

We're here again at the Feast of Tabernacles, and we're here first and foremost because we are commanded to be here. But we're also here because we want to be here. We all share that "expectation" that is spoken of in the scriptures.

We have a common goal. So, I would like to pose to you a question here, "What is your goal?" I imagine most of us would reply something in the manner of becoming part of Elohim, part of the God Family. I mean this is our ultimate goal, isn't it? We are trying to overcome self, and that is pretty much an all-consuming task right there, and in pursuing this challenge of overcoming, we quickly realize that we are responsible for our own actions, and it is only us that can do the changing.

Oftentimes new members are eager to share their newfound knowledge about God to their family and their friends, and they quickly realize that others aren't so interested in hearing about their new knowledge, and they're not interested in taking on this challenge that they have taken on. We learn very quickly that we can't give people these things that come from God, this knowledge.

But just because we can't give them that knowledge or those certain facts, does that mean that they can't learn from us? Does that mean that we can't be of any help to them?

We know Christ said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

I know many of you, especially ones that came into the Church more recently, have had those experiences where people notice a change in you and how you treat others. They may not agree with your tidbits of knowledge that you've shared with them from the Bible, but they can't disagree with how your relationships have improved. It's clear to them that you are now somehow different.

So, we can definitely have an impact on those around us, both in the Church and out of it. We should have an impact on those around us, and it should be a positive one.

But back to our goal. We want to be part of the God Family, yes, but let's step back for a second and ask what is God's goal? What is He trying to do? Well, we know that, too. He is building a family made up of free moral agents that have liberty and freedom, but at the same time are of one mind and one spirit. But not just any spirit, it's a spirit and a mind that is based on love.

So really, this family that God is creating is going to have the best of both worlds. It will have freedom, but it will also have peace, and that is something that the world has never known.

So, does that mean that our role in God's plan is to just work on ourselves so that we can fit into the building? Well, this is kind of a trick question, really, because if we do our part and overcome self and make ourselves the best section of the building that we can, then we are really helping out the entire integrity of the building, and therefore, helping God with His plan. But in order to do that in a true sense means that we are really overcoming self. That means that we think about others, that we put them above us.

In that sense, our goal has to be the same as God's. We need to think about not just our section of the building, but as the project as whole. We are building a house of God, and that house when it is finished is

going to be magnificent. It's going to be without flaws, beautiful, and most importantly, a peaceful place for God to dwell.

And what is this foundation of this house going to be made out of? What's the mortar that keeps all of the bricks or stones together? What creates unity and peace? Well, it's love, agape. God's essential being is love. That's something we have a hard time comprehending.

So, the title of today's sermon is *A House Built with Agape*.

We are going to take a deeper look at agape love that is spoken of and show how it relates to an attitude that we are to have with one another. We are going to take a deeper look at agape love that is spoken of and show how it relates to an attitude that we are to have with one another. We're going to look at how having one mind has everything to do with agape, and we are also going to look at the dangers and places where we might not be showing agape, and we should. In those instances, we might even be showing the opposite and not even realizing it.

So, let's start off today by turning over to **1 John 4:7**. It says, **Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God and knows God.** We have to understand that everything that God does and has done is carried out with love. That is His way of being. If every action is guided by the concern for others then it leads to peace. How could it not?

So, if we have agape for one another like God has had for His creation, then we, in essence, can begin to understand the most important aspect of God and how He works.

**Verse 8—He that loves not knows not God; for God is love.** That's what He is all about, as I was just mentioning there.

**Verse 9—And in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.** So, the only way for mankind to be molded into the God Family and to overcome our carnal ways is through Christ. God sacrificed him for all of us so that we could have a way to overcome and break out of these bodies.

**Verse 10—Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son the atonement for our sins.** This verse is really demonstrating what the basis of agape is all about.

It says, "This is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us." So, mankind obviously doesn't love God. God didn't send His Son because mankind shows Him love. Because we actually show the opposite. From our selfish perspective, only having love shown from one side is reason enough not to show it to the other. But it's showing here that even though we don't show it to God, He still shows it to us.

**Verse 11—Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.** This scripture shows that God's love can and does include sacrifice, and even when it is not owed it's still given to us. That should be our example.

So, we just read that God's very essence is made up of love. It's the overall guiding factor in His thought.

Let's take a look at a few more verses here in Mark 12:28. **Mark 12:28—And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceived that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first or principal commandment of all? And Joshua answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second like this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.**

Loving God with our might, with our mind, heart, and soul, that is something we have to work on. But it's a whole lot easier than the second commandment that was placed there, because we can see that God loves us, He has a plan for us. He created the entire world that we exist in. He has given us everything that we have. We're grateful for Him and what He has done for us. So, in that sense, it should be pretty easy to love God.

But that next one, we are to love those around us as we love ourselves? That's not an easy ask. But it is commanded that we do just that. And on the contrary to God, what have those around us done for us? A lot of times we look, and we think the opposite. We think, "What have you done to me?" We look at the others that are causing problems in our lives. Maybe they caused us discomfort or pain. Now, it's a lot easier to love those that don't cause problems. It is easy to love someone that loves you back. But more often than not they don't love us back. But we are still commanded to love them.

Let's continue on in **verse 32—And the scribe said to him, Well, Master, you have said the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He, and to love Him with all the heart, and with all understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.**

We know what God says about offerings and sacrifices that were made by the Israelites. God didn't really care about the physical burning of animals. He was more concerning that the people obeyed. They were to learn from their obedience to physical laws that He'd given to them.

**Verse 34—And when Joshua saw that he answered discreetly, and he said to him, You are not far from the Kingdom of God. And no other man dared ask him any question.** What an answer! So, those guys were trying to test him, and the last question from this guy was a pretty good setup for a slam dunk. The response shut them up really good.

But you have to take that knowledge there and if you'd apply it to all facets of our life, then, like he said, you are well on your way. He just basically summarized the entire way that we are to interact with God and with those around us.

So, agape is the principal commandment that we are to follow, and we see that God clearly loves His creation, He loves what He is building, and He wants us to love that creation as well.

Let's turn over to Romans 12. **Romans 12:1** says, **I beseech you** (I ask of you), **therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable** (pleasing) **unto God, your reasonable service.** Yeah, and that is our service. We are to give to others by sacrificing our own wants of pleasing just ourselves.

Look at God's mercies. He shows us mercy all the time. We are undeserving and He still gives it to us. He sacrificed so much for us, and we're being told here to do the same.

**Verse 2—And not be conformed by this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove** (test, and then determine, to discern) **what is** (that which is) **good, and acceptable** (well-pleasing), **perfect will of God.** To be able to present our bodies as a living sacrifice we must change the way we think. Our minds must overcome the default that was programmed into them. The world as a whole doesn't try to overcome its selfish nature that exists in it. In fact, it pretty much is celebrated today.

The world is more in love with itself than ever before. You just have to take a quick look at social media. So much of it is about puffing one's own self up. It's about showing how much we love ourselves. It's about presenting yourself as a perfect brand. You know, "Look where I traveled to." "Look what car I am driving." "Look which house I live in." "Look how rich I am."

It's even got so stupid now there are even people that just put cash out on a table, and they take photos of themselves with their cash. There is a particular boxer I've seen. Actually, I think there might be a few of them, but there is one in particular that I'm thinking of, and he does just that. He looks all sad and lonely and takes a picture of just himself with all of this cash stacked up on a table.

And it's all ridiculous, but how many impressionable people try to mimic that. That's just what's seen as cool in the world today. For a while people would say things like, "I'm just living my best life," or "Being my best self," and these are pretty much just covers to excuse putting themselves first. Because today, going after carnal desires is something that's commendable. Getting rich or famous at any cost, it doesn't matter, just as long as you get what you want. There is no shame in how we treat other people in getting what we want. It's kind of seen as a human right just to be selfish.

The sad thing is, when you conform to this world, you can't see clearly. People actually think that pursuing life's carnal and selfish ways are going to produce happiness. But the reality is the opposite.

Continuing on here we'll go to **verse 3—For I say, through the grace given to me, to every man that is among you, do not think more highly that he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God has dealt with every man the measure of faith.** This is repeated so often in scripture, and we're going to hear these same sentiments echoed throughout this sermon as well. It's repeated so often in scripture, and it's repeated because oftentimes we think too highly of ourselves. Happens all the time! So often we don't even realize it, we don't even see it. That's exactly why it is so dangerous and that's exactly why it's repeated so often in scripture.

Let's skip down to **verse 9—Let love (agape), be without dissimulation.** In other words, love is sincere and with genuine feelings. Think about those around us, those in the Church and those outside, those that are friends, and those that don't like us. How do we feel about them? Do we want to see the best outcomes for them? Do we actually care about them?

Continuing on in **verse 9** there it says, **Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned.** This word here is "philostorgos," which is a family type love. So, **Be kindly affectionate,** have this type of family type love towards one another, **with brotherly love; in honor.** In a sense, this honor that's spoken of here has to do with your worth, your value.

**...in honor, preferring one another,** and "preferring one another," this here has to do with showing respect and esteeming one other, putting the other person above yourself. And if you esteem someone you are regarding them highly or favorable. So basically, it's saying to have this love for one another while at the same time valuing the person and esteeming them.

God sees the value in each part of the temple. Do we? Do we esteem each other? Do we see that value that each person brings to the table? We all have different experiences that shape us, and we are all being shaped into different roles for the future, and they're all important. We are a part of God's plan, and if that is in the forefront of our thoughts, then we'll be on the right track.

If our thoughts about one another are correct then that will also show in our actions. We shouldn't tear one another down, and if we find ever that we're doing that then we need to stop immediately! We should be very careful how we speak about each other, especially those that are battling something.

Imagine we speak poorly about someone to someone else because we know that that person is battling something. Maybe in the future that affects how that person sees the other person. We might pass on a wrong judgement of them, and that could stay with them into the future, and we could really, yeah, do damage in that sense by having somebody else think poorly of somebody else when in the reality that other person is trying their best to overcome whatever it is they're overcoming.

**Verse 14—Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind toward one another.** The way we think about one another; it's talking about a humble attitude that we are to have towards one other.

**Mind not high things but condescend to men of low estates. Be not wise in your own conceits.** So, "condescend" here isn't being used how we use it today. Today we mean that someone is showing superiority to someone else, usually in comments that they make. But here it is being used to show we are to lower ourselves, to stoop down in a humble manner. In that sense we are "descending." In other words, this word is just telling us that we're to have humility for one another, and that is a mindset. We need to have that mindset towards one another every day.

And how do we do that? Well, it's pretty simple. We just have to look at the next sentence in that verse. It says, **Be not wise in our own minds.** If we think we know, then we are going to have problems. Because really, what do we know? Pick any topic that you think you know a lot about. Think about it for a second? What have you researched on the internet lately? I know, we all do it, but whatever that topic is, I can tell you, you don't know. You might know little bits of things here and there, but our knowledge is really a joke.

If we realize that human beings, that we have these puny minds compared to God, then that should be enough to shut us up of thinking that we actually know. That should be enough to stop us from arguing with one another and trying to push our opinions down other people's throats. If we do that then we're not creating peace, and quite literally, the opposite.

Let's take a look at the next scripture here, **verse 18—If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men.** It's like I mentioned. What's a really good way to live peaceably with all men? Simple. Know that we don't know. As I mentioned earlier in the introduction of the sermon, love produces peace and unity. That is what hold a family together. God's Family isn't going to have drama. It's going to have peace. It's going to have unity.

**Verse 20—Therefore, if your enemy hunger, feed him; and if he thirst, give him drink. For in doing so you shall heap coals of fire on his head.** This is kind of strange to us today, but "heaping coals on someone's head" was kind of a saying back then. It's kind of like today, we say to "kill somebody with kindness." The hope is that by treating somebody well that treated us badly, that they will have some kind of regret in their actions and that will move them to change.

**Verse 21—Do not be overcome of evil but overcome evil with good.** So, if someone does us wrong, we should never be overcome with feelings of vengeance or of doing them wrong in return. We shouldn't have this "eye-for-an-eye" mentality. These last two verses are speaking about a mindset that has agape in it, that concern for everyone's wellbeing, those that love us and even those that hate us.

We know that we are supposed to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. That is part of what agape love is all about. We have just read about how we are supposed to have a humble attitude that facilitates having this kind of mindset. Let's go a bit deeper now into this direction.

Let's turn over now to **1 Corinthians 8:1. Now concerning things sacrificed to idols. We know that we have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies** or builds up. So, Paul starts off here by making an interesting comparison of knowledge and love. Both of them are pictured as growing but the difference is that one makes you arrogant and haughty and the other is pictured as a building that is being built. We should understand that this is speaking about a building in the sense of spiritual growth.

**Verse 2—And if any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.** That reminds me a lot of when Wayne said in the past, "I know that I don't know." You actually know a whole lot if you know that you don't know.

**Verse 3—But if any man love God, the same is known of him.** This verse is very similar to what Christ told us, that scripture that I referenced in the intro to this sermon, that we are known as Christ's disciples, if we love one another. Because if we love God, we love what He is building, and if we really understand how that building comes to fruition, then we will have love for His creation, and that will be reflected in our own lives.

**Verse 4—As concerning, therefore, the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is none other God but one.** In other words, we know that there is one true God, and these others are idols, are just meaningless.

**Verse 7—However, that knowledge is not in every man. For some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.** So, we know that eating this meat that was often sold in temples and whatnot, we know that eating this meat itself is not a sin. But there are people that don't know that, and they eat that meat thinking and believing in their false idol, and because they don't know and don't have the ability to distinguish what is right and wrong, they continue to defile themselves.

**Verse 8—But meat commends us not to God. For neither if we eat, are we better; neither if we eat not are we worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak.** So, what is this liberty that is being spoken here? Well, it's a freedom that we have to do something that is not against God's law. Eating the meat or not eating the meat doesn't really make a difference, and we certainly can do it. But he is warning that just because we can, doesn't mean that we should, because it could be a stumbling block for others. It could be something that hinders their growth or potential growth.

**Verse 10—For if any man see you which has knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be embolden to those things which are offered to idols? And through your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?**

Christ died for all of mankind. That is something that would be good for us to consider, too. It's in God's plan to have His mystery revealed to everyone, but in due time. We in the Church, we've had a huge preview and we've been given a huge head start, a huge opportunity. We have been called to indeed help the world come into oneness with God. Most of that service will come in the future down the line. But people in this world might not be being called into the Church at this moment in time, but don't think that their experiences now in this world are not going to be used in a powerful way later on in the creation of Elohim.

Let me repeat **verse 11** and we'll continue on from there: **And through your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.** So, we have to be careful in these situations. Because by doing something that is not sin we can inadvertently hurt others that are weak themselves.

Sure, we might have some knowledge, but if we aren't smart about how we use it, then it can actually be detrimental to others. That's not showing love towards them. Everyone is a potential member of the God Family, and we need to look at them as such. That is the kind of outgoing concern that we should be showing towards one another.

It is kind of like what's happened, what's been mentioned in the Church before about these kinds of guidelines that we have for drinking alcohol. The Church has given guidelines, and much of it has to do with this same topic that Paul is addressing here.

It is definitely not a sin to drink alcohol, and we know that, but we also know that we shouldn't take that drinking to the extreme until intoxication. But we also don't want to give the impression that we are

drinking to oblivion. It could be detrimental if someone were to think that, especially if it is somebody that's new.

Or as so often happens at the Feast here, and everything, there are family members that aren't in the Church that are accompanying their family members, and they're around us when we go out to eat or we have certain get togethers, so to say. We definitely don't want to give them the impression that we're a bunch of lushes. That would or could definitely be detrimental to them, and that's not showing love towards them.

That's what this whole section is about. Our love and concern for others should be in our thoughts first and foremost, above whatever knowledge we may have. So, go back now to what Paul summarizes at the beginning. He said, "Knowledge puffs up but love builds up."

Knowledge can indeed puff up. What happens so often when we think we know more than someone else and that we are right? Well, we are probably wrong because we are supposed to know that we don't know. But if we think someone else is wrong then we are seeing their opinion or point of view as less than ours, and that can be an excuse to not love them as we should. It is a warning. We need to remember we don't know anything. Showing love towards one another trumps any kind of knowledge we think we might have.

Let's turn over to 2 Peter 1:2. These next scriptures we are going to read, they illustrate something interesting that we should keep in our mind. In our Bibles, we see the word "knowledge" being used here in several instances. And while the word being used for them is the word for knowledge, there is an ever so slight difference that shouldn't be lost on us, and I'll point it out here as we go through it.

So, we're going to begin in **2 Peter 1:2**. It says, **Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Joshua our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world through lust.**

So, he is stating here that God has given us the opportunity to become partakers in His nature. We can have His ways. That's in stark contrast to our own selfish human nature. We get that through God's full knowledge. The word "knowledge" that is being used here has the prefix of "epi" that is added to it. That just means "above; upon; beyond." You can just think of a couple words that we know like "epicenter," "epidermis," "epidemic." And so, in this verse Peter is making a distinction that this "epi" knowledge is a deeper and more fuller knowledge. It's not just some facts or truth that God gives.

In other words, it has more to do with how we apply the knowledge that God gives us. It is through that complete knowledge that we can escape our natural lusts. We can't escape our natural lusts just by having, you know, regular knowledge, just facts or little truths here and there.

And how do we escape our natural lusts? Well, our natural lusts are selfish, and how can we not be selfish? Well, by being the complete opposite; having agape for one another just as God has for us.

Let's continue on and see this list that Peter has put together for us to help us to be successful in our growth. So, we'll continue here in **verse 5—But also for this reason, giving all diligence**, doing it earnestly and with haste, **add to your faith virtue**. So, we trust God and what He says; we believe Him. Then in addition to that we are to add virtue. And what is virtue, really? Well, virtue is an excellence in how we conduct ourselves. We do what is right because it is right.

Let's continue on here. **And to virtue knowledge**. So, the word used here for "knowledge" is just without the prefix. It's just a regular word for knowledge. We'll see that we have to take this knowledge and

combine it with all the other things that are in this list to be able to have that fuller knowledge that God possesses.

**Verse 6—to knowledge, temperance,** or self-control. That’s a pretty good one. Do we really control ourselves, or do we think, “Nah, forget it, it’s too difficult,” and just let our carnal nature take control of ourselves?

Do we control what we let come into our lives, essentially? Do we control what we let influence ourselves? Do we control the environments that we put ourselves into? Do we control what comes out of our mouths? Do we control the thoughts that enter into our minds? Keep going on and on.

We are afflicted with “the lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes.” Do we have that in check? We need to have it under control, or it’ll have control over us. And if we think we are doing really good in the self-control department, then chances are we need to be careful with that third affliction that we suffer from too that I left out, “the pride of life.”

Continuing on. **...to self-control, perseverance.** So, ever enduring. All those other things that were just mentioned, doing things in diligence, having faith, living in an exemplary manner, growing in knowledge, and applying self-control, do all of those things, and don’t stop. Keep at it. It’s an everyday thing.

Continuing on here it says, **and to perseverance, godliness.** So, what is godliness? Well, it’s a reverence and a respect we show to God by obeying Him. It’s about an awe for God that we are to have and also a fear to go against Him.

Continuing on in **verse 7—to godliness, brotherly kindness.** Brotherly kindness is philadelphia, a fraternal, brotherly love.

Then here at the end, **and to brotherly kindness, agape.** Finally, at the end we have the most important part of the list, the part about conducting ourselves with one another. Oftentimes people will stop at the first few on the list and they think that they have it, but they don’t go all the way down; they don’t get to the one that’s actually the most important.

Continuing on in **verse 8—For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Joshua Christ.** Here again, the word that’s being used for “knowledge” is with the “epi” prefix. It’s speaking of that deeper and more fuller knowledge.

And if we think back on the list, when it says to “add knowledge,” it’s not speaking of this “epi-knowledge,” it’s just speaking of little pieces of knowledge, that we gain here and there, little facts, little tidbits, little truths.

We can think of knowledge like those connect-the-dots drawings that you make as a kid. We get knowledge and those can be likened to dots. So, we have a bunch of dots, but how do you make that overall picture. Well, you have to connect them with lines, and only God is the one who knows how to make all those connections so that the full, deeper meaning, the deeper understanding can be seen, the whole picture, essentially.

We can’t begin to connect any of those dots and come to that better understanding until we escape our natural lusts and that selfish human nature that exists within us. The way that we do that, first and foremost, is through our relationships with one another.

Let’s turn over to **Philippians 1:9—And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all of judgment.** So, here we see the use of the word for “knowledge” that we just saw in the previous example. It has a prefix added to it, so it signifies that this is a fuller knowledge, not just a



truth. He is not talking about specific truths or facts here; he is talking about something more, and that something more needs to have agape in it.

So, if we think this kind of knowledge is going to abound without working on our attitudes and relationships with others, then we are totally missing the mark. Because this deeper knowledge from God only comes when we apply that kind of agape to all facets of our life.

In this verse, he is also stating that he prays that our love abounds more and more in all judgment, and in our discernment more specifically. How are we able to make decisions? Is love a factor? We know that God and Christ make all their decisions based on love, and we are being told here that we need to do it too so that our judgments are right.

Let's turn over to another chapter here, to Philippians 2, and we're going to read through verses 1-4. So, starting here in **Philippians 2:1** he says, **Fulfill you my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each other esteem other better than themselves.**

Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote this, and he is telling the congregation to be of one mind and of one accord. "Of one accord" means to have one desire. We should all have a unity of the spirit, all wanting the same things. That's why we're all here after all, isn't it? So, we are all in this together and we need to have agape with one another so that our desire can become a reality.

Paul says that if the congregation has that same attitude, that it will bring him joy. It pleased him to see that those in the Church were having one mind, being humble, and esteeming others.

It's like a circular chain. If you please your neighbor and your neighbor pleases you, then everyone is pleased. There is peace, there is a joy. Seeing those relationships work together in such a nice manner is very rewarding. God wants to see us living in peace and harmony. That gives Him joy. And if we aren't doing those selfish things that we tend to do as humans, then we will be producing joy in our lives, not drama.

This part about being lowly comes up over and over again, doesn't it? It's really one of those main battles that we face. There is a connection between being humble and having knowledge, but we are told not to let any of that knowledge puff us up. Instead, we are to puff up each other by esteeming one another, putting others above us. Like we read about before, agape, and esteeming others, is what leads to edification, it leads to growth.

Well, since we are covering this topic of God's love today, I think it only makes sense that we head over to 1 Corinthians 13. This is considered to be the love chapter, and the reason for that is simple, that is pretty much all that it talks about. Now, depending on your Bible translation, it may use the word "love," or it may use the word "charity," but just know that it's all referring back to agape.

So, we're going to **1 Corinthians 13:1**. It says, **Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity agape, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.** So, you can speak as much as you want, you can let all that hot air out, but if you don't have agape accompanying your speech, then you are just flapping your lips. It's like the sound of some metal being slapped together, and it might not be making such a pleasant noise.

**Verse 2—And though I have prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not agape, I am nothing.** Think about ourselves. We know far more than those in the world. How many even understand just a little bit about God's plan? Or even better, how many even have any clue that God has a plan for mankind? It's pretty dumbfounding.

I was thinking about that recently when I was working with the guy that did the recording for the audio book. When I was looking for a narrator, how the process works is I basically just narrow it down to several possible candidates that I can present, and we can then discuss and see who likes who for the voice and whatnot. I select several of them because of how good their voice is, but also based on how good of a fit I'll think they could be.

But I also select a couple, because I know that from past experiences that it's possible that the one that we select might not want the job. If they are a big follower of traditional Christianity then they're probably not going to like what's in the book very much. So, of course, we have to be prepared for that.

So, I have them do a little sample reading, and usually by then they can know if they want to do the job or not. They can kind of get the gist of what the book's about by that point. That's at least my hope. But in the back of my mind, I am worried that they might stop working on it after the first chapter, or the second, or basically at any point that any normal reader might stop reading the book.

Thankfully, this guy was professional, and we got through the entire book without any problems. But while we were working on it I did think about that and what this guy must be thinking. Even if he didn't agree with it or like what was being said, he still had to read it. It's not like someone who just downloads the book on the internet and when they get to something they don't like they can just, you know, drop it into the trash bin.

I guess what I am trying to say here is knowing what the world knows, or better said, what they don't know, it must be somewhat overwhelming to be confronted with what is in the book. To hear that God actually has a plan, that He designed things to be as they are for a reason.

Traditional Christianity's view of God's plan is extremely basic. You live in a human life, and if you are a good person then you go to heaven where you live forever. Doing what, nobody exactly knows. Or on the other hand, you die, and because you were bad you go to hell. And again, doing what? No one exactly knows. All they really know is that one place is bad, and one place is good.

If you ask me, that's not much of a plan. You hear the story that traditional Christianity puts forth and I don't think there is anybody really oohing and aweing over the intricacies and how amazing the plan is. It's kind of like comparing the architecture of a strip mall to an extravagant palace. No one is being inspired by a strip malls simple box shape and the utilitarian lack of details.

But a palace, on the other hand, that's a different story. You can look into the details of a palace and see some highly specialized craft person that spent years of their life to create something, whether it's a wood carving or painting, tile work, whatever. You can admire those intricacies that went into building such a building. And in the end, the palace is something that is special.

That's how God's plan is compared to the fake plan from traditional Christianity. And to think we know all about that plan. We know about how all the Holy Days fit together into what God is building. We can see how that plan has gotten more detailed and more fully developed since the time before Israel even existed and up until these end-time events that we're now living in. That's pretty incredible, isn't it?

So finally, getting back to that scripture we read, he states that he knows "prophecy, and understands all mystery, and all knowledge." So, we understand God's plan, unlike the world, but that's just regular knowledge in God's eye. He can give that knowledge to the world, and He is going to. But just because we know that doesn't mean we even come close to understanding that fuller knowledge of God. That's what the apostles were distinguishing about in their speech, the difference between just knowledge and the "epi-knowledge," that more full knowledge.

So, looking at that scripture again it says, on top of the prophecy, understanding all mysteries and knowledge, and on top of that he even has an immense amount of faith. So, if we think someone has all of those things, then we are probably thinking that they are doing pretty good, right? Yes, that might be possible. But again, he says, no, he is nothing! He doesn't amount to anything if he doesn't have agape. That is pretty strong indeed. The fuller knowledge of God can only come to us if we practice agape in our lives. That kind of love is what makes up the essence of God.

Let's go to **verse 4—Love suffers long and is kind; love envies not; love vaunts itself not, it's not puffed up, agape is long suffering.** "Long suffering" means "to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others; slow to anger, slow to punish; to be mild and slow in avenging."

Why is it so important to be mild and slow in our reactions? Well, what happens when someone does us wrong? We get upset, don't we? It's a real injustice in our eyes. Often times it's like "Can you believe what that person did to me?!" It's so very easy for us to have this indignation and get worked up with emotion. And once that emotion takes hold, it's easy for us to get deeper and deeper and deeper into drama.

In fact, our reaction to a wrongdoing can cause us to actually sin. In which case it can become a vicious cycle. That's when you get the real drama cooking, and that's how this world works; it's tit for tat. You even see that between peoples and nations that haven't been able to get along for hundreds of years.

So, instead of letting our emotions get the better of us, we are told to be slow in our reactions. Take a step back, realize that we all do stupid things, and try to cut the other person some slack. We have to be patient with one another. That patience can really put us to the test. But we need to think of how merciful God has been with us and how much time He gives us to change. We need to be able to give that to others as well. That is part of a sacrifice on our side for the benefit of others.

This doesn't just apply to those in the Church, but it's also for those in the world that we come into contact with. Obviously, people in the world are not being worked with in the same manner as those in the Church. They probably aren't trying to overcome their selfish nature in the least bit, and that often comes across.

On the contrary, much of society in the world today celebrates a "me first" kind of attitude. But then you combine that with the influence of Satan and a demon world, and without God's help no one is a match for that. So, do we understand that, and do we consider that when we have contact with people in the world?

Even when Christ was being put to death, he said, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." And if he could say that with something so serious, it should be possible for us to at least acknowledge that people are living in ignorance and give them a break.

That is something we should really consider here at the Feast. And again, not just between those around us in the Church, but also everyone that we come in contact with, whether it be in a hotel, a restaurant, a store, whatever. We need to set a good example in our conduct.

And I know as a whole, we do that, or else we wouldn't get the comments that we do from hotels that speak about how pleasant the group was to work with and to be around. That is how it should be. They should be able to see that difference in our conduct when compared to other groups that they have throughout the year.

Again, it goes back to what was stated earlier where Christ said, "You will know that they are my disciples if they have love for one another. And obviously, that's, you know, seen by the hotels or places that we go to during the Feast. Those people should see that we're different somehow. Maybe they can't explain it,

but that love that we show towards, you know, the group as a whole, and then toward those that are around us, that should be quite evident.

Agape can be a sacrificial kind of love, and we should always be willing to sacrifice for others. We should always be willing to help make their lives better, even if it's in the most minute ways.

Let's look more at **verse 4**. It says **Charity** (agape) **envies not**. Love is not jealous. It's interesting here, the word that's being used for "jealous" in Greek is actually "zealous," and in Greek it had a positive and also a negative connotation depending on how it was used. It wasn't until, and I think it was some time in the middle ages that there became a distinguished separation between being zealous and being jealous. But here in the Greek it was just one that could be either or depending on the context and how it was used.

But, what's interesting too is that the base for this word in Greek for "zealous" meant "to boil." So, what it is speaking about here, really, if you get down to the grit of the word, it's about an emotional state that is hot. Obviously, in this verse it is being used in a negative manner, so you could add in all types of negative emotions that we humans experience.

For example, do we look at someone and have negative emotions based on their achievements or perceived advantages? This is a really sick mindset and it's all too common in the world. It's so sad that someone can have something good happen to them and then there be another person that's not happy for them. Even if it isn't based on an achievement. Maybe they won the lottery. If someone thinks that that other party isn't deserving, then that can even build up more of that burning emotion inside.

So, next time that something that is "good" happens to someone you know, make sure you are genuinely happy for them. And if you aren't, then you had better have a look at yourself and address the issue of why you have problems with it. Do you have outgoing concern for their wellbeing? Do you want to see what's best for them? Do you want to see them succeed?

You know, it makes me think about this idea of privilege that you hear so much of today. You know, goes along with this "woke" ideology that's in the world. I saw this girl talking recently about how her parents, who were both immigrants to the U.S., came over, one of them actually picked strawberries for their first job just to get by. But anyway, they both worked their butts off, basically. They had nothing and then they became doctors.

So, this girl was fortunate enough to have parents that were able to pay for her college. She was totally aware of how fortunate she was, and you could see just in how she was talking, you know, that how thankful she was that she was able to have that and that her parents made the sacrifices that they did in their life to give her that gift.

But with today's crazy thinking, she was battling with almost a kind of depression and feeling of shame and complete guilt that her parents were able to help her by paying for her education. She had to defend herself in the university because other kids didn't see that as fair since their parents couldn't pay for their education like hers had done.

But her advantage really made many of her classmates burn up inside and come to resent her. How disgusting is that? And some of these kids, you know, they're supposed to be her friends. So, you would think if they were her friends that they would be happy for her, right, but they weren't. Yeah, so it makes you wonder, of course, how much of a friend were they really? They definitely weren't showing her love. I bet many of them would have taken pleasure in seeing her trip and fall along the way. It's like they say, the saying, "Misery loves company."

In any case, if we are getting worked up with emotion and it's not a positive emotion then that is not part of agape. Again, it goes back to how we think towards one another.

Going on still here in **verse 4**, it says **agape doesn't vaunt itself**. So, it doesn't boast. It's not about bragging and showing how great we are. It's not puffed up, like it says in the verse that we read before. How could love that puts others before ourselves have anything to do about puffing up one's own self? That's the complete opposite. On the contrary, agape, as we've seen, is about humility. This goes back to what we read earlier about knowledge puffing up. We need that humble attitude that says, "I know that I don't know."

**Verse 5** continues speaking of agape and it says, **it doesn't behave itself unseemly** or in an unbecoming manner. That means we are not to be rude or ill mannered, and we're to treat those around us with respect.

**Verse 6** continues on speaking about what agape is and is not. It says **agape rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices with the truth**. Rejoicing in the truth is something that we are to be doing here at the Feast of Tabernacles. It's a full week, plus an extra eighth day where we are to rejoice in the truth.

As we know, we are commanded to rejoice during this period of time. We should be rejoicing in all the truth that God has given. We should be rejoicing in the plan that He has for mankind and the design that He is meticulously bringing to pass. Agape is about rejoicing in all that.

Look what God has sacrificed for us. He has allowed for the world to be filled with drama and iniquity so that He could make a perfect creation. He sacrificed peace, and then on top of that He sacrificed His only Son. That's real agape, and it's a beautiful thing.

Continuing on in **verse 7**. Speaking still of agape it says, **bears all things**. It covers, it protects, it shields, it holds up a heavy load. This is speaking of a type of sacrificial attitude that we are to have. How do we react to things that happen to us daily? How do we interact with family members, friends, or work colleagues that don't understand why we take off a week and come here for the Feast? They see us as weird, religious nuts, and maybe they even say mean things about us behind our backs or maybe even right to our face?

I know I had that happen to me a lot when I was growing up. I can't tell you how many times I would be called a Jew, and they didn't mean it in a kind manner. I didn't recognize until later, that there were a lot of Catholics where I grew up, and as it turns out they are not too keen on Jews. And unfortunately, me telling them that I wasn't Jewish didn't help. They were just like "Oh no, you're a Jew...and maybe even worse." But anyway, we have to bear such things in God's Church.

But how do we react to them? Sometimes we just have to look at the other person that dishing out this kind of garbage for what they are - ignorant. They don't know any better. In fact, those kids I was just speaking of, they didn't know what they were talking about. I guarantee none of them had ever even met a Jewish person, and I really don't think they knew much as far as the Bible was concerned.

But this type of attitude that they had was just passed on from one generation to the next as part of tradition. And so, on top of that, on top of them having bad influences, they didn't have good ones. They didn't, and have not since, been given what we have been given. We have to see that for what it is, and at the same time, remember that these kinds of people have the possibility of in the future becoming a part of Elohim. It's just at a different time.

This is an attitude we should have with everyone in the world that we come into contact with. They are all possible members of the God Family, it's just that they haven't been given that opportunity right now.

Is it possible that our reactions today could be helpful to them in the future? And if that is the case, then bearing what they dish out can be an act of agape. It's a little like what we read about earlier when it talks about "heaping coals on their heads." It's difficult though because we so much want to react in kind to people. But we are told that that's not that way. We are to be above that.

**Verse 7** continues and says that **agape has faith (trust) in all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** We have belief and trust in God and His plan for mankind. We have a deep desire to see that plan become more fulfilled, and to continue to develop. Everything that God has given and is offering us is about building His Family.

And to build that family, God has had to sacrifice, and we have to, as well. We have to continue to sacrifice ourselves every day, to get rid of our selfish nature. It is all interconnected. God's way of being is being manifest through His plan, and that is a way of being that we are to emulate until the time comes when we are changed, and it becomes second nature for us.

So, we are to have faith in what God is working out and be participants in it coming to pass. The only way to have any success in what is being worked out is for us to have agape.

And lastly, in this verse it says that **agape endures all things.** Now, that should be pretty self-explanatory. You know, after all that we go through it's easy to get down or just get tired. But again, this plan of God must come to pass, no matter what. We want to be a part of it, so we keep on going, we endure.

**Verse 8—Agape never fails,** it never drops away, it never perishes. It's interesting that this Greek word that is probably translated in your Bible as "fails" was commonly used to describe a ship that was driven off course. So, if we think in those terms then we can see how this makes sense in God's plan. Because that plan has a course, it's going to be fulfilled. If we have agape then we are going to be on that course, too.

It might be of interest to you, you don't have to turn there, I'm just going to read you a really quick verse here from **Galatians 5:4.** It says, **Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever you are justified by the law; you are fallen** (here is that same word again) **you are fallen from grace.**

We know that God wants to give us His grace, His favor, and all we have to do is stay the course. You can think of it as a ship or a car or whatever. God's plan is going from point A to point B, and all we have to do is not get distracted on the way and stay the course.

Let's continue on in **1 Corinthians 13:8.** It says, **Love never stops** or drops away, **but whether prophecies... It's not really "fail" here, but more specifically are rendered idle or without effect; whether tongues shall cease, whether knowledge, it shall vanish away.** So, in other words, this verse is saying that agape, something that is the pinnacle of what you can have is something that should always be there and is the most important thing to exercise in our lives.

When they asked Christ what the most important law was he said that we have love (agape) for one another, just as he had loved us. He didn't say the most important thing was that we have knowledge or that we know God's plan or His way of life or that we can speak eloquently about it. No, he said what is actually the action part of God's plan, the agape. That love is the means by which God is bringing about His plan.

Just think for a moment how merciful God has been in our own lives. He doesn't force His way down any of our throats. He leaves it up to us to decide and He gives us time to make mistakes, and we stumble along the way. The only way that godly character can be built in us is if there is an abundance of agape that is shown towards us.

Let's go to the next verse and things will be made even more abundantly clear. **Verse 9—For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.** Isn't that true? We only know what we know and that isn't much. Yes, of course, God has blessed us with much knowledge, but in the scheme of things, we still don't know much yet.

**Verse 10—But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.** It is interesting this word for “perfect” also means “brought to an end or finished.” It is often used to refer to men that are “adults of full age or mature.” So, yes, this verse is speaking of something that will be perfect, but more specifically it is speaking of a time when we are born into the God Family, not being an embryo as we are after we are baptized. It’s again, showing a process.

When that time comes then those things that we have known and done “in part” will be over with. It’ll be complete. We will be complete.

**Verse 11—When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly (obscurely), but at the same time, speaking of the future, face to face.**

Now, this is a great comparison being made here, especially when we consider what mirrors were like back in ancient times. Because they didn’t have mirrors like we have today. They were usually made from a polished metal and the image that was reflected wasn’t very good. It wasn’t very distinct. Oftentimes you would have to move and look from different angles to get a better, more complete image of yourself.

It must have been pretty frustrating. You probably didn’t know if you looked like a mess before you left your house or not. So, probably was pretty good to have good friends back then who could tell you if you had broccoli in your teeth or something like that, because you weren’t going to see it by looking in the mirror!

But anyway, the word that is being used here for “darkly” in this verse is “ainigma” which is like our word “enigma.” Same meaning. So, looking into a mirror was like an enigma, an obscure, riddle-like image of yourself.

That’s really a perfect analogy for how our understanding is. We can see a little sometimes here and there. We move and we see a bit more. We know what God’s plan is, and He shares some of the details with us, which is what makes it more exciting and encouraging. But we can’t even begin to fathom the amount of detail that’s gone into this plan.

Just think of the details that have gone into planning for just a single member of the God Family. We can’t even begin to understand how God and the angelic world have worked in our lives, how we have been given favor, how our lives have been shaped and molded by the experiences that we have had. So, take that and multiply it by everyone that God has ever worked with. Then multiply that by everybody that has ever lived in the world. Then throw in the dynamics between the angelic world and the demons. It’s really something that is so huge it’s difficult for us to comprehend.

In that sense, what God has shared with us up into this point really is obscure. We just see the outline of that plan, just like someone who is looking through one of those old mirrors was only seeing the outline of their face without much detail. But we understand that once our process is complete that we are going to see much more. We’re going to be able to see clearly, and as it says there in the verse, as if it were face to face.

Continuing on in **verse 12**, he says, **Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I know now.** This part is rather strangely worded, but he is just stating here that how he thinks now as an adult is normal for him. The childish things have been put away. And that in the future, he is going to think as a member of the God Family and that is going to be the new normal. He isn’t going to be consumed with humanly things just as he isn’t concerned with childish things now as he is an adult.

**Verse 13** he says, **And now abide** (remain, continue) **faith, hope,** the expectation of good, **agape, these three; but the greatest of these, agape.** So, if this is the greatest, then shouldn't we focus on it the most? Shouldn't we make sure our attitudes towards each other are correct?

So how are our relationships? Maybe you think they are great, and you are doing perfect. But you aren't. How do I know that? Because we're all humans after all, and we're selfish, and we're always going to have that with us until we are completely changed. So, we can always do better, every one of us.

We need to think about that, especially here during the Feast. Think about how we can improve our relationships. How can we put others above ourselves? How can we help someone else to have a better Feast? And besides looking for ways we can improve those relationships, what we should be doing too is adjusting our attitudes. What I mean by that is adjusting how we look at brethren in the Church and those in the world around us.

Do we have an attitude of always wanting to see those around us succeed? Are we happy for others when they achieve something in life? Are we building people up and giving them support or are we tearing them down, thinking bad thoughts about them, only concentrating on their faults? Because that is easy to do. Looking at people's faults is super easy to do. It's easy to see selfishness in others.

We are all experts in selfishness because we are all selfish, so it's easy to spot that in others, but not so easy to spot that in ourselves. But when we see it in others, is that all we think of? Do we dwell on the faults of others? Or do we look at the positive moves they are making in their lives? Sometimes it can be hard to see past the faults though, because it's like, you know, sometimes it's "You can't you see what you are doing?!"

But maybe when we see those kinds of things in others we can try to not get worked up about it and to give the others time where they can hopefully come about and make a change. And so, let's not be so harsh in our judgment of others. If we do that, then it will show in our attitudes.

As we heard today multiple times, humility and knowledge play an important role in love. If we are pushing our opinions on other people it's because we think we are right, and that is not showing love towards them. We need to get in into our heads, "I know that I don't know." Remind yourself of that every day. Put it on your phone's background so you don't forget. That is a great way to kill your own pride.

It's like Paul stated earlier, that he "only knows in part." We know a lot, but so much of it is "only in part." Don't forget that Satan can use that against us. The most effective lies are the ones that have a little nugget of truth in them, and Satan uses that trick all the time to pit us against one another.

Let's close here today by turning to some final scriptures. Let's head over to Ephesians 4.

**Ephesians 4:11-16—And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. Till we all come into the unity of the faith and the knowledge...** And here, that "epi-knowledge," that real deeper understanding **of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature** (speaking of a maturity) **of the fullness of Christ.**

**Verse 14—Then we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, the cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive.** That's more true today than ever before. We have more information at our fingertips than the world has ever known. And like Paul mentioned, now he only knows in part.

We need to be on guard when we start digging into things and we begin to form our own opinions. We don't want to accidentally draw the wrong lines when connecting our dots and come up with a false



picture. It is all too easy to do when you get that little nugget of truth. That can draw you off-course. Or worse yet, your nugget of truth isn't a nugget of truth, it's just plain wrong. Satan is just lying there in wait, ready to deceive us.

**Verse 15—But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things which is the head, Christ. From whom the whole body, joined and united together by which every joint supplies according to the working and the measure of every part makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.**

The Body works together to create, increase, and to grow. That's how God works. He is one. Only His ways produce growth, and when it grows it just adds on to itself. God's house is continuing to be built—and thankfully, we can be part of it—and it's a house that's built with love.

Let's meditate on that for however many days we have left remaining in this Feast of Tabernacles.