

Love Me... Follow Me – Part 3

Scripture Reading: John 21:1-19

The previous lesson laid out the bigger story. Using Luke 22:31-34, 54-62; and John 21:15-17, we established that there was great spiritual testing and character building going on in Peter's life. Peter sincerely loved his Lord, but he had no idea how unprepared he was for what was about to happen in the events that led to the cross and Christ's resurrection. Satan wanted to break Peter down / tear him apart and make him useless. Jesus preempted Satan's attack with prayer. He promised Peter that he would become a different person. He called Peter to strengthen his brothers. As a shepherd, he was to feed the new converts, as well as the mature saints. This lesson will focus on the Lord's emphasis to Peter on what it means to love Him and follow Him.

Remember that, after the resurrection, Peter was specifically called to meet with Jesus privately (Mark 16:7; Luke 24:33-34; I Corinthians 15:3-5). That meeting doubtless was to give Peter specific counsel and to secure forgiveness and restoration. In a public setting, before the other disciples, Jesus would make it clear to all that Peter was restored and commissioned to ministry as a leader of the Jerusalem church. As Peter had denied Jesus three times, he now could confess Jesus three times. This was not done to mock Peter, but to establish the thoroughness of Peter's forgiveness and restoration. It also emphasized some key elements to faithful service of our Lord.

Let's look at the conversation in John 21:15-17 more closely

Two Greek words: "Agape" and "Phileo."

"Agape" is the word for unconditional, sacrificial love. It is the word that is used for the highest form of love. **"Agape"** love is a choice made, not based on circumstances – not on what others have done or could do for us. Agape love serves and gives. We call it "unconditional" with reference to our love for our fellow man. This love is of divine origin. God originates this love (John 3:16; I John 4:16, 19; I Corinthians 13:1-8a).

"Phileo" is the word for brotherly friendship and camaraderie. It represents a generous, warm, tender affection, and a loyal relationship with others.

These two words were used in the conversation between Jesus and Peter [paraphrasing]:

- "Peter, do you **Agape** Me? Yes, Lord, you know that I **Phileo** you." (John 21:15)
- "Peter, do you **Agape** Me? Yes, Lord, you know that I **Phileo** you." (John 21:16)
- "Peter, do you **Phileo** Me? Yes, Lord, you know that I **Phileo** you." (John 21:17)

Peter was grieved, as he remembered the three denials. But Jesus' point was not to shame Peter, but to emphasize that his love for Christ must grow (Ephesians 3:14-19 cp. I Thessalonians 4:9-10 – vs. 9 **"Phileo"** first, then **"Agape."**; I Peter 1:22 - **"Phileo"** first, then **"Agape."**).

Note that these two words (“Agape” & “Phileo”) are sometimes used interchangeably (John 3:16 [A] cp. John 16:27 [P]; John 3:35 [A] cp. John 5:20 [P]). We must not exclude one for the other. We need them both in our love for Christ and the brethren. **For “Phileo” see** I Corinthians 16:22; Hebrews 13:1 [Titus 3:4 – a form of “Phileo” = “*Philanthropia*” cp. I Peter 3:8 “*Philadelphos*”]. **For “Agape” see** Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 8:28; 13:8; I Corinthians 8:3; I John 3:1,14; 4:7-12,16-19. Peter was affirming his love for Christ, but perhaps was humbled and cautious about using the word “Agape.” There is actually no command to love God, using the word “Phileo.” If we have “Agape” love for Him, it will be enough. It covers all aspects of “Phileo” and exceeds that.

“Agape” love is the fulfillment of everything that embodies our relationship with the Lord. Every aspect of faith, obedience, strength and character has its source in the love of the triune God. See I Corinthians 13:4-8a; II Corinthians 5:14-15; 13:14; John 15:9; 17:26; Romans 5:1-5; 8:35-39; 15:30; Galatians 2:20; 5:22-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; 3:14-19; 6:23; I Thessalonians 3:12-13; 4:9; II Thessalonians 2:16-17; 3:5; I Timothy 1:14; II Timothy 1:7; I John 3:1-3; II John 1:3; Jude 1:1-2, 20-21; Revelation 1:5-6; 3:19.

Let’s take a brief look at what it means to follow Christ. (Gleanings from John chapter 21)

Fishers of men – Jesus used this metaphor, when calling some of His disciples to follow Him (Matthew 4:18-20; Mark 1:16-18). In **John 21:1-14**, Jesus used this miracle to remind them of His previous calling (Luke 5:1-11). Though Peter had a unique calling, we all share in such a great work. See Matthew 10:32-33; 5:13-16 (cp. Philippians 2:14-16); I Corinthians 9:19-23; II Timothy 2:8-12.

Shepherds – We follow Christ by loving what He loves (His People / His sheep – John 10:1-30). We follow His example of caring for His people as a shepherd would care for sheep. See **John 21:15-17**; Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-4. This is not just for Elders and Pastors. It is a work that concerns all of us. See John 13:34-35; Matthew 18:1-20; I Corinthians 10:23-24, 31-33; 12:25-27; Romans 12:4-16; 14:17-19; 15:1-7, 13-14; Philippians 2:1-5; Hebrews 10:24-25 cp. Jeremiah 33:12.

Taking up our cross and following Him – In general, we all are to die to self and yield our new lives to Christ and to the will of God (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:9-18; II Corinthians 5:14-15). Besides his call to service, Peter was foretold that He would physically die in like manner as Christ (**John 21:18-19**; 13:36 cp. II Peter 1:14). Each person has a unique calling and plan from God. It is our responsibility to seek His will and lovingly submit to His plan for us. See Matthew 16:24-27; John 16:33; I Thessalonians 5:18; I Peter 1:3-9; 2:19-25; 4:12-19; II Timothy 3:10-12; 4:6-8,16-18.

Addendum: Distractions from following Christ.

John 21:20-22 – Getting our eyes off of Christ and onto others (Hebrews 12:2-3; Galatians 1:15-17; Philippians 1:20-21; 2:5; 3:10; 4:13).

John 21:23 – Getting sidetracked by non-issues or by issues of lesser importance (II Timothy 2:14-18,23; I Corinthians 2:1-2; Colossians 2:6-10; Hebrews 13:9; Romans 1:16; Galatians 6:14).