

# Session 3: Men's Session (Couples Conference)

by Stuart Briscoe

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*Stuart Briscoe explores the different dimensions of love--Eros, Philia, and Agape--and emphasizes the importance of commitment in marriage.*

**Duration:** 40:20

**Scripture:** John 3:16, John 13:34, Galatians 5:22

**Topics:** "Marriage Challenges", "Spiritual Obedience"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by discussing the challenges that young couples face in their marriages. He emphasizes that God designed marriage and there is a reason for the difficulties that arise. The speaker then shares a personal anecdote about talking to young people in coffee bars and being asked to talk about sex. He explains that the fruit of the Spirit and obedience to the Word of God are essential for a successful marriage. The sermon concludes with an illustration about a car not starting and the importance of understanding the problem before seeking help.

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## Transcript

Manchester United would assume, legitimately, that he feels exactly the same about his wife as he does about his dog, as he does about Manchester United. But that would be a mistake. Because if he noticed on one occasion that his dog was left out in the rain, he would of course send his wife out to bring in the dog, because he had to go and watch Manchester United on television.

So people who understand the English, when they hear him say, I love my wife, I love my dog, I love Manchester United, they would immediately put that through a filter. And they would say, what he means is, he loves his wife like you love your wife, and he loves his dog like you love a dog, and he loves United the way you love your football team. Now, this being the case, when we use the word love in so many different ways, and we automatically filter the use of the term love in different ways, this poses all kinds of problems.

For instance, the Bible says God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Now this is important, because the Scriptures make it very clear that when we become followers of Jesus, we are expected to love as he loved. Now when he says that God loved the world, then, and I'm not being sacrilegious here, I'm not just trying to be funny either, what does it mean? Does it mean he loved the world like a man loves

his wife, or like a man loves his dog, or a man loves his football team? That's not altogether a stupid question, or a series of stupid questions.

In fact, it's a matter of clear definition. Now, you're not going to get very much help from English in this, because there's a paucity of words that we can use. The New Testament, however, was written in Greek, which is very, very helpful, particularly if you know any Greek.

It does have problems if you don't know any Greek. Now, the Greeks, as we know, do have emotions, and they do have a tendency to express them, which is very, very fortunate, because it means that their emotional vocabulary is rich. And that is certainly the case as far as their expressions of love are concerned.

Now, let me just identify some of these words for you, in order that we might differentiate between the different aspects of what we guess at when we use the English word love. We guess as you mean love like you love your wife, love like you love your dog, love like you love your football team, right? You don't need to guess in Greek. Now, one of the words, one of the Greek words for love is eros.

Eros. It is obviously the word from which we get erotic, and it has to do with the sexual dimension of love. Now, this is clearly an important dimension of love.

The Bible never uses eros, but it does deal with erotic subjects. Now, I don't mean erotic in a dirty sense, in a scatological sense. I mean erotic in a sexual sense.

The Bible is not at all reluctant to call, to talk about sex. There is a very good reason for this. God invented it.

Many, many years ago, I used to go into coffee bars in London. They were used to me going in there, and the owners liked me going in there because I'd keep them there longer and they'd buy more coffee. So we had a rather good arrangement, and I'd stand up on a table sometimes and say, what would you like me to talk about tonight? I'd just talk for ten minutes, and they'd shout out different things, but it was only a matter of time until somebody from the dim, dark recesses of the room would shout sex.

Talk about sex, you see. And they would do that to embarrass me because they knew I was a Christian and didn't believe in it. So, sex.

Well, I would disabuse them of that misconception immediately, and I'd say I'd be very, very happy to talk to you about sex. In fact, it's one of my favourite subjects. In fact, if it were not for sex, I would not be here.

Moreover, if it were not for sex, you wouldn't be here either. Looking around this room, there's an awful lot of sex being going on somewhere. So I'd say to them, so let's give three cheers for sex.

No, we won't. I was just wondering whether we should. After they had very, very happily given three cheers for sex, these young people, I would say, now then, that's good.

But you must remember that the first person who ever had a sexual thought was God. The first person who ever had a sexual thought was God. He invented sex, so let's give Him three cheers, which they were very, very happy to do.

This was a new spiritual high for them. It was a new approach to worship. But it had a valid point, didn't it? You see, it's just reorienting the whole position, and the whole situation is this, that we have made sex, we

have made sex, in many areas, something almost obsessive.

In other areas, we have made it a means of selling stuff. In other sense, we have made it outright, downright sordid, and we need to look at it entirely differently and see the actual fact. In actual fact, sex is a gift of God that is to be enused in the way that God ordained it.

And seeing God invented it, it would seem to me the obvious thing to do is to figure out what He said about it. And it's a bit like getting a car. If you get a new car and you drive it for a while, and then the whole thing doesn't work, and you call the guy you bought it from and you say, this car's a lemon and you're a crook.

He probably would not appreciate that, and he might well come and see you and go to the passenger side of the car, open the glove compartment, take out a shiny little book that is still in its plastic wrap, open it up and show you that in actual fact there's an owner's manual, and you haven't even bothered to read it. And if you had read it, you'd have done certain precautionary things and the car would have run smoothly. So don't call him a crook and don't call the car a lemon, call yourself dumb.

Now, there's no question about it, that people are getting in all kinds of messes purely on the basis of sex. Purely on the basis of sex. And a lot of people, when they've got it in a real fix, they blame God, you see, they blame God, or they say, oh, this doesn't work, or this is a mess, or, you know, you're a crook and this is a lemon, and God says, no, you're dumb, you're stupid.

If you'd read the instructions, you would not be in the mess you're in. And so, what does God say about Eros? What God says about Eros is this, I invented it, it's a beautiful thing, and easily abused. And if it is not abused, it becomes something that can be enriching in the confines of, and here's the term again, monogamous, heterosexual, faithful marriage.

Very straightforward, that's what God has said. In the beginning of creation, God created them male and female. Now, having said all that in praise of Eros, in praise of sexual love, as God ordained it, we have to admit that when it says God so loved the world, it does not mean that God had erotic thoughts about the world, which is something of a relief.

And I'll tell you why. Because the difficulty with Eros love, which God ordained, but the difficulty with it is this, the tendency of Eros love is to look at the beloved one with a desire to derive pleasure from that one. That is the tendency.

It does have a selfish dimension to it, and therefore it needs something to balance it, it needs something to control it. Otherwise it can very readily become abusive. But that is one dimension of love as the Greeks understood it and as the Bible clearly talks about it, even though the word is not used.

Alright, here's another word. The second word is Philia. P-H-I-L-I-A.

Philia. It's the word from which we get Philadelphia. Philadelphia simply comes from two Greek words, Philia and Adelfhos.

Philia means love, and Adelfhos means brother. Hence the city of Brotherly. Now, Philia is different from Eros.

Philia is sort of friendship love, and you'll find it quite often in the Bible. Philia. Philia love is a mutualistic kind of love.

Let me give an example of it. Boy meets girl. Boy and girl get to know each other.

One day, the boy says to the girl, I like you. And she says, I like you. He, emboldened by that positive response, says, I like you a lot.

And she says, I like you a lot. He, ecstatic at that response, says, I love you. And she says, what? And he says, nothing.

Go on. What did you say? I love you. I love you.

Now, you notice what's happening. I like you generates a response, I like you, which generates a response, I like you more, which generates a response, I like you more, which generates a response, I love you, which generates a response, I love you. What's happening? This is mutualistic.

One is generating the other. You see? It is also escalating. It is an escalating mutualistic experience.

This is like plucking a rose, isn't it? You know, trying to understand it, and you destroy the thing. Philea. Philea.

Now, let's go back to this young couple and see how they are doing. Oh, I love you so much, I can't do without you. I love you so much, I could never live without you.

So, they get married. And they live happily ever after. For six weeks.

Now, as Jill said this morning, opposites attract until they irritate. Now, we look six weeks down the road. Breakfast time.

Toast every morning for breakfast, I don't mind. Burnt toast occasionally for breakfast is understandable. Nothing but burnt toast every morning for the first six weeks of our marriage is 42 times too often.

I've had it with burnt toast. Your mother had you for 23 years, and the best that she could do was teach you how to burn perfectly good bread. What was your mother thinking about? You leave my mother out of this.

Your mother belongs right in the middle of this. It's her fault that you are as inept as you are. You talk about my mother like that, I'm going to talk about your mother exactly how I wish.

And when I see her, you won't need to see her, because if you talk like that about my mother, I'm going back to my mother. Well, I think that probably would not be a bad idea, and maybe you could learn how to do toast without burning it. Door slams, and away she goes.

Now, we've got a problem here. Let's analyze the problem. The problem is simply philia.

That's all. You see, philia is mutualistic and escalating. I like you, I like you, I love you more than I can say, I love you so much I can't do without you, I love you so much I can't do without you.

Which is absolutely wonderful, and it goes on and on and on up into the stratosphere, but because it's mutualistic, if one person de-escalates, the other one might. And then the other, then the other, then the

other, then the other, then the other. I have conducted, I have no idea, dozens, scores, perhaps even hundreds of weddings.

Never, ever have I conducted a wedding for a couple who did not profess to love each other. But sadly, many, far too many of those weddings degenerated into marriages that finished up in the divorce courts, with unbelievable heartache, and devastation, and bitterness, and acrimony. A young man said to me not long ago, a young man whose parents are divorced, he said, how in the world can two people who loved each other hate each other so much? How does it happen? I'll tell you how it happens.

It's because their love never got beyond eros and philea. It isn't that they didn't love each other, they did, but their love never got beyond eros and philea. What does that mean? What it means is this, that eros love is the sexual dimension of love which God ordained, but a marriage that is built on sexual attraction, and sexual attraction alone can very, very soon get into regions of been there, done that.

And it is looking for new fields to conquer, new excitements to enjoy, new challenges to embrace, a new hunt to participate in, a new conquest to enjoy. It happens all the time. They loved each other, it was just eros, and there was nothing to hold it.

And eros, you see, has a fundamental selfish edge to it. The simple fact of the matter is this, as far as eros is concerned, physical attraction can deteriorate. As men are concerned, many of them begin to suffer from a strange illness called chest of drawers syndrome.

It's when their chest slips into their drawers. I like that, don't worry about it, I just thought I'd throw it in. Incidentally, you can always tell a fellow who's on the level, he's got the bubble in the middle.

There's no hurry, we've got a few more minutes. So, here we've got the problem. Why do marriages that start out with two people loving each other so much, finish up dissatisfied and disintegrating? Very often, because their love never got further than eros.

Or, their love never got further than philea, which is mutualistic. Mutualistic love can go either way, because it reacts to the attitude of the other person. Now, the Bible, when it says that God so loved the world, and we should love as God loved, did not use the word philea.

It didn't use the word eros. It uses another word, the verb agapao, the noun agape, or agape, depending on which syllable you put the emphasis. Agape.

This is an entirely different thing. Now, let me define it for you, because this is the key. This is what we're talking about.

Agape love is not a feeling, it's a decision. Agape love is no feeling, it's a decision. It is a decision to be primarily concerned with the well-being of the beloved one.

Are you with me? I'm going to go over this again, because it's so important. Agape love is not a feeling, it's a decision. It is a decision to be primarily concerned with the well-being of the beloved one, listen, regardless of condition, irrespective of reaction.

Now, that's a pretty heavy definition. Agape love is not a feeling, it's a decision. It is a decision to be primarily concerned with the well-being of the beloved one, regardless of condition, irrespective of reaction.

Now, you see the difference there between philia and agape? Because philia is mutualistic, it has a very high regard for condition, and it has a very high regard for reaction. I will love you if, or I used to love you until, I loved you but you did this. Because you did this, I'm going to do that.

Now you can see where we get into trouble. You see, what is needed to hold eros and philia in place, it's a transcendent kind of love. It's a kind of love that chooses to commit to the well-being of the beloved, even though the beloved one may disappoint and fail.

And this is the love that God has extended to humanity. God so loved the world. Now, when we talk about love, the tendency is to think that to love is to like a lot.

To like someone a lot. Well, if that was the case, let's insert in this famous verse, John 3.16, instead of love, let's insert like a lot. Alright? God liked the world such a lot.

Now where do we go with it? God liked the world such a lot that he said, oh, I do like it. And he turned to his son, and the Holy Ghost, and he said, what do you think? Oh, and they said, we like it too. And so, in glorious unity, the Trinity looked at the world that they had made and said, we like it a lot, let's make a lot more like it.

That would make sense. But in actual fact, they disliked it intensely. In fact, the Scriptures tell us quite categorically that it grieved God in his heart that he had made men, because of what men had done to his world.

So what is this love of God? Oh, it's not liking a lot. In actual fact, this love of God is a commitment to the well-being of that which he dislikes intensely. Now we're getting somewhere.

The love of God is a commitment to the well-being of that which he dislikes intensely, regardless of its condition, irrespective of its reaction. Because remember when Jesus came, he came unto his own, remember? What kind of a reception did he get? And his own received him not. So he said, alright, if that's how you want to be, I'm out of here.

I didn't want to come here in the first place. I got a very nice place up there in glory. But he didn't.

You see, because he wasn't operating on the basis of Eros, and he wasn't operating on the basis of Phileah, he was operating on the basis of Agape, which means he'd made a decision to be primarily concerned with the well-being of a world that he disliked intensely, regardless of its condition, irrespective of its reaction. Now you say, what in the world does this have to do with me and my marriage? Everything. Everything.

Because you see, marriage needs more than Eros, and marriage needs more than Phileah. It needs a dash of Agape love. Commitment.

Commitment. Commitment to the well-being of the other person. You say, where in the world am I supposed to get that kind of love from? I'm glad you asked.

I'm glad you asked. Now, let me give you a little insight onto this. Where am I to get that kind of love? It does not come naturally.

I am an intrinsically selfish person. I'm a human being of the male species. So I am intrinsically and innately selfish.

What am I going to do to get this kind of love? Well, let me give you two quotes from Scripture. One is, the fruit of the Spirit is love. Agape is the word there.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. But, here's another quote. Jesus said, a new commandment I give you, that you love.

Agape. Oh, what another. Now I want you to remember those two quotes.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. So here's the question.

Is agape love the result of obedience? Or is agape love the result of the work of the Holy Spirit? That's a huge question. Is agape love the result of obedience? Is agape love the result of the work of the Holy Spirit? And the answer is, yes. Yes.

It's not either, or. It's both. Not either, or.

It's both, and. Now, I don't know if you've noticed, but human beings are wired up differently. Let me give you a picture of two kinds of ways people are wired up.

There are those who are very organized, very meticulous, very detail-oriented. They love day timers. They love lists of things to do.

They love all the recent gadgets that are available to them, in order that they might live efficient lives. Efficiency is a big word for them. They start out the day with a list of things to do, and through the course of the day, you can see them rushing past you with their eyes on the middle distance, and you can hear a clicking sound as they go past.

Check, check, check. Tick, tick, tick. And they are running on schedule.

That's one kind of person. That's a caricature, but I think you get the idea. Then there's another kind of person.

They are relaxed. They are laid back. Their favorite expression is, uh, no sweat.

She'll be right, mate. No hurry. Take it easy.

Take time to smell the roses. Won't matter in a hundred years. Sort of approach.

Now, the first kind of people get ulcers and heart attacks, and have a short, efficient, busy life. The others kind of last a bit longer. You wouldn't notice it, because they're not doing much, but they're just, uh, they're relaxing, and there are still lots of roses to smell.

Now, this of course is a caricature. Now, if it is true that in general terms we are wired up differently, it is also true that the way we are wired up temperamentally will make certain aspects of spiritual truth appealing to us, and certain aspects not at all appealing to us. So if I am tightly wound, and I have lists of things to do, and check, check, check, and tick, tick, tick, and I hear that the fruit, and I hear another commandment, I give you that you love one another, I add that commandment to the list I've already got, and I say, oh boy, I'm going to have to tackle this one.

And so this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to add to all the other commandments that I'm trying to fulfill this one if it kills me. And wife, look out.

I, in sheer obedience, am going to love you, and you are going to enjoy it. Well, this may be somewhat problematic. On the other hand, there are the people who are laid back, and they love the expression, the fruit of the spirit is love.

And they see themselves flourishing like an orange tree. Now you never saw an orange tree with a day timer, with a list of things to do. You never heard an orange tree say check, check, check, tick, tick, tick.

All it did was stand there and enjoy the sunshine, and the fruit just came. Now, people who are laid back, like the orange trees, they love the fruit of the spirit. In fact, they will trust God by his spirit to do what he specifically told them to do.

So what are we to do? This is what we need to do. We need to look at our own personality type. What is it? Wound tight or laid back? Recognize that our personality type will make one aspect of truth very appealing to us.

Acknowledge that that will tend to come rather naturally into our thinking, listen, and concentrate on the other one. So the ones who are wound tight, guess what? They could begin to understand, I don't have it in myself, however much I screw up my courage, however much I grit my teeth and clench my fists, I don't have it in myself, no matter how obedient I've decided I'm going to be to love my wife the way I'm supposed to do it. I don't have it, but God would never call me to do it if he didn't equip me for it.

And somewhere or another, I need to learn what it is to depend on the spirit to empower me to be what I'm not and do what I can't. And I begin to mix obedience to the word and dependence on the spirit. Conversely, if I am one of those laid back people who is trusting God to do by his spirit what he told me to do, what I need to do is factor in some little obedience things.

Like doing things he told me to do when I don't want to do them. So what do I do? I identify that the fruit of the spirit is the basis of the enabling, and obedience to the word is that which puts the power in gear, like the clutch on a car. I look at my own personality type, I identify what it is, I recognize the kind of theological aspects that appeal to me, and I concentrate on the other one.

Alright, it's a bit complicated, it's afternoon, just after lunch, the worst possible time to talk to a group of people. Here's an illustration and then I'll let you go. I don't know where we're going, because the women won't even be into their second hanky yet.

One day my car would not start. It was in the dead of a Wisconsin winter. I looked under the hood and I didn't see a thing I recognized.

I looked rather hopelessly at this thing for a few minutes and then decided to call my friend, Donnie Couchman. I called Donnie, I said, Donnie, my car won't start. He said, it's either the spark or the fuel.

I said, well, thank you for telling me that, Donnie, but would you come around and start it for me? He said, OK, but it's either your spark or the fuel. I said, well, I don't even know what that means, so would you come around? So he came around. I heard him come in, he drove a dune buggy in the middle of a Wisconsin winter.

He's weird. A close friend of mine. I hear him coming half a mile away, so just before he arrived, I went out again as if I've been there all the time.

Peering intelligently under the hood. He jumped out, he said, here, hold this. So he gave me a big screwdriver.

So I held it rather like the Statue of Liberty. He said, not there. And he pressed my arm down deep inside the oily, dirty recesses of this car engine.

And he said, press hard and hold it firmly there. And then he got inside the car, and I had some kind of ecstatic experience. It started, this is an illustration you can't use with women.

It started with my hands, and it worked its way rapidly up my arm and to my head. And I'll swear, there were tongues of fire on my head. And I began to dance.

And I began to utter sounds I'd never uttered before. And I thought, this is amazing. Tongues of fire, I'm speaking a language I'd never learnt, and I'm dancing.

I'm having the experience that half my church say I need, and the other half say they'll leave if I have it. And it stopped as soon as it started. And my friend Donnie got out the car and he said, it's your fuel.

I said, what? It's your fuel. I said, what are you talking about? He said, your car won't start, it's your fuel. Your tank's empty.

I said, how did you find that out? He said, if it won't start, it's either the spark or the fuel. I said, I know you've said that. He said, it's not the spark.

I said, how do you know that? And he said, didn't you feel it? You see, because an internal combustion engine will not operate just on spark, and it won't operate just on fuel. Now I know you mechanics here are going to say, no, it needs oxygen as well. Don't mess with my illustration.

What you need is the spark that will ignite the vapor of the fuel. It's not either or, it's both and. That which ignites the incredibly powerful thing called agape love in the human heart is not just the spirit, and it's not just obedience.

It's an explosive mix of both. Are you with me? And Jesus said, and you command what I give you, love one another. Like that.

And he never gives us a command without empowering us to obey. So there's part of the answer to the question, what is this thing called love? Let's pray. Lord, I want to thank you for this great group of men on a Saturday afternoon who want to think about their marriages and their wives and their love lives.

And I pray that that which we have spoken about will find a warm, receptive place in their minds and in their hearts. Will seep down into their wills. They'll mix it with faith and render obedience to it.

And their lives will be enriched. And their relationships ennobled as a result. In Jesus' name.

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