

Hello, again, I'm Pastor Stephen, filling the pulpit while Pastor Jeff works on a couple projects. He'll be back next week, but this week we are looking at part two of our "How To Love" series. Last week we looked at how to love God, and this week we are going to look at how to love others.

When we say the word love, we sometimes mean brotherly love, we sometimes mean romantic, sometimes familial. But we just have one word, love. We may say crush, smitten, amore, bromance. Yes, our language is constantly evolving.

But when you read the word "love" in the New Testament it could be one of any 4 Greek words.

Because We'll be talking about love this week, I thought I would share what each of those words mean, if you do all your research on Wikipedia and AI chatrooms.

(SLIDE 1) Eros is one Greek word for "love." Eros, sounds like "arrows" (SLIDE 2) and that's because it is. Literally, it is the arrows that cupid shoots at people, making them fall madly in love with each other (SLIDE3). So Eros is romantic love.

A second Greek word for love is Storgi. (SLIDE 4) While some people think this is a love of cigars, it is actually not etymologically connected to the Greek word stogi, it is more connected to the word stork. (SLIDE 5) And as we all know, the stork is how babies get brought into this world. So Storgi has to do with a parental or familial love.

One Greek word that many people are familiar with is Phileo or Philo (SLIDE 6). It sounds familiar to us because it is in a lot of words we use like Philadelphia (SLIDE 7). And because of that it is easy for people to immediately surmise that Philo is the love of Philadelphia cheese steak (SLIDE 8) or a general love of sandwiches.

Which brings us to our final Greek word for love, Agape. (SLIDE 9). Agape, sounds like something familiar. Over the centuries the A in the middle became a softer "uh" sound and the word changed to a guppie (SLIDE 10), which is a love of all things, fish? (SLIDE 11)

I mean, not horrible for Wikipedia, but we need to fix this.

While Eros, does mean romantic love, it has more to do with the god of romance than archery. (SLIDE 12)

While Storgi, doesn't actually have anything to do with Storks, (SLIDE 13) it's not a bad way to remember that it really is about the love a mother or father has for their child.

And, while Phileo, may not have anything to do with sandwiches, it does mean affinity, (SLIDE 14) brotherly love or friendship. Philadelphia literally means brotherly love. You also hear the word in Philanthropist, a person who loves humanity, cinephile, a person who loves movies.

But where Philo means you love something because of a connection or what it is, Agape, rather than being about a guppie,(SLIDE 15) is the love God has for us.

What is the difference between Phileo and Agape? Where Phileo indicates a love, there tends to be an affinity or reason. While Agape, is just a general, unconditional love. You best express it around Christmas time when you say, "Peace on earth and goodwill toward men"

When Jesus is sitting with Peter, eating fish around a campfire. If you remember the story, it was after the resurrection. Jesus told the disciples to cast their nets on the other side of the boat and they pulled up so many fish that it almost sunk them.

Peter jumped into the water because he knew that it was Jesus calling to them from the shore. And as they sat around the campfire Jesus asks Peter if he “agape” loves him, but each time Peter replies with “Phileo.” Jesus twice says, Peter, do you love me unconditionally, and each time Peter replies, yes Lord, I love you like a dear friend.

The third time, Jesus backs down and asks Peter if he loves him like a dear friend, or “phileo.” And Peter is distressed because he’s asked him three times. Peter answers, “Lord, you know all things, you know I Phileo, love you like a friend. He couldn’t tell Jesus he loved him unconditionally. Did he not see the point or was he just being honest, knowing that he had failed to show Jesus love previously?

Well, Peter matured in his faith. We see that at the end of his life, in writing 2 Peter, he has come to appreciate “agape” love. In 2 Peter 1:5-8 we read, “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Those words, “brotherly kindness,” that is Philadelphia, and as you can see, brotherly kindness is to be added to by “love,” that is, “agape” unconditional love; that is what we should aspire to mature into.

Remembering that this is the second, after the first great commandment that we talked about last week from Matthew 22:37-40

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

How do we love our neighbor as ourself?

Let’s look at Philippians chapter 2. Last week we saw how Jesus demonstrated love in Philippians, but I think you’ll notice something new as we read, starting from verse 1. “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,”

Then, if you remember, the passage goes on to say “this mind that was in Christ” speaks of Him giving up his rightful place in heaven to take up the lowest place on earth and die for us. The most innocent being in creation, punished for all sin in creation.

So let’s look at these verses and see what they say.

First you have Paul giving four “ifs.” If any consolation, if any comfort, if any fellowship, if any affection and mercy, then do this. So nothing has been asked yet, just the reason for the asking.

Moving on, in verse two, he makes the ask, but it's kind of odd. There are four statements. Be like-minded, have the same love, be of one accord, of one mind. Really, there are four imperatives, commands, in this verse, but three of them are all about unity, either of mind or of motive. Other than everyone acting the same, there is only one imperative in this verse. "Have the same love." This is agape love.

Because of all that we've received, Paul wants us to be of one mind, and he wants all of us to be acting with unconditional love.

I believe Philippians 2 is a definition of this love.

And verse 3 gets right into it. No selfishness, "lowliness of mind" or humility, esteem others as better, don't look out for your own interests, but for others instead.

And then he gives the example. "Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus." Which, as we saw last week, was sacrificial. Axiomatic, means self-evident or unquestionable. It is axiomatic that Jesus' death on the cross was sacrificial, in other words, it is the whole point. Still, last week we went into great detail, looking at how God prepared the Israelites to understand this sacrifice of God's only begotten son.

Because of sin we needed to be redeemed. Because God freed the Israelites from Egypt the first born belonged to Him and needed to be redeemed. The redemption for centuries, for more than a millennia, was a sacrificial lamb.

Jesus is the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. So definitely a sacrifice.

But in that sacrifice, Jesus also modeled how we are to be loving our neighbors as ourselves. That's the whole point of Philippians 2. Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Put very simply, God gave something up, so that we could gain undeservedly.

When I say it is axiomatic I mean it should be crystal clear, that the message God is trying to teach us through Jesus is that we must be willing to lose something so that someone else can gain. That's love.

That's the love we're supposed to have for one another if we are to carry out the great commandment of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Last week I kept using the word, "prefer." We simply prefer God's way to our way, so we obey Him. We simply prefer God's abode over ours, so we long to abide with God. That's how we show love. We prefer.

It's the same for people. We simply prefer them to us. That's what it means to esteem another as higher than yourself. That's why love and hate are actually opposites. We tend to think love and hate are opposites because love is a strong feeling of romance, and hate is a strong feeling of malice, but that is not the Biblical definition.

Hate can't mean malice, Biblically. Jesus told people to hate their father and mother. Jesus didn't want children holding malice and ill-will towards parents. If "love" is prefer, "hate" is don't prefer. At their lowest forms they stack right on top of one another. I love this thing, and I hate this thing. I simply chose the thing I love over the thing I hate, that's love and hate.

When Jesus says to follow Him and hate father and mother, wife, children, yes, even your own life. . . He's not telling you to have self-loathing. He's simply telling you to prefer Him above those things. Because ultimately, that is love, preference.

Which, by the way, is why being a parent can do so much to mature you in love. That child will die if someone doesn't give up their time and resources to care for it. And it doesn't really give anything back to you. I mean, you could argue that it does, but as a purely empirical investment, a child doesn't really give any sort of return for decades, and maybe never.

But the more you take care of that little helpless baby, the more you sacrifice for it, the more love is built up. As you prefer its needs to your desire for sleep. And you prefer its desire for attention to your desire for alone time. And as you prefer its need to be carried, cleaned, dressed, and fed to your desire to not clean up gross messes, carrying a heavier load, and all the rest of it, you actually discover love and love is built up.

This is why being told that love is an emotion, that is out of your control, is such a lie and such a dangerous message. Because if love is an emotion that is out of your control, then, when you lose it. . . there is nothing you can do about it. It's just gone. I guess it's time to find someone new who I "feel" love for.

But if love is a thing that grows out of your actions. If love is a thing that you discover through sacrifice. Then it is always within your control, and, in fact, a responsibility you have towards all your fellow men. Not a feeling that controls you, but rather a powerful force that you can build up and enact on the world!

It's really important that you understand this because, while at the lowest level, love and hate are about simple preference, at their highest level they are about sacrifice and murder. Love's ultimate expression is sacrifice (greater love hath no man than he lay down his life for a friend). Hate's ultimate expression is murder. What starts a simple preference has pretty profound impacts as the stakes go up.

Someone asked me why they both have to end in death, which I thought, was a pretty good question. Seems kind of morbid. But immediately I thought, "well, because of the verse, 'greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his friend.'"

But it's more than that. It's because we live on a physical plane of existence that ends in death. Our spirit will live on for eternity, but for now everything we do, the struggle of the flesh with the spirit, is locked to this physical plane. If I sacrifice my life, that's over. It is the end of this existence and all the potential that exists with it.

So, at the lowest level me preferring another person, when elevated to the highest level will result in me sacrificing even my life for that person. At the same time, while at the lowest level, me preferring myself to another person, when elevated to the highest level will result in me killing that other person.

You can think about it as two young men looking at that last slice of pizza. Well, if it's the last slice of pizza at the Super Bowl party and there are other snacks, well, there be some gracious giving or gentle tussling. But if it's the last slice of pizza in the world, and there is no other food. It'll be a sacrifice, or a fight to the death.

So don't downplay how important that simple act of preference is.

But how does it play out practically. . . I mean, when it's not over the last slice of pizza in the world?

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 13. The chapter on love. Know that every time you see love here, it is agape, love. Beginning in verse 1.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

There are three actions here that are great, no question about it. We have oratory skills on the level of angels. You have powerful wisdom, knowledge, and faith, and you have charitable acts to the point of physical sacrifice, maybe even death. But in each case, if love is missing, and love is preferring others, then what is actually happening here?

First, if you could imagine, the greatest orator in all of history. Well, maybe you don't have to imagine. Rather remember the greatest speeches in recent history. Doing multiple searches the same four speeches kept popping up on every list. Martin Luther's I have a dream, JFK's 1961 inaugural address, Winston Churchill's "We will fight on the beaches," and President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address.

What's striking about each of those speeches, and many more like them that actually have meaning that will live on and continue to resonate with us, is how much the focus is on "fellow man," equality, freedom, the willingness to sacrifice for humanity or work to bring humanity together in harmony. It's the language of love!

Meanwhile speeches that go down in history as the most narcissistic and self-centered of all time are by the likes of people like Caligula, early Roman emperor who declared himself to be the highest god and demanded a statue erected by the other Gods. Of course, his statue would be bigger. He was assassinated soon after that speech.

Or Muammar Gaddafi, dictator of Libya from 1969 until 2011, who was known for his long, rambling, narcissistic speeches. During the 2011 Libyan civil war he said, "I am a Bedouin warrior who brought glory to Libya and will die a martyr. I will not surrender. I will not leave the land of my ancestors. I will fight to the last drop of my blood." He was killed by his own people later that year.

Notice the simple difference between his speech and Winston Churchill's speech. "we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender. . ."

Just that little difference between the pronoun "I" and "we" says so much, doesn't it?

If I'm not saying the mighty things I can say in service of another then I'm just noise!

Is there any better picture than a clanging gong?

It's not accidental Paul evokes the imagery of music here. Music is about taking multiple instruments or voices and making them work together to create a greater, more complex composition than any one of them could on their own. It means sometimes one instrument takes a back seat to the others,

sometimes one instrument supports a melody by playing a counter melody or just falls along behind in harmony. The instruments have to be willing to not always be the loudest focus. . . in other words, they have to sometimes prefer other instruments to themselves.

If the music is playing and you're totally focused on yourself, you're just noise. If you're not using your noise to build more harmony around you, then while everyone else is playing to an orchestrated sheet of music, you're just off beating your own song out to the universe.

You're a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal

"And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

This second great gift represents all you could possibly need mentally. As a prophet you can see what is coming, with all knowledge, you can understand it, and with all faith you trust how it's going to play out in the future. Moreover you have the strength that faith brings, and the power that God gives with it. Enough to move mountains!

But you have no love. Balaam was a prophet, you can read about him in Numbers 22-24. He was a prophet for profit. He wanted to personally profit for his prophecy. He seemed like he wanted to listen to what God was telling him, but it wasn't hard to see what really motivated him; personal gain.

We've all seen that person who was right, who knew, but who used that knowledge tear down, hold back someone else, or to elevate themselves. We've all experienced it, and we can all probably remember times when we ourselves have done that. And maybe we've rationalized the negative reaction we received as "well, they just don't want to hear truth," rather than realizing that your truth might not have been motivated by love.

Who is your prophecy for? For you or in preference to God and others? Who is your knowledge for? Who is your faith for? Because if it's for you, Paul says, you are nothing.

Which brings us to the final section here,

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

I defined love as preferring others. Isn't that what is happening here, literally? A person is giving all they have and delivering their own body sacrificially. How can love be missing? What is happening here?

Simple, a person can practice charity and sacrifice, selfishly. If I believe that dying a martyr will be a great enough benefit, I will selfishly give my life. Just like we are taught from scripture that the Israelites followed the law, but for their own benefit, not out of love for God, so too, we can act in ways that look loving, for selfish reasons.

If you are acting loving, if you are putting others before you, will you give your possession and even sacrifice for them? Absolutely, it's the natural fruit of love. But you could also do those things because you want to be viewed favorably, and what a scary place to be. That's what Ananias and Saphira did in Acts. When people were donating their possessions to help the poor. They conspired to look charitable, but held some back, and it cost them their lives. It profits you nothing.

Think about that, selfishness profits you nothing. Love is where all the profit is, not just for you, but for everyone! Withhold your first-born from God and it's destruction, but willingly offer up your offerings to God and it's life and blessing. Prefer yourself to your fellow man and watch how much you lose. Prefer your fellow man to yourself and watch the blessings pour in. Taste and see the Lord is good!

So, If you're well spoken, full of faith, generous, or have some other god given gifts, you need to really pay attention to what is being said here. Love unlocks the potential of what we have to offer.

Just like Isaiah saying his good works were filthy rags. . . we can produce good things that have no life in them because they lack the activating agent of "love" to give them life.

So what is Paul really saying here? It sounds a lot like he's saying you can't be saved if you don't have love, isn't he? And doesn't that bring us back to where we started in 1 John last week? Turn to 1 John 4 again and lets look at what he says.

1 John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

But wait, there's more. Look down at the end of this chapter;

1 John 4:20-21

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

If loving God is preferring Him and His ways to ours, how can we say we are following Him if we are still going our own way. John and Paul, both use similar logic in relation to other people. How can you say you are loving God or that you even have love, if it is not evident in how you relate to your fellow man?

You can continue reading in 1 Corinthians 13 and see some specific ways Paul calls on us to be loving and I encourage you to go through the rest of the list on your own and apply this simple definition of love to these words and meditate on how you can apply this to your life.

But before we finish up this morning, I want to talk about unbelievers.

Are you thinking about how you love them? Are they your neighbors? How do you love them? How do you prefer them to you?

It's not always right for you to just make those around feel comfortable and loved. How is that any different from telling someone to be warm and well fed, but not giving them the material needs to warm and feed them?

What is the temporary peace and security of living through this world without conflict and with your threadbare blanket of false hope in the after life compared to an eternity of suffering without God?

In 1000 years how many of your friends, family members, co-workers, or fellow students, upon finding out that you were a believer, will cry out in anguish saying, "Why didn't you tell me!?" Because you would lose face? Because it jeopardized the relationship or your job or even your life?! Who are you preferring?

You have the greatest gift that can be given to any person. You don't have to force it down their throats, but shouldn't you at least give them an opportunity to accept or reject it?

What greater way can you show love to the lost of this world than by telling them about the only hope for their eternity? What better way can you show love than by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with them? I don't want to sound overly harsh and I definitely don't want to send you into a tailspin of shame. I get it. I struggle with the same things. We all have people we look at in our lives and a small voice nags at us and says, "when, . . . when." Why haven't you shared the gospel with them? Why not go right now? We'll, they are taking in their groceries right now. The next time we are sitting together, out on the front lawn, that's the time. That's when. But it hasn't happened in so long!

There is something to be said about waiting and praying for the right opportunity to share the gospel with those neighbors around whom God has placed you. But don't be fooled or mistaken, it is the most loving thing you have to share with them. You need to be intentional . . .

1 Thess 2:1-2 & 7-8 says

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. . . . 7 But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. 8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

You show love to those around who don't know Jesus, by modeling and talking about Jesus. You show love to God by talking about him and you show love to others.

So, love God and love others, on these two laws hang all the laws and the prophets. At first it seemed like Jesus was simplifying everything, but actually it exposes how our own selfishness complicates everything. Often times, when I mess up, it's not about me "not knowing" all the laws and regulations God has put on me. It's more about me preferring what I want to what those around me want or need.

And it is in that selfishness. . . that lack of love, that all the evils in the world break out. How do you love your neighbor as yourself? There's a reason it's called the golden rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Jesus did it for each and every one of us. And then told us to be like Him.

Maybe you're sitting here this morning and feeling depressed, or inadequate to the task. Maybe it just all seems too big and complicated or you feel too small and set in your ways.

Think back to Peter, sitting around the fire with Jesus and being asked, "Peter, do you love me unconditionally?"

With honesty, the best Peter could answer is, "Lord, I love you like a dear friend."

Peter didn't feel up to the task, maybe he knew it wouldn't be honest of him to answer with the strongest possible love.

But later on he could say this, 1 Peter 1:22-23 “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren (*Philadelphia*), love (agape) one another fervently with a pure heart,”

How do you love your neighbor? One small act at a time. (Preferring them)

How do you grow your love for your baby? One diaper change at a time.

How do you grow your love in a relationship, one small sacrifice at a time. (Preferring them)

You are literally building value into those around you by investing yourself. The more you do that the more value those people will have to you and the less you will value yourself. And just like Peter you can grow from a brotherly friendship love, to a true Christlike agape unconditional love.

Let's pray



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Philippians 2:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 13

How do you Love Others?

Summary: You show love to others by preferring them to you.

- What are you a philo of, i.e. what are some things you love because of what they are or what they bring into your life?
- When are some times you've seen people act:
 - o Without ambition or conceit
 - o In lowliness of mine (humility)
 - o In esteeming others better than themselves
 - o Looking out for the interests of others
- We don't naturally want to act in a loving manner. We have to be on guard and remind ourselves. What are some ways you remind yourself to act lovingly?
- Looking at the first 3 verses of 1 Corinthians 13, where do you find it difficult to show love in *your* gifted areas of life?
- Go through the end of verse 7 in 1 Corinthians 13 and discuss how showing preference present in the attributes of love.
- Who has God put in your life who needs to hear the Gospel?
 - o What are the reasons you've given yourself for not sharing (Not enough time, don't want to disrupt work, their an atheist, it will offend them, etc.)
 - o Pray with someone over those reasons and seek God, ask Him what you should do.