kind of affection precisely because of its constancy, while he views every other kind of love as being merely transient. Kierkegaard argues that every other kind of love, “whether humanly speaking it withers early and is altered or lovingly preserves itself for a round of time—such love is still transient; it merely blossoms. This is precisely its weakness and tragedy, whether it blossoms for an hour or for seventy years—it merely blossoms; but Christian love is eternal.”<sup>58</sup> Christianity could not be built on any foundation that is

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<sup>55</sup> Cooper, *Living God’s Love*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 83.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 88.

<sup>58</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 25.

less than Christian love. Consequently, the experience of Adventism as well, ought to be built upon this great foundation.

The active expression of Christian love is what was written about in Jas 2:15-16 as being more important than the verbal claims of loving. That love is characterized by actions that show God's love to the next person by meeting the physical needs of the hungry through the provision of food, and meeting the needs of the naked by providing them with clothing. God, in His own wisdom, has designed His love in such a way that He depends on human beings to show His love to the whole world. Todd Wilson refers to it as 'perfected love' which, he asserts, is "visible love—love that's gone public.... It's tangible. Not only can it be seen; it can be touched. This is because perfected love is practical, the kind of love that meets real concrete needs."<sup>59</sup>

Christian love is other-centeredness, and that principle defines the selfless abandon with which Christ loved humanity. Every design of Satan aimed at Christ in His earthly ministry was intended to undo His principle of other-centeredness in a bid to arouse the opposite principle of self-centeredness. Ty Gibson observes that:

The condemnation of our sin upon Him, the corresponding sense of separation from God, the abuse and cruelty heaped upon Him by those He came to save—all was calculated to wrench love from His heart and force Him into self-centeredness. 'The rulers... derided Him, saying, He saved others; *let Him save Himself*, if He be the Christ, the chosen of God.... The soldiers also mocked Him... saying... *save Thyself*.... And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be the Christ, *save Thyself* and us' (Luke 23:35-39).<sup>60</sup>

The diabolical purpose of Satan was to thwart the plan of salvation by appealing to the inherent human inclination of self-preservation at all costs. Gibson further notes in this regard that "[e]verything about the cross event pressured the Son

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<sup>59</sup> Wilson, *Real Christian*, 150.

<sup>60</sup> Ty Gibson, *See with New Eyes* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 92.



of God in the direction of self-preservation. The core essence of God's character was under siege"<sup>61</sup> even as it has been since the beginning of the cosmic conflict. In Gethsemane, Christ's humanity was so weighed down and beginning to buckle under the enormity of the sin that He had been called to bear, that Christ Himself indeed prayed for self-preservation. This being the first time in eternity that God the Son had ever been separated from God the Father, Jesus was fearful that this unbearable separation would be eternal. Ellen White writes that "[t]he Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal."<sup>62</sup> The fear that Christ experienced did not originate in Himself. Ellen White also reveals that "Satan told Him that if He became the surety for a sinful world, the separation would be eternal."<sup>63</sup> Satan who sought to thwart the greatest expression of God's love for human beings instigated this fear.

It is important to note that though Christ prayed three times to the Father that the bitter cup would pass from Him (Matt 26:39, 42, 44; Luke 22:42-43), it was the other-centeredness of love that caused Him to surrender His fear and natural human proclivity to self-preservation into God's will. It is a great testament to the love that Christ showed towards humanity when, in spite of His fears of eternal separation from God the Father, He still went through with the sacrifice for the sins of the world. That sacrificial act of love suggested that Christ was accepting that—in the event that the separation indeed turned out to be eternal—the sacrifice on behalf of the human

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>62</sup> White, *Desire of Ages*, 753.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 686.

race was still worth pursuing, though it might potentially cost Christ His eternal communion with God the Father. This other-centeredness ought to be the foundation of Christian experience because through that other-centeredness in the passion of Christ, salvation was secured for humanity.

Douglas Cooper is forceful in his assertion of the significance of Christian love when he argues that “the heart of Christianity is loving the Father and loving people with all our heart and soul and body. It can only follow that *the opposite of Christianity, and therefore the essence of sin, is failing to love.*”<sup>64</sup> Other-centeredness is very inconvenient. It goes against a very basic and natural human characteristic and therefore can only occur in the context of Christian love. Other-centeredness also leaves a person vulnerable to the possibility of disappointment when those that are the objects of one’s Christian love abuse or reject that love. But be that as it may, Christian love is still something that is so fundamental to Christian experience that more investment of time and teaching of this great subject of other-centeredness would benefit Adventist Christians by engaging them in effective evangelism by simply loving their friends and neighbours.

Ἀγάπη love has been described as being a love of the divine variety. The *SDABD* explains that “the KJV translates *agapē*, ‘charity.’ When the KJV was produced, ‘charity’ did not have the restricted meaning it often has today, and because of its use in this passage [1 Cor 13] it has come to mean ‘divine love,’ ‘love in its perfection.’”<sup>65</sup> The rest of the demands of Christianity would be met as the fruitage of having Christian love in the heart. The development of Christian love is so pivotal, so critical, and so consequential for a Christian because Christian love is the

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<sup>64</sup> Cooper, *Living God’s Love*, 15. (emphasis mine)

<sup>65</sup> Horn, *SDABD*, s.v. “Love.”

basis for Christian interaction and experience. Eldersveld goes so far as to liken it to the law of gravity, which is also a law of God;<sup>66</sup> any debate with or against the law of gravity does not change the realities of that law, it continues to operate. It remains true that whatever mass is unsupported at an elevated position will be drawn down by the force of gravity regardless of whether one believes in that law or not.

In much the same way, the principle of Christian love is as unequivocal as it is intransigent. Christian love cannot be done without in Christianity in general, nor in Adventism in particular. It is the basis upon which believers must operate and grow in their religious experience. Ty Gibson articulates it this way, “What fuel is to an engine; what oxygen is to fire; what electricity is to a lamp; what sunshine is to vegetation, God’s love is to life.”<sup>67</sup> Chris Blake holds the view that “[l]ove is the highest reason for our existence. Love is to people as light is to [a] light bulb. Whatever prevents us from loving makes us unhealthy; an unloving person is as ‘unfit’ as a bulb with a broken filament. Loving involves our minds, our bodies, our souls.”<sup>68</sup>

Christ identified Himself in His discourse with His disciples as the foundation upon which His church would be established (Matt 16:13-18) immediately after Peter had identified Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus declared that He would build His church upon the content of Peter’s confession, which asserted Himself as “the Christ, Son of the living God.” The church of Christ was therefore established on the foundation that is “Christ, Son of the living God.” Jesus is the foundation of His church. The apostle Paul later affirmed this truth to the Corinthian

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<sup>66</sup> Eldersveld, *Of Law and Love*, 75.

<sup>67</sup> Gibson, *See with New Eyes*, 90.

<sup>68</sup> Blake, *Searching for a God to Love*, 111.

church by stating that “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11, NASB). Therefore, if Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church, and His nature is love, it is reasonable and logical to conclude that the foundation upon which the church of Christ was established is love. This reasoning gives impetus to the idea that Christian love is the foundation of all that is Christian.

The necessity of Christian love being foundational to the Christian’s experience is also anchored in the fact that Christian love does not originate in man, but since God’s nature is love, then “such love comes only from Him [God]” (1 John 4:7, TCW). One of the challenges that often plagues well-meaning Christians is that they seek to show love to all people, which would be commendable if they did not make such an attempt out of their own limited reservoirs of human-born love. Such an exercise is daunting and leaves the well-meaning Christian quite exhausted and depleted. Hence it must be understood that Christian love does not find its source in human beings—it is divine love because it finds its genesis in God himself. Ellen White buttresses this position by affirming that “we can never come into possession of this spirit by *trying* to love others. What is needed is the love of Christ in the heart. When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously.”<sup>69</sup> This is the only way that this initiative of Christian love can be sustainable. If being firmly rooted and grounded in the love of Christ is not the source, that love will diminish and eventually cease to be. It may subsist for a season—a long season or a short season—but it will eventually cease. With regard to the inexhaustibility of God’s love as a source of Christian love, White notes that “[i]t is not possible for the heart in which Christ abides to be destitute of love. If we love God because He first loved us, we shall love

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<sup>69</sup> White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 384.

all for whom Christ died.”<sup>70</sup> The inverse implication of that assertion is that if a heart is destitute of love—then Christ does not abide in it; and if one does not love God regardless of the fact that He first loved us—one cannot love those for whom Christ died.

The emphasis that is placed upon any facet of church life shows the importance that is placed upon that dimension of the life of the church. The resources that are expended upon a particular area have the same effect of indicating where value is, or at least perceived to be. Douglas Cooper interrogates the question of love in the Adventist church by contrasting it with other very necessary functions of the church when he itemizes the various functions and then poses a piercing question; Cooper articulates it as follows:

The church today has expert ministers whose eloquence and ability combine perfectly to do a splendid job of communicating truth and encouraging belief. The church has expert administrators—people whose talent for giving management and direction may be on par with that of corporate executives. The church has public relations experts—people carefully schooled in the techniques of projecting the right image of the organization to the public. The church has financial experts—individuals whose keen knowledge of monetary affairs enable it to operate its fine institutions successfully and prosperously. The dedicated service of experts in various fields have made it possible for the church to put together a fine, modern, efficient, functional organization.... But.... Where are the church’s experts at loving?<sup>71</sup>

The question demands an honest introspection of the church by her leadership at the various levels of the denominational structure, as well as an introspection of each individual member of the church. The average Adventist might speak about the love of God convincingly, and might claim to love his or her enemies—but who are the experts at loving? Where are those who can love people with the same expertise and fervour with which other professionals discharge the duties of their specific

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Cooper, *Living God’s Love*, 17.

vocations? What would the job descriptions be of such experts in the church structure? What kind of academic or professional qualifications would indicate that they indeed are experts at loving others? These are questions that must be posed and interrogated if this critical subject is to gain prominence in the Adventist church.

### **Soteriological Dimensions of Christian Love**

The foundation of being firmly rooted and grounded in love (Eph 3:17b) serves as a platform from which two outcomes are expected by the apostle Paul. The first of Paul's expectations is that when believers are firmly rooted and grounded in love, they "may have power to comprehend with all the saints" the dimensions of Christ's love (v. 18). Rosscup has suggested, regarding the dimensions of Christ's love, that "in its depth reaches to man's lowest depression and in its height carries him to highest glory,"<sup>72</sup> alluding to the salvific function of Christ's love. Christian love may be understood as loving people the way that Christ loved and loves people. Christ's love is the example and the high standard to which Christians are called to love. Christ's love for God the Father and His will, which is expressed through His law, and Christ's love for human beings, which was demonstrated by His self-denying act of giving of Himself for the salvation of humanity, is the kind of love to be comprehended "with all the saints." If Christ's love has a salvific dimension, then so must Christian love.

Christian love is "a consciously chosen attitude of a mind given over to God. A determined set of a will submitted to God. Loving is simply using one's God-given power of choice to say or do that which is in the best interest and for the best good of another person. Regardless of feeling."<sup>73</sup> Christian love, therefore, must cause

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<sup>72</sup> Rosscup, *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible*, 2226.

<sup>73</sup> Cooper, *Living God's Love*, 26.

Christians to so love God and other people regardless of any factors at all. Christians are also called to love God's truth especially since that love of the truth has got salvific implications for all who believe. Those who will be lost in the end will perish not because they did not believe correctly, but "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess 2:10). Loving the truth leads to salvation.

When Christ's love for sinners is met with sinners' love for the Saviour, such sinners experience salvation and are transformed into saints. At the Second Coming, those who will be saved will be changed, and their process of sanctification completed according to 1 Cor 15:51-54. However, in preparation for the Second Advent, characters must undergo some transformation; the image and character of God must begin to be restored in the saints. Sanctification is progressive, and through it "God hopes to change fallen beings into His image by transforming their wills, minds, desires, and characters."<sup>74</sup> White reveals that "if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses."<sup>75</sup> Such is the extent to which the characters of those who love God shall be transformed in preparation for His Second Advent.

Cooper has noted that the greatest and most urgent universal need for human beings is to feel loved and accepted, and that everything else in life orbits around whether that needs is being met or not.<sup>76</sup> That need to be loved has been built in to every human being and it sets the stage for how they must be saved because all those who encounter God will do so in the process of seeking to have that fundamental

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<sup>74</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 141.

<sup>75</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, 668.

<sup>76</sup> Cooper, *Living God's Love*, 20.

need met. Gary Chapman concurs with this view and reports that research has revealed that “not only does man have the potential for responding to the love of God but, in fact, man is not fully content until he has made a love connection with God.”<sup>77</sup> This idea is premised on the belief that all human beings have a natural need to be loved, and on the fact that God’s nature is love, therefore, when human beings seek to satisfy that universal human need, it is God Himself who fulfils that need. However, Cooper points out that God uses human instrumentalities in sharing His love to other human beings, and he further notes that “[t]he world needs nothing else so much as human beings showing the Saviour’s love to each another.”<sup>78</sup>

Christian love has a salvific propensity for both, the giver or conduit of the love, as well as for the object. The day of judgement is one that is looked upon by a great number of Christians and non-Christians alike as a day comprised of pessimistic foreboding; many people view that day as one that is associated with uncertainty regarding the eternal verdict that will be pronounced on each human being on that day. Many people cannot state with confidence where they believe their eternal destinies lie; most can articulate where they *hope* their eternity will be spent, but only an underwhelming minority speak with some measure of confidence about their eternal destinies. Wilson suggests that “as we grow in perfected love, we not only bless those around us, but also boost our own confidence in the outcome of the last day.”<sup>79</sup> The apostle John wrote concerning God’s love for humanity and how believers were to abide in God’s love and noted that “by this [abiding in God’s love], love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgement” (1

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<sup>77</sup> Gary Chapman, *The Love Languages of God: How to Feel and Reflect Divine Love* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2002), 17.

<sup>78</sup> Cooper, *Living God’s Love*, 18.

<sup>79</sup> Wilson, *Real Christian*, 161.



John 4:17a). The opposite must also be true; that if people neither abide in God's love, nor believe in the love that God has for them, that there cannot be confidence in the outcome of the day of judgement—but fear. The apostle John commented about fear in the great scheme of God's love and declared that “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love” (1 John 4:18, NASB).

Soteriologically, it is appropriate to suggest that love has everything to do with the salvation of humanity. It is recorded in Jer 31:3 that God has loved humanity with an everlasting love, and has drawn humanity with lovingkindness. Cooper boldly claims that “[e]very person who will be saved will be saved through love.”<sup>80</sup> All who will be saved will be saved ultimately by God's love, to which they would have been introduced by the Christian love of other human beings. Love for God and love for one's neighbour as commanded by God are central to the salvation of the human family. The entire process of salvation is laced with the real human expression of God's love.

### **Missiological Dimensions of Christian Love**

The apostle Paul's expectation is that once believers are firmly rooted and grounded in love, they will have power to comprehend corporately the dimensions of Christ's love. That comprehension must extend to the realm of the missiological demand of Christ's love. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a mission-driven church which employs a variety of creative strategies to ensure the propagation of the Gospel throughout the world. This is aptly demonstrated by informative statements, such as the one below, which affirm that:

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<sup>80</sup> Cooper, *Living God's Love*, 21.

Seventh-day Adventists, with a membership that represents about 700 languages and 1,000 dialects, are proclaiming the gospel in 204 countries. Almost 93 percent of these members live outside of North America. A total of 347 languages and dialects are used in publications—and 882 languages and dialects are used in both publication *and* oral work. Believing that medical and educational work play essential roles in fulfilling the gospel commission, we operate 698 hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and dispensaries, 34 orphanages and children’s homes, 10 medical launches, 28 health food factories, 101 colleges and universities, 1,385 secondary schools, 5,322 elementary schools, 125 Bible correspondence schools, and 33 language institutes. Our 57 publishing houses produce literature in 190 languages and 157 dialects, and our shortwave radio stations broadcast to approximately 75 percent of the world population. In addition, 5,512 radio stations are used each week—as well as 2,252 television stations. The Holy Spirit has abundantly blessed our mission thrust.<sup>81</sup>

The gospel commission which was issued by Christ in Matt 28:18-20 to His disciples after His resurrection serves as the basis for why mission is such an important thrust in Adventism throughout the world church. The importance of this gospel commission cannot be over emphasized because it has a direct bearing on the fulfilment of the words spoken by Christ as recorded in Matt 24:14, in which Christ stated that the preaching of the gospel in all the world for a witness would precede the Second Advent. A belief in the Second Advent is a salient part of the Seventh-day Adventist faith and the importance of this belief is demonstrated by its inclusion within the nomenclature used in the identity of the church.

It is the view of the researcher that a faithful comprehension of the dimensions of Christ’s love with all the saints, and consistent demonstration of Christian love can play a vital role in the successful accomplishment of the mission of the Adventist church. Christ issued a warning about the danger of proselytizing and adding to the corporate number of the community of faith great numbers of people if those converts ended up worse off than they had been before their conversion (Matt 23:15). Of this

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<sup>81</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 381.

period of Jewish missionary zeal it has been noted that “[a]s heathen religions lost their hold, and the Jews everywhere carried on aggressive missionary work, proselytes to the Jewish faith could be numbered in the hundreds of thousands, if not in the millions, according to various competent modern scholars, both Jewish and Christian.”<sup>82</sup> The Jewish historian, Josephus, is quoted as having boasted of the numbers of Gentiles who accepted Judaism when he noted that “[t]he masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances; and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed.”<sup>83</sup> The missionary zeal of the Jews and the consequent growth of the number of adherents of the Jewish faith are matters of historic record.

Whilst the numeric growth of the Jewish faith was exponential, and from which growth much can be gleaned to guide the missionary strategies of the twenty-first century Adventist church, Christ observed that after great efforts were made to proselytize and win converts to Judaism, sometimes “[a]n enthusiastic convert became, if possible, even more bigoted than the Pharisees.”<sup>84</sup> That observation is a warning to those who might seek to win converts to Adventism without taking an interest in ensuring that these new converts “are strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16), and are firmly rooted and grounded in love, so that they develop and nurture a love for the Saviour, which will naturally flow out as love to others.

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<sup>82</sup> “Proselytism” [The Jews of the First Christian Century], *SDABC*, 5:63.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> “Twofold more” [Matt 23:15], *SDABC*, 5:489.

Douglas Cooper posits that Christian love is a potent strategy of evangelism that can minister in a dynamic way and possibly become the basis of exponential numeric growth of the church. Cooper states that “[s]ince the Father’s plan for reaching the hearts of needy, sinful, dying men is based on using His children to share His love in the world, the gospel in its most dynamic form consists of loving people well. Loving them where they are and as they are. This is pure evangelism at its best.”<sup>85</sup> Not only is this an idea from Douglas Cooper, but this is the injunction that is given to Christians by Christ, through which Christ stated that the world would know that Christians are His disciples (John 13:34-35).

It has also been suggested that the pagan religions did not possess an ethical emphasis which could inform the morality of their adherents, and thus Judaism provided a sharp and attractive contrast from the amoral religions of the Roman world.<sup>86</sup> Through this suggestion is portrayed the impact of the virtue of right living by believers upon corporate missionary success since it is stated that “the morality that the Jewish people acquired from their concept of deity and from the Torah attracted the attention of the people of the empire, especially since the Jews applied it in everyday living to a remarkable degree. Thus many were led to accept Judaism to a greater or lesser extent...”<sup>87</sup> If, therefore, the principles of Christian love can be demonstrated in the lives of Seventh-day Adventists ‘to a remarkable degree,’ such love will likely not go unnoticed by a world that is in search of Christian love, and that will have a positive impact on the missionary thrust in which the Adventist church is engaged.

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<sup>85</sup> Cooper, *Living God’s Love*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> “Proselytism” [The Jews of the First Christian Century], *SDABC*, 5:62.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

Ellen White corroborates this thought when she testifies that “[w]ere all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel”<sup>88</sup> and, in the words of Matt 24:14, the end would come. People are attracted to what they see and believe to be genuine virtues, and love is a virtue whose benefits every human being seeks to enjoy and experience. If the vast populations that are reached as a result of the evangelistic strategies that are employed by the church were to experience Christian love as it is exemplified by Christ, then the conclusion of Ellen White when she noted that ‘the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel’ would be realised.

It is of vital importance to note, however, that even if all members of the church were to apply themselves to virtuous living, the church would still not be perfect and will not reach perfection before the Second Coming as suggested by the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-43). It is a biblical fact that within the visible church, there are those who will not be saved in the end, but will remain within the visible church until the eschaton, while there are those who shall be in the number of the saved in the end but are outside the visible church in the interim.<sup>89</sup> This research does not take the view that the church militant shall reach a state of perfection before the Second Advent. Ellen White warns:

Some people seem to think that upon entering the church they will have their expectations fulfilled, and meet only with those who are pure and perfect.

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<sup>88</sup> Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), 39.

<sup>89</sup> The researcher does not endorse Last Generation Theology which teaches that immediately prior to the Second Coming, there will be a generation of those who will reach a state of perfection which will vindicate God from Satan’s claims that His Law cannot be kept. The teaching renders ineffectual the victory that was accomplished by Jesus Christ’s life of perfect obedience to God’s Law, and His sacrificial death on the cross. Woodrow Wilson quotes Eric C. Webster in questioning the irrelevance that Last Generation Theology makes of Christ’s role and example, “If the controversy revolves around the question whether man can keep the law, then surely a man who never sinned once is a far better answer than a man who finally stopped sinning.” Quoted in Woodrow Wilson, “The Vindication of God and the Harvest Principle,” *Ministry*, October 1994, 46. The teaching has neither biblical nor Spirit of Prophecy support.

They are zealous in their faith, and when they see faults in church members, they say, ‘We left the world in order to have no association with evil characters, but the evil is here also;’ and they ask, as did the servants in the parable, ‘From whence then hath it tares?’ But we need not be thus disappointed, for the Lord has not warranted us in coming to the conclusion that the church is perfect; and all our zeal will not be successful in making the church militant as pure as the church triumphant.<sup>90</sup>

Therefore, while the missiological dimension of Christian love gives impetus to the church to labour for the salvation of sinners, it does not overlook the reality of the state of the church at the end of time. The teaching and practice of Christian love also recognizes from the parable, that Christ never committed the task of purifying the church to mortals—on the contrary, He saw no danger posed to the wheat by allowing it to grow together with the tares until the time of the harvest.

### **The Member-Retentional Effects of Christian Love**

One of the disturbing realities of the exponential growth statistics of the Seventh-day Adventist church is the rate of membership loss in relation to member-retention. Membership loss is a reality of most any religious persuasion, and every care should be taken to minimize such loss. It is the view of the researcher that a demonstration of Christian love among Adventist church members would contribute significantly to increased rates of membership retention. This view is based on Gene Outka’s suggestion that ἀγάπη love looks outwards to see what can be done to benefit not the giver of the love, but the next person; a love for one’s neighbour “which in crucial respects is independent and unalterable.”<sup>91</sup> New members will find the processes of *belonging* and *becoming* more achievable among a community of

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<sup>90</sup> White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 47.

<sup>91</sup> Outka, *Agape*, 9.

believers for whom “Christian love seeks the good of all men, whatever their race or creed. ‘Neighbour’ literally means ‘near-dweller.’”<sup>92</sup>

Paying attention to fellow members, brothers and sisters in the Adventist faith, is something that is a function of love. Peck suggests that “the principal form that the work of love takes is attention. When we love another, we give him or her our attention; we attend to that person’s growth.”<sup>93</sup> If this can become the goal of each member, love can be experienced. Indeed, much attention is focused on attaining new members and that attention is evidenced in the decision of many to join the ranks of Adventism. The attention that is paid for the purposes of winning new members to the church is portrayed in various ways by mission-oriented church members—it may be in regular visits to non-members and Bible studies with them, or in free health training and free literature distribution to those who have been targeted for evangelism. Yet when one has finally become a member through baptism, they find that the attention they received prior to their baptism is significantly higher than that which they experience after their baptism.

According to Peck, such a person may have felt loved prior to baptism because of the attention that they received from well-meaning mission-oriented Adventists. However, the event of baptism might wrongly, and perhaps subconsciously, signal to some members that it is time to focus on the next target to be evangelized whilst neglecting to give attention to the newly baptized. Therefore, if more genuine Christian love in the form of attention can be paid to new comers into the faith, that expression of love is likely to have the consequence of increasing member retention. The impact of such a consequence speaks directly to the actual

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<sup>92</sup> “Thy neighbour” [Matt 5:43], *SDABC*, 5:340.

<sup>93</sup> Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 120.

quality of the numeric growth of the church. Whilst membership loss cannot be completely eliminated, practising Christian love which is rooted and founded on the love of Christ in the church, and applying Christian love to all people can significantly reduce it.

It is worth noting at this juncture that Christian love does not wait until a person changes before Christian love is lavished upon them. Christian love loves the neighbour as he is found, and if members—long time members and new members—can embrace such an attitude, much transformation can be experienced by those whose characters still seek to be converted, which is essentially all members. Kierkegaard calls it *loving the person you see* as opposed to *loving the person as you hope they should be*, and he notes how Christ exemplified such love towards the apostle Peter; “Christ’s love for Peter (after his denial) was so boundless that in loving Peter he accomplished loving the one He sees. He did not say, ‘Peter must change first before I can love him again.’”<sup>94</sup>

This idea goes against the natural, against the norm, whereas people often occupy themselves with the task of finding perfect people who will fit neatly into their ideas of ideal companionship, Christian love does not look for perfect people because then the love would be motivated by the perfection of the object. Kierkegaard argues that “men talk about finding the perfect person in order to love him. Christianity speaks about being the perfect person who limitlessly loves the person he sees.”<sup>95</sup> There is no telling how far-reaching the consequences of such love would be in arresting membership losses, which losses can most certainly be avoided. Hence

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<sup>94</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 168.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 170.



Christian love is a fundamental part of the solution to the membership haemorrhage that sees large numbers of converts departing from the Adventist faith year after year.

### **Results/Outcomes of Christian Love**

There are some results and outcomes that are expected when believers embrace the paradigm of Christian love with all of its demands and dimensions. In this section will be considered only two such biblically expected outcomes of those who wholly embrace Christian love. The consequences discussed below display the characteristics that believers who are firmly rooted and grounded in the love of Christ can be expected to exhibit as they grow in faith and mature in their spirituality.

#### **The Sign of Love**

Believers who are firmly rooted and grounded in love will exhibit the sign of love. Love is the basis for keeping the commandments of God. Keeping the commandments of God is an indication of one's love for God, hence, a sign of love. Paul wrote to the believers at Rome saying that "love doesn't do things to hurt others. That's why love fulfills all the requirements of God's law" (Rom 13:10, TCW). When loving one's enemies is presented in the form of a commandment, there must necessarily be clarity on which kind of love believers are commanded to exhibit to their enemies. Having examined the nuances of meaning of the Greek words that are all translated into English as love—*agapan*, *philein*, and *eran*—the *SDABC* notes the impossibility of *philein* being the kind of love that is expected of believers by God and reasons that:

The command would be impossible if it enjoined men to *philein* their enemies, for they could not feel toward their enemies the same emotional warmth of affection that they feel toward the immediate members of their families, nor is that expected. *Philein* is spontaneous, emotional, and is nowhere commanded in the NT. *Agapan*, on the other hand, can be and is commanded, for it is under the control of the will. To *agapan* our bitterest

enemies is to treat them with respect and courtesy and to regard them as God regards them.<sup>96</sup>

Kierkegaard compares erotic love to Christian love and examines the various elements of each from the perspective of one whom he refers to as a poet—referring to the one who embodies erotic or romantic love, and the perspective of the Christian—who is the advocate of divine love. Kierkegaard notes that in romantic or erotic love, there is a significant attraction to, or admiration of, something attractive and admirable in the object. He then notes the following about the biblical command to love one's neighbour, "The neighbour, however, has never been presented as an object of admiration. Christianity has never taught that one must admire his neighbour—one shall love him."<sup>97</sup> Therefore the command itself eliminates any occasion in which one may seek to justify a failure to love another person. Kierkegaard also notes that any act of charity that is not accompanied by love itself cannot in fact be rightly called a work of love.<sup>98</sup> Love is at the center of the fulfilment of this command.

It is the considered view of the researcher that if Christian love were taught as an ideal to be reached and nurtured with deliberate effort and zeal, commandment-keeping would become the natural consequence of having love for God. Of commandment-keeping based on love, the rhetorical question is posed, "how could we worship other gods, take His name in vain, and neglect the observance of the Sabbath if we truly love Him? How can we steal that which belongs to our neighbour, testify against him, or covet his possessions if we love him?"<sup>99</sup> The implied answer is

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<sup>96</sup> "Love" [Matt 5:43], *SDABC*, 5:340.

<sup>97</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 66.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>99</sup> "God spake" [Exod 20:1], *SDABC*, 1:600.

that it is not possible to break His law if we have a true love for God. Love for God must precede any attempt at keeping His law.

Eldersveld has already concluded that there are two kinds of love that constitute Christian love as it is commanded and expected by God in His law; love for God and love for man.<sup>100</sup> He does clarify that these are really only two dimensions of the same love, and not technically two different loves *per sé*. He notes that they are “really only one love, though it moves in different directions.”<sup>101</sup> He suggests that these two kinds of love were symbolically represented in the two beams that formed the cross onto which Jesus Christ was crucified.<sup>102</sup> The significance of that submission comes to the fore when it is pointed out that the One who hung on the cross on Mount Calvary was the Son of God, and indeed, the Son of Man at once. Therefore, the *cri de cœur* that is aptly made by Eldersveld is that if “we love Him as our Saviour, by faith, we love both God and Man in one Person! And that is the only way for sinners to begin obeying this law of love again. For to love God above all and our neighbours as ourselves we must first have the redeeming love of Christ in our hearts!”<sup>103</sup>

Cooper concludes that “[o]ur love for God is intimately and inexorably bound up with our love for people. It is not possible to have two mutually exclusive dimensions of our love, one for God and one for other human beings. You cannot love God without also loving people. Neither can you truly love people without also loving God.”<sup>104</sup> White states that “[l]ove is the basis of godliness. Whatever the

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<sup>100</sup> Eldersveld, *Of Law and Love*, 75.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>104</sup> Cooper, *Living God's Love*, 94.

profession, no man has pure love to God unless he has unselfish love for his brother.”<sup>105</sup> She further supports this view by asserting that “[w]e cannot come in touch with divinity without coming in touch with humanity; for in Him who sits upon the throne of the universe, divinity and humanity are combined.”<sup>106</sup> Divine love manifested in the hearts of Christians will express itself in loving interactions with fellow human beings.

When Christ stated in John 14:15 that loving Him was the condition for keeping His commandments, the silent implication was that if loving Him is not first accomplished by His professed followers, then keeping His law cannot subsequently be accomplished. Such is the love that motivated the psalmist to declare “O how love I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps 119:97). The psalmist further articulates his love for God’s law when he declares “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold” (Ps 119:127).

When Christian love is embraced, John makes it known that we will keep God’s commandments, and that those commandments will not be burdensome (1 John 5:2). On the other hand, Paul contends that those who do not love God, or those whose minds are in enmity with God, cannot subject themselves to the law of God (Rom 8:7). To such, the observance of God’s commandments is a taxing and burdensome exercise. The sign, therefore, of love—expressed by our loving God—is the keeping of His commandments.

### **The Sign of Sanctification**

Believers who are firmly rooted and grounded in love will also exhibit the sign of sanctification. The weekly Sabbath was instituted at creation by God, and, by

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<sup>105</sup> White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 384.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

virtue of the time frame in which Adam and Eve were created—the latter part of the sixth day—the Sabbath became one of the first experiences that they had within their first day of existence. This signifies the role that the Sabbath was designed to play in the relationship between humankind and God. Kenneth Strand suggests that “God loves fellowship with His created beings. This was demonstrated at Creation by His setting apart the Sabbath as a special day of fellowship with the human beings He had created.”<sup>107</sup> God’s love for humanity propelled Him to institute a special time in which there would be close communion between Himself and human beings—for the benefit of human beings.

From creation, the Sabbath was designed to be a memorial of creation, a weekly reminder that God was the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and by so doing, would preclude the consideration of anything else as an object of worship. The relationship between love and law has already been stated; that love is essentially the summary of the whole law abridged to one word.<sup>108</sup> While all the Ten Commandments are important, the Sabbath commandment occupies a position of prominence within the Decalogue. When God urged humanity to ‘Remember’ the Sabbath day to keep it holy, He was “alerting humanity to the danger of forgetting its importance.”<sup>109</sup> Hence the importance of both love and the Sabbath are inseparable in the Christian faith.

The Sabbath was declared by God to be a sign of sanctification of those who observe it (Ezek 20:12, 20:20; Exod 31:17). It is noteworthy that “[j]ust as the covenant is based on God’s love for His people (Deut 7:7, 8), so the Sabbath, as the

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<sup>107</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, “The Sabbath,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 509.

<sup>108</sup> Bunch, *Love*, 7.

<sup>109</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 284.

sign of that covenant, is a sign of divine love.”<sup>110</sup> The historical prologue of the Decalogue in Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5 refers to God’s redeeming act in saving His people from Egyptian bondage (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6). Therefore, the Sabbath, which was already a memorial of creation, became a memorial of deliverance and redemption as well (Deut 5:15). Strand takes the view that “[t]he Sabbath as a sign of redemption actually has precedence over the Sabbath as a memorial of Creation.”<sup>111</sup> This view is based on the understanding that it is only those who are redeemed by God who have the capacity to appreciate what Creation means in the first place. This is in view of the myriad of theories that seek to explain the Creation in ways that in one way or another contradict the record of Scripture. The fact remains, however, that the Sabbath is a sign of sanctification. Ellen White affirms that “[i]ts observance is bound up with the work of restoring the moral image of God in man.”<sup>112</sup>

Sanctification can be defined as “a progressive process of moral change by the power of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with the human will.”<sup>113</sup> Ellen White defines sanctification by stating that “[t]rue sanctification is harmony with God, oneness with Him in character.”<sup>114</sup> She further states, in connection with both, sanctification and the Sabbath, that “the Sabbath is the sign of obedience. He who from the heart obeys the fourth commandment will obey the whole law. He is sanctified through obedience.”<sup>115</sup> Therefore as Christians obey God’s commandments, which

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<sup>110</sup> *SDAE*, s.v. “Sabbath.”

<sup>111</sup> Strand, “The Sabbath,” 509.

<sup>112</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1925), 140.

<sup>113</sup> Ivan T. Blazen, “Salvation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 296.

<sup>114</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1957), 261.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

commandments can be summarized as *love*, and which obedience springs from the love that Christians have for God, those Christians will be sanctified, and their characters will be transformed progressively into being like the character of God. She also indicates that the “completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within—when the sunshine of heaven fills the heart and is revealed in the countenance.”<sup>116</sup> White also states that “[a]ll who love God will show that they bear His sign by keeping His commandments,”<sup>117</sup> of which the Sabbath is especially mentioned.

The observance of the Sabbath is the sign of sanctification, which is the progressive transformation of a Christian’s character, whose character will more closely resemble the character of God—whose character is love. The mysterious relationship between Christian love and Sabbath observance is that at the center of Christian love, which has variously been described as God’s love manifested in the heart of a human being, is Sabbath observance—and at the center of Sabbath observance, which is the sign of sanctification—which is transformation into the character of God, is Christian love.

The logical suggestion from the foregoing arguments is that a Sabbath-keeper who does not have love (for God or mankind) is a contradiction of terms. Likewise, a person who has love (for God and mankind) but chooses not to observe the Sabbath is also a contradiction of terms. This conclusion must challenge every Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath observer to honestly examine whether they truly love God and all fellow human beings.

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<sup>116</sup> White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 384.

<sup>117</sup> White, *Christian Service*, 140.

## **Maturity of Christian Love**

The ultimate purpose of Paul's prayer (Eph 3:14-19) is for the believers to reach the point of spiritual maturity<sup>118</sup>—when they are filled with the fulness of God. The prayer for spiritual maturity is alive to the need for believers to be strengthened through the Spirit in the inward being, and the permanent indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith so that they may be firmly rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, from which emerges Christian love. When the believers are firmly rooted and grounded in love, it is the expectation of Paul that they will have the power to corporately comprehend the staggering dimensions of Christ's love, and to have an experiential knowledge of the love of Christ so that they will experience spiritual maturity.

Best suggests that this spiritual maturity occurs when the believers are filled with that which fills God.<sup>119</sup> Hence if God is filled with love, so are the believers; and if God is filled with joy, peace, and patience, then so are the believers. If God loves human beings of every nation, tribe, and kindred—Paul expects believers who are rooted and grounded in love to also love human beings from every nation, tribe, and kindred, and to be united in God's cause of loving all people everywhere. One of the ways in which spiritual maturity finds expression is in the nature of race relations among believers.

### **Consummate Race Relations**

The term "race" is used here in the context of its more secular and contemporary usage, where it refers to the various ethnicities across the world which are differentiated on the basis of physical differences such as skin colour, hair texture,

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<sup>118</sup> Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 197.

<sup>119</sup> Best, *ACECE*, 348.



eye colour among other exterior features. The matter of race relations within the church is one that inadvertently displays the church's understanding of Christian love. Racial and tribal prejudice is a phenomenon that has plagued many communities and countries around the world. The cancer of racial and tribal prejudice has been evident even within the ranks of the Remnant church. It is curious that David R. Williams reports that "there is more racial prejudice in the Christian church than outside it, that church members are more prejudiced than nonmembers, that churchgoers are more biased than those who do not attend, and that regular attenders are more prejudiced than those who attend less often."<sup>120</sup> These statements point to the slow rate at which the Christian church appears to respond to matters of racial prejudices.

It is common knowledge that Christian churches, including those referred to by David R. Williams, exist in societies where people of all races are interacting with each other with increasing frequency through working together at places of employment, or living together in the same neighbourhoods and shopping in the same stores. Therefore, one gets the impression that the world outside of the Christian church is moving with more urgency towards the ideals of racial equality among all peoples than the church is. The drive for racial justice and equality by various sectors of society may be said by critics to be motivated by fear of legislative consequences for racism, or by political expediency, or even by the financial benefits that such sectors of the society enjoy for being seen in that society as being racially sensitive.

However, New Testament theologian, Frank Stagg, still sounds the rebuke that "[t]o say that these have done it for money removes none of the sting, for it is a humiliation if a pagan for money effects good which a Christian fails to effect for

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<sup>120</sup> David R. Williams, "The Right Thing To Do," *Adventist Review*, February 20, 1997, 24.

love.”<sup>121</sup> Stagg highlights once again the role that Christian love must play in the question of racial equality. It is the view of the researcher that a deeper, more deliberate, and more fervent understanding of Christian love in the church is the only antidote to racialism and tribalism, firstly, within the church, and secondly—since the church exists within the society—within the wider society.

On the complete disregard of distinctions based on differences in tribe, ethnicity and nationality and other superficial human differences, Ellen White reveals that:

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere.<sup>122</sup>

This statement states that race and tribe, caste and nationality are the inventions of human beings because God recognizes none of those distinctions. In other words, none of those things cause God to behave in one way in respect to a person of the one class, and in another way in respect to a person of another class. She further emphasizes that “[c]aste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character.”<sup>123</sup> In the course of sanctification, a Christian must reach the point where they hate what God hates, and love what God loves.

The apostle Paul, addressing these superficial human distinctions when writing to the Galatians, told them that there was neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, for they were all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). Raoul Dederen notes that “[s]uch a unity toward which Paul strove transcends the

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<sup>121</sup> Frank Stagg, *The Book of Acts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1955), 124.

<sup>122</sup> White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 386.

<sup>123</sup> White, *Desire of Ages*, 403.

divisive elements of race, class, and gender (Gal. 3:28). It is not the result of a voluntary act of uniting on the part of the members of Christ's body, but a unity enabled by the Spirit, for the church has found oneness in Christ (Eph. 5:2-15)."<sup>124</sup> These prejudices on the basis of ethnic or national differences within the body of Christ may serve as an indication that the members of the body of Christ are not firmly rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, and they do not love their neighbour as God commanded.

In many instances of racial prejudice or injustice, it might be that such acts are not perpetrated by Christian believers themselves, and yet standing by idly and not exerting their influence and power in stemming the tide of this evil against people for whom Christ gave His life has a negative impact on the cause for which Christians stand. Ellen White notes that whenever a professing Christian does nothing to aid a neighbour who is struggling under some adverse circumstances, such a one is misrepresenting Christ. She clarifies that when "the Lord's professed servants are not in co-operation with Him, the love of God, which should flow forth from them, is in great degree cut off from their fellow men. And a large revenue of praise and thanksgiving from human hearts and human lips is prevented from flowing back to God."<sup>125</sup> It is therefore imperative that Christians use the platforms that they have at their disposals to speak out against racism wherever its presence is evident. It is the duty of Christians to use their influence and whatever power they have at their command to help to dismantle systems that perpetuate racism and tribalism. By so doing, they are generating praise and thanksgiving from human hearts which ascend to God.

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<sup>124</sup> Raoul Dederen, "The Church," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 562.

<sup>125</sup> White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 383.

This immediately lets us know that the world is watching the conduct of the church—the Adventist church. Not only is the world watching, but whatever the world sees being reflected in the conduct of the church has an impact on the impressions that the world forms about the church, and more importantly, about God. The conduct of the church has an influence on whether the world sees the church’s discipleship after Christ. Ellen White declares that the world not only looks and sees the conduct of the church, but that it has a right to do so. She affirms that the world:

“has a right to look for self-denial and self-sacrifice from those who believe advanced truth. It is watching, ready to criticize with keenness and severity our words and acts. Everyone who acts a part in the work of God is weighed in the scales of human discernment. Impressions favourable or unfavourable to Bible religion are constantly being made on the minds of all with whom we have to do.”<sup>126</sup>

The things that the world seeks to find in the church, self-denial, self-sacrifice, are the very qualities that come only from divine love.<sup>127</sup> Divine love is the source of Christian love and Christian love is what the world is looking to find in the Christian church.

If racism and tribalism and all other forms of bigotry are denials of the value of human life, Christians must make their voices heard in rebuke of such practices.

Adventist pastor and church administrator, Harold L. Lee, made the following statement about the gravity of racism:

In spiritual and biblical terms, racism is a perverse sin that cuts to the very core of the gospel message. Racism is demonic. Racism negates the reason for which Christ died—the reconciling work of the cross. Racism is at the core of sin. It is a lack of trust in God and a denial of His transforming grace. The devil has used racism as a primary tool to divide not only nations but the Christian church as well. Racism denies the mission and purpose of the church, which is to bring together, in Christ, those who have been divided

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<sup>126</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1913), 324.

<sup>127</sup> Canale, “Doctrine of God,” 111.

from one another, to remove the middle wall of partition—Jew and Gentile—a division based on race.<sup>128</sup>

The church must be seen as the place where bigotry and prejudice fail to find conducive conditions in which to thrive, and those who are victims of such abuse in the world must find relief and healing in the companionship of Adventist Christians. In a real sense, Christian love is an effective force against racial bigotry if it is studied and taught and practiced “with all the saints” to the extent that the church becomes known for the love with which it treats all people. The church may become the oasis of love and peace in a hostile world. Christian love will drive Christians to love other human beings simply because of the recognition that they were also created in the image of God. Hence the church believes that “[r]egardless of sex, race, education, or position, all have been created in God’s image. Understood and applied, this concept would eliminate racism, bigotry, and any other forms of discrimination.”<sup>129</sup>

### **Ecclesiastical Unity**

The Lord indicated that Christian love—loving one another as He had loved His disciples—would be sufficient evidence to the world that they indeed were His disciples (John 13:34-35). Christ also offered a prayer for His disciples in John 17, that His disciples would be as united amongst themselves as Christ had been united with the Father. Christ extended the context of His prayer to include those generations of disciples who would live centuries after that group of disciples that He was surrounded by had lived. In other words, Christ prayed for Adventist Christians of the twenty-first century and beyond, that they would be conduits of His love and prove to the world that they are His disciples. This means that Christian love eliminates

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<sup>128</sup> Harold L. Lee, *Church Leadership in a Multicultural World: Directions for Cultural Harmony in the Adventist Church* (Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 2000), 14.

<sup>129</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 85.

prejudicial mistreatment of any person on any basis whatsoever. Such prejudicial mistreatment grows out of a lack of other-centeredness, and is the manifestation of self-centeredness.

When divine love becomes the standard to which every Adventist aspires to love, there literally can be no circumstance in which any forms of division within the church can be justified, perhaps even experienced. When there is no circumstance that can justify any division in the church, the church can be said to be united. When the church is united, that unity will be unequivocal evidence to the world that the church is made up of the disciples of Jesus Christ. As important as many of the virtues for which the Seventh-day Adventist church is known are, the one that was specified by Christ Himself as being that which would indicate to the world that the church was truly made up of His followers was that of unity. Christian love is the only way through which this unity can be realized. Charles Bradford describes the church as a place “where people are loved, respected, and recognized as somebody, a place where people acknowledge that they need each other. Where talents are developed. Where people grow. Where everybody is fulfilled.”<sup>130</sup> While the church is known for many noble things, the church must also be known for being a place where Christian love abounds.

The advantages of the unity which Christ prayed for, the one that embraces people from all walks of life, are that all people have some good that they can contribute to the body of Christ, good that may otherwise not have been known. Ellen White concedes that “[t]here is no person, no nation, that is perfect in every habit and thought. One must learn of another. Therefore God wants the different nationalities to mingle together, to be one in judgement, one in purpose. Then the union that there is

in Christ will be exemplified.”<sup>131</sup> The very imperfections that might be seen as the justification for division and separation within the church, could very well be, if overcome with Christian love, the most convincing arguments in favour of Christianity to the world.

John Stott suggests that the unity that Christ prayed for included a unity in the theology of the church as evidenced by Christ’s reference to ‘these’ (the apostles), and ‘those’ (subsequent believers), many of whom would never have the chance to be physically present with the apostles at that time.<sup>132</sup> The latter would be united to the former only by their adherence to, and propagation of, the teachings of the apostles. While David Williams concurs with Stott’s understanding of the unity that Christ prayed for, Williams goes further to note that a “unity that will convince the world must be visible and readily evident. It cannot be limited to doctrinal unity or some mystical ‘invisible’ unity. The world must see a unity in practice that demonstrates that the gospel of Christ is strong enough to destroy the sectarianism, selfishness, and ethnocentrism that is natural to human nature.”<sup>133</sup> Therefore, whilst theological unity is very essential as a dimension of unity—ecclesiastical unity must be visible in order for it to have the impact that Christ envisaged when He stated that when believers love one another, then the world would see their love one for another, and by this would know that they are Christ’s disciples (John 13:35).

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<sup>130</sup> Charles E. Bradford, “What the Church Means to Me,” *Adventist Review*, November 20, 1986, 15.

<sup>131</sup> White, *Counsels for the Church*, 288.

<sup>132</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Liberator* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1946), 82.

<sup>133</sup> Williams, “The Right Thing To Do,” 24.

## Summary and Conclusion

Leviticus 19:18 is a command that is issued in the context of God's requirements of the nation of Israel with regards to how they were to interact with each other. The extent of the beneficiaries of that command has been understood from a Christian perspective to apply to all of humanity. Therefore the command was extended by Christ to not only the nation of Israel, but to the less fortunate members of society, and even enemies. While Lev 19:18 may be seen as God's command to the individual believer, the passage in Ephesians may be understood as Paul's understanding of how to fulfill that divine command.

Ephesians 3:14-19 is a prayer that is offered by the apostle Paul on behalf of the Christians at Ephesus, and the content and structure of the prayer provide a NT basis for the development of a doctrine of Christian love. The main points of Paul's prayer can be understood as being that (1) the believers would be strengthened with might through the Holy Spirit (v. 16), and that (2) Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith (v. 17a). The purpose of these two points is so that (3) the believers can be firmly rooted and grounded in love (v. 17b), a foundational condition necessary for them to (4) comprehend the dimensions of Christ's love with the saints (v. 18), and to (5) have an experiential knowledge of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (v. 19a). The purpose of points 1 to 5 are so that (6) the believers may be filled with all the fullness of God (v. 19b)—which means they must reach and experience spiritual maturity.

On the basis of Eph 3:14-19, love is proffered as a foundational and central tenet of Christianity, and must be possessed as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Consequently, as a foundation, love is instrumental in the soteriological reality of human beings because “[e]very person who will be saved will



be saved through love.”<sup>134</sup> A love for all people by Christians, and a love for the truth by every believer will lead to the salvation of those who believe. Love must also be a necessary stimulus for the missiological thrust of the Adventist church because, as Cooper observes, “the gospel in its most dynamic form consists of loving people well. Loving them where they are and as they are. This is pure evangelism at its best”<sup>135</sup> which will have a remarkable impact on the retention of new members in the faith community.

The outcomes of Christian love include exhibiting the sign of love—which is keeping the commandments of God; and observing the sign of sanctification—which is the observance of the Sabbath day. Christian love is both the basis and the means by which spiritual maturity can be reached. Spiritual maturity must not only be represented by intellectual growth, but must be observable among Adventist Christians in the ways that they relate across ethnic and racial contexts in answer to Christ’s prayer that His followers would be one, even as He and the Father are one (John 17:11, 21-23).

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<sup>134</sup> Cooper, *Living God’s Love*, 21.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

This study has sought to establish the importance of divine love in Christian theology as a basis for developing a doctrine of Christian love. In chapter 1 of this research, a background that sets forth the foundation and significance of love in the government of God is presented as it is portrayed in selected texts (1 John 4:8, Eph 3:14-19), the writings of Ellen G. White, and the work of John C. Peckham. A statement of the problem is set forth, based on the assertions of Seventh-day Adventist authors, Ellen G. White, George R. Knight and others, that there is a need for the teaching of Christian love to become more pronounced in Adventist doctrine. The justification of the doctrine of Christian love is presented on the basis of the command to love one's neighbour in Lev 19:18, as well as the apostle Paul's appeal and prayer in Eph 3:14-19, that Christians are to be "firmly rooted and grounded in love." This rootedness and groundedness are essential for them to understand the dimensions of the love of Christ with the saints, which love surpasses knowledge. The ultimate purpose of Paul's prayer is the inward spiritual maturity of the believers which has outward visible behaviours.

The justification further seeks to demonstrate that there was an appeal from the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church for the church to focus on the love of Christ, and how the set of Adventist doctrines rests upon the fundamental understanding of the love of God for man. These appeals from James S. White, Ellet

J. Waggoner and Ellen G. White do not appear to have resulted in corporate efforts by the church to comprehend Christ's love with the saints in the form of a doctrine in order to elevate this important teaching and consequently be filled with all the fullness of God.

A prophetic interpretation of Rev 10:11 points to the important role that a message of justification by faith in Christ is to play in the church's focus on her proclamation of the three angels' messages. In an effort to arouse the church out of its lukewarm Laodicean state, the angel in Rev 10:11 instructs John to prophesy again—and the content of what John should prophesy again is the third angel's message. Ellen White summarizes the message of the third angel by asserting that it is a message of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> The message of justification by faith has at its core the incalculable love of God for man. Therefore, at the core of the Adventist message—is a message about the divine love of God. Furthermore, an understanding of that love is the basis for then reciprocating that love and extending it to the rest of humanity.

Christian theology in general, and Adventist theology in particular, is not made up of independent doctrines which stand alone, each with no connection to the other. On the contrary, they are interconnected doctrines that must seek to reveal the character of God—whose nature and law is love.<sup>2</sup> The central pillar, which holds up all the other truths of Scripture, is Christ Himself.<sup>3</sup> The significance and purpose of the study speaks to the prominent position that a study of Christian love must occupy

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, "Repentance The Gift of God," *The Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890, 193.

<sup>2</sup> White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 33.

<sup>3</sup> White, *Selected Messages*, 2:87.

in Adventist theology, with its potential to be an answer to Christ's prayer in John 17:21.

The second chapter of the research investigates the love of God as a backdrop for the ensuing discussion about the love of man. The chapter begins with an appraisal of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church and an analysis of the frequency of their references to love. This analysis reveals that love is made reference to in less than half of the fundamental beliefs which are all meant to reveal the love of God. This reality is in glaring contrast to the appeals made by the pioneers of the denomination and the writings of authors such as Ellen G. White and George R. Knight for love to be more fundamental and foundational in Adventist theology. The chapter also surveys the understanding of the love of God from the OT through various eras of historical theology and the work of John C. Peckham. Peckham's contribution reconciles those instances in which God's love is apparently conditioned upon the disposition of the object with those instances in which God's love seems to be bestowed without conditions, or more precisely—prior to conditions.

Richard Horsley calls upon believers to make Christian love foundational to Christian living in his conclusion that “love of enemies transcends the reciprocity between those who love each other”<sup>4</sup> and by so doing, eliminates any grounds for not loving any person. Gene Outka defines this Christian love that must be fundamental to Christian living as “a regard for the neighbour which in crucial respects is independent and unalterable.”<sup>5</sup> Its independence and inalterability mean that it does not have an “if” price tag attached to it as is often the case with natural human love as suggested by Cooper.<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard then adds that when believers view the concept of

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<sup>4</sup> Horsley, “Ethics and Exegesis,” 16.

<sup>5</sup> Outka, *Agape*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cooper, *Living God's Love*, 38.

‘neighbour’ as the completely unrecognisable distinction between people—that is an eternal equality of humanity before God and it is possessed even by enemies.<sup>7</sup> Hence this call for Christian love enjoins believers to exclude none from being the recipients of their expression of Christian love.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of Lev 19:18 and Eph 3:14-19 as OT and NT bases for developing a doctrine of Christian love. The analysis of Christian love in this chapter reveals that love is commanded by God in the OT to those who are believers, and their obedience to God’s command has salvific implications upon themselves—they must love if they will be saved. Christians must love each other, and they must love non-Christians, just as they must love God and His truth. As God’s love is perfected in Christians, they look forward to the judgement with confident expectation rather than fear for “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18, NASB).

Christian love is also presented in this chapter as a potent strategy to accomplish the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church because, as Douglas Cooper points out, loving people well is the greatest invitation for those people to join the community of faith. Loving them well is the most dynamic form of the gospel. Kierkegaard differentiates between loving people as they are and loving them as we desire them to be, noting that loving them as they are is what *ἀγάπη* love is fundamentally about. Loving them as we desire them to be ceases to be *ἀγάπη* love because the basis of that love is that they would have met certain desirable qualities, and such love is no longer based on the magnanimity of the giver of the love, but on the merits of the beloved.

In the same chapter there is an exposition of the maturity of Christian love in the context of race relations within the Adventist church and the importance of

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<sup>7</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 79.

ecclesiological unity. This exposition reveals that there is reportedly more racial prejudice in the church than outside the church, and that those who attend church more consistently are generally more prejudiced than those who attend church less consistently. The distinctions that are made on the basis of race are shown to be the inventions of human beings because God recognizes none of those distinctions. The discussion on race also reveals that the requisite unity that is needed in the church is not one that can be attained merely by human will or ecclesiological legislation; it can only be attained as the Spirit of God immerses the individual members of those faith communities in the love of Christ.

Chapter 3 concludes with a discussion of the importance of the unity of believers and how that unity provides compelling evidence to the world about the discipleship of Christians after Christ. Love is presented here as the unifying agent, which is no respecter of race, tribe, age, or economic status, but which operates above those superficial man-made distinctions. The unity of believers extends to the realm of doctrinal unity, so that all believers share the same set of values and beliefs. However, that is not to minimize the importance of visible unity through the loving interactions of persons of all nations and races in one location. It must be visible because Christ stated that through that sort of unity, the world would know that the believers are His disciples. However, this does not suggest a belief in the teaching that there will be a last generation who will reach perfection just prior to the Second Coming. It does imply, however, that the world should see a visible unity between the believers.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the foundation of Christian love is the love of God—divine love—love personified in the obedient life and sacrificial death of Jesus

Christ. Christian love is informed by one's understanding of what divine love is. One's conception of divine ontology has a direct bearing on the implications and limitations of divine love. The content of Christian love, as enunciated by Paul, is an intimate and experiential knowledge of God—for Christian love does not originate in the Christian, but originates in who God is, and then flows through the Christian in loving behaviour towards others.

The essence of Christian love is anchored in the essence of divine love, which is God's subjective divine ontology. Hence the essence of Christian love is the universal bestowal of God's love by the Christian upon all human beings in response to the divine imperative to do so (Lev 19:18), and also in response to God's love that is initially bestowed to the Christian (Eph 3:17-19). This study also deduces that the meaning of Christian love is seen in the progressive spiritual development of the Christian in a process that culminates in the experience and realization of spiritual maturity.

The point is made by Cooper that the love that human beings have to offer is so significantly inferior to the love of God that human beings hardly need to be frugal with their love. Cooper opines that “[i]n the light of God's willingness to love us so much and forgive us so much, just as we are, in our pitiful state of sinfulness and wretchedness, it is totally unacceptable that we should expect anyone else to make any changes or meet any qualifications before we are willing to consider them worthy of our puny human love.”<sup>8</sup> Those who are loved in spite of themselves get to experience the love of God through human instrumentalities; they get to experience Christian love. Looked at from a church-growth perspective, those who join the church because of the transformative universally relational love of the believers are

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<sup>8</sup> Cooper, *Living God's Love*, 37.

most likely to never leave the church, hence impacting directly upon membership retention.

This study perorates by summarizing the researcher's understanding of what Christian love might be defined as if it were to be coined in a brief statement, based on the injunctions and teachings that are found in both the Old and New Testaments. That summary is rendered as follows: God is love. In response to this love, Christ—who is the perfect manifestation of the love of God—has called His followers to exhibit Christian love to each other as one of the evidences of their discipleship to Himself. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart, and the full acceptance of Christ in the believer's life by faith, make the reality of this love possible. Firmly rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, believers recognize God, and not themselves, as the generous source of this infinite love. *Agapē* love is the means of salvation for all, and it is the basis for all Christian experience. Since *agapē* love is also the underlying principle of God's government, it must be the foundation upon which Christian character is established. Christian love must also be the basis for all missionary service that is lovingly rendered for the benefit of humanity, and for the cultivation of character, to the glory of God.<sup>9</sup>

### **Implications**

The implications of an understanding of Christian love include a paradigm shift in the understanding of Christian love which is informed by a biblical systematic theological study of the subject. Such a study of divine love reveals the extents to which Christ's love was bestowed on the world with no regard for the eternal

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<sup>9</sup> Lev 19:18; Deut 6:4; Prov 27:5; John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Rom 12:10; 13:8; Gal 5:13; Eph 3:17-19; 4:2; 5:2; Col 1:19; 2:9; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9; Jas 2:8; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 John 2:7-10; 3:10-11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5.



consequences of such a bestowal of love. The Incarnation of Christ was not without its own inconveniences for the second Person of the Godhead. Love imposed upon God the Son the inconvenience of Him losing the quality of His divine omnipresence when He chose to come to the world in human form. Says Ellen White, “In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Recommendations**

For the benefit of the world church, this study recommends that for the duration of at least one quarter, the Adult Bible Study Guide be prepared under the theme of Christian love as a way of guiding dialogue on this consequential issue. This will give the global church the opportunity “to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:18-19a), and by so doing, create an environment in which the study of Christian love may receive the attention that it deserves.

A revision of the 15 fundamental beliefs which are silent about the love of God is also recommended so that His love can be immediately discerned through those beliefs as envisioned by the editors of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. Furthermore, this paper also recommends the formulation of a doctrinal statement on Christian love as an additional Fundamental Belief in the denomination’s set of Fundamental Beliefs.

Qualitative and quantitative studies on the impact of an introduction of a doctrine of Christian love may be conducted to determine the extent to which such a doctrine might affect the theology and lifestyle of SDAs.

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<sup>10</sup> White, *Desire of Ages*, 25.

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