



[Matthew 24:12-13](#)

(12) Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, (13) but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

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In recent years, the indicator in verse 12 about "[love](#) . . . grow[ing] cold" has often been cited when a grievance toward a particular church organization or group arose. This verse, however, can easily be misapplied, so it behooves us to more fully understand what it means so that we can know if or when it is being fulfilled.

Understanding the word translated "love" is a vital first step. It is the well-known Greek word *agape*, the love that people have only because [God](#) has given it to them ([Romans 5:5](#); [II Timothy 1:7](#); [I John 2:5](#); [4:7-8](#)). The people whose *agape* love is growing cold must have had it in the first place, so it refers to those whom God has called into a relationship with Him ([John 6:44](#)).

It is important to differentiate between this *agape* love and the other types of love mentioned in the Bible. *Phileo* love means "to be a friend to" or "to be fond of" a person or object, indicating "having affection for," whereas *Strong's Concordance* notes that *agape* "is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the *deliberate assent of the will* as a matter of *principle, duty and propriety*" (emphasis ours). Similarly, *philadelphia* love means "fraternal affection" or "brotherly love." *Agape* love, though, is manifested first toward God, because it is a dutiful, submissive, obedient love, one that does what is right regardless of how a person feels about it. In other words, *agape* love has a *moral* core rather than an *emotional* one.

The Bible shows that, in general, we show *agape* love to the Father through our obedience and submission, especially to His law ([John 14:15-23](#); [15:10](#); [I John 2:5](#); [5:2-3](#); [II John 6](#)). We show *agape* love to each other through sacrifice, just as Jesus' example of love—to those around Him and to us—was through sacrifice ([John 13:34](#); [15:12-13](#); [Romans 13:8-10](#); [Galatians 5:13](#); [Ephesians 5:2, 25](#); [I John 3:16](#), 18; 4:9-12).

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The meaning of [Matthew 24:12](#), then, is that *agape* love will grow cold because of lawlessness, even though there may still be brotherly love, [kindness](#), and human affection. Remember, we show *agape* love to God through obedience—the opposite of lawlessness—so when disobedience increases, *agape* grows cold. An example of this appears in the letter to the Ephesians, where Jesus says that they had left their first love—their first *agape*—and He commands them to [repent](#) ([Revelation 2:4-5](#)), that is, to turn away from their lawlessness. When there is compromise, or the setting aside of God's standard of righteousness and [holiness](#), then the submissive love toward God and the sacrificial love toward man will begin to grow cold. It is a simple cause-and-effect relationship.

In this prophecy, [Jesus Christ](#) is describing an ongoing breakdown in the [relationship with God](#). Since that most important relationship is the source of *agape* love, if it is waning, then it will be evident in other relationships. A symptom may be that sacrificial love toward other people is decreasing, but the real cause is that the relationship with God is cooling off.

A cause of this deterioration is found in the preceding verse: "Then many [false prophets](#) will rise up and deceive many" ([Matthew 24:11](#)). While a true prophet always upholds [God's law](#) ([Deuteronomy 13:3-4](#); [Isaiah 8:19-20](#); [Romans 8:7](#)), a [false prophet](#) is willing to compromise with God's standard of holiness when it suits him. Those following a false teacher will likewise slide into lawlessness, becoming separated from God ([Isaiah 59:1-3](#)).

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:
[Is the Love of Many Growing Cold?](#)

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[Compromise](#)

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[Love Growing Cold](#)

[Philadelphia](#)

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