



August 14, 2026

Do you love Me more than these Fish?

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast of lower Alabama. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

We had a good visit with family and brethren in Aransas Pass, TX and are now back home and back in our offices.

While in Texas I was reflecting on what a blessing it is that God has called us to be His special children now with the potential of being spirit sons in His very family. *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* (1 John 3:1-2)

It is another blessing that we can be part of a group of called out ones who make up the *ekklesia* – aka the church of God, and are also able to come together, whether in local congregations or perhaps via webcast connections, like scattered little families who make up one large family with God as our Father. I am continually encouraged as weekly I'm connected with more scattered spiritual family members in various parts of His body around this nation and the world. His family is alive and seeking His will!

Upon return from our trip, shortly after arriving back to Alabama, I received a call from a long time member of the Church who at 85 years old was still as enthusiastic as when baptized in the early 1970's.

I reflected upon how our heavenly Father expressed His love generally for mankind and His desire for mankind to fulfill the destiny He had planned for them. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that*

whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) The Greek word translated "loved" in this verse is the verb *agapao*. This is the word most often translated "love" or "loved" in the Greek Scriptures. As we've studied before, *agapao* is used to apply to love for God the Father, Christ, men, and also objects.

Let's again examine the account in John 21 where there is an interaction of Jesus with the apostle Peter.

Jesus had prepared a breakfast for the disciples while they were fishing in the Sea of Galilee. They did not catch anything after fishing all night.

Having done a lot of salt and freshwater fishing over the decades, I know what that is like! Not only can it be patience testing, but wearying and you tend to be hungry come sunup!

As they came within earshot, Jesus instructed them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. After doing so, and finally pulling in a net full of fish, they went ashore and enjoyed a delicious breakfast of fresh bread and roasted fish.

I've done something very similar in Guatemala many years ago, but we used tortillas roasted on a make shift grill on the beach instead of bread. In this account, after eating, Jesus talked with Peter personally. It appears that the other disciples were there also and heard the conversation. *"So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than **these**?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He then said to him, "Feed My lambs.""* (John 21:15) In the recorded Scripture, the word that Jesus used for love is *agapao*. Whether Jesus spoke to Peter using Aramaic or Greek is not exactly known. The account is described using the Greek language. The word that Peter used for love is recorded in Greek as *phileo*. Again, we do not know what language actually was used in this conversation.

As an interesting side note, I have heard over the years many different explanations for what were "these" he referred to in John 21:15?

Scholars debate the exact meaning of "these" because the pronoun is ambiguous in the original Greek text. That being said, theologians often point to three different possibilities for what Jesus meant by "these" in His question:

- 1) More than his fishing trade: Loving Jesus more than his old life, his boats, nets, and the livelihood he had just returned to.
- 2) More than the other disciples: Asking if Peter loved Jesus more than the other disciples loved Him, especially since Peter had previously boasted he would never desert Jesus.
- 3) More than his companions: Asking if Peter loved Jesus more than he loved his close friends and fellow fishermen?

I personally think what he meant was “do you love Me more than *these fish* you just enjoyed”.

Jesus repeats the question as recorded in verse 16. The same Greek words for love as in verse 15 are used. Then in verse 17, Jesus uses the word *phileo* as recorded in the Greek. There have been various comments about the implications of why Jesus uses *agapao* at first and then switches to *phileo*. They often describe the love that Peter had as being deficient somehow at that time.

Might there be another way to explain these verses? The following analysis of the verses in John 21 is found in the Easton's Bible Dictionary (electronic version) under the Topic of 'Love'.

"This word seems to require explanation only in the case of its use by our Lord in his interview with "Simon, the son of Jonas," after his resurrection (John 21:16, 17). When our Lord says, "Lovest thou me?" he uses the Greek word *agapas* ; and when Simon answers, he uses the Greek word *philo* , i.e., "I love." This is the usage in the first and second questions put by our Lord; but in the third our Lord uses Simon's word. The distinction between these two Greek words is thus fitly described by Trench: "Agapas has more of judgment and deliberate choice; *phileio* has more of attachment and peculiar personal affection. Thus the 'Lovest

thou' (Gr. agapas) on the lips of the Lord seems to Peter at this moment too cold a word, as though his Lord were keeping him at a distance, or at least not inviting him to draw near, as in the passionate yearning of his heart he desired now to do. Therefore he puts by the word and substitutes his own stronger 'I love' (Gr. philo) in its room. A second time he does the same. And now he has conquered; for when the Lord demands a third time whether he loves him, he does it in the word which alone will satisfy Peter ('Lovest thou,' Gr. phileis), which alone claims from him that personal attachment and affection with which indeed he knows that his heart is full."

I think this explanation is worth considering. Even though the Greek verb word for love most often used is *agapao* there are a number of verses where *phileo* is used in a meaningful and instructive way. "*For the Father loves (phileo) the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.*" (John 5:20) "*for the Father Himself loves (phileo) you, because you have loved (phileo) Me, and have believed that I came forth from God*" (John 16:27) See also John 20:2; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Revelation 3:19.

Certainly the love expressed in these above verses is not deficient in any way. It conveys an emotional heartfelt attachment with affection.

In our daily walk as Christians, you and I need to demonstrate both *agapao* and *phileo* as we express our love and commitment in our relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and with one another as human beings.

Might I suggest, that during these upcoming fall Feast Days, inclusive of the Feast of Tabernacles, make sure to spend the very much needed time in prayer, and then reflect on what Christ taught us all through this recorded interaction between Him as our Savior and Peter.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



T. S. Hoefker

Senior Pastor, CGM

Church of God Ministries (CGM)/(Ministerios de la Iglesias de Dios)

tshoefker@cogministries.org / www.cogministries.org

P.O. Box 983, Daphne, AL, 36526-0983 / 251-930-1797 Offices