

Love and self sacrifice

Key verses

- “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for His friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” John 15:12-14
- “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” 1 Cor.13:13

We will be considering two Greek words that have been translated into the English word “love” in our Bibles, and another that refers to “friendship”.

Those Greek words are:

- “agape” (pronounced ag-ah'-pay)
- “phileo” (pronounced fil-eh'-o)
- “philos” (pronounced fee'-los)

Understanding ‘agape’

In the past many have insisted that the Greek word “agape” refers to Christian love only. Although it is helpful to understand the meaning of “agape”, it should be noted that this word is not always used in a good sense in Scripture. All the following quotes are instances where “agape” is the Greek word used, but not in the sense of Christian love:

- **Demas:** “...having loved this present world” 2 Tim.4:10
- **Pharisees:** “...for you love the best seats” Luke 11:43
- **Sinners:** “...sinners love those who love them.” Luke 6:32
- **The world:** “Do not love the world...” 1 John 2:15

‘Agape’ the self sacrifice

The best way to understand “agape” is that it refers to a **self sacrificing love or desire** in a particular area. Demas sacrificed his future hope in God's Kingdom for the enjoyment of this present world. That was indeed a self sacrifice of great proportions. The lesson we can learn from this is that we have to sacrifice **personal gain and comfort** many times in our life in order to demonstrate this agape love to others **in a good sense**.

If you read 1 Cor.ch13, you will notice how agape love is portrayed as being **completely impartial**, or to put it another way, we have to work at **not showing ‘favouritism’** and not allowing decisions to be based on personal bias. This is probably one of the hardest things for us to do as disciples of Jesus. This impartiality though is based on **what God requires of us**, which may appear to be biased by those who do not have a knowledge of God's way. We are most assuredly accused of bias and lack of love for our country when we state our case for objection to military service, but this decision is based on agape love for Jesus and our desire to serve and obey His commandments (Matt.5:39,26:52). There are other facets of discipleship that people will not connect with love if they do not know God (1Pet.4:4).

Love and obedience

- “If you love Me, you will obey what I command.” John 14:15 N.I.V.
- “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” John 14:21 See also John 15:10
- “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” John 14:23
- “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.” John 15:10

The concept of love and obedience being inextricably linked is clearly portrayed in the above verses. True agape starts with **obedience to God and the commandments of His Son**. Most parents would of course agree with this concept with regards to their own children, so it should not come as a surprise to us when our Heavenly Father also requires obedience from His spiritual children.

‘Phileo’ the kind affection

- “Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.'” John 11:3
- “For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me...” John 16:27 (“Phileo” appears twice in this verse)

The Greek word “phileo” refers to a “**kind affection**” for others. We have a “phileo” for our family members and special friends. “Phileo” is a love that is easier to demonstrate, because it comes from the heart, nevertheless it is still an important part of the **Christian love and compassion** we can show others. **Both God and Jesus have a “phileo” love for us.**

‘Philos’ your friend

- “...Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God.” James 2:23
- “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” James 4:4
- “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” 1 Pet.1:22

Close friendship or attachment is the meaning of the Greek word “philos”. In the verse above the phrase “love of the brethren” is actually the Greek word “Philadelphia” which we are all familiar with, and is probably more accurately translated, “**friend of the brethren**”.

Some handy Strong's Concordance numbers to note

“agape” translated, ‘charity, dear, love’. 25 and 26 NT

“phileo” translated, ‘kiss, love’. 5368 NT

“philos” translated, ‘friend’. 5384 NT