

**~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:**

Peter was obviously full of regret that he had let the Lord down, having denied Him three times. Jesus did not hate him for it or end their relationship permanently, but loved him, and gently confronted him to ultimately encourage and restore him. It began with another fish miracle that was similar to the one Peter witnessed when he first repented. Could Jesus' intention have been to reveal His love in the same fashion in order to remind Peter that His love for him had not waned? God loves sinners who sin, and so of course He still loves His children when they sin. Both need to repent.

Jesus, ever gentle, didn't immediately raise the subject, but first served Peter, fixing him breakfast, a task not below the resurrected Son of God who loves to serve. Then, taking Peter apart from the others, Jesus asked him a probing question: "Do you love Me more than these?" (21:15). Remember that Peter had boasted that his love for Jesus was greater than the other apostles. He had said, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away" (26:33). Shortly after his claim, he denied the Lord three times. Jesus now gave him three opportunities to reaffirm his love.

In most translations it appears that Jesus asked Peter the same question three times, but actually He didn't. The first two times, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him using the Greek verb *agapeo*, which each time is translated "love." The final time, He used the Greek verb *phileo*, which is also translated "love." *Agape* is a self-denying, sacrificial love, whereas *phileo* is a lesser love based on common interests and mutual benefits.

Interestingly, when Jesus first asked Peter if he loved Him with an *agape* love, Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, You know I *phileo* You." It was probably said with a sigh of regret, and meant, "Yes, Lord, You are well aware from my actions that my love for You falls short of *agape* love." Jesus repeated His question a second time, and Peter responded with the same answer.

The third time, however, Jesus said to him, "Peter, do you love me with *phileo* love?" That is why Scripture says that Peter was so grieved at the third question. I don't think Jesus asked him this because He Himself didn't know the answer, but because He wanted Peter to affirm it to help lift him from his despondency. Sometimes when we fail, we give up, which is a greater failure. Failures should make us more determined to do better, thankful for God's grace. Peter replied, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I *phileo* You" (21:17).

Most importantly, notice that after each of Peter's three replies, Jesus gave him a commandment: "Tend My lambs...Shepherd My sheep...Tend My sheep" (21:15-17). Surely this was intended to encourage Peter. Even though he had failed the Lord, Jesus had not given up on him, and there would be plenty of future opportunity to prove his love for Jesus. That is probably why Jesus also told Peter, "When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go" (21:18). John knew that this was a reference to Peter's future martyrdom, perhaps because Peter had already been crucified by the time John wrote his gospel. In any case, we might wonder why Jesus foretold Peter about his future martyrdom. I think it was meant to encourage him. Peter was so disappointed in himself. He had shown by his actions that he was not willing to die for Jesus. Jesus assured him that would change. He would glorify God in martyrdom. Tradition tells us that Peter requested to be crucified upside down, considering himself unworthy to die in the same position as Christ.

I can relate very much to this story, and I'll bet you can, too. When we let the Lord down, He doesn't hate us, and we make a huge mistake if we give up. He is there to encourage and restore us, just as a father with his child. Thank God for His amazing grace!