



"Human things must be known to be loved; but Divine things must be loved to be known."

—Blaise Pascal

01-Feb-13

## Breakfast by the Sea (Part Two)

Most translations fail to bring out that two different words are translated as "love" in [John 21:15-17](#). Twice, [Jesus](#) asks Peter if he had *agape* love for Him, and both times Peter says, "Yes, You know that I love you"—but Peter does not use *agape* but *phileo*, which indicates personal warmth, regard, and affection. *Phileo* is a more fickle, more human love than *agape*, which is a reasoned, intentional devotion with a moral core. *Agape* love comes from [God](#), and it is focused on what is right and best for the other person, regardless of how one feels.

Jesus twice asks Peter if he has this *agape* love, and both times Peter can only truthfully respond that he has tremendous personal affection for Him. Peter cannot say he has *agape* love for Him, when he had recently demonstrated that he did not love Jesus as much as he had claimed. Peter feels personal warmth and affection for His Messiah, but when it came to putting His will above his own, Peter is not as devoted as he has claimed. We can see that *the love of God cannot be separated from the will of God*. His will forms the basis for *agape* love; if an act is outside of God's will, it cannot be *agape* love.

Peter probably thought his intention to sacrifice his life was an act of *agape* love! After all, that same [Passover](#) night, Jesus had told the disciples that "greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" ([John 15:13](#)). So Peter may have reasoned that dying with Jesus would demonstrate godly love. Yet, because that was not God's will for Peter, such a great sacrifice was not actually the love of God!

The third time that Jesus questions Peter, He uses the word *phileo*. He lowers the bar, essentially asking Peter if He were a close friend and felt affection for Him. This upsets Peter, because, undoubtedly, his recent failure is still fresh in his mind, and these reminders are painful. The gospels record that after Peter had denied Christ the third time, and the rooster crowed, that Peter "wept bitterly," indicating painfully moving grief.

In [John 21:17](#), that grief is still present: "Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?'" And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.'" Here the

translations obscure another important distinction. In addition to the two Greek words for "love," these verses also contain two different Greek words translated as "know." When Peter says, "You *know* all things," it is the same Greek word that he uses in his previous answers—*eido*—and it means "to see," usually in a figurative sense. It has the sense of understanding, comprehending, and perceiving.

But this third time, after Jesus asks if Peter had *phileo* love for him, he responds with a different word that means "to know." This time he uses *ginosko*, indicating an experiential knowledge. His third response, then, implies that Jesus understood all things and had experienced Peter's *phileo* love toward Him, yet the humbled Peter will not claim that Jesus had experienced *agape* love from him. The lesson for Peter (and for us) is that we cannot have *agape* love if Christ does not supply it. If He is active in us, however, then the meager efforts we put forth—if they are His will—will begin to produce abundantly, just like the earlier great catch of fish.

Each time Peter responds, Jesus commands him in a way that links to Peter's answers. The meaning is that *because* Peter loves Christ, here is what Christ wants him to do. His commands apply mostly to the ministry, yet there are aspects of them that every member can put into practice. This is not to suggest that we try to take on a role that God has not given to us, but these commands provide guidelines for how each of us can support those God puts in our path.

In verses 15 and 17, Jesus tells Peter to *feed* those under his care. In verse 15, it is with regard to the lambs—that is, Christians who are either young in years or new in the faith—and in verse 17, it refers to more mature sheep. Christ's emphasis is on *providing spiritual food*. In verse 16, Jesus tells Peter to "*tend* [His] sheep." "Tending" encompasses all of what a shepherd does for his sheep, which goes beyond just feeding, indicating total guardianship of the sheep, including tasks like guiding, governing, defending, putting them in a fold, checking for disease, etc.

On occasion, lay-members can contribute similarly. If, in our interactions with our brethren, we are reminded of a sermon or article that may edify them, we can certainly mention it. Perhaps we find ourselves in a position to give helpful advice or to warn other sheep about a wolf. Maybe we can keep someone from going astray by exposing some religious deception.

Yet, before assuming that we know what is good—and loving—it is wise for us to seek God's direction before pursuing our ideas of how someone can be "helped." Peter neglected to seek God's will before plunging into a course of action, and he ended up stumbling badly in trying to show *agape* love. If we act by our own will, even if it is out of the deepest of human regard and affection, it will not bear the same good fruit as if it were God's will. Sometimes, in spite of what initially seems best to us, what is actually best is for God to work it out in a way that does not involve us or in a way in which our part is very different from what we had imagined. There is a time to speak, and a time to remain silent; a time to act, and a time to sit on one's hands. The only way to know the time is to seek the Good Shepherd and wait for His response.

Jesus continues His instructions to Peter in [John 21:18-19](#):

"Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

When Peter was younger, he was his own man. Even within the parameters of God's law, he was accustomed to living on his own terms. His rebuke of Jesus regarding His death and resurrection, his determination to go to the death with Him, and his triple denial, are all examples of Peter "girding himself" and "walk[ing] where [he] wished." Until this point, he had been largely self-directed, but Jesus prophesies that, by the time he was old, Peter would be directed by somebody else, even to the point of a violent death. The language invokes an image of Peter being led by a Roman soldier to his crucifixion.

But there is something else to consider: This prophecy accepts Peter's pledge to Christ to lay down his life and endure both prison and death, but it also indicates that at his life's end, Peter would be fully submissive to God's will. *God* would be directing Peter's life, and he will have surrendered, even to the point of martyrdom. By allowing God to gird and carry him where he did not wish, Peter would then follow Christ in glorifying God by making a faithful witness.

Submission to God, seeking His will, and surrendering to it are encapsulated in Jesus' final two words: "Follow Me." Practicing that now is what will set the stage for Him to produce abundantly through us, both in this life and in the age to come.

- David C. Grabbe

---

## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Love God, Love Neighbor](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Popular music trumpets the theme of romantic love as the answer to all the world's ills, yet the composers of these lyrics have no idea as to what love really is. The fuzzy definition of love is responsible for tolerance of sin, deviancy and liberal, multi-cultural mis-evaluations. We should have a more mature understanding of love for God and love for neighbor. The outgoing concern toward other beings begins with God the Father to Jesus Christ to us. Without godly love, real love does not exist. Real love does not exist in isolation; another being must always be the object of real love. God's plan involving the reciprocal sharing of love among members of God's Family began well before the foundations of the world, at which time a possible sacrifice for sin had to be factored in. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The love of God, through the mechanism of His Holy Spirit, works on our inner beings (our mind and spirit), making us like Him, demonstrating the love of God, loving God with all our minds (keeping His commandments) and our neighbors (including our enemies) as ourselves. The extent that we love our brethren may be an accurate gauge as to how much we love God.

---

## From the Archives: Featured Article

### [Learning to Love One Another](#)

by Geoff Preston (1947-2013)

We may look around the church of God and wonder why so many are not being healed. Geoff Preston, suffering a chronic illness himself, uses his experiences to assure us that God is working out even these matters for our good.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

---