

– Continued from page 1 –

him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?'" (17), but the third time He asked He switched from “agapao” to “phileo.” If a substantial difference exists between the two words for love, then He was not asking “*the third time*” – rather, He asked twice, and then asked an entirely new question. Yet, that is not how John recorded the conversation. It was the same question, re-worded.

The words are not as unlike as many teachers and preachers have led students to believe. The divine relationship is such that “*The Father loves the Son*” (John 3:35), but also that “*The Father loves the Son*” (5:20). In one verse, “agapao” expressed God’s love for His only begotten, and, seventy-five verses later, “phileo” described the affection between the Father and the Son. If Peter’s “phileo” love for Christ fell short of the “agapao” love the Lord was asking for, then consistency demands that the reader concludes God the Father’s love toward His anointed diminished, as well. That seems unlikely. Furthermore, the apostle John frequently referred to himself in indirect terms as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Four of those five occurrences employed the word “agapao,” but one used “phileo.” Unless Jesus’ regard for the man whom He entrusted with the care of His mother lessened at one point, it must be admitted that the terms essentially carry the same meaning.

If the words rendered as “love” have tremendously different definitions, then other seeming synonyms in the context, must also carry substantially different meanings. Three times Jesus asked Peter about his love, three times Peter answered, and three times Jesus assigned him a task. The Lord told the apostle, “*Feed My lambs*” (John 21:15), “*Tend My sheep*” (16), and “*Feed My sheep*” (17). English translations accurately convey the variation in Greek terminology. If a difference exists between “agapao” love and “phileo” love, then, in the same verses, there must be a difference between feeding and tending, as well as between lambs and sheep. Seldom, if ever, do teachers and preachers who insist Peter was professing a lesser love also dwell on the apparent differences in Peter’s pastoral mission.

After breakfast on the beach one morning after His resurrection, Jesus had a one-on-one exchange with Simon Peter. Since the impact of that interaction was not about the degree of Peter’s fondness toward the Lord, it must be determined what the honest student’s take-away ought to be.

The man had been warned that Satan was after him (Luke 22:31), but

– Continued on page 3 –

– Continued from page 2 –

declared he was ready for all manner of suffering and even martyrdom (33), so the Master emphasized the warning, specifically foretelling the apostle he would deny Him thrice before the night was through (34). Even with that precise information, Peter did what, just hours earlier, he said he never would; he denied, he denied, and he denied (54-62). Three times, he said, “*I do not know the Man!*” (Matthew 26:72), or some variation on that, as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all chronicle the disappointing episode. However, just as Jesus foretold of Peter’s denial, He likewise foretold of his restoration: “*And when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren*” (Luke 22:32). The account of Jesus inviting Peter to profess his love of the Savior is the fulfillment of that prophecy, that Peter would “*return to*” Jesus. Thus, the repetition. Peter denied, denied, and denied again. Later, he was given explicit opportunity to affirm his love, affirm his love, and affirm his love again. The wayward apostle needed not only His Lord’s welcome, but to expressly and directly proclaim his love.

Immediately following the triple affirmation wherein Peter was restored, Jesus informed him, “*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’*” (John 21:18-19). The prophecy of Peter’s death was not the discouragement one might imagine, but was actually a comfort! He had told the Lord, “*If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!*” (Mark 14:31), yet, the same night, he denied Him over and over. He was already discouraged, disappointed in his own failure. Therefore, when Christ assured him that his death would be as a martyr, it came as a relief. Peter then knew he would not finish his life as a failure, one who denied Christ. He would eventually suffer as he had intended initially.

Jesus was able to reassure Peter of his future steadfastness after letting the once-wavering disciple pledge his devotion. That is what the text is about, not Peter’s lack of love.

**"WHAT MUST I DO
TO BE SAVED?"**

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"THE ASSEMBLING OF
OURSELVES TOGETHER"**

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard
Belén, New Mexico

**Seekers Welcome.
Members Expected.**

**"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN
ANY TRESPASS...
RESTORE SUCH A ONE"**

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS
LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN
SETTINGS OF SILVER"**

PROVERBS 25:11

"Some Christians are experts in knowing athletes' stats, celebrity gossip, or the latest political outrage, but remain novices in knowing the Bible. People will naturally want to learn about what they're excited about. Passion reveals priority."

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

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"THE THIRD TIME"

Bryan Matthew Dockens

Much has been surmised about the depth of Peter's affection for Jesus based on a variance in Greek words attributed to the apostle and the Lord. The third time Christ appeared to the disciples following His resurrection (John 21:14), he conversed directly with Simon Peter, asking him, "Do you love Me more than these?" (15), the word "love" being translated from a conjugation of the Greek verb "agapao," but Peter replied, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You" using the Greek "phileo." Essentially the same exchange follows in the next verse – "He said to him again the second time" (16). Finally, "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?'" (17), but the word for love used by Jesus in this instance is translated using "phileo" instead of "agape" with Peter replying affirmatively with the same term. Allegedly, Peter, having denied the Lord, was unready to commit his love fully and thus expressed a shallower endearment, offering his brotherly love, but not the loftiest love, the sacrificial kind, which the Lord inquired about. Christ, being merciful, supposedly condescended to Peter's frailty and accepted his lesser love. That's how many preachers and teachers present this text, but there are several reasons to reconsider.

Jesus presented His query three times, even though the wording attributed to Him varied in the final instance. Remember, "He said to – Continued on page 2 –

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