



FEED MY SHEEP

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Did Jesus ordain Peter as the first “pope?”

Feed My Sheep, Part 4 (Conclusion)

It is important that we back up just a paragraph or two to set the stage for picking up where we left off in the last issue.

Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat:

32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

Here in verse 34, our Lord *does* address him as Peter, but I believe it is in response to Peter’s proud boast. It is as though Jesus is saying, “Oh, so you think you already are Peter, the rock-solid man who is so strong he will never desert Me? But I tell you that you are going to deny me three times.

Here’s another thought: do you think that if Jesus prays about something, that His prayer will be answered? Well, we immediately think about His prayer an hour or two later in the garden of Gethsemane when He asks that this cup be taken away from Him. That prayer was not answered, was it? Don’t answer too quickly. I don’t think we can say that it was not answered because in the same prayer Jesus knew such was not possible. He knew He had to go through the ordeal of crucifixion and therefore He finished that prayer with the words “yet not my will but thine be

done.” So I don’t think we should count that as a prayer that failed.

But other than that, do you think there was ever a prayer from Jesus where the Father turned Him down? I don’t know of any, do you? Thus here Jesus tells Peter that Satan wants to sift him as wheat, but then He adds that He has prayed that Peter’s faith will not fail.

So the question is, was Peter’s denial of knowing Jesus really a failure of his *faith*? I don’t know that we should be so absolute. Perhaps not. Perhaps it was more a failure of his *courage*. We could say that Peter’s fear punned his courage, but I don’t know that we can say that his *faith* failed entirely and completely.

He slipped; and slipped badly, but Jesus foreknew the outcome also, and therefore told Peter that when he would be converted, he should strengthen his brethren. What’s that all about? Maybe we will come back to that later, if time permits.

Back to John 21...Verse 15 Therefore, even though Jesus had asked him, Do you agape-love Me; Peter humbled himself by not daring to claim that highest form of love for Jesus. Rather, he said: You already know that I merely phileo-love you. I am not worthy to claim that I agape-love you.

Through this question and answer process—Jesus already knew, of course—He was drawing out of Peter what effect his denial and subsequent humbling had had on Peter’s mind. Was it preparing him for the labors that lie ahead? Or had it so depressed Peter that he was going down the path of Judas in remorse and despair?

This is a question we can all put to ourselves. When the sovereign working of God in our life has brought us to a tremendous trial of our faith—whether it is in the loss of a loved one, or whether the trial is one in which we, like Peter, have failed morally; the question is:

What has that experience done to our *present* state of mind towards Jesus Christ? Do we acknowledge His goodness in all things, even the death of a loved one? Or if the trial is a moral failure, do we come back to Him humbly, begging forgiveness and acknowledging our total weakness? Or will we continue to turn away, and go down that dark path that ultimately leads to death? Let each of us ponder that question.

As a result of Peter's heart-broken confession, Jesus begins the restoration process by commissioning Peter.

15: ...He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

These are lambs, mind you, not fully mature sheep. Jesus begins the restoration by telling Peter he is to provide nourishment for the lambs. Metaphorically, the lambs represent children who are young of years, as well as *those of any age*, but who are babes in the Christian faith.

In Peter's first epistle, chapter 2, we find the pastoral picture of the shepherd. One of the duties of a Christian pastor-shepherd is to provide the milk of the Word so that children, as well as adults who are spiritually babes in Christ can grow spiritually thereby. Until they grow, the strong meat of the Word of God is to be kept from them lest they choke on it.

Peter himself demonstrates that he understood this because as he wrote this letter to Israelites of the so-called ten "lost" tribes some of whom—who by that time, were living in what is now Turkey but which then was called the areas of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia—Peter wrote to these new converts to Christ in verse 2.

1 Peter 2: 2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

The word "sincere" there is a poor translation. The Greek word is *adolos* which means unmixed, unadulterated or pure. Nourish the babes in Christ with

the unadulterated milk of the Word.

A major problem in American Christianity as I see it, is that the vast majority of ministers provide almost nothing *but* milk, month after month, year after year. Moreover, the milk that they do provide is not pure and unadulterated because they teach their congregations all manner of fables as gospel truth.

...Fables such as the burning hell doctrine, the immortal soul doctrine, the any-moment-now rapture to heaven of all the Christians, and the list could go on to Miami. Such shepherds are thus responsible for stunting the growth of their flocks, keeping them forever spiritually immature, and under the spell of doctrines of devils.

Which is why so many people who were born into nominally-Christian homes are disenchanted with Christianity and leaving it altogether; *or* those whom God calls, they are simply leaving organized "churchianity" and are finding the strong meat elsewhere, outside the denominational walls of the churches. Now verse 16.

John 21: 16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, *son of Jonas*, lovest thou me?

Once again, Jesus addresses him by his pre-call-to-ministry name; and once again Jesus says, Do you agape-love me? But these three times are not mere repetitions of the same question. Because we note that this second time, even though Jesus repeated the question using the concept of agape-love once again, that here Jesus omitted the reference to the other apostles.

Which leads us to conclude that he was not repeating the test to see if Peter would once again compare himself in a superior manner to the other apostles. Instead, this was a more *basic* question; namely, did Peter have agape-love for Jesus at all?

What do you think Peter answered? Do you think Peter used *agape* or *phileo* in his answer in verse 16? Actually, Peter maintained his humility and deemed himself not worthy to claim that he agape-loved Jesus. He also thereby threw himself on Jesus' mercy and honored our Lord's omniscience when he stated, as I paraphrase it....

16 ... Lord; you already know that I only phileo-love you.

Again, Jesus is satisfied with Peter's answer because our Lord continues the public restoration process with Peter as he further commissions him now to "feed my sheep." We immediately recognize that in addition to providing nourishment for the children and the babes in the faith, to that is added further responsibility of feeding the sheep.

The word for sheep there is the ordinary word for sheep which would be inclusive of lambs as well as the mature sheep. Once again though, the English leaves us lacking because the Greek word here translated "feed" is a different verb from that used in verse 15. The verb in verse 15 meant strictly to feed, as in "to provide nourishment."

This verb is G4165 ποιμαίνω poimaino {poy-mah'-ee-no} which in addition to feed also means 1a) to rule, to govern or to lead. Roman Catholicism—not surprisingly—is quick to jump on that definition in order to claim supremacy for Peter as the first pope. They are mistaken about that, of course, and I **will show why before we close.**

Implied in this verb also is the idea of guarding and protecting the flock as does a shepherd over his sheep. Children are relatively easy to lead. They are trusting and will follow an adult who feeds them. That's why we caution our children not to take candy from strangers because some adults will feed them in order to lure them away from safety and lead them to harm.

So it is within the Christian church. There are wolves who offer candy—the milk of the Word in the form of milk-chocolate candy bars, if you will—for the purpose of deceiving and destroying the flock.

In contrast to out-and-out wolves, there are also unfaithful pastors whose ambition to control people, or to fleece the flock for personal riches and fame, have caused them to fail in their duties as shepherds. They use the sheep instead of leading the flock in the paths of righteousness. Verse 17...

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?

Curiously, this time Jesus says, in my paraphrase, Simon, do you really even phileo-love Me? Ouch!

17 Peter was grieved because he said unto him

the third time, Lovest thou me?

Let us understand this properly. Peter was not grieved because Jesus asked him three times, Do you love Me? Peter understood by the first question, or if not, then certainly by the second question, that Jesus was referring to Peter's three-times denial.

He therefore would not have been surprised that Jesus would ask him three times if he loved Him? So Peter was not grieved because Jesus asked him the question three times. He knew he deserved to be asked three times. That is not what grieved him.

What grieved him was that on this third time, Jesus quit asking Peter if he agape-loved Him. In this question, Jesus came down a notch on the levels of love and he asked Peter if he even phileo-loved Him? That's what tore Peter's heart!

17 And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.

What can Peter say? He can only repeat what he has already affirmed. He knows that his Lord knows his heart better than he himself does, and so he hopes that by affirming his phileo-love for Jesus that Jesus will acknowledge that Peter has *at least* great affection—phileo-love for his Master.

And this Jesus *does* acknowledge as He concludes the three-fold re-commissioning of Peter as an apostle by telling Peter to...

17 Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

This Greek verb for *feed* is the same one as in "feed my lambs," in verse 15; that is, nourish and provide appropriate food for my flock. The word *sheep* here is inclusive of the entire flock, from newborn lambs to the most mature. Some believe that the word for sheep in verse 17 has more the connotation of "my very dear sheep," with which I have no quarrel.

In either case, the point is that Peter understands that whatever his level of love is for the Lord Jesus Christ, that that love is to be demonstrated by feeding, leading, governing and protecting the flock that Jesus loves so much, from the very young children and those new in the faith, to those veteran believers who need the strong meat of the Word.

Peter's breakfast on the beach has been a lesson in love. The Master Himself has just demonstrated how to restore one who has fallen. He did it with great tenderness, and with compassion, and yet the process was not without hurt; because Jesus was demonstrating both levels of love to Peter:

The affection and emotion of phileo-love as well as the purpose-driven principles found in agape-love. The hurt was necessary for the healing, in order that Peter, who had fallen harder and further than the other apostles, could understand both levels of love in action as he would need to apply them to strengthen his brethren over and over again throughout the course of his life.

You see, contrary to what the papists of Rome pretend that Christ is teaching here, the fact that Jesus focused so much attention on Peter was *not* because He was setting him apart and placing him above all the other apostles, as the first, so-called pope.

No, it was because Peter had been the one to boast the loudest and to fall the farthest, that he needed to have that public re-instatement to ministry. It was Peter's own prominent denial of the Lord that necessitated this touching act of forgiveness by our Lord.

It was, of course, not only so that Peter would be commissioned and enabled to help others who fall, but so that Peter himself would learn humility and thus be strengthened to be as unwavering as a stone from then on for the rest of his life.

In fact, we know that Peter did just that. He was a humble man thereafter. There is only the one instance recorded in the book of Acts, where Paul confronted Peter, and Peter graciously and humbly backed down, and yet he continued to have the highest regard for his fellow apostle Paul.

But the flock-fleecers and people-controllers of the Roman church system also have a peculiar interpretation of this passage. They claim that the lambs are the laity, the people in the pews; while the sheep are the clergy—the big boys, the priests and bishops and cardinals; and that all of them are hereby placed under Peter as the pope.

What nonsense! As we have stated, this scene is not about conveying any special and individual authority on Peter that was not shared by the other apos-

tlés. This breakfast on the beach was for the purpose of our Lord showing His forgiveness of Peter and to publicly reinstate him to apostleship, to be co-equal with the others.

Therefore, just as the other apostles had no apostolic successors, neither did Peter. When John the apostle, son of Zebedee, wrote this gospel, Peter had been dead for approximately 35 years already.

If Peter had been a so-called pope, then according to the "church history" written by Rome, there would have been one or two or three successor-popes after him in the 35 years, then surely John's gospel would have recorded something as important as this supposed hierarchy of leadership in the Christian church.

And would John, who was one of the original, hand-picked apostles by the Jesus himself, would he have been under the authority of some second or third generation pope? Get real! Was Paul under the authority of Peter?

As we mentioned earlier, the book of Acts instead shows us that Paul challenged Peter's authority and Peter backed down. Peter had made all his boastful claims of being better than, and superior to the other apostles before the crucifixion.

But afterwards, Peter never again claimed to be superior to rest of the apostles in any way. That's the truth from Scriptures. Do we believe the Word of God, or the commandments of men (Rome)? By the way, if *any* readers are offended by the foregoing condemnation (of the Roman system, not of Catholics as individuals), I must ask you: what are you still doing under the thumb and spiritual control of Rome!!

It is my prayer that this little discussion of the topic of "Feed My Sheep" has been valuable to you in helping you to understand the key differences between phileo-love and agape-love.

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