

Do You Love Me

1 Cor 13:13

1

13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul begins chapter 13 by talking about spiritual gifts. These are the same gifts he speaks of in ch. 12 verse 1. Tongues, miraculous knowledge, spiritual gifts, but the real impact of what he is talking about is love. That's his point when he says...

1 Cor 13:1

2

1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Love is the key in all that we do in our relationship with God. Christ tells of those who come to him...

Matt 7:21-23

3

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. **22** "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' **23** "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

A relationship with God is not just going through the motions. It isn't just about doing the right things, it's about doing the right things for the right reason. These people came to Christ having done the right things, but they didn't do them for the right reason, they didn't do them out of love for God, and Christ defines that as lawlessness. If we don't respond out of love then we respond out of lawlessness. The other side of that same coin though, is that we can say we have all the love possible, but if we don't keep His commandments, then that love means nothing either. In the passage we began with in **1 Cor. 13:13**, Paul illustrates the vital importance of love. Understand, that he is not trying to compare faith or hope with love in terms of being necessary, they are all equally necessary and they are all equally essential to our relationship with God. His point is that we must have love in all that we do, in our faith, in our hope, in our actions.

That said, it makes sense that we have a complete understanding of what that love is. In...

2 John 6

4

6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments.

God defines for us what this love is all about. The Biblical definition of love is wanting for the best of the object of that love. With that understanding look at...

Eph 5:1-2

5

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; **2** 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.

Christ is the very manifestation of the love of God for man, **Jn. 3:16**, and God, through Paul, uses Christ's sacrifice to illustrate that love when He gave himself for all of man's sin. Now look at,

John 21:15

6

15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"

So given the importance of loving God and His Word, given that Peter had dedicated the last two or three years of his life in travelling with Jesus as one of his disciples, given that he had been part of the limited commission sent to teach the Jews about Jesus, given all of that, plus so much more, it is hard for me to imagine the emotion of this conversation and of our Lord's question to him. It had to seem to him that the Lord was questioning his actions of the past years of his ministry. **7** For me, this is one of the most moving passages in the scriptures. We see here Peter, the one who always seemed so brash, so spontaneous in his commitment and love for the Lord, sometimes even to his undoing, engaging in what had to be a very distressing conversation, at least for him, with the Lord. I have to wonder what was going through his mind when Jesus asked this. Was Jesus questioning his love for the Lord? Was He trying to probe the depth of Peter's love? Was this a rebuke for what Peter had done on the night Christ was betrayed?

Matt 26:31-35

8

31 Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.'" **32** "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." **33** But Peter answered and said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." **34** Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times." **35** Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.

Peter knew that he had sunk to enormous depths of hypocrisy that night of betrayal when he went so far as to swear that he did not even know Jesus, let alone having been one His disciples that had followed Him. Did Peter recognize that he had put his trust in the wrong things? We see his overconfidence and arrogance when he tells the Lord that he would never deny Him, even to the point of death. We watch as he goes away and weeps bitterly after hearing the rooster crow and seeing Jesus look at him after he had done just that, not once but thrice. Did Peter learn from his mistake? Did he now know that his trust and confidence needed to be put in the Lord and following His teachings and examples and not in his own perceived strength?

I have often wondered whether this was the same Peter that drew his sword so impetuously, that Jesus asks, "Do you Love me more than these?"

There is some discussion in the commentaries about whether Jesus is asking Peter if he loves the Lord more than he loves the bread and fish they were eating or other things of this world. I find that thought to be almost demeaning to both Peter and Christ. Or if he loves the Lord more than he loves the rest of the disciples, but I don't think that that is it either, I think the Lord is asking Peter if he thinks he loves the Lord more than the other disciples do. In times past, we might have expected Peter to claim just that, so this might be viewed as a test for Peter, I don't know, maybe the Lord was trying to determine if Peter had learned his lesson about being too arrogant in his confidence. Maybe, but I see a twofold purpose in His question to Peter. I do think that one aspect of the question is for Peter to consider his response. When we put our trust in our overconfidence and self assurance as opposed to faithful obedience, we, like Peter, are doomed to repeat his mistake, relying on ourselves instead of the Lord and failing. I think that the second aspect of the Lord's question is to try and get Peter and the rest of the disciples to begin to focus on the future.

In this lesson, we are going to spend a little time looking at these aspects. Let's look again at John's account of the conversation.

John 21:15-17

9

15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." **16** He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." **17** He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love

Me?" 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. "Jesus said to him," Tend My sheep.

There is a dynamic occurring in this conversation that much has been made of, and rightly so, I think. Interestingly, in verses **15** and **17** the lord tells Peter to "Tend" His sheep. The idea of "tend" here is from the Greek...

Bosko (bo/skw, NT:1006),

10

"To feed," is primarily used of a herdsman (from boo, "to nourish," the special function being to provide food; the root is bo, found in boter, "a herdsman or herd," and botane, "fodder, pasture"), its uses are (a) literal, Matt 8:30; in v. 33, the RV corrects the KJV, "they that kept," to "they that fed," as in Mark 5:14 (KJV and RV) and Luke 8:34; in Mark 5:11 and Luke 8:32, "feeding"; Luke 15:15; (b) metaphorical, of spiritual ministry, John 21:15,17

This is as opposed to the term He uses in **verse 16**, which comes from a different Greek word...

Poimaino (poimai/nw, NT:4165),

11

"To act as a shepherd" (from poimen, "a shepherd"), is used (a) literally, Luke 17:7, RV, "keeping sheep," for KJV, "feeding cattle"; 1 Cor 9:7, (b) metaphorically, "to tend, to shepherd"; said of Christ Matt 2:6, RV, "shall be Shepherd of" (for KJV, "shall rule"); of those who act as spiritual shepherds under Him, John 21:16, RV, "tend" (for KJV "feed"), so 1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28, "to feed" ("to tend" would have been a consistent rendering; a shepherd does not only "feed" his flock); of base shepherds, Jude 12.

Bosko means to give sustenance, to feed, while Poimaino, used literally, means the keeping of sheep and carries with it a far deeper meaning; to guide, to lead, or to shepherd.

But Peter's response does speak to his tendency to fall back into his old ways, to proclaim in his zeal and overconfidence that no one loves the Lord more than he and that no one will be able to show their love for others better than he. Do we see ourselves in Peter's answer? One of the questions that consistently comes up when we talk with others is their perception that we think we love the Lord more than they do and therefore that makes us better than them. And, truth be told, we, as Christians, need to be careful in our discussions, that we make sure that we portray Christ and His Word in our actions and speech and not any type of arrogance in our own selves. Christians must always remember that Christ died for all and wants all to come to repentance. This is not a competition between us and them. God wants them as well as us and it is up to us to try and help them to become us. I, as I would hope that we all do, would like to think that no one has a greater love for Christ than I do. But what is the point in that kind of thinking? I am not going to be judged by how I compare with anyone else, God does not grade on a curve, rather, I am going to be judged by how I compare with the Word, which is an absolute standard. My faith and obedience are the criteria that I need to be concerned with, not what anyone else is doing. This was a lesson Peter needed to learn. It is a lesson we all need to learn. Our focus is to be inward, primarily, and outward, only as far as we are seeking to help others learn their own lessons from God's standard.

There are two words that I think we need to define to help us understand the discussion between Peter and the Lord.

Agapao (ag-ap-ah'-o);

12

"Agape and agapao are used in the NT **(A)** to describe the attitude of God toward His Son, John 17:26; the human race, generally, John 3:16; Rom 5:8, and to such as believe on the Lord Jesus Christ particularly John 14:21; **(B)** to convey His will to His children concerning their attitude one toward another, John 13:34, and toward all men, 1 Thess 3:12; 1 Cor 16:14; 2 Peter 1:7; **(C)** to express the essential nature of God, 1 John 4:8

Phileo (fil-eh'-o); 13

Is to be distinguished from **agapao** in this, that **phileo** more nearly represents "tender affection." The two words are used for the "love" of the Father for the Son, John 3:35 (No. 1), and 5:20 (No. 2); for the believer, 14:21 (No. 1) and 16:27 (No. 2); both, of Christ's "love" for a certain disciple, 13:23 (No. 1), and 20:2 (No. 2). Yet the distinction between the two verbs remains, and they are never used indiscriminately in the same passage; if each is used with reference to the same objects, as just mentioned, each word retains its distinctive and essential character.

These understandings are important as we look at this passage and begin to break it down. When Christ asks Peter if he loves Him, He is using the term "Agapao", but when Peter answers, I love you, he uses "Phileo". Do you see what is happening? Christ is asking Peter if he has an esteem, a value, a loving attitude for the Lord and what He has done, Peter's answer is indicative that he either doesn't understand what the Lord is asking or that he is afraid to cross the line into arrogance again, so he stays safe and says, Lord I have a "tender affection" for you. This happens twice before Christ changes His question to reflect Peter's answer and uses "Phileo" in the question. Vines puts it this way...

14 **The distinction between the two verbs finds a conspicuous instance in the narrative of John 21:15-17. The context itself indicates that agapao in the first two questions suggests the "love" that values and esteems (cf. Rev 12:11). It is an unselfish "love," ready to serve. The use of phileo in Peter's answers and the Lord's third question, conveys the thought of cherishing the Object above all else, of manifesting an affection characterized by constancy, from the motive of the highest veneration.**

I don't think any of us think that Peter didn't love the Lord. But I am not sure that that is what the Lord is trying to emphasize. It seems that Christ is pointing Peter towards what his purpose is going to be as an Apostle. Note the Lord's responses to Peter, "Tend my Lambs", "Shepherd my Sheep", and "Tend my Sheep". Jesus wants Peter to respond to His, the Lord's, newborn converts, lambs, and also those that are more established, the sheep, with and from Love. Love, not just for the followers, but the affection, esteem, and value that Peter has for the Lord.

Our efforts in helping each other, teaching others about God, or living our confession for the world to see, are a direct reflection of our Love for Christ, God, and the Word, and as a result of their Love for us as manifested in that Word.

Peter had needed to transition from his arrogant overconfidence to someone who recognized the power that is in Christ to save **all** who come to Him, and to let that power manifest itself in the way Peter tended to the Lord's followers. Note Isaiah's prophecy...

Isa 40:11 15

11 Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs, And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes

The Love that was shown in the sacrifice of Christ, both His, in His offering, and God's in sending Him, far out measures any Love that we as men could ever possibly begin to show back.

When we allow the Love of God and Christ to dwell within us and radiate out from us, then we are tending his sheep.

John 21:18 16

18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go."

This might seem like an unusual thought to have in this discussion. The point that is being made is that Peter, at this point in his life, was in control, but there would come a time when he would not be.

John 21:19

17

19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.

Christ was telling Peter that he would be taken against his will and put to death. This statement is not out of context with their discussion. Peter is on the verge of becoming a central figure in the establishment of Church. This is what Jesus told him in....

Matt 16:17-19

18

17 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. **18** "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. **19** "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

As a result of this notoriety, Peter will become a target, a target for all that will want to stop the growth of the Church for whatever their reasoning, and that because of his role in helping to spread the Gospel, there will be those that will come to take him and put him to death. Peter's reliance on the Love of Christ and God would be pivotal in his ability to withstand the difficulties of what lay ahead.

Do we Love Jesus more than these? Do we love Him more than our father and mother? Do we Love Him more than sister or brother? How about more than husband or wife or children? How about more than friends or careers? How about more than the things of this world? There are two true manifestations of our Love for Christ. One is what we are willing to give up for Him. The other is that we are to cling to him.

That seems to be the message we should get from **Jn. 21**.

Do you Love, Agapao, me?

19

What are you willing to give up for me? What do you value me more than? What are you willing to give up, in order to Love me?

And

Do you love, Phileo, me?

20

Are you willing to cling to me, to Love me in the face of whatever difficulties you might run into in this world? Is your Love for me so great that you will anchor your soul in my Love for you?

What does our Love for Him do for us?

God gave His love to us so that we might reflect that love back to Him...

John 14:15

21

15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.