**The Process and Progression of Agapeo-**

***Learning* to Love**

There are a few different types of “love” in the N.T.- each coming from a different Greek word:

* Stergo is *natural affection;* apparently used as love *of family* (of the lack thereof, as it only appears in the N.T. as *astorgos,* cf. Rom.1:31; 2Tim.3:3).
* Phileo is *brotherly love,* or a kind, warm affection toward another.
* Eros is *sensual love* properly expressed through the sexual relations of husband and wife.
* But agape is the love that *establishes* rather than *requiring* a value- it is the love of the unlovable.

Note that within the differing types of love mentioned above, there is both a *progression* and a *process.*  One *progresses* through each type of love in a *process* by which the highest love, agape, is ultimately achieved. I would present to you that this *process* is both *natural* (in the sense of being according to God’s order), and *learned.*  Thus, if you follow God’s order, and do things the way He says, we *learn to love* as He does. Let’s see how this works….

How we *progress* to agapeo through *learning* to love:

**Step 1, Love of Parents.** Stergo (familial love) is our introduction to love and loving. We first learn to *receive,* and then to *give* love from **our parents**. They are not only the *providers* from which we derive every need and blessing- at least as far as we can first discern (1Tim.5:8; Matt.7:9-10; 1Thess.2:7), they soon become the only *authority* (source of right and wrong) we have, Eph.6:1-3. Obviously, this is a critical first step. Failures at this beginning level can make it very difficult to progress further toward mature, divine love, Rom.1:31.

**Step 2, Love of God.** If the parents, as the first sources of love, do their job right, they begin to shift the love the child feels for them (as sources of provision and authority) toward God. They start to educate the child on the true source of loving provision and authority to Him, Eph.6:4. This is done incrementally and in practical ways. They begin to speak *of God* to their children about His love for them, emphasizing His provision of food and material things, as well as His authority as the ultimate source of right and wrong, cf. Deut.6:1-13. They also speak *to God* (through prayer) in the hearing of their children, and teach and encourage them to do the same with the family and on their own. This too, is a part of the process of shifting the focus of the child(ren) from them as parents to God as both a *provider* and *source of ultimate authority.*  But loving a God who we cannot see is a big step from loving parents who we can see and with whom we are so intimately involved, cp. 1John 4:20b. So, other incremental steps are necessary. The love of God mirrors the love of parents, Rom.5:8. The parents are the child’s first knowledge of and step toward God. In this sense, they are the child’s first knowledge and representatives of God. It’s an important responsibility- do it well!

**Step 3, Love of God’s Word/Truth.** This love begins still within the scope of parental responsibility. Children must be taught to love truth by parents who love truth. This begins by teaching the child(ren) to love and appreciate “truth” in a general way- truth as opposed to falsehood. But from this base, a love *“the truth”* of God’s word must be developed, cf. 2Thess.2:10b,12-15; 2Tim.1:5,13: 3:14-15. Though all of these “steps” are vital, the importance of this one cannot be over-emphasized, Rom.1:16!

**Step 4, Love of Righteousness.**  The next logical step in the process of learning to love is to loving righteousness. It naturally progresses from loving the truth of God’s word. Having learned of the provision and authority of God from the parents, and having been introduced to loving God Himself through transference of parental love to Him, and then beginning to love His word as “truth,” we then learn to love *the ways of truth,* Psalm 119:47-48, 97-104, 127, 163.

**Step 5, Love of Brethren.** After learning to love *God, His word,* and *His ways,* we then are ready for the next incremental step toward true, divine love- loving those who are like-minded: *brethren*. *Brotherly love* (phileo) can be manifested to *brethren of the world* in the sense of humanity. We should love our fellow man. They are, after all, children of the same Maker as are we. But, the love of *spiritual brethren* is closer, by far, than this societal love of our fellow man. We develop a special, but still very natural, affinity for those who *think* and *feel* the same as we do about God, His word, and His ways. We are naturally drawn into a deep *brotherly love* because of shared *spiritual* parentage, desires, hopes, and kinship. The N.T. speaks in glowing terms of this kind of love- both to *commend* and to *command* it, 1John 3:1,10-18,23.

**Step 6, Love of Souls.** From loving *those who love us* and have manifested great care and compassion towards us, to *loving God, His word, His ways,* and *His people,* now love must begin to progress and proceed *outside of ourselves*. It must become less about “me.” Let’s face it: It is much easier to love those who love and care for us, and even those who share our same affections and desires (spiritually), but it is much more difficult to love those who may not love us, and those who don’t share our spiritual desires and affections. Thus, we must begin at this stage to learn *divine love.* This is the love Jonah could not seem to grasp, Jonah 4:9-11. It is the love that Jesus demonstrated, and expects, Rom.5:6-10; 1John 4:19; Matt.9:10-13.

**Step 7, Love of Enemies.** As important as it is to progress to the point that we love *the souls* of others, and desire them to be saved, the ultimate sign of matured agapeo love is the ability to love our enemies- those who actively abuse and persecute us. But this is *divine* love, Matt.5:43-48. Until and unless we can love *as God loves,* we cannot be *“sons of your Father who is in heaven,”* and have not learned agapeo.

**Conclusion:**

I certainly may be wrong, and may not “get it” at all- let alone practice it myself, but it seems to me that this is how love is learned.

It is an intuitive process that this incremental and progressive, but must none-the-less be learned.

But, once we have followed the procedure and learned to love as God loves, we can practice the wonderful, gracious, and fulfilling *divine love* that enables us to see and feel as God does toward truth, righteousness, the sinful souls of men, and even our/His enemies!