

Eros, Storge, Phileo, and Agape

INTRODUCTION

Love is ambiguous in the English language. There is “Strawberry Shortcake Love.” We love cats, dogs, and ice cream. This is trite and without depth or permanence. There is “Aunt Minnie Love” which is reserved for “special” people who are sweet and lovable. Sometimes it is condescending. There is “Bowling Team Love” for “buddies” in a reciprocal way. Moderns do not zero in on “Tough Love.”

So there is a Greek word study. However, the Bible is not learned in a seminary; it is learned out on the street with people in local work. Footnotes will not preach. Also, the Bible must not be reduced to word studies. You can get so far out on a limb looking at a leaf you forget the tree. Word studies can be helpful, but they can also become technical.

I. *Eros*

- A. This is physical, carnal, passionate, erotic, fleshly love. We are afraid of this in general. When was the last time you seriously studied the Song of Solomon? Are you embarrassed to study it? Why?
- B. There is an illusion about romantic love. You fall “in” and “out” of love. You do not apply this to family love or friendship. Falling in love is temporary. The honeymoon ends and reality sets in.
 1. The myth of romantic love is that marriage is the answer: “My future mate will meet my needs and make me happy.” This is futile.
 2. If you are not happy being single, you will not be happy being married. There are some needs others cannot bring.
 3. The “Marriage Box.” Moderns believe in marriage as a gift-wrapped beautiful box to which we daily go and reach into to receive our daily blessing. This is *wrong*! The “Marriage Box” is a common pasteboard box in which mates bring gifts daily. Marriage cannot bless or curse; it is neutral. Marriage is what two people make it be.

II. *Storge*

- A. This is natural affection—family, kin, the humblest of loves. We love each other simply because we are of the family.
- B. It is negative in Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3:3, used regarding homosexuals.
- C. It is used in withdrawal in 2 Timothy 3:14, 15. Withdrawal is not excommunication, putting one out of the church. It is what it says, withdrawal of fellowship.

III. *Phileo*

- A. This is tender affection and brotherly love. (Philadelphia is the city of “brotherly love.”)
- B. However, sometimes we make too clear a distinction between *phileo* and *agape*. Be careful. There are surprises. Read Titus 2:3, 4; Romans 12:9, 10; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Hebrews 13:1; John 16:27; and 1 Peter 1:22. *Phileo* and *agape* are both used in the same reference. First Thessalonians 4:9 is *phileo*, not *agape*. Luke 15:20 (“kissed him”) is *phileo*. The Elder Son refused to accept or give love.
- C. Conclusion time is here—a great marriage can only exist among strong mates, not one strong and one weak or two weak mates. Tough love is strong love.

IV. *Agape*

- A. This is in the will, not the emotion. It is commanded. It is not “like,” but love. *Agape* is the course of active good will even to enemies. We are to love even where we do not like.
- B. *Agape* is the permanent key to all healthy relationships. I will love you, period! Notice John 3:16; 13:34, 35; 15:12; Matthew 5:43-48; 22:36-39; Romans 12:9; 13:10; 1 Corinthians 13; Colossians 3:14; 1 John 3:18; 1 Peter 4:8; 2 Peter 2:15; and Jude 12 (*agape* love feasts).
- C. However, love must become more than that willed! It is pathetic for husbands and wives to not also have *eros*, *storge*, and *phileo*! Read 1 Corinthians 7. *Agape* is there but these other loves remove it from being cold and mechanical.

—Charles B. Hodge, Jr.