

The Attributes of God: Love

GCF Fall Retreat – November 9-11, 2007

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...” ~ Psalm 103:8

Some motivating questions:

- “I’ve been hearing ‘Jesus loves you’ since I was a kid, but what does that really mean?”
- “I believe in the existence of a higher being, but I don’t believe in a personal God. Isn’t it arrogant to think that the God of the entire universe would care about us as individuals?”
- “With all the bad things I’ve done, how can God possibly love me?”
- “I know in my mind that God loves me... but where do I go from there?”

What is Love?

1. Old Testament: two primary words for love
 - a. *Aheb*
 - i. Broad meaning
 - ii. “general feelings of attachment” between people, including but not limited to families, friendships, and romantic relationships
 - iii. “demands the concrete acts of love and personal responsibility necessary for the maintenance of relationships and the community”
 - b. *Hesed*
 - i. More limited meaning, but more frequent use in the OT
 - ii. always refers to people, within established relationships
 - iii. someone is in distress and desperately needs the help of another
 - iv. only one person can help, and this person freely chooses to help
2. New Testament: one word for love almost always used
 - a. *Agape* is the Greek word for love used throughout the NT, although Jesus himself did not use this word since He did not speak Greek
 - b. *Agape* was chosen in the Septuagint (over *philia*, friendship, and *eros*, desire) to represent the Hebrew words for love
 - c. *Agape* is a less common word with a less specified meaning
 - d. *Agape* is defined by its usage, i.e. defined by Christ Himself and his acts of love
3. The Four Loves (C.S. Lewis)
 - a. affection, especially within a family
 - b. friendship
 - c. *eros*, desire
 - d. charity

Sources:

Brady, Bernard V. *Christian Love*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003.

Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960.

Passages for Study:

- Psalm 36
- Luke 15
- 1 John 4:7 – 5:5