

Feed My Sheep

By Michael Clark and George Davis

I (Michael) recently was asked by a sister about two words used for feeding in the New Testament in John chapter twenty. Here is what I found out.



There is an exchange between Jesus and His disciple, Peter, that is very telling if we take the time to consider how it applies to us as His disciples. Jesus was very demanding with Peter. He would not let him get by with just a half answer. Have you ever had the Lord ask you the same thing three times? Believe me, it gets your attention when He does and you should also be grieved as Peter was.

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [agapao] Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You." He said to him, "Feed [bosko] My lambs."

He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [agapao] Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You." He said to him, "Tend [poimaino] My sheep."

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [phileo] Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love [phileo] You." Jesus said to him, "Feed [bosko] My sheep."

"Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish."

This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." (John 21:15-19, NKJV).

Jesus *agapao(ed)* Peter, but Peter could only *phileo* Jesus. *Agapao* was not there in his heart. I think it did come later, though, after he was filled with the Spirit at Pentecost. So how does a *phileo* shepherd feed and how does an *agapao* shepherd feed? Just as there is a difference between *phileo's* brotherly love and *agapao's* unconditional love, so there is a difference between *bosko* feeding and *poimaino* feeding.

Jude spoke of shepherds who fed themselves and ignored the flock. He uses *poimaino* in this passage:

But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.

Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

These are spots in your love [*agapao*] feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving [*poimaino*] only themselves [feeding and tending only to themselves instead of the flock]. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots. (Jude 1:10-12, NKJV).

Other than these two verses in John 21 where Jesus is speaking to Peter about feeding his lambs and sheep in both manners as a point of contrast, the only other usage of *bosko* is in the context of slopping the hogs! Read it for yourself (Matthew 8:30 and 33, Mark 5:11 and 14, Luke 8:32 and 34, and Luke 15:15). *Bosko*-ing was what the Prodigal son found himself doing when he finally came to his senses. Would that today's shepherds of mechanized Christendom would come to their senses.

Now, *poimaino* is what God calls us to do as His shepherds. It involves more than just pushing the feed off the back of a truck, as our dear sister wrote, or slopping the hogs. It involves tending to them and their needs with personalized care as a servant tends to

the needs of his master or a lady in waiting tends to a queen. It is a life of giving, not taking. It is a life of giving of yourself without restraint or concern for your own needs. This tender care of a *poimaino* shepherd is a rare thing in our western culture these days. The saints are herded into the feeding shed (church) for their Sunday feeding time in shifts... to bad if you need some quality time and you are in need of personal attention from the shepherd.... time's up! Next! You go home with grease oozing out of all your openings, feeling "serviced" just like you have been run through a Minute Lube. Zip-zap, wham-bam, thank you ma'am! Let's see now, here is your bill. It comes to a tenth of your income before taxes!

Here are some other verses that use the Greek word *poimaino* that should shed light on this important difference between the indifferent *bosko* feeding and the tender care of *poimaino*.

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd [*poimaino*] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28, NASB).

"...shepherd [*poimaino*] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness." (1 Peter 5:2, NASB).

"...for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd [*poimaino*], and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:17, NASB).

Have you ever ask yourself where their tears came from? Where were their tender caring *poimaino* shepherds while on earth?

As you can see, *poimaino* is what Jesus does to and for us as His flock. It is as if Jesus was asking Peter three times, "Do you *agapao* love me, Peter? I *agapao* you! Are you willing to deny all of your self-interests and love Me more than these... your boat, your nets, even this great catch you just received? Peter, *phileo* love is not enough to be a true shepherd of My sheep. You said you would never deny me, but I am asking you to deny yourself! You must tend My sheep with *agapao* love as I have love you. Your life is no longer your own. You can no longer dress yourself in what you like and step out

and strut your stuff in the power of your old nature. You must be so bound by My love that you cannot help but lay down your life for my flock and love them like I do. Brotherly love is not enough. It will fail you in this work. You must *agapao* Me and my flock and become a slave of them all, not seeking ever again your own self interests. You must die, Peter. Your old man will not make the grade in what I am binding you to and where I am leading you."

Here is a very telling story about how short the disciples were falling of *agapao* love.

"They [James and John] said to Him, 'Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but [it is for those] for whom it is prepared.

"And when the ten heard [it], they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to [Himself] and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority [control] over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" (Mark 10:37-45)

You who would be great--are you ready to be a lowly servant of all and cast away all hope of having a life of your own? Or are you still girding up yourselves and going and leading the flock where YOU want to go? If so, Jesus doesn't take your presumptuous ways with HIS sheep lightly. We must ask our own hearts, "Do we *agapao* love our Lord?" If so, it will show in the way we treat His sheep.

If someone says, "I love [*agapao*] God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love [*agapao*] his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:20, NASB)

In Christ's dealings with Simon Peter we see the making of a true shepherd.

The Making of a True Shepherd

Contrary to popular opinion, true shepherds are not made in seminaries. Neither do men ordain them. They are birthed in crisis. Such was the case with Simon, surnamed Peter. The name *Peter* is a prophetic name, descriptive of God's calling and destiny for Simon.

When Andrew introduced his brother Simon to Jesus for the first time, Jesus looked beyond the flesh and blood Simon, beyond the motley fisherman with his rough exterior and his rash and sometimes thoughtless behavior, to a calling and destiny that only He could see. Only He could see Peter in Simon.

Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is by interpretation, Peter). (John 1:41-42)

Later on, we catch another glimpse of the destiny and calling that the prophetic name "Peter" promised.

"Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' They said, 'Some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:13-19)

This name *Peter* means "a stone" and denotes sureness and steadfastness. We need not read far in the gospel narrative to discover that Simon was anything but sure and steadfast. In fact, it is not difficult to imagine the other disciples snickering under their breath every time Jesus called Simon "Peter." How was it that this impetuous fisherman would become a rock? It all began with a great crisis. In Luke 22:31,32, Jesus warned Simon of this crisis.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren.

Jesus warned Peter, admonishing him regarding the nature of the trial just before him. It was a sifting. Sifting is the process by which unwanted elements are removed from the precious grain. It speaks of separation. Such was the case with Simon. We should pay close attention to the use of the name Simon here, as it was repeated twice for emphasis, "Simon, Simon." Simon must be sifted before Peter could emerge. For the barrier between Simon and the reality of all that the prophetic name Peter implied, was a wilderness of temptation--a sifting, designed to winnow the natural strength of Simon, that it might be blown away like the chaff at the summer threshing-floor.

In passing through this God-ordained stripping Simon would come to see the utter futility of attempting to follow Jesus in the strength of his own soul. In what must have been perceived as an utter state of failure and shame, having no redemptive value whatsoever, Simon would learn to have no confidence in his flesh. He would learn to distrust his own resolve and tenacity as he would a liar or a thief. He would be converted from one life-source to another--from his natural strength to the life and recourses of Christ.

The Sifting

Oh, how Simon loved the lord! Surely if anyone would follow Christ to the very end, Simon would! But little did Simon know that just before him was a testing, a sifting that would shake him to the core of his being.

The Lord had been preparing His disciples for His death on Calvary. Accordingly Jesus said "Where I go, you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow me afterwards." This disturbed Simon and as per usual he spoke up, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake." (John 13:37)

Jesus answered Simon first with a question and then an answer. (John 13:38)

Matthew records Peter's response.

"No!" Peter insisted. "Not even if I have to die with you! I will never deny you!" And all the other disciples vowed the same. (Matthew 26:35 NLT)

Before we judge Peter too harshly we should remember that all the other disciples made the same promise. But as usual no one did it with Peter's pizzazz. We know the

story. It happened Just as the Lord had foretold. Peter openly denied the Savior--not once, not twice but three times.

Things looked rather dismal for Peter. For he had not only failed to lay down his life for Christ but had even denied Christ three times, in order to save it. O the shame! Simon had been winnowed and the chaff his self-confidence and self-reliance had been blown away and Simon was left to wallow in the constant memory of his utter failure.

Jesus' word's of hope, "when you are converted, strengthen your brethren," were all but forgotten.

It was imperative that Simon's faith in his natural strength, resolve and abilities should fail him. Simon, in his own strength, could not embrace the cross. His bold declaration "even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!" echoed in his mind, in condemning tones, as a haunting and constant reminder of his weakness. Simon would not make the same mistake twice. He would never again overstate his strength and resolve. However on that faithful day Jesus asked him those three telling questions, Simon would be sorely tempted. Jesus would test Simon, giving him every opportunity to repeat those fatal words.

In the conversation below there are two different Greek words translated "love"--*agapao* and *phileo*. *Agapao* is love in its highest expression--a sacrificial love, where the one loving gives his all for the ones loved. Span class="verse">"Greater love (*agape*) has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13) *Phileo* is a word that is much cooler in intensity, which means fondness--a friendship kind of affection.

With this in mind, let's listen in, shall we?

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you *agapao* me? Do you love me with a sacrificial love, so intense that you would lay down your life for me? Do you love me more than the rest of these, your brothers?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I *phileo*--have a friendship fondness--for you."

Jesus: "Then feed my lambs."

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you *agapao* me? Do you love me with a sacrificial love, so intense that you would lay down your life for me?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I *phileo*--have a friendship fondness--for you."

Jesus: "Then take care of my sheep."

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you even *phileo* me? Do you even have a friendship fondness for me?"

Simon: "Lord, you know everything. You know I *phileo* you! You know I have a friendship fondness for you!"

Jesus: "Then feed my sheep."

Note that Jesus begins each question with a reminder of Peter's frailty and human weakness, even tracing his lineage, "Simon son of John." Nowhere in this discourse did Jesus refer to Simon as Peter. Jesus is clearly directing Simon's attention to the source of the problem, i.e., "Simon son of John." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." No flesh shall glory in God's presence. Though one should give their body to be burned, if it is not motivated by the agape love of God, it is nothing.

I don't think we quite appreciate the position Peter was in here. Because of his previous failure, Simon dared not use the word *agapao*. He had already proven himself a failure here. Instead he used the lesser word *phileo*. There can be no doubt that Simon was Christ's friend. But with an *agape* love—a sacrificial love—a love expressed in laying down one's life for another? Not yet!

Then Jesus said something to Peter that for years seemed out of context to me. Looking into the future, Jesus assured Simon that there would come a time that he would glorify God in laying down his life for Him.

"The truth is, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don't want to go." Jesus said this to let him know what kind of death he would die to glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me." (See John 21: 15-19 NLT)

Simon could never lay down his life for Jesus but Peter could, and did. Eventually Peter would gladly lay down his life for his friend Jesus. Tradition has it that when he was "old" he was indeed "bound" and taken where he formerly had been unable to go - to the cross. After years of embracing the cross in his heart, it came to pass, that faithful day in Rome, that Peter hung on a literal cross, all for the love of his friend Jesus. Peter reasoned that he was not worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus had,

so he asked to be crucified up side down. So it is with the utmost respect that we now call him "Peter." What devotion! What greater love is there than this?

More than any other apostle, the faults of Simon have been put on display, even documented in the scriptures for generation after generation to read. It seems that none of Peter's bloopers have been left out. Be honest now, you have often taken comfort in Peter's failures, haven't you? I have! One look at Simon and we know there is hope. But we also see the method, the principle means, by which God makes gentle shepherds out of rough old fishermen.

This sifting of Simon presents a vivid picture of how God continues to sift those whom He has called, predestined and glorified - that they might be of greater service to the Chief Shepherd (Jesus) and His sheep.

Furthermore, Simon's denial of Christ is typical of much that goes on in Christian circles today, that likewise stands in the strength of the flesh, evading the cross; lacking the Spiritual strength required to truly "strengthen the brethren."

The outcome of religious man's well-intentioned, Simon-like efforts to lay down his life in service for Jesus, to die for Christ, is that somewhere in route he will always betray. How quickly his bold declarations fade into a bemoaning of his inconsistencies and failures! Leaving him to retreat in shame, and silent self-disgust—to lick his wounds and muster enough courage to take another stab at it. Why this constant cycle of failure?

The answer is simple.

The flesh will flee the cross every time. Oh, it may follow, for awhile, at a distance, but rest assured, when put to the test it will always elect to save itself. Although bragging of its self-denial, and making bold declarations to follow at all cost, as the cross draws near, confidence wanes, and then, drawing back to a safe distance, it warms at the world's fire—openly denying Christ.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Christ has seen your desire to serve Him and his sheep but before you can truly poimaino Christ's sheep, before you can strengthen the brethren, you must be converted. You must go through the sifting, that your natural Simon-like strength could be winnowed and blown away by the Wind of God's Spirit. So you see

dear brothers and sisters, shepherds are born in the threshing floor, not in the seminary.

[Copyright](http://aWildernessVoice.com) © aWildernessVoice.com