

# Grace Evangelistic Ministries

## Summer Conference

June 23-25, 2017

### How to Build a Healthy Marriage

#### Day Two - Section One - Moses Onwubiko

#### The Power of Love in Marriage

Building a healthy marriage demands that one understands three things.

- The true meaning of the word “love.”
- The role of love in the establishment of the church
- The role of love in Christian marriage.

Unlike English Language which has only one word for love, Greek language offers several, but for our study, we will focus on two, *phileo* and *agapao*.

#### 1. The True Meaning of the Word Love

Love is a variety of different feelings, states, and attitudes that ranges from interpersonal affection ("I love my mother") to pleasure ("I loved that meal"). It can refer to an emotion of a strong attraction and personal attachment. [1] Love can also be a virtue representing human kindness, compassion, and affection—"the unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another". [2] It may also describe compassionate and affectionate actions towards other humans, one's self or animals.

Love is very complex making it difficult to define. In the past, even in the present, love dominates the theme in the creative art. There're varieties of meaning assigned to the word, love. In the ancient time (Greek culture), love was at the center stage; and that culture ensured that the society had a grip on the subject. There are four different types of love in Greek, (*eros* = romantic or sexual love), (*storge* = kinship or familiarity love), (*philia* = friendship love) and (*agape* = virtues or unconditional love). We narrow our study to two, *phileo* and *agapao*.

- **Phileo**

*Phileo* means “to love” or “kiss.” It has a connotation of fondling and affection. This type of love is personal reserved for family and friends.

Characteristics of Phileo

- It’s selective, loving only a few.
- It’s attractive, loving only attracted objects.
- It’s an object dependent, loving only when the object is loveable.
- It’s reciprocal, loving only when the object of its love can reciprocate (scratch my back and I will scratch yours type of love).
- It’s easily angered, and when provoked, withdraws its affection from the object of its love.
- It’s emotional, waxing and waning according to circumstances.
- It’s retaliatory and unforgiving.
- It’s very weak.

Building a marriage on phileo (personal) love, which is typical of most Christian marriages is like erecting the Eiffel Tower on sandy ground. Considering the state of Christian marriages today, it explains why many holy matrimonyes built on phileo love have suffered shipwreck.

Phileo love alone is not sufficient in building and sustaining a healthy marriage. It cannot hold a marriage together. Honest psychologists are discovering the truth. Building marriage on phileo love (a sinkable foundation), psychologists and their clients are frustrated as phileo love collapses giving way for a marriage breakup.

- **Agapao**

*Agapao* means “to love.” Unlike *phileo* (unstable) love, agape love is pure, unconditional and incorruptible. It does not and cannot wax or wane. It is the very attribute of God. “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Characteristics of Agapao

- It is a divine love.
- It is unchangeable—an everlasting love. “For the mountains may move and the hills disappear, but even then my faithful love for you will remain. My covenant of blessing will never be broken," says the LORD, who has mercy on you” (Isa. 54:10 NLT).
- It’s unselfish, sacrificing with no expectation of a return.

- It builds up (1 Cor. 8:1).
- It's ever ready to cover "a multitude of sin" (1 Peter 4:8).
- Object independent
- Subject dependent
- It loves unconditionally at all times—the moral, amoral and the immoral.
- Agape love never fails.

The apostle Paul had a difficult time defining the indefinable term. He couldn't define God's love with a sentence or two, instead he used a chapter of the Bible to describe it:

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

<sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:4-8)

Question: on which foundation is your marriage standing? Pause and reflect on the question. Is your marriage standing on the foundation of phileo or agape love?

## 2. The Role of Love in the Establishment of the Church

To build a healthy marriage, we must begin where Scripture begins, "God is love [agape]" (1 John 4:8). Love alone establishes God's church. How? The question is important.

It's God's love that both establishes and sustains the church. It took the unified effort of the Godhead and *a tri-union love* to build the magnificent, glorious and everlasting "church of the living God." (1 Tim 3:15).

Here's how it happened: all three members of the Godhead were involved in the church.

The Father projects His love. Love thought of your best interest and mine; consequently did not withhold His best. Think of it. He gave us His Son (John 3:16). Not being self-centered, Love sacrificed His Son, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The Son's love shines. As God, Jesus Christ is equally love. "Greater love has no one than this that one lay down His life" (John 15:13). "He offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:27). He hung on the cross and paid the penalty for the sins of the undeserving ones—us. That's an ultimate expression of agape love.

The Holy Spirit casts His love. Being God, He's love (Rom. 15:30). By His strength, Jesus Christ was offered as a sacrifice. Through "the eternal [Holy] Spirit He [Jesus Christ] offered up Himself."

Having accomplished the work of redemption, Love reached out in the pit and took us, the skunk of skunks. Love washed us, sanctified us and placed us in union with Jesus Christ and called us “the church of the Living God.”

Agape love is not finished. Love continues to build and nourish the church, with the view of presenting it one day before God, “in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:26). This is powerful!

### **3. The Role of Love in Christian Marriage**

Agape love plays an indispensable role in any relationship. Its bricks are essential in laying the foundation and the structure of a marriage. Any substitutes for agape begs for trouble in building a healthy marriage.

No marriage can survive the assaults of the evil one unless it’s sheltered under the umbrella of God’s love. In building a healthy marriage, Christian couples must imitate God’s love. There are no two ways about it and there’s no shortcut. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph. 5:1-2).

*“Be imitators of God...walk in love.”* In these two sentences are hidden the secret of building a healthy and a long lasting marriage relationship.

- **Imitating/Modeling God**

You and I are commanded to imitate or model God, “Be imitators of God.” Imitate His love. The apostle Paul exhorts, “Imitate me just as I am imitating Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). He portrays himself as a role model, we “offer ourselves as a model” (2 Thess. 3:9). The mandate remains, “Be imitator of God.” The problem is how can the fallible imitate the Infallible? God has found a way —by living His life through us. “For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him” (Phil. 2:13 NLT).

This raises another question how can God live His life through me?

- **Reflecting God’s Love**

How does God work out His plan in our lives? Through His Spirit. Take for instance, love. By indwelling us, God manifests His agape love through the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who indwells us (Gal. 4:6). “Living in love” demands constant fellowship with the Holy Spirit. He alone has the monopoly of making God’s love available to the believer, when he is in fellowship. It’s this love supplied by the Holy Spirit that enables the believer to imitate God. It’s this love that makes marriage a wonderful union. It’s this love, which makes marriage enjoyable beyond description. The apostle Paul commands every believer, “Be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).

In other words, “Be controlled by the Holy Spirit.” Under the control or influence of the Holy Spirit, He provides divine assets for building a long lasting marriage relationship.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal. 5:22-23).

Question: If God is perfect (certainly He is); if His work is perfect (no doubt it is); if He indwells me (Scripture affirms it—He does); if God is the One who works in me to do His pleasure according to Scripture (Phil. 2:13), why then is my marriage a nightmare? Whose fault is it? Is it my fault or God’s?

I am happy that someone is asking the right questions. Most Christians avoid these important questions altogether. You and I blaspheme God, when we blame God for our unhealthy marriage. Many marriages have come short of displaying God’s glory because we’ve not given God His proper place in our lives.

It boils down to this: a healthy marriage is a reflection of a healthy spiritual life. Conversely a mediocre spiritual life forfeits the dynamic power of love, which God in His infinite wisdom and grace has provided us through the Holy Spirit to make our marriage a bliss.

Consequently, wherever the fruit of agape love is manifested in a marriage relationship, such a union takes the meaning of marriage to a new height, leaving the jaws of the world dropping in utter amazement.



## Day Two - Section Two - Forgiveness in Marriage

### Moses Onwubiko

We must not forget that marriage is an ultimate battle ground. This is why forgiveness is so important and we will look at two aspects:

- The impact of forgiveness on Spiritual Life
- The impact of forgiveness on Marriage

God's purpose is to show Satan and his fallen creatures that two regenerated individuals, male and female can be united in holy matrimony and become a trophy of God's glory to the lost and dying world. But Satan and his minions refused to buy into God's claim. In an effort to make God a liar, they take their war to the home of every married Christian couple.

Scripture gives us a glimpse of the ongoing courtroom confrontation between God and Satan. *Open your Bible to Job chapter 1.* God's boast to Satan regarding Job's spiritual integrity shows His love for Job. "For there is no one like him on earth" (Job. 1:8). Satan refused to accept God's impeccable testimony. Satan's sarcastic reply revealed his frustration, anger and envy. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (v. 9).

Pause for a moment.

- What's your take away from Satan's question?
- Job is dead; Satan is not. Could it be that we the living are still caught in the line of fire where Satan's objective is to prove God wrong?

Back to Job. The deduction is that Satan accused God of bribery. In other words, Satan in essence was saying, "God, You bless Job abundantly as an incentive to love and obey You." Knowing Satan, it wouldn't be different in our case. Are you having a blessed married life? Who knows whether Satan has already gone to the courtroom of heaven on your behalf? All assaults come from the evil one. The vicious attack on Job came from him. Right now, Satan is either planning an attack on your marriage, or he's already lunched a barrage of assaults on you and your spouse. His aim? To discredit you as a corporate witness. He roars like a lion seeking to devour you. (1 Peter 5:8).

Question: what has forgiveness to do with marriage? *Everything!*

Forgiveness is the superglue that binds a loosed or broken relationship. It's a healing balm for a bruised soul.

## 1. The Impact of Forgiveness on Spiritual Life

Forgiveness opens the pipeline of fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. When we forgive, bitterness, venom and an outburst of anger and the sort are purged. This frees the pipeline of fellowship. On the negative side, lack of forgiveness halts one's spiritual life necessary for building a healthy marriage.

### Lack of Forgiveness

“But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:15).

Scripture is clear. When we refuse to forgive others of their sins, we block God's pathway of our own forgiveness. Someone argues, “Well, if we refuse to forgive others and confess the rest of our known sins that we will be purified from all unrighteousness. Let's assume for a moment that such assumption is true. The danger is that bitterness will rupture the forgiven believer's fellowship and sends him back to carnality. “Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you” (Heb. 12:15 NLT).

Forgiveness uproots bitterness.

Forgiveness is so crucial to the spiritual life that we are mandated to measure our forgiveness against Christ's. “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. *Forgive as the Lord forgave you*” (Col. 3:13 emphasis added).

### Forgive as the Lord forgave you

Talk is cheap. We claim to forgive those who offend us. Do we really forgive as we ought to? Christ is our measuring rod in forgiveness. How did He forgive you? He wiped out your past sins and promises never to use them against you for any reason. That's the sparkling of grace! You are forgiven and you know your slate is wiped clean. “You have cast all my sins behind Your back... and will remember them no more” (Isa. 38:17; Jer. 31:34).

That's what God expects of us when we forgive others. Forgive and forget. Forgive in the sense that you hold no grudges against the one who wronged you. Forget in the sense that you will never retrieve the sin and hold it against the one who wronged you. This is spiritual life.

Aha, how can a sinful man trapped in the coat of sin nature *forgive as Christ forgave*? I am glad that you asked the question. It is not by might, nor by power, but by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4:6). When the Holy Spirit controls the believer, he uses the fruit of the Holy Spirit, love, joy...kindness (Gal. 5:22) to forgive as Christ forgave. In other words, the Holy Spirit, who enabled Christ in His human nature to live victoriously, will enable the believer to do the things that are not natural—living like Christ.

## **Point of Truth**

By and large, a healthy spiritual life is the only fertile ground for cultivating a healthy marriage. This is God's plan. There's no other!

## **2. The Impact of Forgiveness on Marriage**

Forgiveness has a huge impact on a marriage relationship. It restores and nourishes marriage bond. True forgiveness brings the offender and the offended back to the circle of love, reminding them of Christ's love for them.

By restoring relationship through forgiveness, the couple will stand as witnesses to the world, Satan and his minions, demonstrating that though fallen, man in regeneration, empowered by the Holy Spirit can still reflect God's glory beyond measure. This is the epitome of Christian marriage.

