

Th131 God's Plan

Lesson Th131- 6 The Nature of Love

In our previous lesson we learned that God is love. In this lesson we will begin to understand the nature of God's love.

In many languages there is only one word for love. This can cause people to misunderstand the nature of God's love which is pure and perfect. The New Testament portion of the Bible was written in the Greek language. The Greeks had four different words for love. Each of the words described a different type of love. The word *eros* was used to describe sexual love. The Greek word *storge* was used to describe the natural love that parents have for their children. The next word is *phileo*. This describes the type of love or affection that friends or brothers have for each other. It is a matter of the heart. *Phileo* denotes emotional attachment. The final Greek word for love is *agapao*. It usually describes a love that is a choice or of the mind.

The New Testament uses only two of the four words for love: *phileo* and *agapao*. Both of these words are used to describe God's love for mankind and thus we know that God's love for mankind is complete and perfect. God loves us from His heart and from His mind. God has strong emotional feelings of love for people and He has chosen to love us.

Which of these two loves is greater? For some people emotional love is the greatest. It is something one feels in their heart. Emotional love can spur a person into doing great acts of love to benefit the one who is loved. But emotional love has a potential weakness. As one's emotions change, their love can change with it. Love that is a decision of the mind is long-lasting, steady, and able to bear great injustices.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the apostle John wrote about Jesus appearing to His disciples on a number of occasions during the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension to heaven.

Some of the disciples left Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection. They returned to their village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where Peter and his brother Andrew had a fishing business with John and his brother James. Nathanael, Thomas, and two other followers were there with them. Peter announced to his friends, "I'm going fishing!" His fellow disciples volunteered to help and together they went down to the shore and launched the small fishing boat into the Sea of Galilee.

Now the Sea of Galilee is actually a large lake surrounded by mountains and hills. The lake is about 13 kilometers wide and 21 kilometers long. Peter's fishing boat was about 8 meters long and 2 1/2 meters wide and would be either rowed or sailed on the lake.

Together they rowed out into the lake and began fishing using a lightweight circular cast net. Peter would stand near the bow of the boat and grasping the net in his hands, would cast the net away from the boat in such a way that the net would open up into a circle almost 8 meters

across. Around the edge of the net, small stones were attached to cause the net to sink into the water. An attached rope would draw the net back into the boat causing the net to close at the same time. Time after time Peter and his companions took turns casting the net. The hours passed as the disciples fished all night long without netting a single fish.

It was late spring and the waters were beginning to warm. The musht fish, a favorite fish to catch and eat, usually schooled near shore in the winter when the deep water was cold and shallow water was warm. But it was late spring. The Sea of Galilee was warming and the schools of fish were dispersing to deeper water. Thus the disciples had labored throughout the night and had not caught anything. Peter had stripped off his outer garments as he worked hard casting and retrieving the net. The boat was perhaps 100 meters off shore when a man standing at the water's edge began to call to them.

"Friends," the man called loudly, "have you caught any fish?"

"No!" they called back to him.

"Cast your net on the right side of the boat. You will find the fish there."

And so Peter moved to the opposite side of the boat and cast the net one more time. As he began to draw the net back towards the boat he suddenly felt a huge weight. The net was filled with large fish. And then John said to Peter, "Peter! The man on the shore is the Lord!" Peter quickly put on his outer garment and then jumped into the water and swam ashore while the disciples struggled with the huge catch of fish. The net was so heavy that they could not pull it back into the boat but rather had to row the boat back to shore towing the catch of fish behind them.

When they stepped out of the boat and onto the shore, they saw a fire of hot coals. There were fish on the fire and some bread there too. Then Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish that you caught."

Simon Peter got into the boat and pulled the net to the shore. It was full of big fish—153 of them! But even with that many fish, the net did not tear. Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." Jesus walked over to get the bread and gave it to them. He also gave them the fish.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me, do you *agapao* me more than these other men love me?"

Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you, that I *phileo* you."

Then Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lambs."

Again Jesus said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me, do you *agapao* me?"

Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you, that I *phileo* you."

Then Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

A third time Jesus used the word Simon had been using, "Simon, son of John, do you *phileo* me?"

Peter was sad because Jesus asked him three times, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I *phileo* you!"

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep. The truth is, when you were young, you tied your own belt and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will put out your hands, and someone else will tie your belt. They will lead you where you don't want to go." (Jesus said this to show how Peter would die to give glory to God.) Then he said to Peter, "Follow me!" (John 21:1-19).

In this story we see a demonstration of Jesus' love for His disciples and for the type of love He expected from them. Jesus cared about their labors. He knew that they had fished all night and not caught anything. He could have just called to them and told them to come to shore so that He could speak to them. But Jesus' love and compassion for His disciples included blessing the labor of their hands and meeting the need of their hunger. The Lord, their Master, served them by preparing something for them to eat.

Jesus' conversation with Peter is very enlightening. He asked Peter if he loved, *agapao* him. Peter response was the he had *phileo* love for Jesus. Peter was a passionate and emotional man. Perhaps in his mind *phileo* love or emotional love was greater than *agapao*. But Jesus asked the question again. "Do you *agapao* me?" Again Peter gave the emotional response. What was it that Jesus was looking for? Why did Jesus keep asking three times? Perhaps because Peter had also denied Him three times.

Emotions are good. Love that is *phileo*, based upon emotions, is powerful, but can change with one's emotions. *Agapao* is a love that is based upon a choice, a person's will. A person decides to *agapao*. A decision does not change with emotions. A decision remains true even in the face of death. And Jesus knew that the man Peter, who had denied Him before, would one day face death as a martyr. *Phileo* love is good, but *agapao* love will withstand tribulation.

When Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" He answered: "Love [*agapao*] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37).

This lesson is **important** because it helps us understand the different kinds of love and the kind of love we should have for God, based on our decision to love Him.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God has chosen to love us. This decision will not change.

To review this lesson, answer the following questions:

1. What are the two Greek words for love used in the Bible? [Pause 5 seconds]
A. If you said that the two Greek words for love are “*phileo*” and “*agapao*,” you are correct.
2. How would you describe *phileo* love? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said, “*phileo* love is emotional love of the heart,” you answered correctly.
3. How would you describe *agapao* love? [Pause 5 seconds.]
A. If you said, “*agapao* love is of the soul or the mind,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to replay this lesson two or three times until you fully understand the two types of love used in the New Testament and can tell the story of Peter's meeting with Jesus. Then, find someone and tell them the story, teaching them the concepts of *phileo* and *agapao* love. If you or someone you know has failed the Lord in some way, remember how Jesus loved Peter and used him, even after his denial and even after he had decided to go back to his fishing nets. Jesus told him to take care of His lambs and tend his sheep.