

John 21:15 – 17

This exchange between Jesus and Peter centers on two different Greek words which, unfortunately, are both translated 'love' in the New Testament: *agape* and *phileo*, selfless concern and brotherly kindness. Using 'love' for *agape* and 'like' for *phileo*, the exchange goes like this:

So, when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon, Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I like you."

He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

He said to him again, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I like You."

He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you like Me?"

Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you like Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know that I like You."

Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

- Note the progression of Jesus' questions. They are three different questions, not the same thing three times: Do you love Me more than these? Do you love Me? Do you like Me?
- 'These' in the first question may refer to the fishing business rather than the other disciples.
- Peter refused to move up to selfless concern, sticking with brotherly kindness all three times.
- Peter was grieved because Jesus dropped down to 'like,' not because He asked three times.
- Jesus told Peter to do essentially the same thing all three times. Feed My Sheep.

What does it mean?

- Perhaps Peter recognized in himself that he did not have selfless concern for Jesus, but rather loved Him as a brother. Romans 5:5 says that love (*agape*) is poured out in the hearts of the faithful by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Peter had not received that yet.
- Interestingly, Jesus did not disqualify Peter because he could not assert selflessness.
- Note that Peter used *agape* in 1 Peter 1:8, 1:22, and 2:17 concerning love of Jesus and the brethren. So, after Acts 2, Peter made that assertion of selfless concern.