

LOVE ... "GREEK STYLE"

One of the greatest things about the Greek language of New Testament times was that it was very precise, especially in comparison to our modern-day English language. The Greek language used numerous prefixes and suffixes on words which not only determined their placement in sentences, but also (and consequently) determined their exact meanings in those sentences. Furthermore, and more relevant to our present study, the Greek language used more precise terminology to express its meaning than does our language today; with reference to our subject at hand, for example, we have one primary word, "love," that we use with various shades of meaning, whereas the Greeks had at least four words.

Perhaps it would be helpful to us if love was a many "splintered thing"; in other words, if we used more explicit terminology. When we say that we love our spouses, perhaps we should have and use a particular word that denotes a romantic attachment to our marriage partners. When we say that we love our children, perhaps we should have and use a particular word that denotes a fondness for our offspring. When we say that we love Christians, perhaps we should have and use a particular word that denotes an affection for our brethren. When we say that we love all men, perhaps we should have and use a particular word that denotes a desire for the well-being of our fellowman. See, it sounds somewhat demeaning to wives when a husband says, "I love pizza and my dog and my wife." Without the use of distinct words, vagueness prevails! So...

Let's investigate the four primary words that the Greeks used for love in the New Testament times. (Incidentally, all these loves have two sides to them.)

EROS

Eros has a romantic side. *Eros* is "the love between man and woman which embraces longing, craving, and desire" (2:539)^[5]; similarly, it "includes the idea of yearning to unite with and the desire to possess the beloved" (59)^[11]. *Eros* is romance or being "in love" (131)^[6], that "overmastering passion seizing upon and absorbing into itself the whole mind" (111)^[12].

Eros has a sexual side. Webster's 10th Ed. Collegiate Dictionary reads, "[Gk *Eros*, fr. *eros* sexual love]." (Interestingly, we all probably remember that Venus (Roman) or Aphrodite (Greek) was the goddess of love, but we all probably don't know that Eros (Roman) or Cupid (Greek) was the god of love. And guess who was Cupid's mother? Aphrodite. So the goddess of love gave birth to the god of love.) *Eros* "refers to physical, sexual love, usually set going by the emotions" (19)^[8]. What emotions? Romantic ones, of course. (And, obviously, there's merit to these definitions because our words "eroticism" and "erogenous" are related to *eros*. Furthermore, there's a Greek word that denotes this "lust," if you will, for a person—it is the word *epithumia*; this is the word used in Matthew 5:28 where Jesus forbade people to lust after those to whom they aren't married.)

Although *eros* was not used in the Greek New Testament, its counterpart was used in the Hebrew Old Testament. In Proverbs 7:18 Solomon wrote, "Let us delight ourselves with love"; the word "love" here is *erotai* in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). The Hebrew counterpart then is the root word *awhabe* which means "To desire, to breathe after,"^[3] or "to have affection for (sexually or otherwise)."^[9] (One "otherwise" may be seen in the use of *eros* in Proverbs 4:6b where it's used with reference to wisdom: "Love (*erastheti* from *eros*, TD) her (wisdom, TD), and she will keep you.")

Both of these sides of *eros* may be summed up in the word "passion" (111)^[12]: "The modern way of saying much of the above is simply, 'Love is blind.' If you retain your common sense, you do not have a real case of *eros*" (31)^[8]. [Just from a casual reading of the book in which this quote is found, it's obvious that this writer didn't mean this literally: one **can** keep from acting upon this impulse.]

Romantic and sexual loves are both passionate. The Song of Solomon concerns itself with both sides of this love. So *eros* is almost, if not, totally selfish, and is obviously the love we usually refer to when we say that we love our spouses.

STORGOS

Storgos has an unselfish side (unlike *eros*), which is best understood from the definitions of the only way *storgos* is used in the Greek New Testament—in its ugly, negative side. *Astorgos* means "without natural affection"^[4] (cf. Romans 1:31 & Second Timothy 3:3); the words "heartless" and "inhuman" describe it (2:542)^[5]. Parents love their children by caring for their well-being, nurturing them for the future; so when a parent leaves her living newborn in a dumpster, that's pretty good evidence of someone lacking that natural concern for one's own kin. Why is this? Because *storgos* is the "love of kindred, especially of parents for children and children for parents"^[10]. (Interestingly, etymology associates the stork (you know, the bird in the cartoon that brings a mother her newborn in a small blanket) with the word *storgos*; stork—*storgos*.) So back to the baby dumping mom: she is *astorgos* which "designates 'the unfeeling and hard, whose heart is warmed by no noble sentiment; it is applied to parents, but also to animals who do not love [care for] their young'" (110)^[10]. See, *storgos* "is 'a natural movement of the soul ... something almost like gravitation or some other force of blind nature.' It is the love which the animal has for its offspring. It is a love of obligation, the term being used here not in its moral sense, but in a natural sense. It is a necessity under the circumstances" (110)^[10]. In our day and time, we have either met or heard of many people who lack this important kind of love, probably because they were raised without it.

Storgos has a selfish side (like *eros*) as indicated in this description: "a comfortable old-shoe relationship comprised of natural affection and a sense of belonging" (60)^[11]. In other words, children love parents because of the feeling of security they have in their parents' care. *Storgos* is a warm comfortableness, a satisfaction in being together; we see it between a man and his dog or with a man and his favorite chair. So it could be said that "by *eros* we're conceived and by *storgos* we're reared." *Storgos* is obviously the primary love we refer to when we say that we love our children.

PHILIA

Philia has an unselfish side (like *storgos*). *Philia* is "friendship"^[4]; in fact, the only time the noun *philia* is used in the New Testament (James 4:4), it is translated as "friendship": "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" (The verb form, *phileo*, is used 25 times, and the word Philadelphia, brotherly love or brotherly kindness, is used 6 times.) *Philia* has an unselfish side: as Solomon said, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, and there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). The true friend is the one who sticks by you when times are tough; this was the kind of friendship that David and Jonathan had (First Samuel 18:1-3): Jonathan was closer to David than David's own brothers were (First Samuel 17:28-30). This kind of friendship is emphasized by Jesus to Peter in John 21:14-17: since Peter kept on answering Jesus' *agape* love with *philia*, the last time Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, Jesus used *philia* as if to say, "Do you really *phileo* Me, Peter?" Then verse 18 indicates that Jesus believed that Peter really did *phileo* Him because Jesus said that He would stick so close to Jesus that he would finally die a martyr for Him.

Philia has a selfish side (like *storgos*), because two people don't remain friends unless there's mutual friendliness. *Philia* "cherishes and has tender affection for the beloved, but always expects a response. A love of relationship—comradeship, sharing, communication, friendship. *Eros* makes lovers, *phileo* makes friends who enjoy closeness and companionship. [*Eros* is a face-to-face relationship while *philia* is a shoulder-to-shoulder relationship.] They share each other's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, plans, and dreams.... They also share their time and interests" (60)^[11]. So if "A" shows that he doesn't want to become or remain a friend to "B" after "B" has tried hard to be friendly, then the bond cannot be created or continue to exist.

In the Greek New Testament...

- *philia* can be found as a love between God and His Son Jesus (John 5:20);
- it can also be found as a love between Jesus and His disciples (John 16:27, cf. First Corinthians 16:22);
- it can further be found as a love directed to man from God (John 16:27); however...
- *philia* directed to God from man is neither found nor demanded. So...

Philia is obviously the primary love we refer to when we say that we love the brethren; in fact, it's the word Paul used when he wrote, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love" (Romans 12:10a).

AGAPE

Agape has a decision side. *Agape* "is a mental attitude based on a deliberate choice of the will" (62) [11]. As Paul indicated in First Corinthians 10:13, God does not ask us to do something that we cannot do; therefore, when He commands us to *agapao* Him (Matthew 22:37), our brethren (First Peter 1:22), and even our enemies (Matthew 5:44), then it's apparent that *agape* is a choice—it is a possible task to accomplish. "Nowhere [in the New Testament] is [*agape*] defined in terms of the emotional. Love is always equated not with what one feels, but with what one does. Love is something you do. 'If you love Me, you will obey My commandments'" (21)[2]. See, while the other loves are primarily innate, *agape* is not; *agape* then must be a result of a deliberate decision carried out.

Agape has a devotion side. To understand the power of this devotion, we must first be forever aware that *agape* "is marked by a total absence of any selfish motive" (19)[2]; in other words, it is unconditional commitment and therefore "must always be a free gift" (65)[7]. Webster says, "unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another." Note how this all fits so well in a description of God's love for mankind. "God is *agape*" (the source and epitome of love, First John 4:8 and 16). *Agape* (God) initiates (First John 4:19 & John 3:16). *Agape* (God) gives and sacrifices even for those undeserving (Romans 5:6-10). *Agape* is "unconquerable benevolence, undefeatable good will. *Agape* is the spirit in the heart which will never seek anything but the highest good of its fellowmen. It does not matter how its fellowmen treat it; it does not matter what and who its fellowmen are; it does not matter what their attitude is to it, it will never seek anything but their highest and their best good" (65)[1]. Paul said it this way, "*Agape* never fails" (First Corinthians 13:8). Here's an illustration of *agape's* relation to the other loves discussed: "Lewis described the natural loves as a garden that would soon run to weeds if left alone. This is inevitable because of self-centeredness, willfulness, and the other sins resulting from the Fall. *Agape* love acts as the rakes, hoes, shears, plant food, and weed killer employed by a skilled gardener to keep the garden thriving, orderly, and beautiful. When God planted the garden of our nature and caused the flowering, fruiting loves to grow there, He set our will to tend them, to watch over them and care for them as a wise gardener should. This operation of the will is *agape* love—a knowledgeable and skillful love always concerned with doing what is best for the beloved" (61-62)[11]. Scholars agree that *agape*, the highest and most important love, was virtually an unused word before the apostles employed it in their writings; it's used more times in the Bible than in all Greek writings prior to the New Testament, and, in addition, God exalted it above all others, while the Greeks only spoke of it in an unimportant manner. *Agape*, then, is obviously the love we refer to when we say that we love everyone.

Conclusion

So we have moved from the love of spouses, to the love of family, to the love of people, then to the love of God! Although *agape* is clearly the most eminent of loves, yet all of these are important, yea essential, within the family unit; therefore, it's to our benefit as we study each role of the family unit,

that we see how each fits into the overall picture!

[Tony E. Denton, February 1998. ASiteForTheLord.com]

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