

THE SABBATH SCOOP

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What Is Love?

The world is confused about the meaning of love. Are we?

Part 1

By Gregory Dullum

As Valentine's Day arrives Feb 14, the thoughts of many people in this world turn toward love. They give each other heart-shaped boxes of chocolates, bouquets of fragrant flowers and special greeting cards called "valentines" to declare their love for each other.

Our purpose here is not to delve into the pagan origins of Valentine's Day and its customs (see the article on page 5 for that.) In this series of articles, we'll focus on a much bigger and more important topic: LOVE. Do the people in this society even know the meaning of love?

"In today's modern world, the meaning of LOVE has been all but lost. It has been so romanticized, so confused with LUST, that people carelessly call any sex desire or sex use 'love.' Usually this is LUST.

"Today nearly all popular songs are falsely supposed to sing about love. Motion pictures, television, novels—all confuse and eroticize 'love' and induce society to accept lust in the name of 'love' " (*The Missing Dimension in Sex* by Herbert W. Armstrong, 1981, p. 81).

We in the Church of God have heard a lot about love because the Bible has a lot to say about it! God is love (1 John 4:8). The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors (Mat. 22:36-40). We should even love our enemies (Mat. 5:44). These are very important concepts, so it's critical that we understand what love *really* is!

Let's examine this subject from the Bible, the source of truth (John 17:17).

Bible Words for Love

If we look up "love" in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, we'll find 16

words translated as "love." They are: ahab, ahabah, chashaq, racham, dowd, rayah, agabah, egeb, agapao, agape, phileo, philadelphia, philarguria, philandros, philoteknos and philanthropia." Additional words may be found if we look up similar words such as "lovedst," "loves" "loving" and "lovingkindness."

What About Eros?

One word that is missing from this list is the Greek word *eros*. We may have read or heard that there are three basic Greek words for love (*agape*, *phileo* and *eros*). *Eros* "refers to sexual love between husband and wife. But it means *love*, not lust. The Greek language uses a different word for lust. *Eros*, however, is a love expressed physically, not spiritually" (Armstrong, p. 81).

Eros is a Greek word for sexual love and the New Testament was written in Greek, but *eros* is not used in the Bible: "*eros*, signifying sexual love in Greek, is not used in the NT [New Testament]" ("*Love*," *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, David Achtemeier, ed., 1996, p. 625).

While the word itself is not in the Bible, the topic of sexual love is mentioned.

The Apostle Paul wrote about sexual love when he told the Corinthian church, "Let the husband render to his wife the affection [the Greek word is *unoia*, not *eros*] due her, and likewise also the wife her husband ... Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self control" (1 Cor. 7:3, 5).

The *very first* COMMAND that God gave to a husband and wife that is recorded in the Bible is "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Another Biblical instruction from this time is: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and be



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The world romanticizes "love" and often confuses it with lust.

joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

Obedying these instructions from God requires *eros*, making *eros* a very important kind of love.

The Song of Solomon (which was written in Hebrew, not Greek), is filled with the topic of romantic, sexual love!

Since the word *eros* is not in the Bible, we will end our discussion of it here. We'll continue our discussion with the other two Greek words, *agape* and *phileo*.

As we do, be aware that there are different spellings of these words, depending upon whether we are using the noun or verb. Let's not be confused by different endings on these words—we are still discussing *agape* and *phileo*.

What Is Phileo?

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words states: "PHILEO is to be distinguished from *agapao* in this, that *phileo* more nearly represents tender affection" (p. 21).

Strong's Greek Dictionary of the

LOVE

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Love

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New Testament tells us that *phileo* is to have a FONDNESS or AFFECTION for something or someone, based upon the nature of the object being loved.

The focus of *phileo* is on the OBJECT that is being loved. We love our children because they are OURS. They may be surrounded by other children on a playground, and while our children are *just as valuable* or *important* as the OTHER children, we don't have the same feeling toward the other children as we have toward our own. Why? Because we love (*phileo*) our children for *who they are*. They are OURS.

Similarly, we love our friends for *who they are*. We appreciate their humor, their personality, their values, and perhaps even their wealth. We share interests in common. We don't use our brains to decide whether to love (*phileo*) our friends; we are drawn to them subconsciously; our *phileo* comes automatically from our "heart" without bothering our brains.

When the OBJECT of our love has *intrinsic value to us* and it appears to be WORTHY of our love, then our love is *phileo* and it is of the heart, NOT the head.

In the past we may have thought of *phileo* merely as "brotherly love" because *philadelphia* (which means "brotherly love") comes from this word. But that is a woefully inadequate definition. A better and more complete definition of *phileo* is: "tender affection for a person or object based upon the intrinsic value of that person or object."

What Is Agape?

The third Greek word is *agape*. *Agape* is defined in *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* as "to love (in a social or moral sense)" (p. 7).

How does *agape* differ from *phileo*?

Agape has three characteristics.

1. *Agape* is a choice; a mind-set.

Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament explains the difference between the two Greek words. *Phileo* is "to be a friend to (fond of [an individual or an object]), i.e., having an affection for (demoting personal attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling; while [*agape*] is wider, embracing espec. the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety; the two thus stand related very much; the former [*phileo*] being chiefly of the heart and the latter [*agape*] of the head ...)" ("Phileo," pp. 75-76).

In other words, *agape* is a deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle,



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Parental love is a type of *phileo*. Parents love their children because of who those children are (theirs). They don't have the same feeling for other babies.

duty and propriety. It is to love in a social, moral sense. *Phileo* is to be a friend and to have tender affection for something or someone.

Agape has LITTLE to do with emotion or warm, fuzzy feelings and EVERYTHING to do with setting the will. It is NOT based upon the heart (as is *phileo*) but upon the head. One who has *agape* for another sets his mind to have outgoing concern for that person, no matter what.

Agape is UNCONDITIONAL love while *phileo* is CONDITIONAL—its conditions are based upon the object being loved.

Agape is love for others that does NOT require the OBJECTS of that love to be loveable. When God expresses *agape*, He sets his will to love that object, whether or not that object deserves his love. And *agape* does NOT require love to be returned! God expresses *agape* for mankind even when mankind hates Him or ignores Him.

Notice how *Vine's Expository Dictionary* explains God's *agape* for mankind: "this is not the love of complacency, or affection, that is, it was not drawn out by any excellency in its objects, Rom. 5:8. It was an exercise of the Divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself, cp. Deut. 7:7, 8. ..."

"In respect of *agapao* as used of God, it expresses the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the Giver, and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others seek the Giver" (*Vine*, p. 21).

In other words, we humans are not deserving of God's love. God does NOT love

us because WE are so wonderful and great and marvelous. God loves us, *even while we are evil sinners*, because HE is wonderful, great and marvelous. He CHOOSES to love us, not *because* of who we are, but *in spite of* who we are. He loves us not because of *who we are* but because of *who He is!*

When we become aware of God's love (*agape*) for us, we react to that love in three ways:

1. We love (*agapao*) Him back.
2. We love (*agapao*) the brethren—other humans who are being shown that same love (*agape*) by God.
3. We preach a message of repentance to a world of unbelievers, so they also can come to enjoy that close relationship of *agape* with God.

God's love to us is similar to light striking a prism that gets redirected in three

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228 O'Connell Drive
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Editor

Gregory Dullum

Circulation Managers:

Craig Evans • Raleigh Collins

Gregory Dullum

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directions: some returns to Him; some is shared among the brethren (other illuminated prisms); and some is sent out into the dark world, hoping to strike and illuminate more prisms.

2. *Agape* is expressed by action. “Love can be known only from the action it prompts. God’s love is seen in the gift of His Son, I John 4:9, 10” (Vine, p. 21).

There **MUST BE ACTION** if we have *agape*. God’s action toward us was to sacrifice his Son. What action must we perform to show *agape*?

We show our love for God by *keeping his commandments* (1 John 5:2-3). The first four of God’s 10 Commandments tell us how to love God, the remaining six tell us how to love our fellow man.

The 10 Commandments are **NOT** complete instructions on how to love—they are the *starting point*. Christ expanded on them when He walked the earth. For example, the sixth commandment tells us not to murder. Christ taught us it was wrong to hate, an attitude that can lead to murder. The seventh commandment forbade the act of adultery but Christ expanded that commandment to include a ban on lust (Mat. 5:17, 21-22, 27-28).

3. God is the primary object of *agape*. “Christian love has God for its primary object, and expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to His commandments, John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 2:5; 5:3; 2 John 6. Self will, that is, self-pleasing, is the negation of love to God.

Our love (*agape*) for God leads us to love (*agapao*) others. We love others, not because they are worthy of our love, but because we love God, and in submitting to God’s will, we love others.

“Christian love [*agape*], whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Rom. 15:2, and works no ill to any, 13:8-10; love seeks opportunity to do good to ‘all men, and especially toward them who are of the household of the

faith’ Gal. 6:10” (Vine, p. 21).

Agape is the word used to describe three things in the New Testament:

“*Agape* and *agapao* are used in the N.T. (a) to describe the attitude of God toward His Son, John 17:26; the human race, generally, John 3:16; Rom.5:8; and to such as believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly, John 14:21; (b) to convey His will to His children concerning their attitude one to another, John 13:34, and toward all men, I Thess. 3:12; I Cor. 16:14; 2 Pet. 1:7; (c) to express the essential nature of God, I John 4:8” (Vine, pp. 20-21).

To sum up, *agape* is a conscious decision to express unconditional outgoing concern for someone that is not based upon the intrinsic value of that person being loved; it is based upon the mind set of the giver.

***Agape* Is Not ‘Godly Love’**

In the past, we may have oversimplified the definitions of the three Greek words for love in this way: *Agape* = “Godly love”; *phileo* = “human love”; and *eros* = sexual love. This oversimplification causes us to miss out on the real meaning of the words, as we have learned from Strong’s and Vine’s Greek Dictionaries.

Strong defined *agape* as “to love (in a social or moral sense)” (p. 7). He said nothing about it being Godly.

If we think *agape* is “Godly love” because we think it’s the **ONLY** type of love God expresses, we’d be wrong. God and Christ express **BOTH** *agape* and *phileo*!

In John 3:35 we read, “The Father loves (*agapao*) the Son.” Two chapters later, in John 5:20, we read, “the Father loves (*phileo*) the Son.” In John 14:21 Christ said He and the Father will love (*agapao*) their followers who keep the commandments. Two chapters later in John 16:27 we read about a different love (*phileo*) between God and Christ’s followers. In John 13:23, John is called the disciple whom Jesus loved (*agapao*). Seven chapters later, in John 20:2, John is the disciple whom Jesus loved (*phileo*).

Although God and Christ have both kinds of love for the same object, those words have separate meanings! “Yet the distinction between the two verbs remains, and they are never used indiscriminately in the same passage; if each is used with reference to the same objects, as just mentioned, each word retains its distinctive and essential character” (Vine, p. 21). In other words, we can’t interchange the words *agape* and *phileo*. When used to describe the same object, the two words remain two different and distinct forms of love.

Holy Spirit Not Required

One of the fruits of the holy spirit is *agape* (Gal. 5:22). Does that mean the holy spirit is required in order to have *agape*? No more than it requires the holy spirit to experience joy, peace, longsuffering, etc. The things listed as fruits of God’s holy spirit can be experienced without God’s spirit—but **NOT** to the *same degree*!

For example, there is a type of peace that the world experiences. But the peace that Christ makes available through God’s holy spirit is *much better* (John 14:27)!

Likewise, people who do not have God’s spirit can express *agape*. But those who have God’s spirit can express it to a *much higher degree*!

How do we know that people without God’s spirit can have *agape*?

Because Jesus Christ told his disciples, “But I say to you, love [*agapao*] your enemies ... for if you love [*agapao*] those who love [*agapao*] you, what reward have you? *Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*” (Mat. 5:44, 46, emphasis added). Carnal, unconverted, and sinful tax collectors had *agape* for those who had *agape* toward them! They did **NOT** have God’s holy spirit, and they didn’t need it to have *agape*!

Need more evidence? What did Jesus say were the two greatest commandments? “ ‘You shall love [*agapao*] 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 [*agapao*] your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Mat. 22:37-39).

From where did Jesus get these commandments? He was quoting from the Old Testament, where these were commands given to ancient Israel (Deut. 6:5, Lev. 19:18). The Israelites were expected to have *agape* but they, as a whole, did not have God’s holy spirit! Only certain leaders and prophets had God’s spirit. The holy spirit was not made available to the “general public” until after Pentecost in the New Testament (Acts 1:5, 2:1-4).

Conclusion

Let us keep in mind the difference between *phileo* and *agape*. *Phileo* is tender affection for a person or object based upon the intrinsic value of that person or object. *Agape* is a mind-set of outgoing concern for another being that is not dependent upon who that being is. *Phileo* is of the heart while *agape* is of the head.

We’ll see an example of this in Part 2. (To be continued.)

Know Your Bible

By Charles Nenninger

1. Who was Moses’ spokesman?
2. Who was Jacob’s father?
3. Who was Solomon’s father?
4. Who were the sons of thunder?
5. How were the wise men warned not to tell Herod where Jesus was?

(Answers on page 5)

Peter's Love for Christ: Agape vs. Phileo

A Bible passage that is confusing in English makes sense when we understand the Greek words.

Part 2

By Gregory Dullum

In Part 1, we defined the two basic Greek words for “love” in the Bible and showed how they have different meanings.

When *agape* and *phileo* are used to describe the love for the same object, the love they are describing are two different kinds of love, even though the object being loved is the same object.

Let's look at an example of this in John 21, where Christ three times asked Peter if he loved Him.

In the past, we may have read this conversation and thought Christ asked Peter if he had the best kind of love for Him (*agape*) and Peter replied, no, he had only the second-best kind of love (*phileo*). If we apply what we learned about *agape* and *phileo* in Part 1, we will see this conversation in a whole new light.

Setting the Stage

After Christ was crucified and resurrected from the dead, He planned to meet his disciples again in Galilee (Mat. 26:32). The disciples went there, but Jesus did not immediately show Himself. As they waited for Christ to appear, Simon Peter said to the other disciples, “I am going fishing” (John 21:1-3).

Peter obviously *loved* fishing; it was his vocation before he was called by Christ. He very likely *loved* everything about fishing: the sea, the fresh air, the wet ropes and nets, the creaking wood of the boats, and the thrill of capturing fish and bringing them to shore. Peter was a *very passionate* person and *NEVER* did anything *half-heartedly*. When he was a fisherman, he loved with all his being the fisherman's life and everything that was part of that life.

Now, sitting on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, unsure of his future, he retuned, if but for a moment, to *what he loved*. He returned to fishing. His intention most likely was not to start up his business again; this was just one last fling; one night of doing what he loved as he waited for Christ to appear.

Other disciples agreed to go fishing with Peter. They got into a boat, sailed out onto the sea and fished *all night*. They caught NOTHING. This had to be unusual and frustrating for PROFESSIONAL fishermen. They did not grasp it at the time but their lack of catch was Christ's way of telling them that *if they went back to their old way of life*, they would NOT produce fruit.

In the morning, a Stranger on the shore called out to them, “Children, have you any food?” They didn't know it was the resurrected Christ. They replied, “No.”

The Stranger told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat and they would find some. They obeyed, and caught more fish in the net than they could pull into the boat.

They recognized this as a miracle and John realized the Stranger on the shore was the Lord. Christ was teaching them a lesson to *obey Him and their efforts would produce fruit*.

Peter, with his *driving enthusiasm* and *overwhelming zeal*, did not wait for the boat to get to shore. He jumped into the sea and swam for shore. The others followed in the boat, dragging the net of fish behind them.

First Question and Answer

After they had all eaten some fish and bread for breakfast, Christ asked Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (*agapao*) Me more than these?”

Jesus did not ask Peter if he had warm, fuzzy feelings toward Him. He asked, “Have you SET YOUR WILL to love Me? Have you made up your mind that you will FOLLOW Me and OBEY Me and PUT ME FIRST in your life? Will you put me first, above all these things which surround you—the fish, the sea, the fresh air, the creaking wood and the wet ropes? Do you love MY way of life more than YOUR way of life?”

Peter was NOT one to give 50 percent or 80 percent. He always went above and beyond. If 100 percent was required, he gave 110 percent.

Remember, it was Peter who jumped into the water and swam to shore so he could get to Christ first. It was Peter who thought he was a better servant than Christ and refused to let Christ wash his feet at Passover. When Christ said, “If He didn't wash Peter's feet, Peter would be none of his, Peter did not reply, “Well, then, wash my big toe.” No, Peter went way above and beyond what was required and said, “Wash all of me!”

When asked by Christ, “Do you *agapao* Me more than these fish,” Peter replied, “Yes, Lord, you know that I *phileo* you.”

Peter used a different word for love. Why? Because he was trying once again to outdo Christ. By using the word *phileo* instead of *agapao*, Peter told Christ, “I have

gone beyond setting my will to obey, I have a *great fondness* for You as a Person. I recognize You as the Son of God and I love You because of WHO YOU ARE.

Christ seemed pleased with this response and told Peter, “Feed My lambs,” referring to his future work of spiritually nourishing the church. If Peter had the spiritual maturity that he claimed he had, he certainly could spiritually nourish those *young in the faith* (lambs) whom the Father would call into the church! Peter could spiritually feed the lambs God would call. The food Peter would feed them would not be *physical FISH* but *spiritual TRUTH*.

Second Question and Answer

Next Christ asked Peter, “Do you *agapao* me?” This time Christ did not add, “more than these.” In the first question, Christ seemed to be asking Peter to compare his love for Christ with his love for fishing. Now, the question is more direct: “Do you REALLY love Me?” “Have you REALLY set your will and your mind to put me first in your life? Have you determined to put Me—not just above the life of fishing—but first *above everything* that is in your life?”

Peter's reply was the same. “Yes, Lord, you know that I *phileo* you.” He replied, “I have gone beyond just setting my will. I am very fond of you with tender affection. My fondness for you is greater than my fondness for anything else.”

Christ didn't argue with Peter. He simply replied, “Tend my sheep.” Not only was Peter to teach the YOUNG Christians in the church about Christ, but he was to care for ALL THE FOLLOWERS with the *same tender affection* he claimed he had for Christ.

Third Question and Answer

Now, Christ asks a different question that *upsets* Peter. Peter has already told Christ twice that he *phileo* Him. Now Christ asks Peter directly, “Do you *phileo* Me?” Christ seems to be asking, “Are you SURE you are fond of Me? Do you REALLY have tender affection toward Me? Do you really appreciate Me for who I am?”

This question “grieved” Peter. Perhaps it stung Peter, because if he had *really* cherished Christ with tender affection—if he had *really* understood who Christ was—he would NOT have denied Him

PETER'S LOVE

Continued on Page 6

Should We Celebrate Valentine's Day?

Is it wrong to celebrate a day dedicated to love?

By Gregory Dullum

Christians are to live the way of love: loving God and neighbor. Could it possibly be wrong to send a card, chocolates or flowers to a friend or spouse on Feb. 14 or wish someone "Happy Valentine's Day"?

To answer this question, we need to delve into the origins of this day and its customs. Although named for Roman Catholic "saints" who had feast days in February, this day originated in paganism!

"St. Valentine's Day is a festival of love that amalgamates the pagan traditions of Rome and northern Europe. It is also dedicated to the Norse deity Vali, the archer god, son of Odin, and to Juno Februa, goddess of love. The festival begins after sunset on 13 February" (*The Pagan Book of Days* by Nigel Pennick, 1992, p. 42).

A famous symbol of Valentine's Day is Cupid. He is pictured as a baby cherub who shoots people with arrows and causes them to fall in love. Cupid was the name used by the Romans. The Greeks called him Eros ("Cupid," *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1956, vol. 3, p. 1826).

So in reality, Valentine's Day is a day dedicated to the worship of the archer god Cupid, also known as Vali! Perhaps a MORE ACCURATE name for this day would be Vali-time's Day!

Cupid's origins go back to Nimrod, who was worshiped as a "mighty hunter before [in place of] the LORD." Nimrod established Babylon and the Babylonian Mystery Religion (Gen. 10:9-10).

Valentine's Day also is associated with the pagan god Pan and a Roman fertility festival called Lupercalia on Feb. 15.

"One of the most important, as well as one of the most ancient, of the festivals celebrated by the Romans was the Lupercalia. This was a Spring festival involving peculiar fertility rites, and was especially concerned with young people. The following account from an old Roman history [*Antiquities of Rome* by Basil Kennett, 1776] is quoted for an interesting description:

"The most ancient Order of the Priests were the *Luperci*, sacred to *Pan* the God of the Country, and particularly of Shepherds. They had their Name from the Deity they attended on, called... a Wolf, in *Latin*, *Lupus*; because the chief employment of *Pan*, was the driving away such beasts

from the Sheep that he protected. ...

"The Ceremony was very singular and strange.

"In the first Place, there was a Sacrifice killed of Goats and a Dog. Then two Children, Noblemen's Sons, being brought thither, some of the *Luperci* stained their Foreheads with the bloody Knife, while others wiped it off with Locks of Wool dipped in Milk; the Boys must always laugh after their Foreheads had been wiped; This done, having cut the Goat-skins into Thongs, they ran about the Streets all Naked but their Middle, and lashed all that they met in their Procession. The young Women never took any Care to avoid the Strokes, but rather offered themselves of their own Accord, fancying them to be great Helpers of Conception and Delivery. They ran naked, because *Pan* is always painted so. They sacrificed a Goat, because the same Deity was supposed to have Goat's Feet.... As for the Dog we meet in the Sacrifice, it was added as a necessary Companion to the Shepherd, and because of the natural Antipathy between them and Wolves.' ...

"When the Romans invaded Britain, they introduced their religious festivals and customs, and in this way the festival of the Lupercalia was established in these Islands.

"It is because Saint Valentine was martyred on the 14th of February, that his name has ever since been associated with the Spring festival of Lupercalia, which took place on a fixed date, the 15th of February. For, in later years when the early Christian fathers were busy obliterating pagan superstitions and dates by substituting those of the Christian belief, names of many of the martyred Saints were used to replace the old festivals" (*The Valentine and Its Origins* by Frank Staff, 1969, pp. 11-12).

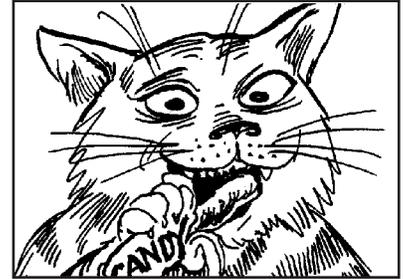
God does not want his people to be keeping days or customs that honor pagan gods, even though they have been replaced with "Christian" names or meaning (Deut. 12:30-32, Rev. 18:4, 2 Cor. 6:14-16).

Know Your Bible Answers

1) Aaron. 2) Isaac. 3) David. 4) James & John. 5) They were warned in a dream.

Fun Fact

of creation, history, holidays & the Bible



Drawing and Fun Fact are courtesy of NAPS
Cats do not have the ability to taste sweet things.

Witerature

Wit and wisdom to complement the truths of the Holy Bible can be found in secular writings.

The 7 Wonders That Will Change Your Life by Glenn Beck and Keith Ablow, M.D., Threshold Editions, 2011, p. 251.

Be Fully Behind

"Gut feelings don't always arrive on schedule. For example, sometimes I have done all the thinking I can about a project and decided on a creative direction my team should take. We'll go down the road a piece and I'll crash—*smack*—right into my common sense. I'll *feel* that we made the wrong decision back, say three weeks earlier. I'll just get a quick glimpse of that fork in the road where we chose the wrong path. I might feel badly, of course, that we wasted time going in the wrong direction, but you can't achieve your best unless you are fully behind what you're doing."

Eccles. 9:10, Col. 3:23

Quotable Quotes

"The life of the nation is secure only while the nation is honest, truthful and virtuous."

—Frederick Douglass

Memory Scripture

"A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation."

—Ps. 68:5

Peter's Love

Continued from Page 4

three times. Here on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Peter spoke the WORDS of love (*phileo*) to Christ. But Peter's ACTIONS revealed where his heart truly lay. He had denied Christ three times on the night He was crucified. And now, days later, he had gone back to fishing (his first love). Were these the actions of someone who was fond of Christ with tender affection?

There is a curious point to be made about Christ's question regarding *phileo*.

Nowhere in the New Testament are humans commanded to *phileo* God. "Phileo is never used in a command to men to love God" ("Love," *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 21). We're commanded to *agapao* God but we're not commanded to *phileo* Him!

To *phileo* God requires that we understand his nature and love Him because of who He is. God is so awesome that it is difficult, if not impossible, to wrap our minds around Him and fully comprehend who He is. But here was Peter, saying twice that he could *phileo* Christ.

Finally, Christ asked Peter if he really meant what he said. Had Peter really achieved *this kind* of love (*phileo*) for Christ?

Peter's reply, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I *phileo* You."

Jesus did not argue or correct Peter. He gave him the instruction, "Feed My sheep." *If you truly know who I am, pass along this information to others who will follow Me. Feed them spiritual food about Me.*

Peter, not once in this conversation, used the word *agapao*. Not once did he tell Christ *specifically* that he had *set his will to obey Christ* and had placed Him first in his life. He dodged the question by using the word *phileo*. Considering that Peter often tried to outdo others, he probably used *phileo* to show that his affection for Christ WENT BEYOND what was asked of ANY man and went beyond what was required of *agape*.

If we have any doubts about Peter's *agape* toward Christ, Christ settled that doubt. He let Peter know that he would, indeed, *agapao* Him. Christ told Peter he would be martyred for His sake (vv. 18-19).

Christ had told the disciples on his last Passover, "This is My commandment, that you *agapao* one another as I have *agapao* you. Greater *agape* has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:12-13).

Because Peter would later lay down his life for his Friend, Jesus Christ, Peter did indeed have *agape*.

(To be continued.)



Chicago Violence Considered 'Normal'

Christmastime is considered by the world to be a time of "peace on earth." There have been times when armies fighting each other in world wars have laid down their arms and ceased fighting on Christmas. This is not the case in Chicago.

"At least 27 people were shot, seven fatally, in a 48-hour period in Chicago over Christmas weekend, according to the Chicago Police Department. It was the latest bloody chapter in a city besieged by gun violence.

"Homicides and shootings, already an all-too-common hazard in the city, have skyrocketed since last year, when the numbers were already high. The rise in violence is fueled in part by gangs, whose disagreements range from neighborhood turf wars to disputes over girlfriends. The conflicts often escalate quickly to gunfire" ("At Least 27 Shot, 7 Fatally, in Chicago Over Christmas Weekend" by Katie Rogers, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, Dec. 25, 2016, p. 1).

"The nation's third-largest city will end 2016 with a surging murder rate, a demoralized and distrusted police force and a weary populace that has become inured to daily reports of shootings.

"More than 750 people have been murdered in Chicago in 2016, the police said, a 59-percent increase over last year and the highest total since 1997. There have been more than 3,500 shootings in the city this year. ...

"As the year draws to a close, residents and community leaders say they are despairing over the ceaseless violence, which city officials are trying to confront with more police officers and new law enforcement strategies. But many people here also worry that the shootings, primarily in African American and Hispanic neighborhoods on the South and West Sides, have been normalized, a routine part of life" ("As Chicago Murder Rate Spikes, Many Fear Violence Has Become Normalized" by Julie Bosman and Mitch Smith, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, Dec. 28, 2016, p. 1).

This end-time violence was prophe-

sied in the Bible.

When Christ was asked about a sign pointing out the time of his return, He gave a number of things to watch. One of the things He said was, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Mat. 24:12). Certainly murder and attempted murder are lawless deeds committed by people who have no love for one another!

We are also told, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-4). We are living in the last days.

Lone Terrorist Opens Fire in Florida Airport

"Federal law enforcement officials said they were investigating whether the gunman who opened fire on Friday [Jan. 6] at the airport here [Fort Lauderdale, Fla.] killing five people and wounding eight, was mentally disturbed and heard voices in his head telling him to commit acts of violence.

"According to a senior law enforcement official, the gunman, identified as Esteban Santiago, 26, walked into the F.B.I. office in Anchorage in November and made disturbing remarks that prompted officials to urge him to seek mental health care. ...

"Other officials said it was too early to tell whether Mr. Santiago, who was captured at the airport, had been inspired by terrorist groups, including the Islamic State [it was later reported that he had been]. The officials said he had viewed extremist materials on the internet" ("Florida Airport Assailant May Have Heard Voices Urging Violence, Officials Say" by Lizette Alvarez, Richard Fausset and Adam Goldman, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, Jan. 9, 2017, p. 1).

Such violence is a sign we are in the last days (see previous story). God promised to send terror upon his people if they disobeyed him (Lev. 26:14-16).