

A Biblical Study of *Agape* Love in Eric Wilson's *Fireproof*

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Abstract

Marriage is a divine bonding that has to be intermingled with love for a harmonious life. Every marriage brings challenges, often profound ones. It is the responsibility of the couple to lead a compatible life. Therefore, marriage should be accompanied with love for a fruitful and harmonious life. With writers like Eric Wilson, challenging the problems in the institution of marriage, perhaps the inconsistencies that loom large in nuptial relationships may be set right living together as dignified human beings sharing the same space with love and harmony.

Love is the most important emotion that holds a unique place in the Bible and that has grandeur of its own. Despite of race or status, people cherish and value love and recognize that it will shape what is good and true. It is the most significant quality that is essential between partners in marriage life. The marriage life turns out to be successful when the couple cherish love. A proper understanding of love is practised inside and outside the family or home.

Life is successful when love goes with religion and faith. The Bible has its origin in the Hebrew and Greek language. Hence, the theologians have traced four equivalent words for the Greek word love. They are *agape*, *philia*, *storge* and *eros*. The paper explores how *agape* love is reflected in *Fireproof*.

Agape love is a selfless love and it is the love of the Calvary Cross. The verb form of *agape* is *agapan* that means, "to value, to have a concern for, to delight in and to be faithful to" (Poonen 41). The Christians generally relate it to the unconditional love of God. He loved the human kind so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for the redemption of the sinners: "But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (*The Catholic Answer Bible*, Rom. 5. 8). *Agape* love is also related to the love between two partners. Love should be rooted firm in commitment, just as God's love is for the mankind: ". . . in God's eyes, nothing is worthy of being called 'love' unless it has the *agape* constituent in it" (Poonen 42).

True love is not based on expecting something in return but should be based on loving regardless of return because the person is committed to love the other unconditionally. Each

partner should value the other as of infinite worth and they should delight and rejoice in each other. *Agape* love is a pure love felt at the soul level, where one person loves another at a profound level. This kind of love is,

slow to suspect but quick to trust; slow to condemn but quick to justify; slow to offend but quick to defend; slow to expose but quick to shield; slow to belittle but quick to appreciate; slow to demand but quick to give; slow to provoke but quick to conciliate; slow to hinder but quick to help; and slow to resent but quick to forgive. (Poonen 41)

The *agape* love is lacking between Caleb Holt and Catherine Holt. As they lack it, their marriage life becomes vacant. Caleb wanted to marry a woman who lives on her mind but, unable to accept when she behaves open-minded and feels that he loses his respect: “If you can’t give me the respect I deserve—*look at me!*—then what’s the point of this marriage?” says Caleb when Catherine points out his mistakes (43). Caleb does not share anything with Catherine. Even the time when he gets back home, whether he will dine home or outside, and so on is not informed to Catherine. According to Caleb, Catherine gives him no affection, no understanding and not even a civil conversation. He accuses her but, never realizes that it is the end result of his selfishness and rude behaviour.

When John asks Caleb to do the 40-days Love Dare, the latter does not commit himself to it. He did it for the sake of doing it but, not wholeheartedly with love and affection for Catherine. He does not have any unconditional love for the humankind. Similar love that has to be practised between Caleb and Catherine is lacking between them. Caleb who is a firefighter, the man who rescues the people from fire fails to rescue his love.

On the other hand, as a three year old child, Catherine wanted to marry a man who really loves her and to live happily ever after. Catherine’s love for Caleb shatters when he turns his full attention towards pornography from her. At the same time, Caleb has \$24, 000 at his savings to buy a boat while Catherine needs money to buy a hospital bed and wheelchair for her sick mother. Catherine also broods over Caleb’s neglect towards her. The man who promised for the better and for the worse neglects her. Catherine’s removal of her wedding ring shows her contempt towards Caleb and how she wants to put an end to her marriage.

Love is the most beautiful word in the Bible and is a many-sided splendour. Marriage fails due to the lack of understanding the real meaning of love. Emotional thrill or infatuation is often mistaken for true love. Catherine who created sparks within him during their early stages of love, means nothing to him after seven years of his marriage. The sparks sparkle again within Caleb after he commits himself to the Love Dare.

Love is a commandment and *agape* love is a commitment to love, and a decision to love regardless of the circumstances. Caleb understands this fact and starts loving Catherine regardless of the circumstances. Caleb pays \$24,000 for Joy Campbell’s hospital bed and wheelchair though Catherine has removed her wedding ring showing her contempt for him. Caleb seeks God’s help to love Catherine: “Lord whatever it takes I want the chance to love my wife again—body, soul and mind. Please, I need You to show me how” (205).

According to the Bible, the first *agape* love is the love that existed between Adam and Eve. God found Adam to be lonely and so He created Eve to love him and accompany him. He created Eve out of Adam’s rib bone so that she would be at his side. Both Caleb and

Catherine realize this towards the end: “So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man” (Gen. 2. 21-22).

The couple gets reunited after Catherine learns that Caleb does the Love Dare and has paid for Joy’s hospital bed and wheelchair. They become spiritually attracted towards each other. It is believed that a Christian must be directed by the Holy Spirit of God in his love life: “The Holy Spirit alone can lead you to the person God has chosen to be your life-partner—and that is the only person you should ever fall in love with” (Poonen 43).

One must willingly submit to the Lord so that he or she would be led in the right path which the Lord has chosen for him or her. The Lord has led Catherine in the right path or else, she would have fallen for Dr. Gavin’s temptation. The Biblical promise also reminds this idea in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7:

The presence of love affirms others and overcomes destructive aspects of our character. Patience, kindness and truth matter. Just as avoiding those sins in the Ten Commandments which deal with other human beings nurtures relationships, so too does love. Envy, boastfulness, self-assertiveness, anger and evil are avoided. Love provides both the stability and consistency in which life thrives. (Winter 1181)

The couple reconcile and celebrate true love and their marriage becomes fruitful as their love is unconditional and so their souls are spiritually bound towards each other.

Such an unconditional love is also reflected in the relationship between John and Cheryl Holt, Caleb’s parents. Like Caleb and Catherine, John and Cheryl too lacked unconditional love in the early stages of their marriage life. Cheryl Holt did the Love Dare and the couple started to share unconditional love. Their love is visible when they support each other. Even when Caleb blames or accuses his mother, John supports her and comes for her rescue. It is John who makes Caleb understand the real meaning of unconditional love.

Eddie and Joy Campbell love each other unconditionally. Catherine as a three year old girl wishes to marry her father, when her parents are done with their marriage, but, Joy tells her that they will not be done with their marriage. This is evident when they stay together in their old age and in Joy’s sickness. Eddie too loves Joy to the utmost and is evident through the care that he shows towards her even after she is affected with stroke and could not walk. Eddie serves as a moral support to Joy for her happiness.

Lieutenant Michael Simmons, Caleb’s friend, and Tina Simmons too share *agape* love. They both share and spend time for each other. When Simmons escapes from the train accident while saving the lives of two girls, he does not want the incident to be known to Tina. He tells Caleb not to inform anything about the accident to Tina. Simmons does not want to share anything that would panic and make Tina sad. In short, as the Kendrick brothers put forth, “*Agape* love is ‘in sickness and health’ love, ‘for richer or poorer’ love, ‘for better or worse’ love. It is the only kind of love that is true love” (43).

True love does not have to be a fairytale romance where every moment is a happy experience. True love undergoes difficulties and overcomes it. True love is an experience forged in the fire of life. It is a lesson in patience and perseverance with rewards that last a lifetime. Hence, true love is the greatest of all things as expressed in the Scripture: “So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13. 13).

Works Cited

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