

The Challenge of Love, Lovest Thou Me?

by Peter Brandon

The challenge of love is to respond to the divine love of God and to live a life of obedience to Him.

Duration: 57:39

Scripture: John 21:15

Topics: "Spiritual Leadership", "Agape Love"

Description

Peter Brandon emphasizes the profound challenge of love in his sermon 'The Challenge of Love, Lovest Thou Me?'. He explores the significance of agape love, which is divine and essential for the church's growth and function, contrasting it with worldly distractions. Through the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, Brandon illustrates the call to a deeper, sacrificial love that transcends mere emotional attachment, urging believers to prioritize their love for Christ above all else. He highlights that true love is demonstrated through obedience and service, ultimately leading to spiritual maturity and pastoral care within the church.

Transcript

We are taking up this great study of love. We have noticed from the scriptures that where there is theological contention, it drives people from the church. Where there is true Christian love, it builds up the church.

We have noticed from the word of God that the greatest truth in scripture is the divinity of our Lord. And probably the greatest moral truth in scripture is love. We have seen from the word of God that this word love, agape, is mentioned 120 times and the verb is mentioned 135 in the New Testament.

We have seen that the word, generally speaking, was not used very much in Greek literature. It is mainly a New Testament expression. We notice from the word of God that this divine love, agape, is a love that is spiritual, it is essentially divine, it comes from God.

The love of God is shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost. It is impossible for a man in the street to love in a way in which God loves. In fact, the same kind of love that the father loved the son and the son loved the father, is the same love that has been given to us.

Think of that. And the teaching of that truth is beautifully portrayed in John chapter 17. And therefore this love is not to be found in the man of the street, but this love is to be found with the man in the sanctuary.

And therefore this is a sanctuary love. And every Christian has the propensity to love in a divine way. And when that comes to us, we should bow our heads and quietly worship.

Secondly, we have seen that this love is essential. Number one, it's essential to a functioning church, 1 Corinthians 13. Number two, it is essential for the continuation of a local church.

Revelation chapter 2, when we leave our first love, the candlestick is removed. And you'll remember the night we discussed that particular problem. We ask ourselves the question, had we left first love? Then we saw in the word of God that this divine love was social.

For instance, John tells us that we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. The Lord Jesus made it quite clear that love is the hallmark of discipleship. By this you'll all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another.

And we saw in scripture that love was the secret of soul winning. For we read those amazing words, uttered by Paul, the love of Christ constrained me. And then we saw from the word of God that love was a spiritual principle.

And then I corrected myself, you'll remember, and I put in the definite article, love is the principle. And we notice from the word of God that we have been delivered from the oldness of the letter and we have been brought into the newness of the spirit. And the newness of the spirit was first of all the faith work, the spirit's work, but essentially love's work.

And we notice that tremendous commandment given to us by our Lord, if ye love me keep my commandment. And then we got new thoughts on this great word agape, we noticed that it was not an emotional love, it was not even a physical love, it was not even a family love. It was a love of obedience, a love that's rational, a love that's intentional.

And we went through the scriptures to see just how this love characterized itself in various people. Then you will notice last night we dealt with the subject love's rivals. And you'll remember we looked at that tremendous challenge where John says, love not the world, neither the things of the world.

If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that's in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life is not of the Father but of the world. And then we saw that the world was going to pass away.

And we noticed last evening the world it's meaning. Then we noticed it's nature. Then we looked at it's various characteristics.

Then we looked at it's world's ruler, Satan. Then we observed it's opposition. The world is diametrically opposed to the church.

And then lastly we saw it's ultimate judgment. And then we closed by using that scripture which the apostles used in order to exhort the Corinthians to live closer to his Lord. Come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord and touch not the unclean things.

And then we just touched on the great sin of Balaam. And we noticed how that God hated the doctrine of Balaam as it was outlined in Revelation 2. And we noticed the doctrine of Balaam was twofold. Number one it was evangelical.

Some of the finest truths came by the prophecy of Balaam. And yet at the same time he seduced the children of Israel. And we noticed that it's possible for a man to preach the gospel.

And yet at the same time for that man to be seducing the people of God to go into the world in order to find their pleasure. And that was hateful to the Lord. Now tonight we are going to look at this great subject love is devotional and pastoral.

And we shall read tonight from John's gospel chapter 21. John's gospel chapter 21. And we shall read for the sake of time from that night.

As soon then as they were come to land they saw a fire of coals there. And fish laid their own and bread. And Jesus saith unto them bring up the fish which ye now have caught.

And Simon Peter went up and threw the net to land full of great fishes a hundred and fifty and three. And for all there were so many yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them come and dine or breakfast.

And none of the disciples does ask him who art thou knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh and taketh bread and giveth them and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples.

After that he was risen from the dead. Now when they had dined or breakfast. Jesus saith to Simon Peter Simon son of Jonas lovest thou me more than thee.

He saith unto him yea Lord thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him feed my sheep or my lamb. He saith unto him again the second time Simon son of Jonas lovest thou me.

He saith unto him yea Lord thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him feed or tend my sheep. He saith unto him the third time Simon son of Jonas lovest thou me.

Peter was grieved or literally hurt because he said unto him the third time lovest thou me. And he said unto him Lord thou knowest all things thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him feed my sheep.

Verily verily I say unto thee when thou wast young thou girdest thyself and walkest whither thou wouldest. But when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thy hand and another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This be he signifying what death he should glorify God.

And when he had spoken this he saith unto him follow me. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. Tonight I want to speak upon a love that comes to us first of all as a challenge and a love that will produce a pastor.

The first challenge that the Lord Jesus gave to the apostle Peter was evangelical. There was Peter and his brother Andrew casting a net in the sea for they were fishers. And obviously it was a casting net which was conical in shape and they were actually throwing it in the sea from quite near the beach.

And as they were pulling out the fish the Lord Jesus Christ called Peter and said follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men. And from that moment he and Andrew left their net and they followed Jesus. The second challenge that the Lord gave to Peter was at Caesarea Philippi.

And you'll remember he put to his disciples the question whom do men say that I the son of man am. One said John the Baptist another said Jeremiah another said Elijah or one of the prophets. And I want you to

think of those statements.

Who was Jeremiah God's foreseer. Who was Elijah God's foreteller. Who was John the Baptist God's forerunner.

But they were all wrong. And then he turned from the world's opinion and he turned to his own disciples and he says whom say ye that I am. And as Peter looked right into the face of his Lord he received a mighty revelation.

God commanded the light to shine out about him. And into that man's mind there thundered a revelation that came obviously from heaven. And if I may paraphrase now divine language he said something like this.

You're not a foreseer. You're not a foreteller. You're not the forerunner.

But you are the foreteller. Thou art Christ the Messiah. Doesn't that ring with reality.

And then having said that he made this tremendous statement. Thou art Christ the son of the living God. There is no ifs and buts.

This is not presumption or arrogance. This comes by not mere mechanical education but divine revelation. And therefore the Lord Jesus said to Peter upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

What a revelation. Flesh and blood hath not revealed it to them that my father in heaven. And dear friends if you can say in the power of the spirit that Jesus is Lord.

1 Corinthians 12 verse 1 and 3. If you can say with divine revelation that Jesus Christ is the son of God. Then you are a blessed happiness. And then the last challenge the Lord gave to Peter was not an evangelical one.

It was not a challenge that was ecclesiastical. But it's a challenge that passed. And after all his failures God was going to fully restore him.

And make him now not the teacher of men. But the pastor of death. Now can I say this carefully enough.

That is where we have been. An assembly will never rise higher than it spiritually. When God raises up holy ghost shepherds you will have holy ghosties.

When you have good godly leaders in the church of God then you will have spiritual children. We cannot lift people higher than what we are. It doesn't matter what our academic ability might be.

It doesn't matter how deeply we read into the original. It doesn't matter how many thoughts we can accumulate. It doesn't matter how we can analyze the scriptures.

We cannot lift people higher than what we are. And that is why the apostle could say you became followers of me and of the Lord. I used to know as a boy the father of E.W. Rogers who was an outstanding man of God.

He lived until he was 97 and died with all his family. I knew him when he was about 93. And when you went into this godly man's home the first thing he did was to pull you on his mat and he would pray.

Let all our conversation be exclusively for thy glory in the name of the Lord Jesus. And then when you went into his study there was a graph of the whole assembly and all the members were sectioned off and every day he spent two hours praying for sections of the assembly. No wonder it was spiritual.

Why? They had spiritual leaders. And beloved I do want to say this to you from the depths of my innermost being. We must not make people leaders of the local church.

We must not allow them to be elders because of their proficiency in business. But they must become elders because they possess the qualifications and they do the work. And again I want to say this sincerely to you.

We shall never see New Testament churches until we see New Testament earth. And that is absolutely right. Could I now give a word of warning.

If a man claims to be an elder and sits with the elder and does not do the work he will be responsible for that at the behemoth. But if a man has done the work of an elder when he stands before the behemoth he will receive the crown of glory that pays not a word. Now having said that I want to show you from the word of God that love is pastoral and devotional.

We cannot possibly understand this narrative and challenge until we go back into the life of Peter. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples just before his death that they would all be offended because of him. The word there means they would stumble because of him.

Peter was hurt because of that statement and he said arrogantly they might all offend him yet will not I. And the I there is emphatic. In other words he was saying Lord they might be offended but not me. And then he went further.

He said if I may now paraphrase his language that he was prepared to follow the Lord and to die for him. And then the Lord Jesus warned Peter three times because he knew that Peter was going to deny him three times. He told him very clearly by prophecy that the cock would crow and before the cock crew he would deny him three times.

And we all know the sad story. Peter followed afar off. Secondly he associated with the world.

Thirdly he warmed his flesh by the world's fire and killed his own heart. And then in the midst of the company of the world he denied his Lord alas with some swear word. And immediately he denied the Lord Jesus on three occasions.

The cock crowed. The cock was an ornamental bird. The pyrrhid and sometimes the high priests had in their temples and in their courts.

And the phantom bird was the only bird in nature that when it crowed inflates itself twice its normal size. And I want you to see Peter. I will never deny you.

They might be offended but not me. Not me. And now we see this man following afar off mingling with the world warming his flesh killing his heart.

And then he saw crowing in his face there was this cock and he could have run his neck. Because when Peter saw the cock inflating itself its normal size he saw himself with all his feathers. And you'll remember this if you're familiar with the offering.

When the bird was offered the feathers were cast on the east side with the cross. With the cross. And there you see that bird crowing right in his face and he could have killed him.

And then in the midst of all that drama and we must remember this that when the church becomes worldless God always makes a noise. He warns us. He has his cock crowing.

Then the Lord turned and looked on Peter. I think that's what the Lord is doing in Britain. If I had now my finger on the post the church is worldless.

The church is worldless. In fact I would go deeper. We're right in Babylon.

The cocks are crowing. The Lord is turning. And his look.

And Peter got one glimpse from the Lord and went out and wept bitterly. Beloved friends could I stop and ask the question. Are you getting too near the world's fire? Is there something in your life and in your home that's withering up your spiritual life? Is there something that you're doing that's causing you to deny your Lord? Is he looking at you now with those eyes of love and yet with disappointment? Peter went out and wept bitterly It was dark.

In that darkness he was handed over to Satan. Now note this. Satan was never allowed to shift him.

But sit him. Not shift him. Sit him.

Listen to this. Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. He couldn't be shifted from that could he? But he was handed over to the enemy that he might shift him.

I think this is what Peter meant when he wrote in his letter. That the trial of your faith being much more precious than gold. It was the ideal of purification.

As Satan got hold of him to shift him the Lord was praying for him. Somehow through that experience all the arrogance, all the pride, all the impetuosity was being shifted up. Beloved I say this with a sense of agony.

Don't we need that today? I'm not saying that we need to be handed over to Satan. But we need the shifting of the Lord. The purifying of the faith.

When the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead he called for Peter and obviously secretly Peter was restored. And then after his restoration you remember according to the prophet there they were to wait at Galilee. But somehow we see a tinge of Peter's impetuosity.

I go a fishing. The others followed him because he was a leader. And that night they caught nothing.

And as they were shivering in the cold they looked over the gummel of the boat and there is a stranger and he says children have you any meat? And they answer coldly no. Then he says cast the net on the right side and ye shall find. And they cast and they were not able to draw for the multitude of fish.

And then immediately the man of discernment who is John says it's the Lord. In the miracle he sees the identity of Christ. And then Peter is over the boat he is rushing to his Lord.

And after meeting him he runs out to help the disciples and he brings the net to land full of fishes a hundred and fifty and three. The net wasn't broken and every fish was brought to the place where it could

be used for the glory of God. And isn't that a picture of real restoration.

The fish caught. The fish landed. And there's a beautiful fire prepared by the Lord Jesus.

You will notice the fire is not a fire of wood that burns and splutters and then quickly burns out. You will notice here that it's the fire of coal probably charcoal. But it was a fire of coal that burns consistently.

And I love that. Our little fires burn on but they burn out. The fire of God burns on forever.

And God is marked by holy consistency. And after the Lord had given them in his love and grace the fish and the bread. And after they had dined he said I've got something to say to you.

You know sometimes I believe after we have taken the bread and wine and we have said on Christ and worshiped him. Somehow the Lord would have something. I want you now to note the challenge of the love.

I want you to note first of all the nature and the object and the arrival of love. Then I want you to see the response to the challenge of that love. And then I want you to see the calling of that love.

First of all the challenge of that love. Notice to whom it was given. Jesus to Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas.

Now why do you think he uses his unconverted man. Those of you who are familiar with the first chapter of John will notice that when Andrew brought Simon to Peter. He calls him Simon son of Jonas and he tells him that he is going to be Cephas.

Which by interpretation means Cephas. And therefore Peter was his new name, his Christian name. Simon son of Jonah or John was his unconverted name.

Or you may put it like this. Simon son of John was his old name relating to his old nature. Peter was the new name given to the new man.

And therefore in Simon son of John we have the old, in Peter we have the new. Why then does he refer to him as Simon son of Jonah. Because of the action of the apostle Peter.

When he was following the Lord of Pharaoh he didn't look a Christian. When he was associating with the world he didn't look like a follower of Christ. When he denied that he knew the Lord Jesus Christ he certainly didn't look like a Christian.

When eventually he used blasphemy in order to excuse himself of their company. He certainly looked far from this. When he was going through that process of being sifted by Satan.

His life was in doubt. When he even said I go a fishing. It was the impetuous old Peter.

Therefore in a most masterly way the Lord addresses him as though he was the old Peter. Beloved friends take this from me. And you know I'm saying this to you.

Sometimes many of us live as though we come home and we spend hours around the television. You know I've been in believers homes of life. And I say this with tears.

When I've seen them watching the filth of this world. And my dear wife and I. Simon son of Jonah. Sometimes we meet together and the Lord looks upon us.

And I'm sure he doesn't see us acting in our newness. But operating in our oldness. And therefore in a most masterly way he goes right back.

Simon son of John. The moment he said Simon son of John. Peter's mind would go back.

And his mind would go back to the grace of the Lord. His mind would go to the moment when he denied him. And the loving Lord.

His mind would go through those days of darkness when he was being sifted by the power of Satan. Then he would hear himself foolishly saying. I go a fishing.

And then he would remember that moment of his life. As the Lord said. It would break him because of the grace.

Beloved as you look back over your life. Then having said that I want you to tell me again he uses the word agape. He did not say to Peter Simon are you going to obey me.

He didn't say that. He didn't say Peter are you going to fully follow me now. He just uses one word love.

And he uses agape. Somehow I may be wrong. But somehow I believe the Lord was fair.

Peter I knew you were going to let me down. I told you you were going to deny me trust. I provoked you.

But I knew Satan was going to sift you. And yet I prayed for you that your faith was not fair. I knew the experience you went through in that darkness.

But Peter I did die for you. And here is the sign of my life. Here is my agape.

You will say to me I'm rightfully so. Well Peter where's your textual evidence for that. Because in this very chapter Peter the Lord Jesus predicted the very way in and therefore the word agape here is sacrificial almost bleeding love.

Now that's the love God wants for us. You see Peter said he would deny he would prepare to die for the Lord. But the very thing that caused him to blaspheme was the very thing that caused him to preserve his life wasn't it.

But now the Lord Jesus Christ comes to him with his dying love. With his glorious agape. And now it's not verbal it's demonstrated.

It's demonstrated by Calvary. Therefore he says to you sacrificial. Now this is love.

It's Sunday morning and you're not feeling too well and the saints are being gathered around the Lord's table. Love will bring you to that meeting. It's the track band and all the saints should be going from door to door with their little track.

Love will take you to the doors of the booth. It's the prayer meeting and perhaps it's a very hot evening and the hall is very hot. Love says I'll leave the comforts and the cool of my home and I'll go to the faith.

Faith is in great difficulty and needs help perhaps. Love goes to that place. Some of the Christians have lost their homes and everything.

Love so bright where there's sacrifice. You see this agape is a love that's prepared to be. Secondly I want you not only to note the nature of the love but I want you now to look at the object of the love.

Lovest thou me. Now when you love sacrificially there is always a danger. For instance that some of the Corinthians were loving the world sacrificially and therefore they became worldly and carnal.

Some of the Galatians were loving the letter of the Lord to such an extent they were going back and instead of saying for me to live as Christ down there in Colossae they had a tremendous and they were bringing in liberalism. The church there in Laodicea loved the material things of life and therefore they loved the gold and they loved the white raiment. They loved the eyesoles and that was the sole purpose really of some of their living.

Christianity to them was just a hobby but what they really loved was the very thing of persons that you love with agape love becomes your God. So he says to Peter, Peter now I know I'm bordering on something that's rather. It's possible to love the study of Scripture.

If the Bible doesn't bring you to God, if it doesn't bring you to Christ then it's failed in its object. And the reason why the book has been given to us is to give us an intimate knowledge of Christ and of God so that we might know him and know God. And therefore it's possible to have a massive knowledge of the Scripture and to have a very little knowledge of the experimental Christ.

It's possible to have a knowledge of the church and we want to gain a knowledge of the church. It's possible to have a knowledge of the local church and love the pattern of the local church and we should all seek to study the word of God so that we find ourselves in New Testament churches. But if we love the church more than Christ we become legal.

But when the object of our love is Christ himself we become exceedingly spiritual. And may I say this in passing, what an object to love. Love is that the only man that ever lived that could not sin was the Lord.

What an object to love. When God looked upon the Lord Jesus he did not look for sin, never. When he looked upon the Lord Jesus he looked upon him to see in him the highest development of all divine good and he found it.

That's why he said this is my beloved son in whom I find all my delight. No wonder we can love. There was only one being who was co-equal with God who was in the very form of God and yet was it not robbery, a thing to be grasped at, to be equal with God that made himself of no reputation.

And that was the Lord Jesus. No wonder. There was only one mighty man that had the right to bear the sin of the world and that was the Lord Jesus.

And as he bore the judgment he cried with a loud voice, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And when he had finally exhausted that judgment he cried with victory, sinners. What an object to love, the one who loves us. When God raised him from the dead he raised him from the dead with mighty.

He exalted all the glory of his fatherhood when he raised Christ from the dead, Romans 6. When he raised Christ from the dead he was the glorious firstfruits and the firstborn. When he ascended back on high he

led captivity captive, gave gifts unto men. There at God's right hand is a mighty man crowned with glory and honor.

We hear it coming to us tonight from Galilee. Beloved, beloved, I believe the Lord is coming. Then I want you to note not so much the nature or the object but the rival of love.

Lovest thou me more than these it could refer to the fish. What was Peter doing when the Lord called him? Fishing. What was Peter doing when the Lord consecrated him? Fishing.

Luke 5. What was Peter doing now when the Lord weaned him from it once and for all? Fishing. If Peter was alive today and he knew some of the modern poets he would have said I must go down to the sea again to the sea man. The thought was in his veins.

The voice of the sea was like a magnet to him. He was reared in it. He loved the fill of the net.

Loved the hold of the oar. Loved the smell of the sea. Loved the sight of the net.

And now the Lord was going to wean him from it and he said there's the hundred and fifty in three. Do you love me more than these? Beloved, if you've got a business that can be your greatest net. You know quite frankly when people prosper in business they need the prayers of all the time.

Perhaps the Lord is saying to us lovest thou me more than these. That these could be your hobby. Could be a sport.

It's something that comes between you and the Lord. And yet I believe he was actually saying do you love me more than these? The apostles he said that he did. What the Lord was saying probably he was saying this not facetiously but factually.

Peter you said that you basically love me more than these by saying that you would never be offended. They might. You would.

Now Peter you went deeper into darkness than the others. They never let me down with swear words. They were never sifted by Satan.

Lovest thou me more than these? Never imagine that you're the only one that's following. When that mighty prophet of God Elijah said I am that. He was told to appoint Elijah.

Never become I am that. And somehow Peter got that into his brain that he was the only one. And so in love and tenderness you love me more than these.

The response is yea Lord. No I love that. Yes Lord.

I'm quite sure he wasn't saying yes I do love you more than all these. But the word yes Lord means to acquiesce to what the Lord basically was saying about love. Yes Lord thou knowest all things and therefore he appeals to the omniscience of the Lord.

In other words he was saying Lord you know me from my very birth. You know all the details of my life. You predicted it.

There's nothing that I can hide from you. You know all things. And then if I may now paraphrase what he was saying.

He was simply admitting that he could not come up to Agape love. He could only give the Lord filial love. Which basically means a family love.

And so the Lord says to him feed my sick or less. Then he turns to Peter the second time and he asks the same question but now abbreviated. Love is thou me.

Not more than these. I believe the first question was a test case. The second one was to see his response.

And so he says well Lord thou knowest that I love thee. And he uses again a family love. He cannot rise to the heights of Agape.

In other words he was basically saying I love you. I love you as a man. But I cannot enter into this divine love.

Then the Lord Jesus comes down and he says Peter do you still love me? Do you really fondly love me? And because the Lord comes right down to his level, his hurt, his grief. He wants to be lifted. He says Lord thou knowest all things.

Thou knowest that I love thee. Now my dear friends once God gets our hearts. His letter through Sarnia says the writer to the Hebrews.

Not with clear head. God gets us. Gives me the heart.

His palm is thick. His heart was thick. And my dear friends once the Lord Jesus has got your heart.

He gets everything. And here he gets the heart. Then I want you to note the course.

First of all he says feed my lamb. Secondly tend them. Care for them.

Thirdly feed my sheep. And then he predicts to Peter that when he was young he girded himself. What did he mean by that? When he was living in the realm of Simon son of John.

He girded himself. But when he was old. The word means when you are mature.

Another shall gird you. What does that mean? Instead of moving impulsively and impetuously and doing the Lord's work in your own way. You will now do the work in my way.

And Peter I will eventually move you again. And he predicted that this he would do. And no wonder the Lord said to Peter.

When thou art converted. Turn the back. Strengthen thy breast.

Beloved I believe in a very real way tonight and with this I'm going to. The Lord is in this room. And he's saying to a few of us in a very personal way.

Love thou me more than this. I believe he's saying. I'm afraid to point.

Meaning to equate. So it is. I see now in my mind's eye.

An old man crying. And in his hand there's a bowl. His last son is.

And they're nearing the top of the mountain. And the son says to the father. Father.

You have the fire and the knife. I have the wood. But where's the land? That father says.
My son God will provide himself. And that old man moves up that hill. With shuddering determination.
For it was like. And then all of a sudden he turned to his beloved. And then with trembling hands.
He put him on the wood. The very wood that his son. And then turning away from his son.
He takes the knife. And his hand is shaking. And he lifts that knife.
And he hears God saying. Abraham Abraham. Love his son.
He says with blinding tears. Lord by my authority. He's throwing us a knife.
Be prepared to say.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/32/SID32322.mp3>
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