

[Matthew 24:12](#)

(12) And because lawlessness shall be multiplied, the love of many shall grow cold.

A Faithful Version

Not long ago, this nation saw the senseless massacre of twenty kindergarten children at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, plus six other adults. The shooter's motives were unclear, although it was reported that he was "troubled" and perhaps "autistic" and "weird." His grade school classmates and neighbors are not surprised at all that his life ended this way. He seems to have been a time-bomb just waiting to go off.

Obviously, his actions in killing so many people—and children especially—show no love at all. One would have to be "cold," without feeling, to do such a thing. It brings up another verse, [II Timothy 3:2](#), where the apostle Paul prophesies that the last days would be dangerous because "men will be lovers of themselves," and in verse 3, "without self-control, brutal." It seems we are seeing this prophecy fulfilled in ever-greater frequency, as people seem to have less and less compunction about terrorizing and taking the lives of their fellow human beings. Under the grip of a merciless narcissism, many are losing their humanity.

Even so, [Matthew 24:12](#) is not speaking about such people; it is not addressed to the people in [the world](#) at large but directly to Jesus' disciples and their spiritual descendants. How do we know this? Jesus uses the word *agape* for the [love that grows cold](#). Such spiritual love, godly love, is unattainable by those driven by the spirit of this world. This *agape* love—the love of God—is the kind that is "poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit [which] was given to us" ([Romans 5:5](#)). Jesus, then, is warning His church

that the wickedness of the world will increase to such an extent that it would sap the spiritual heat out of His own people, causing their love to grow cold.

This has two major ramifications: 1) People in God's church will love Him less, and 2) they will love each other less. These are the two recipients of godly love. We will see the effects of this drop in the temperature of our love in reduced time and respect for [God](#) and in deteriorating relationships between brethren. We will ease off in our prayer and study, relax our formality before God, and behave carelessly ("[sin](#) in haste and [repent](#) at leisure"), assuming that He will forgive us our every trespass. Yet, we will [gossip](#) about our church friends, take advantage of their [kindness](#) and forgiveness, betray them when convenient, and judge them mercilessly even for their most minor faults. None of these things express godly love; they all portray love growing cold.

Late in his life, the apostle John wrote almost exclusively about *agape* love. Most of his audience probably thought it was an obsession with him, and they likely turned a deaf ear to him, complaining that the old man was ranting about his pet subject again. But perhaps John remembered hearing these words from Jesus' lips decades before and realized that love was what the church needed to be reminded about. "This is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" ([I John 3:11](#)). "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" ([I John 4:20](#)).

Clearly, he saw the practice of godly love in the church as critical to those living in his day. How much more critical is it to those of us who live so much nearer to the horrors of the end time and the [return of Jesus Christ](#)? The horror of the murders in Newtown, Connecticut, should remind us that we need to stoke the fires of God's love as we see the Day swiftly approaching.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Related Topics:

[Agape](#)

[Love Growing Cold](#)

[Love One Another](#)

[Lovers of Themselves](#)

[Narcissism](#)