

BUILDING GOD'S HOUSE – Part VII The House that Love Built



When talking about building a house for Jesus on earth, the topic of love cannot be ignored. The problem is how to define God's love. For the last few months we have looked at the healing aspect of God's kingdom. In order to move in that aspect of God's society, we need to understand prayer and worship, topics we have discussed in depth on this site. The need for this understanding is simple. How can we be involved in God's healing of mankind without knowing how or what He wants to heal? The only way to know this is through prayer and worship, which should always become a two-way conversation with the Lord. It's during that two-way conversation

that we receive God's revelation of healing and deliverance. Another interesting occurrence takes place as we pray and worship: we, ourselves are also healed and made whole by the same Holy Spirit that we are worshiping and seeking His guidance to heal another. This month I was going to go into a brief review of prayer and worship. As I was attempting to do that the Lord challenged me with a thought: LOVE. None of our worship, no aspect of prayer and absolutely no healing can take place without the reality of God's love. To confirm this word for me He took me to Psalm 136. This is not exactly the place I would have started. For one thing, there are some human translation 'issues' that are not easy to reconcile with the word 'love' translated as such in the NIV and the word 'mercy' translated in the KJV and the word 'loving-kindness' translated in most other Bibles that we see in Psalm 136. To be honest, I really didn't want to get into a dissertation on the simplicity of love. So I went through both Old and New Testaments for the word LOVE. I discovered, as with all things GOD, that we humans just don't understand HIM. It seems that there are 'human translation issues' throughout the whole Bible when it comes to our simple word "love."

It was then that I realized my problem is the same as the translator's problem. We define love as a feel-good, do-good emotion. There is nothing wrong with that, except that God's love is a bit more than that and a bit more intense than that. There are roughly 19 or so words commonly translated as love in

our Bibles (and a few others that may mean something else but are also translated as 'love'). Not all of these words and not all of these situations in which they are used depict our 'feel-good' attitude of love. Many most certainly do, but there are situations that totally confront our 'peaches and cream' attitude about God's love---and that's where we will begin. I had to do my best to understand that there is human love defined as such in the Scriptures and then there is God's love, which is somewhat unable to be put in a nice definition box, and then there is something totally 'other.' It is a place where God's love defines and becomes human love in a divine package. That place is totally depicted and summed up in Jesus Christ---and it is the birth right that all of true Christianity finds itself in and aspires to on earth as we work out our salvation with "fear and trembling" (See Philippians 2:12 & 13). I think that is why we find the Apostle John's writings so intense and profound. Out of all the New Testament writers, he wrote the most prolifically about divine love. And of all the Old Testament books, the Song of Songs talks about God's love and human love in language and allegory that defines God's love easily, but makes us less comfortable in that definition.

Let's look briefly at the psalm the Lord gave me that confronted my understanding of divine love. First let me say that I will print it in the New International Version, but the word 'love' used here is translated as mercy in the KJV and probably best translated as loving-kindness in most other Bibles. PSALM 136: "Give thanks to the Lord, for

he is good. *His love endures forever.* Give thanks to the God of gods. *His love endures forever.* Give thanks to the Lord of lords: *His love endures forever.* To him who alone does great wonders, *His love endures forever.* Who spread out the earth upon the waters, *His love endures forever.* Who made the great lights---*His love endures forever*---the sun to govern the day, *His love endures forever.* The moon and stars to govern the night; *His love endures forever.* To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, *His love endures forever.* And brought Israel out from among them, *His love endures forever.* With a mighty hand and outstretched arm; *His love endures forever.* To him who led his people through the desert, *His love endures forever.* Who struck down great kings, *His love endures forever.* And killed mighty kings---*His love endures forever.* Sihon king of the Amorites, *His love endures forever.* And Og king of Bashan---*His love endures forever.* And gave their land as an inheritance, *His love endures forever.* An inheritance to his servant Israel; *His love endures forever.* To the One who remembered us in our low estate, *His love endures forever.* And freed us from our enemies, *His love endures forever.* And who gives food to every creature. *His love endures forever.* Give thanks to the God of heaven. *His love endures forever.*”

I did not add the normal capitalizations concerning God because the translation I was copying from did not have it and I could not add the punctuation because they were too unusual for my computer program to handle. Most of these problems are actually

due to the original Hebrew. To complicate this for us in our translations the Psalms were written as music; not our western style of music, but Oriental or Middle Eastern. Our English language and Hebrew music phrases don't always make for easy reading, but if you read the refrains in italics and imagine you are singing them, it will become easier to identify the phrases. Most scholars agree that this psalm, along with the preceding one should be grouped together and are probably written by Hezekiah, although there is a good argument for some portion of Psalm 135 having been written earlier and used in the first temple. Nevertheless, these psalms were used in the second temple worship system. They were antiphonal. And with Psalm 136 it is easy to imagine the priests singing and the congregation voicing the refrain. In the Jewish liturgy this psalm is called The Great Hallel to distinguish it from The Hallel (Psalms 113-118). Some give Psalms 135 & 136 this nomenclature while others refer to Psalms 120-136 as The Great Hallel. It should also be noted that the refrain (which is in italics) is not written as such in the original. Only the first line is and it is written, *ki leolam chasedo*, translated “for forever His mercy.” Another ‘translation’ issue that English Bibles have with this psalm is in the first line with the pronoun He. That is not what is written in the original language. As with many things in the Hebrew, a dual understanding is given and is actually kind of impressive. In English we have read, “for he is good.” But the original is “for good.” So a better translation might read, “Give thanks to the Lord, for good.”

Implying that the Lord is good and it is good to give thanks as well as the understanding that something good happens when you give thanks, almost as a spiritual blessing or invocation and thus a supernatural benefit ensues. It is a shame that our English translations cannot encompass all of these very real meanings by the simple Hebrew words, “*ki tob.*”

Another very real translation issue is with the actual word used for love (mercy or loving-kindness). The word is *chesed*. It is seen as God's mercy or pity and in some cases translated as loving-kindness, which in this particular case is the better word. If you were going to take a paragraph to explain it you could say it is the very practical exhibition of God's love manifested in due consideration toward and for man, whose need for Him to exhibit that love is great, multifaceted and in need of a manifold witness! Once you can digest that kind of an understanding of this aspect of love, you are now ready to read the psalm with this understanding in the forefront of your psyche. Once that understanding is in place, the context that God places His love within this psalm is pretty astonishing.

First of all this psalm is to give thanks. The previous psalm is to praise and bless the Lord, which brings its own benefits. But in this psalm we are commanded to give thanks. First and foremost thanks must be given for who God is. There are four titles employed here which encompass God. The first is Yahweh or in our English translation, Jehovah. The next is Elohim of the *elohim*.

The third is Adon of the adonim and the last is leEl hashamayim. In English, Eternal, all encompassing, covenant-keeping, Ever-present I Am, who is above all other gods; the God of creation who is the Lord of all lords and is Ruler and Sovereign, who is the God of Heaven (the God of all strength and power. Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient covenant-keeping God). I don't know about you, but I just think, WOW, when I hear that and realize how incomplete our English is in its translation. What other response could you have after reading those titles in verses 1-3 & 26 but to give thanks? To understand that LOVE is employed by God in the context of these titles is also a bit awesome.

It really doesn't stop there because from verse 4 on you then understand that this God made creation, the heavens above, along with all the celestial lights. There are those that place spiritual connotations on the celestial lights. If you are one of these readers, there is even more to give thanks to the Lord for. The more solid theological interpretation is the tremendous power due to His love for mankind that He gave us the wonders in the heavens with the lights that guide our night and our day and all of earth's functions. He did this for LOVE! WOW! The next few verses are a little more difficult for us as humans to comprehend when it comes to our definition of love. It is here that we have to understand God's definition of love. Verses 10-24 talk about God delivering Israel and giving her their land for an inheritance. It talks about past enemies and redemption from future ones (at

least future from the time when this psalm was written). It talks about killing and plundering other kingdoms for the sake of His people, Israel. Yet we are plainly told in other portions of Scripture that God loves all those from every nation that come to Him. If the word justice or even righteousness were used here instead of mercy, loving-kindness or the concept of love that is used, we might be able to understand this portion better. But that is not the case, and here is my personal opinion as to why. God, the All-Knowing Creator knows exactly what it will take to deliver all of humanity from the clutches of sin and degradation for eternity. He chooses, as improbable as it may sound, a small group of people, not well liked, and basically a stench to their neighbors to bring forth ONE person---Messiah---that will save all mankind by belief in that ONE person. To the thinking and rational mind this is ludicrous. Why use a group of people that so many have a problem with, and then One Man that even His own people have a problem with to save all of humanity? In the mindset of God He goes to great lengths to deliver that one group of people that brings forth that One Man and He calls those deliverances acts of loving-kindness for the whole of earth. Furthermore, for all of the missionaries that have lost precious blood telling the story of the One Man, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah that can save people from an eternity in hell, the loss of their blood is God's love exhibited to a lost a dying world, in much the same way that the shed blood of their Lord was God's love exhibited to a lost and dying world. This is that definition of God's love that can overcome in the face of

such horrid evil and overcome all odds, not simply for a moment in time or for the events of a lifetime, but for the big picture---for eternity! God thinks for eternity. When thinking on the human level He thinks for the generations of humanity who follow each other. In the realm of that kind of thinking, love eclipses our feel-good emotions. It is solid and not fleeting. It is love for the ages and actions that speak for eternity that matter. This is hard for us as humans to grasp. This is why the Holy Spirit must indwell us and lead and guide us. Let's face it, without Him doing so, we just would not be able to comprehend that kind of love.

This psalm should be a great hope for the nation of Israel as well as an anchor to all those suffering persecutions and hard times for their faith in Christ. Verse 25 must not be overlooked for this reason: the preceding verses talk about the low estate of people and verse 25 talks about God's providence for all creatures (the lowest of the low). We don't realize that by killing off the animals (uselessly or negligently) we are actually ignoring God's love for mankind in supplying the animal kingdom with provision. This thought is also seen in the New Testament (Romans 8:18-23). From this psalm it would seem that in providing for the animal kingdom, it is not just because of His love for mankind, but also for the animal kingdom itself! This surprises many theologians, but the language in this verse is plain.

One of the things that surprised me in my observations throughout the Bible

concerning the word or concept of love is how often God uses it. There are roughly eight words translated as “love” in the Old Testament. God is quite free in His use of the exact words translated as ‘love’ as well as other words that describe some concept of ‘love.’ The word chashaq means to desire or be in love with or set one’s affection on. It is used to describe God’s love for His people, as well as the love an Israelite might have for a foreign woman that is taken in war and held captive whom he desires to take as his wife! (See Deuteronomy 7:7; 10:15; 21:11) When Hezekiah becomes ill and writes about his trouble and deliverance this word chashaq is used, “Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your LOVE you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.” (Isaiah 38:17) The most frequently used words for love is the word ahab, which is masculine or the feminine, ahabaha. It describes all forms of proper human love, like or great fondness. But God uses it of Himself to describe a few things. It’s used in Song of Songs 8:7: “Many waters cannot quench LOVE; rivers cannot wash it away.” This is where God’s love becomes human love and human love is reflected back to God. God uses this word of His love in Isaiah 61:8, “I the Lord LOVE justice (or judgment in the KJV); I hate robbery and iniquity.” In Isaiah 63:9: “In all their distress He too was distressed, and the angel of His presence saved them. In His LOVE and mercy He redeemed them.” In Jeremiah 31:3: “The Lord appeared to us in the past saying: ‘I have LOVED you with an everlasting LOVE.’” At the same time the

Lord uses it to describe His love of Solomon, a subsequent son of the onerous relationship of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:24). He also used it to describe His people’s love of false prophecy: “The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people LOVE it this way.” That God uses this word here is an example to His people everywhere how easily it is to see proper, human love fall prey to sin. One of the more astonishing places is not exactly where the word love (ahab) is used, but how it morphs. If you read this in English and you see that the Hebrew word for love, ahab, is spelled exactly like the name of the crafty and evil king of Israel, Ahab, you would be exactly correct. Although his name does not mean love, his name does come from the root word for Father and means brother or more particularly friend (close fondness) of my father. The word for love, ahab is a root word in and of itself, but some word etymologists feel that the root word of love may actually have been linked from the ancient root word of father. Whether this is true or not, I cannot say.

Another word used in the Old Testament for love is dwd and literally means to boil. It can be used to show love for a brother or anyone else and is used the most in the Song of Songs. One of the most interesting places that it is used is in Ezekiel 16 where we see an allegory of unfaithful Jerusalem in comparison to God’s love: “Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for LOVE, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered

your nakedness.” In Ezekiel 23:17 God employs this exact same word to describe Israel’s love of Babylon. One last observation I had is seen using the word egeb. It is the most outward and passionate expression used for love. In the following verses though, it’s easy to see that passionate outward expressions of Godly love are not always what they appear to be. In Ezekiel 33:31 & 32 we read a dialog God has with His prophet: “My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they EXPRESS DEVOTION (the word egeb), but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings LOVE (egeb) songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.”

The New Testament employs some twelve or so words to describe LOVE. More often the words agapao and agape are used and can range in scope from brotherly love, affection, good will and contentment with a thing, to the beloved brethren and the love feast or what we would commonly refer to as a church service. That such a word is used to describe such a service should make all of us take notice. Any strife, discontentment or gossip along with attendance in church is not viewed by the Lord as wholeness. I’m going to write something that might offend many, but if you or your church services have these elements, I would advise you to attend elsewhere and quickly. The concept of love in the Greek is just as intense as the

Hebrew but in the New Testament church we have brotherly love taken to its most closest and intimate form. It's noteworthy to me that that is exactly what Jesus says will happen to the brethren in the last days: "Because of the increase of wickedness, the LOVE of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:12) This is not about missing church attendance but the ease with which many accuse, fight and misunderstand each other. That this was going on already in the early church is obvious: "These men are blemishes at your LOVE feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm---shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted---twice dead." (Jude 12) Many would say that Jude is speaking about people who commit immorality. I have no argument with that. But I see another evil just as perverse as immorality and it is the lack of brotherly love, the lack of peace makers and the rise of those who seek division and personal gain. Read with me these next few verses from the New Testament and let's get a glimpse together of how important the early writers felt love was to maintain in the midst of the congregation: "This is my commandment: love one another (John 15:12). Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. (Romans 12:9). Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another. (Romans 12:10). Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10) By this shall all

men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another. (John 13:35) And to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul and with all the strength and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. (Mark 12:33)"

Some other places in the New Testament where the word agape/agapao is used: Galatians 5:22, LOVE as a fruit of the Spirit; 1 John 4:8, God is LOVE; 1 Corinthians 13, the LOVE chapter, even though it is translated as charity in the KJV it is the word agape---greater even than faith and hope is LOVE; husbands LOVING their wives in Ephesians 5:28; In LOVE the whole body grows from Christ in Ephesians 4:16; ministers are commanded to move in LOVE in 1 Timothy 6:11; How the individual believer should behave in LOVE in Philippians 2; When we are united in LOVE we have the full treasures of the mysteries of Christ in Colossians 2:1-3. There maybe some theological disagreement concerning this but it would seem from a complete overview of 1 Thessalonians that abounding in LOVE gives not only spiritual increase but also financial increase (See 1 Thessalonians 3:12 and see also 1 Corinthians 2:9).

I have learned the hard way over the last few years that when I see the love of many grow cold in general, or toward me specifically, in order to keep the bond of peace I will seek the Lord's direction. I will say that following the way of love is not easy. As a young Christian I expected the world to give

Christianity a hard go of it. But what shocked me more was when the brethren would give each other a tough time. I have reached out to many in love when these occasions have arisen in the past, but it has not always met with success. I've often felt that if we understood how important it is to love not only in word, but in deed as well, peace among the brethren would be far more easily accomplished. Like forgiveness, loving the brethren when they act unlovely is a choice and not a feeling. That is not easy, but it is character-building. I hope you have enjoyed these short insights from the word concerning love. May the God of love keep you in peace. Log on next month for more.....

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