

1. Understanding the Three Different Kinds of Love

The Greek language had at least three different words that are translated by the English word “love”. Those three words had three very different meanings. As a result, people can use the word “love” and mean very different things by their use of that word. That has caused much confusion both in our society and in the church. We will look at the meaning of those three different kinds of love in our topic today and then in future topics we will look at the Biblical principles to help our children grow in godly love.

One word that the Greeks used that is translated “love” in English was “eros”. This Greek word was not used in the New Testament but it was a word that spoke of sexual love. The English word “erotic” comes from this Greek word. Because of the wide use of the word “love” on television and in the movies, many people in the world today only know about this form of love. A more proper word in the way that television and movies use the word would probably be “lust” because the media have often moved this word completely outside the context of marriage.

A second word that the Greeks used for love was “phileo” and was a word that spoke of the kind of love that was shown in a family whether that family was a Christian family or knew nothing of Christianity. In fact, the name of the city of Philadelphia came from this word. Philadelphia actually comes from two Greek words “phileo” and “adelphos”. “Phileo” means *to love* and “adelphos” means *a brother*. As a result, the city of Philadelphia actually means *the city of brotherly love*. When people talk about the love of parents for children, the love of children for parents or the love of sisters and brothers, this is the kind of love to which they are referring.

Various books have been written to describe this kind of family love. Several of the books that have been written speak about the fact that as children are growing up, they feel loved by their parents because their parents show that love to them in one of five ways:

- Words of encouragement or affirmation
- Quality time spent with the child
- Receiving gifts
- Acts of service
- Physical touch

As it is easy to see from this list, this kind of love can be understood by children whether they are in families that are Christians or in families that have never heard of Christ. Parents that are not Christians can show love in each of these ways to their children just as parents that are Christians can show love in each of these ways. As Christians, it is certainly important to show this kind of love to our children. However, Matthew 10:37 warns, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Here, we see that we are to have an even greater love for Christ than we have for our own family. The reason for that will become clear as we begin to understand the third kind of love. If we love Christ most than we love our family, we can learn to love our family with the love of Christ and that love is far greater than family love.

The third word in the Greek language for love was “agapao” or its noun form “agape”. This is the word that is used to speak of the love that Christ showed for us when He gave His life and shed His blood to pay for our sin. This kind of love is defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a where we read, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...” The night before His crucifixion Christ commanded the disciples to have this same kind of love for one another. John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” We see that we are to show this kind of love both to our family and to all Christians.

The definition of love that we gave above from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a says that the love of Christ has two characteristics:

- Love is patient
- Love is kind

These verses say that there are eight things that the love of Christ does not do:

- Love is not jealous
- Love does not brag
- Love is not arrogant
- Love does not behave rudely
- Love does not demand its own way
- Love is not irritable
- Love thinks no evil
- Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness

These verses say that there are six things that the love of Christ does:

- Love rejoices in the truth
- Love bears all things
- Love believes all things
- Love hopes all things
- Love endures all things
- Love never fails

Christ gave this new commandment to the disciples to love one another as He loved them after they had the opportunity to view this love for about three and a half years. They had learned from the example that Christ had shown them over that period of time what that love really meant and the practical ways in which that love functioned. We see that love in action as Christ prays for the disciples in John 17. Even though Christ knew that He was going to the cross in a few hours, Christ focused His prayer on the needs of the disciples rather than His own needs. His great concern was that all believers would be one and that is only possible as we learn to love Christ and one another as Christ has loved us. That is also the kind of love that we have to show our children if we want them to grow in their understanding of the love of Christ.

However, we cannot show this kind of love in our own strength. This kind of love will only be shown as we yield our lives to Christ so that our children and others experience the love of Christ flowing through our lives. Romans 6:16 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” We have a choice. We either yield ourselves to sin or we yield ourselves to God.

When we try to live the Christian life in our own strength, Romans 7:19-21 explains how much love will be felt by our children. Those verses say, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.” These verses make it clear that we can determine to love our children with the love of Christ in our own strength and we will always fail to show that love.

In contrast, Romans 8:35-39 shows how we can experience the love of Christ as we yield our lives to Him. The result is that His love flows through our lives to our children and others. Those verses say, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

There is a key difference between Romans 7 and Romans 8. In the first seven chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit is only mentioned once. In Romans 8, the Holy Spirit is mentioned nineteen times. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to love others as Christ has loved us because He is our source of power. Christ said in John 15:5, “...without Me, you can do nothing.” Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” As we depend on our own strength, we can only love as those in the world love. As we yield our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to love one another as Christ loves us. We will be looking in future topics to see what this means in our practical ministry to our children and others.

As we come to the end of this topic, think through the following questions: Is my life still conformed to the world so that I view love and show love from the viewpoint of the world? Have I grown in my understanding of love so that I regularly help my children to experience family love? Am I yielding my life to the Holy Spirit moment by moment so that my children are experiencing the love of Christ flowing through my life? May the Lord richly bless you as you grow both in your understanding of love and your practice of love.