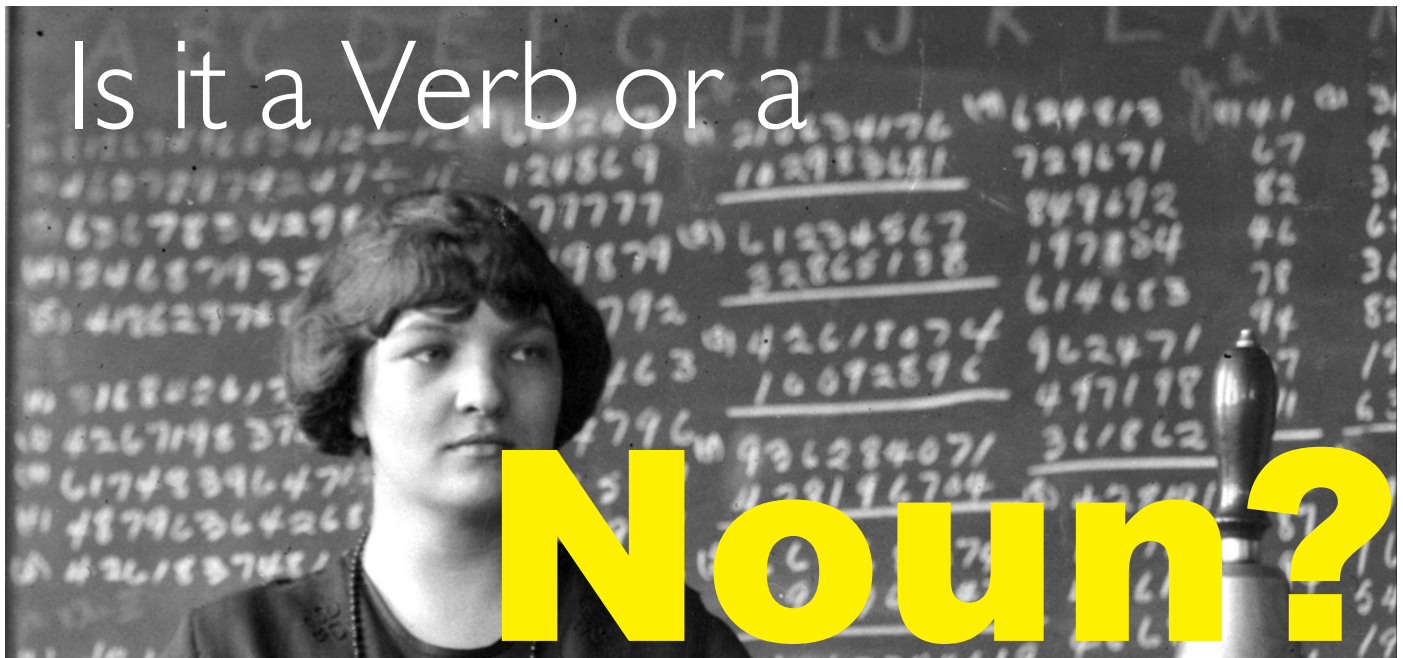


January 28, 2007



The Greek language, from which much of the English bible was translated, has three words for love where English has one. So then what does “love” mean when Jesus asked us to love God, to love him, or to love each other? Even his disciples had trouble understanding him.

## Perhaps the Greeks had it right.

They used three words for what we try to condense into one. *Philia* means friendship in modern Greek, a dispassionate virtuous love. It includes loyalty to family, friends and community and is often used to describe fraternal love, that which was shared between a brother and a sister.

From here we move to *Eros* from which the word erotic finds its root. As one might guess, this is passionate love with sensual desire and longing.

And finally, there is *Agape*. This word allows for a broader definition and whereas the first two words do not necessarily have anything to do with God, the third, *agape* love is God centred or at least God inspired. *Agape*

## Is it a Verb or a **Noun**?

in the New Testament often speaks of self-sacrificing love. It is a love which seeks nothing in return. It is more than a mental or intellectual feeling but it defines 'a caring' that comes from beyond ourselves. Agape can be loving the unlovable and even loving your enemy. There is no need for warm fuzzy feelings twitter-patting throughout one's being to love agape style, but simply a genuine caring for the well-being of all -friend and foe . . . as God has loved us, we are called to love one another.

Somehow, in English, we have lumped them together blurring the whole concept of love. We love our mothers and chocolate pudding. We love a good movie, and our spouses. We love a good debate and our teacher, boss and co-workers. But, do we love them all the same? I hope not!

Just think how much easier communications would be if we had a clearer vision of love. The young man with hormones ragging pronounces the depth of his affection. I love you, he declares passionately. I love you . . . Eros

She looks back of this poor love sick human being and says . . . I love you too . . . like a brother . . . Philia! And he says to himself, I don't need another sister and moves on!

Yet, even in English the word has become further distorted. We don't know whether it is a noun or a verb. Does it describe an action or a feeling? It is something we are or something we do?

A bride came out to me the night of the

wedding rehearsal quite upset. I had worked with the couple on the service and like many couples before them, they had picked out the 1st Corinthians 13 passage to be read, the one Neil shared with us a few moments ago. The bulletins were printed and all seemed ready.

Then, with Bible in hand, she accosted me that Friday night. You gave me the wrong verses, she said rather accusatory. When I opened my grandma's Bible, which she did before me, it doesn't say anything about love. It only speaks of charity. This is not a charity wedding you know!

I carefully and lovingly explained to her that in the King James Version, Grandma's Bible, the word 'charity' in the 16th Century, meant giving and expecting nothing in return . . . agape, love. Yet as our definitions of both words changed over time, so too did the way this text was translated. I gave her a more modern translation and sent her on her way to live happily ever after, wishing for them a charitable relationship each with the other!

Our Old Testament lesson speaks of the call of the prophet Jeremiah. It opens with the words . . . Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,

and before you were born I consecrated you, I loved you.

I thought of this text as I prepared to meet my grandson for the first time later this week, this three-month old bundle of joy was born and lives in Switzerland with his mom & dad and whose job it is to en-

## Is it a Verb or a **Noun**?

sure that the Smith name doesn't slide into extinction. I thought of this text, I loved him before he was born; not for what he has done, for other than eating, sleeping and crying, I hear that's about it. I love him not for what he may become some day but simply and only because he is a child of my child and a child of God. Nothing more is necessary for my love.

Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. Remember, this was a letter to a church, people like you and I, and, after giving them an organizational chart in 1st Corinthians 12, comparing the church to a body with many parts and functions yet with a common purpose and resolve, the 'what' of church life, he pushes the believing community one step further in the last verse of 1st Corinthians 12, before launching into what has been commonly called 'The Love Poem, he writes . . . And I will show you a still more excellent way.

He begins by putting love into context . . . If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. Churches describe themselves in different ways. Essentially what the apostles is saying here is, even if we have God-living people, excellent programming, a wonderful building and even a Foundation, but do not have agape, a genuine caring for people and their plight, then we are just beating our own drum but no one else will join our parade. Even if we are outstanding in the community and fund an 'In from the Cold' Program and even

sacrifice ourselves in doing so, but we do not love those whom we serve, then, we are nothing! Love is the action which grows out of the faith. Love is the motivation behind places and programs; it is the driving force which makes us who we are. It is more than a feeling; in the words of Jesus, it is a command!

In the 21st chapter of John, after the resurrection, Jesus asked his disciple Peter . . . do you love me, do? Do you agape me? Peter responded, yes Lord, you know that I love you, I love you as a brother. I Philia you.

And Jesus comes back . . . that is not what I asked you. Do you agape me? Do you love what I stand for? Do you love what I have been trying to show and tell you? Does your love for me extend beyond me that it might reach out to into the lives of others . . . That is the call of every Christian . . . then feed my sheep.

And then in verse 4 to 8, he launches into a list of do's and don'ts . . . Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

The do's . . . patience, kindness, truthfulness, believing, hoping, enduring

The do nots . . . envious, boastful, arrogant, rude selfish, irritable, resentful, rejoices in vengeance.

## Is it a Verb or a **Noun**?

I heard a preacher once say that if we replace the word love with our name and read that passage again . . . Bill is patient and kind . . . it will serve as a barometer for our faith living.

A little later today, we will have our Annual Meeting and an opportunity to both look back at 2006 and embrace the opportunities of 2007. The Annual Reports speak volumes of the work and commitment of this congregation, to which I say thank you.

Yet the question which lies between the lines of every report, at least in the words of Paul is . . . as we did this ministry, did we do it in love. And as we embrace 2007, it that still the factor which defines us as a church and motivates us as Christians. For the apostle concludes . . . And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three. You cannot be a church without faith. You cannot face the future with hope, but the but starting part, the motivational action, the reason d'être and the greatest of these three is the agape . . . the greatest of these is love.

### Biblical References

Jeremiah 1: 4 - 10  
1 Corinthians 13: 1 - 13

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