

BIG WORDS OF THE BIBLE

H2398 *hata* - roughly, sin;
H6588 *pesha* - transgression;
H5771 *avon* - iniquity
H2617 *hesed* - lovingkindness
H5315 *nephesh* - soul (literally throat)
H7307 *ruwach* - usually translated spirit, breath, wind
H7585 *sheol* - grave, pit
G25 *agape* - agape love
G908 *baptisma* - immersion
G2098 *euangelion* - gospel
H1350 *gaal* - redeemer
G3144 *martys* - witness
G3824 *palingenesia* - regeneration
G3875 *parakletos* - comforter, aide, one called to
one's side
G4152 *pneumatikos* - spiritual
G4102 *pistis* - faith and
G5485 *charis* - grace
YHWH, El, Eloah, Elohim, Shadday, Tzevaot, Ehyeh
H8666 - *teshuba (tshuva)* - repentance, return

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Lesson One: The Hebrew Names of God

YHWH (Yahweh, Jehovah) - יהוה The Tetragrammation, mostly forbidden to be pronounced in Judaism. Jews will typically replace this term in the text with *Adonai* (The Lord) or *HaShem* (The Name)

H3067

KJV Translation Count: 6,519

EI, Eloah, Elohim - A more generic word that simply means God. It's worth noting that the Hebrew suffix -im usually means masculine plural. That is a major reason we refer to God the Father and the Holy Spirit as "he" instead of a female or gender-neutral pronoun.

Elohim - H430

Genesis 1:1

KJV Translation Count: 2,606

Shadday - literally means Almighty, typically a formal adjective added to the word *EI* to get *EI Shadday*, or God Almighty.

EI (H410) **Shadday** (H7706)

Genesis 17

KJV Translation Count: 11

Tzevaot - literally means armies or hosts. Like Shadday, it is typically affixed to *EI* or *Adonai* to get *Adonai Tzevaot*, or Lord of Hosts

Lord (H3068) of **Hosts** (H6635)

1 Samuel 1

KJV Translation Count: 235

Ehyeh - There are several possible translations, but the most common is "I am that/who I am."

H3068

Exodus 3

KJV Translation Count: 43

In a culture that is much more accepting of blasphemy (even among many who would call themselves Christian) it's difficult for us to understand the level of reverent fear ancient Jews had surrounding the name of God. Rabbinic Judaism considers these seven names (YHWH, EI, Eloah, Elohim, Shadday, Tevaot, Ehyeh) to be so sacred that once they are written, they are not allowed to be erased.

In the bible YHWH is by far the most common name used for God, but even in modern translations it is rarely translated fully. Some translations use Jehovah or YHWH, almost never in both old and new testaments. YHWH occurs in the Hebrew bible, but only as the Tetragrammation, never as Yahweh, Yeshua, or Yashua.

Jehovah is an attempt to bring The Name into a pronounceable translation by Latinizing it. It is otherwise no different than YHWH. It is not found in many mainstream English translations.

God referred to himself as *'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh*, I AM WHO I AM, in Exodus chapter 3 when answering Moses from the burning bush. However the first time God is referred to in the bible comes in Genesis 1:1 where the term *elohim* is used at the beginning of the creation account. Elohim (as well as El and Eloah) is the second most common term for God in scripture, and it is most closely associated with the word “God” with which we are familiar.

El Shadday is another self-ascribed term used by God. This time God was speaking not to Moses, but to Abram at the establishment of his three-fold covenant with Abram. It seems purposeful that God would use the term meaning “God Almighty” when promising that this childless old man would be a father of many nations, possess a great land, and be the progenitor of Messiah.

Samuel first referred to God as the *Lord of Hosts* in 1 Samuel 1:3. The term *tevaot* typically refers to an army or other large assembly of people. It's a term that David used as well, right before calling God, “the God of the armies of Israel” in his threat to Goliath. It is a clear call to God's power, especially against the enemies of His people.

There are many other names of God, but these were selected due to their historic importance in Judaism and Christianity.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

What do you learn about God from understanding these seven names?

Discuss the differences between how Judaism and Christianity treat Exodus 20:7.

What is the proper way to refer to God in prayer, teaching, and conversation?

Lesson Two: *nephesh*

The Hebrew word *nephesh* (Strong's H5315) is one of the most important words in religion. It is also one of the least understood. The word appears some 753 times in the King James Version. Like many Hebrew words it is translated into several different words in English bibles. Examples include life, person, mind, heart, creature, body, himself, yourselves, themselves, and man. But the most common translation by far is the most important and the most interesting: soul.

Before your imagination constructs your own interpretation of what a soul is or is not, it's best to consider this Hebrew word and how it functions in its home contexts.

A great primer for this study is to watch [The Bible Project's short video on the word Nephesh](#).

The word *nephesh* is derived from the Hebrew root *naphash* (H5314) which means to draw breath. That gives us the first clue of what *nephesh* means. The most basic translation is throat, and the word is sometimes used that way in scripture. But most often it means something more than throat.

Nephesh is used in the bible to refer to one's self entirely, to something in which life exists, to a living being, to the seat of appetites and emotions. It is not a term that exclusively refers to human beings. In fact, the

first use of *nephesh* is found in Genesis 1:20, "And God said, 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures (*nepheshes*), and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.'"

Nephesh doesn't get translated as *soul* until we get to Genesis 27:4 when Isaac asks Esau to prepare for him a meal "and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul (*nephesh*) may bless you before I die." *Nephesh* had appeared in Hebrew texts nineteen times before this story, never once translated as soul.

Isaac's use of the word *nephesh* in Genesis 27:4 sparks a question: what does it mean that Isaac's soul would bless Esau? We know the rest of the story. Rebekah will conspire with Jacob to steal the blessing from Esau. If we rely on the common understanding of the word soul to this story, it seems this cosmic life force inside of Isaac makes a terrible mistake in giving the blessing to the younger son. That seems very odd. Let's keep studying.

When most people think of a soul, they think of a life force that lives eternally, regardless of whether or not the host body survives. We see something similar in Genesis 35. After Rachel endured a difficult delivery, verse eighteen says, "And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni, but his father called him Benjamin."

In Genesis 35:18, *nephesh* is translated soul in the ESV, NASB, KJV, and NKJV. The NIV opts for "As she

breathed her last breath.” The idea is the same, but the NIV may be the better translation for us because it saves us from our own bias.

That’s because our bias has been influenced by Greek philosophy without us even knowing it. Remember that the first use of the word *nephesh* wasn’t in reference to an eternal life force that dwells exclusively within human beings; it was referring to sea creatures.

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all contended that the *psyche* (or soul) was the incorporeal (that is, not dependent on a body) essence of a living being. The soul, in their understanding, could be either mortal or immortal. Judaism and Christianity adopted similar views over time. Thomas Aquinas attempted to bridge the two schools of thought by reckoning that all living beings had souls, but only human beings had immortal souls. That seems to be the most enduring understanding. But is that what the bible teaches?

The Shema in Deuteronomy 6 may provide some understanding. There Israel is told to love the Lord God with “all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” In Jewish literature, the heart was most closely linked to the mind, conscience, or understanding. Might referred to effort, energy, diligence, or zeal. That leaves us with the soul. What did it mean for Israel to love the Lord with all of its soul?

Remember that *nephesh* is a word that is closely associated with life, most literally referring to throat or breath. What part of you is alive? Is it your heart? Your blood? Your lungs? Your

brain? See the point? You can not isolate any one part of yourself and call it alive. You are alive. All of you.

Put these thoughts together in understanding the Shema. Now we may interpret it: “Love the Lord your God with a strong, fully-conscience effort that envelopes your entire being.”

This concept is beautifully illustrated in Song of Solomon’s phrase “the one whom my soul loves.” The object of affection that captures the attention of my entire self.

There is much, much more to say about the biblical concept of the soul. However, such study may be better suited to a personal effort.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

Considering some of the other translations of the word *nephesh*, what do you learn about the biblical concept of the soul?

How does studying *nephesh* affect your understanding of other bible topics like death and eternity?

How do we know that the soul is eternal?

How does this study influence your understanding of the resurrection?

Lesson Three: *hata, peshah, avon*

When are we displeasing to God? When we fail to obey his commands. When our hearts aren't loving and merciful. When our efforts to do good fall victim to our selfishness. When we don't worship him as we should. When we fail. When we sin.

In the Old Testament there were three words that were most often used to talk about sin. The words are defined similarly, but the differences are important.

Exodus 34:7 contains all three of the words in this lesson (as a bonus, it also includes a word we'll study in lesson six, *hesed*): "keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity (*avon*) and transgression (*peshah*) and sin (*hata*), but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

The first word we will consider is *hata*. The word appears 238 times in the KJV, most frequently translated sin. Literally it means to miss a goal or a way. It is the word used to describe an archer missing the mark, that definition of sin that many of us would recite when asked. It is also defined as a stumble.

Although *hata* doesn't appear a great number of times when compared to many other words, it does show up in 27 of the 39 Old Testament books. It is an important

word for us to understand as we study scripture and get to know the mind of God.

Hata first appears in the story of Abraham and Abimelech, when Abraham pretends Sarah is his sister to preemptively save himself from harm. Abimelech had taken Sarah to be his when he was stopped by God. God spared him when He said, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning (*hata*) against me." *Hata* is also used by Abimelech when he asks Abraham what offense (*hata*) he had done to Abraham to deserve such treatment. So it is not a word that refers exclusively to an offense against God.

This understanding calls to mind Jesus's answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:34-40. When asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus replies with the Shema from Deuteronomy 6, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." But Jesus does more than answer the question. He goes on to say, "a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

That we can sin against/offend both God and man in our unrighteous behavior is a very important consideration. We must exist in the world being mindful of how we treat others.

Peshah (also *peshah*) appears 93 times in the KJV. It almost always translated "transgression." *Peshah* and

hata are not interchangeable. Pesha is a stronger word as demonstrated in Job 34:37, "For he adds rebellion (pesha) to his sin (hata); he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God."

Like hata, pesha can be against individuals, a collective, or against God. Whereas hata can be understood as a stumble or mistake, pesha is a rebellion or revolt. If hata reveals a heart that is either careless or reckless, pesha reveals a heart that is obstinate or selfish. This is why it is considered a stronger word than hata.

The word first appears in Genesis 31:36 as Jacob is arguing in Laban asking what trespass (pesha) or sin (hata) he had committed that Laban pursued him as he did. A possible modern translation may be, "what evil or error have I committed?"

Avon (also aon) appears 230 times in the KJV and is most frequently translated "iniquity." It may also refer to punishment for iniquity, which is how it is used when it first appears in Genesis 4:13 as Cain complains that his punishment for iniquity (avon) is too much for him to bear.

Differing from hata and pesha, avon refers more to the unrighteous state of the individual or collective. It is a word derived from *ava* H5753 which means crooked. It is a state of depravity or perversity that exists that causes a person or people to sin.

As an erring person, I can sin (hata) but not necessarily rebel (pesha). I can both sin and rebel, and still not necessarily be depraved (avon.) At the risk of being overly simplistic, the three terms build in severity from hata to pesha to avon. From an error to a rebellion to a state of depravity.

To be clear, all of these words refer to unrighteousness. Although hata may be thought of as a mistake or an error, it is still a mistake or error for which atonement is required. When we are in pesha against authority, especially God's authority, we clearly need forgiveness and redemption. And when we are in a state of avon our hearts need to be purged and we need to seek God through Jesus.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

How does this lesson help you in understanding what it means to be found righteous in front of God?

In what ways can we fall short of the standard God has set for his people?

When did you first become aware of your own sin?

Describe how you have been depraved in your past.

Lesson Four: *sheol, abaddon, bor, sahat*

Four Hebrew words are closely associated with the idea of hell. Of the four, sheol is most dominant, but the other three are important to study as we work to understand the Hebrew concept of the afterlife. (Sahat appears more frequently in scripture, but its translation is significantly more diverse.)

Sheol H7585 is a difficult Hebrew word. It appears 65 times in the KJV. Although it is translated three times into the English word “pit”, the remaining 62 appearances are evenly split between “grave” and “hell”.

Translators agree that it is the place man goes when he dies (Korah and his household went to Sheol while still alive [Num. 16.]) In various places in Old Testament scripture Sheol is described as being under mountains and sea, having bars, being dark and gloomy, without work or knowledge or wisdom.

In the early part of scripture (Genesis through 1 Samuel 2) Sheol is not associated with punishment except in the case of the aforementioned Korah. Instead it is simply the grave, where man goes when he dies. There is no negative connotation to the term; rather it is spoken of in a matter of fact way. For example, the first appearance of the word is in Genesis 37:35 where Jacob says, “No, I shall go down to Sheol for my son, mourning.” Jacob was simply referring to his death.

The waters become muddy in 2 Samuel 22:6 when David refers to the cords of Sheol which entangled him in the context of other suffering and threat. But it is within the wisdom literature that Sheol gains its reputation as a place of punishment for the wicked.

It begins in Job, where Sheol appears eight times. Sheol has a permanence within the text that threatens Job. In 24:19 it says, “Drought and heat snatch away the snow waters; so does Sheol those who have sinned.” Then in 26:5-6, “The dead tremble under the waters and their inhabitants. Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering.” (more about Abaddon later in the lesson.)

Sheol appears sixteen times in the Psalms, but only a quarter of those are associated with wickedness. Most often it is simply a metaphor for death.

Psalms 49 is a psalm of the sons of Korah. The psalm speaks to foolish people who are proud and naive. It is in Psalm 49 that we see the strongest connection between Sheol and punishment of the wicked. Those with this foolish confidence are said to be like sheep appointed for Sheol; “death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell” (Psalm 49:14).

Proverbs also occasionally links Sheol with punishment, as in the familiar proverb, “If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol” (Proverbs 23:14).

Proverbs twice ties Sheol and Abaddon together in a passage, just as is done in Job 26. Proverbs 27:20 says, “Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and never satisfied are the eyes of man.”

Although there is rarely context in Proverbs, chapter 15 does develop a theme of warning to the wicked, beginning in verse one and peaking in verse eleven, “Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the children of man!”

Abaddon appears only six times in the scripture and is tied to destruction each time. The root of the word is *abad*, which simply means to perish. So Abaddon is known as the place of destruction. When coupled with Sheol, it becomes not just a place of rest for the dead, but a place of destruction for the wicked who have died.

Two more words that are often associated with hell are Sahat (H7843) and Bor (H953). Sahat is a word that means corruption, rot, or decay. It is rarely associated with eternal punishment or death, but does appear in that context twice. Once in Isaiah 38:17 as the “pit of corruption” and again in Ezekiel 28:8 as “the pit.”

Bor appears less frequently overall, but it is more often translated as a pit, cistern, or dungeon, including a couple times in Isaiah (14:15 and 24:22.) But it is in Ezekiel 26:19-21 that Bor becomes a stark example of death as eternal punishment.

Ezekiel 26:19-21 is the pronounced punishment for the city of Tyre. God threatens to make the city laid waste, covering it with the waters of the deep. In verse 20, God says, “then I will make you go down to the pit (Bor), to the people of old, and I will make you to dwell in the world below, among the ruins from old, with those who go down to the pit (Bor), so that you will not be inhabited”.

In chapters 31 and 32 of Ezekiel, the word comfort is sometimes used, in conjunction with the pit, in the judgment against Egypt. Chapter 32 provides some clarity by listing the other uncircumcised nations who have fallen to the pit before Egypt. It is a cold-comfort offered to Pharaoh. His welcoming party shares his fate.

The Hebrew understanding of the afterlife isn’t well illuminated in the Old Testament. That may seem unsatisfactory to us, but we must resist the urge to paste in our expectations.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

Where do we get our ideas of hell?

What surprises you most about the study of these words?

What was the threat to the unrighteous in the Old Testament?

What motivates your service to God?

Lesson Five: *ruwach*, *parakletos*

Most modern Christians are Trinitarian, believing that God is simultaneously three consubstantial beings: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Of those three beings, it is the Holy Spirit by far that is the least understood. This study will examine a Hebrew word and a Greek word in an effort to better understand this part of the Godhead.

Ruwach (H7307) appears 378 times in the KJV. At its most basic, the word means breath or wind. Keeping that simple definition in mind is helpful when studying this word in its various contexts. It is translated as wind or breath over 100 times in the KJV, but most often it is translated as spirit.

Ruwach appears in the second verse of the bible during the Creation, when we read that “the *ruwach* of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” (ESV) Later in the Genesis chapters six and seven, *ruwach* is used in the phrase, “breath of life.”

These two contexts provide us useful insight into the role the Spirit of God played in the Old Testament. During Creation we see that the Spirit hovered over the waters before God brought forth life on the planet. Then in chapters six and seven, the breath of life phrase adds some validation to that concept. A beautiful illustration of this is seen in Ezekiel 37..

Ruwach is also frequently translated as wind. Sometimes that wind is attributed to God, and other times it is not. Rather than risk overreaching, we will not explore any deeper meaning in this study.

Finally we consider where *ruwach* is translated spirit. We’re accustomed to seeing both little “s” spirit and big “S” spirit when we read our modern translations. Sometimes *ruwach* refers to a man’s spirit and other times it refers to the spirit of God and still other times it refers to the entity we frequently call the Holy Spirit.

While bible translators put in innumerable hours refining their works, we still have to be mindful that their choices of what is a common noun versus what is a proper noun are fallible. You may choose to disagree with them when deciding whether something is a reference to God’s spirit or the Holy Spirit.

What is a man’s spirit? What is God’s spirit? What is the Holy Spirit? And how do each of them differ from the others?

To assist our understanding, I find it helpful to remember what the word *ruwach* actually means: breath. Without diving too deeply into ethics, consider what it means for a person to be alive. Is it that their heart beats? That their brain is minimally functional, allowing for vital physiology to be present and active? Or does being alive mean something more?

In Genesis 2:7, God breathed the breath of life into the newly formed man. In full disclosure, this is not the word *ruwach*, but the imagery is consistent. In the aforementioned Ezekiel 37, it

is the breath of God that fills the reassembled human bodies, resurrecting them to a living, physical presence.

So then, one may understand spirit (*ruwach*) to be the life force within a being. By extension, the Holy Spirit may be seen as God's life-giving entity. Just as the Spirit hovered over the waters of creation, waiting to give life. Just as the Spirit fills Christians as described in Romans 8.

To further explain the Spirit's role in the New Testament, we move to our second word in this lesson: *parakletos*. *Parakletos* (G3875) literally means one called to your side as an aide. Although the definition can be more broad, it most often carries the connotation of a defender, or one who argues your case as an intercessor. *Parakletos* appears only five times in the bible, but is remarkably important.

Four times in John, Jesus refers to "the Comforter" that will come to aid the apostles after Jesus is crucified. This Comforter will abide with God's people forever. The most illuminating verse is John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (ESV)

Many Christians are quick to connect John 14:26 with 2 Timothy 3:16, wherein the apostle Paul says that all scripture is "God-breathed." That connection also links us back to the Hebrew word *ruwach*.

Consider two more ideas about the *parakletos*. One, Jesus himself said the Helper/Comforter/Spirit/*Parakletos* would be

with the disciples forever (John 14:16.) This indicates the role of the Spirit wasn't a limited time appointment.

Two, consider the one other reference to *parakletos* in the bible: 1 John 2:1, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an **advocate (parakletos)** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

I love the illustration of God and man being separated like a busted seam. God sends Jesus (as a *parakletos*) to earth, representing God to man. Jesus, having completed his work, ascends to the Father, representing man to God. Simultaneously, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to earth, representing the Father and Son to man. Each time, a thread is woven into the seam, and we are pulled closer together. Amen.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

Is Holy Ghost a good translation of *ruwach*?

How would you define the role of the Holy Spirit?

Did the Holy Spirit change from the Old Testament to the New Testament?

What does it mean to you to be filled with the Spirit?

Lesson Six: *hesed*, *agape*

How would you describe God? On the spot we might say, “God is love” or “God is good.” Both are 100% accurate, but not deeply descriptive. How would the bible answer this question? Let’s again consider both a Hebrew word and a Greek word as we try to better understand the goodness of God.



One of the most beautiful concepts in all of religion is a Hebrew word that we struggle to translate in English. It is the word *hesed* (H2617). It’s a frequent word, appearing almost 250 times in the Old Testament. English translations of *hesed* include: mercy, lovingkindness,

goodness, piety, beauty. As varied as those words are, they are all part of the multifaceted concept of *hesed*.

The simplest definition of *hesed* I’ve found is: giving oneself fully in love and compassion. In several examples in Genesis, it refers to kindness and mercy offered by God. If that seems like a small thing to you, remember that God’s kindness and mercy is far bigger than our own. It includes God’s blessings and favors, which blends well with our simple definition.

The key to understanding *hesed* is understanding that it is relational; either relational between God and man, or relational between one man and another. *Hesed* is considered a foundational Jewish ethic. Simon the Just, a Jewish high priest around 300 BC, wrote, “The world rests upon three things: Torah, service to God, and bestowing kindness.”

The common misconception of “Old Testament God” being a punishing and uncompromising deity is derailed by the presence of His *hesed*. It is the characteristic of Jehovah that blessed Abraham, spared Lot, delivered Israel from Egypt, and provided a Messiah to save us from our sin.

In Exodus 34:6-7, “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **steadfast love** and faithfulness, keeping **steadfast love** for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...’” God proclaimed this about Himself just before giving the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, renewing His covenant with the people.

God’s *hesed* is frequently celebrated in the Psalms, accounting for nearly half of all the appearances of the word. Psalm 25:6-7, “Remember, O LORD, your tender mercies and your **lovingkindnesses**, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to your **mercy** remember me, for your goodness’ sake.” (I chose to quote Psalm 25 from the NKJV because the ESV elects to consistently translate *hesed* as “steadfast love.”)

A similar term to the Hebrew *hesed* is the Greek word *agape*. Together with the very similar *agape*, the words appear 259 times in the New Testament. The word is almost exclusively

translated as “love.” But although agape always means love, love does not always mean agape.

In the Koine Greek of the New Testament, love can be translated from *agape*, *storge*, or *phileo*. But without a doubt the highest form of love in the bible (or anywhere) is agape.

Agape (agapao) is a love that is rooted in good will and benevolence. It is not a love earned by the merit of the recipient nor is it a love inherent in a familial or fraternal relationship. It is expressed in scripture as the love of Christians toward each other, the love of God toward people, the love of God toward Christ, the love of Christ toward people.

Excerpts from Romans 5:5-8: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us....God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Excerpts from Romans 8:31-39: “If God is for us, who can be against us?....nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God’s agape love toward people is demonstrated by sending the Holy Spirit and Christ to undeserving sinners. Soon after sharing that glorious message, Paul goes on to say there’s nothing in all creation that can take that agape love of God away from us. No man loves like this. This is the ultimate demonstration of what John says in 1 John 4:8, “God is love.”

Agape love is a necessity among God’s people. Jesus made that clear when he said, “Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

Paul amplifies this message in Romans 12:9 when he reminds disciples to “Let <agape>love be genuine.” Understanding what we’ve studied already about how God demonstrated agape love, we can glean some instruction on how to let our agape love be genuine.

Genuine agape love is not merit-based. Genuine agape love is not conditional. Genuine agape love is not something we give or retract based on the actions of the recipient.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

How would you define *hesed*?

In what practical ways could *hesed* be demonstrated?

Discuss how the church could demonstrate *agape* in individual and collective ways.

How does understanding *agape* change your understanding of God?

Lesson Seven: *euangelion*, *martys*

In the introductory section of his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul says he is eager to share the gospel with them in person, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Paul was eager to share the *euangelion* (G2098). *Euangelion* appears almost eighty times in the New Testament. At its simplest, it means “good tidings” or “good news.” But in the first century the term became to refer to many more specific and slightly varied things.

In the first chapter of Mark, the *euangelion* is called the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of God, and Jesus spoke of the gospel as a prophecy of God’s coming kingdom. In Mark 1:15, Jesus says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

The gospel of the kingdom was a message that was intended to bring hope to the hopeless, yet Jesus himself coupled this news with the call to repentance. So even in the infancy of the “gospel” being used to refer to God’s coming salvation, it was linked with action from the recipient.

Later when the apostles took up the work of the kingdom, they continued to grow the meaning of the gospel. Paul says in Romans 10:16, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel.” This

phrase sees a new understanding of the *euangelion*, now as something to submit to and obey. Earlier in Romans 2:16, Paul had said that people would be judged by the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1, Paul writes, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you -- unless you believe in vain.”

The *euangelion* has now come to refer simultaneously to the good news of the coming kingdom, the victory of Jesus on the cross, and the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.

For the apostles, spreading the *euangelion* was never a question. They would proclaim what they had seen and heard. It would cost them their careers, their freedom, and in some cases, their lives. But they spread the gospel as witnesses.

The Greek word for witness is *martys* (G3144). Of its thirty-four New Testament appearances, 29 of them are translated “witness” (3x “martyr”, and 2x “record”).

Martys first appears in Matthew 18:16. In the context, Jesus is teaching his disciples how to deal with a brother who has sinned against you. To convince them of their sin, it is advised that you take one or two others with you to act as *martys*, witnesses.

In Matthew 18, and in several other instances, *martys* refers to a witness in a strictly legal sense. It’s the same word Caiaphas

used when questioning Jesus, “What further witnesses do we need?”

The last words Jesus spoke to the apostles before ascending back to the Father are, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my **witnesses** (*martys*) in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Jesus was echoing a promise he had made to the apostles in Luke 24, that they would be witnesses to the world and that the Holy Spirit would aid them in this work. These passages are where we see the expanding of *martys* from the strictly legal use to include the evangelistic understanding as well.

In American legal parlance a witness may be anyone who testifies in a proceeding. In the bible, the word is much more specific. We may refer to a *martys* as an eyewitness. Someone who can relay a personal account of the action in question.

A witness was powerful in Jewish law, but multiple witnesses were nearly indisputable. Deuteronomy 19:15 establishes the weight of single and multiple witnesses, “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”

The evidence of two or three witnesses was enough to establish a monetary debt. It was enough to convict a person of a capital offense, punishable by execution.

Jesus sent his apostles out by twos in the limited commission, very likely because they were being sent specifically to Jews. As they worked as ambassadors for Jesus, they would also be working as *martys*, carrying the Jewish legal weight of a multiplicity of witnesses.

One final note about witnesses in Jewish law seems noteworthy. If a multiplicity of witnesses was opposed by a multiplicity of witnesses, the matter was considered unreconciled. It makes no difference how many witnesses are in either group.

For example, two witnesses who proclaim Jesus a sinner would not be overcome by one hundred witnesses who proclaim he committed no sin. Each group is considered to have equal legal force. This was a merciful aspect of Jewish law, but Roman law had no such provision in Jesus’s day.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

How does one obey *euangelion*?

What is included in teaching the *euangelion*?

Can we act as witnesses today? Why or why not?

In what ways does having a better understanding of these two words help you as an evangelist for Jesus?

Lesson Eight: *teshuba*, *baptisma*, *palingenesia*

The effects of sin have been felt by humans ever since the Fall in Genesis chapter three. The prevalence of pain, sickness, death, a strained relationship with God, the necessity of a sacrificial system, and other ramifications of sin's existence are difficult, the most serious consequence is the threat of eternal damnation. An eternity in torment, separated from the loving Yahweh God is the most terrible result of man's sin.

Since God is loving, longsuffering, and merciful, His plan has always included a vehicle to deliver man from sin: namely, the salvational work of Jesus. For those who would be Christians, there is also work to do and it begins with the idea of the Jewish concept of *teshuba* (H8666.)

Teshuba is the Hebrew word that we translate into the word repentance, but the word literally means "to return." For many Jewish believers *teshuba* is not a single act at a single point in time, rather it is a process. It consists of four steps: regret, cessation, confession & restitution, and resolution.

There is also a season of *teshuba* bookended by two Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. The season of repentance is a return to God. Although the word doesn't appear within the text, Psalm 51 is considered an excellent example of *teshuba*. For the Jewish believer, *teshuba* is as much a noun as it is a verb. The return is a very significant process of restoration.

Christian believers would do well to recognize the depth of the Hebrew concept of *teshuba* when considering what it takes to become a disciple of Jesus.

Baptism is a Christian act of faith that holds incredible significance in scripture. Baptism is connected to the remission of sins, demonstration of faith, connection to both the burial and resurrection of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit, and more.

Baptism comes from the Greek word *baptisma* (G908) meaning a dipping or sinking. More commonly it is defined as immersion. Scholars believe a baptism-like process existed before even John the Baptist. Aaron was instructed to bathe his body in water before coming into the Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:4, 23-24.)

Some scholars believe other customs of baptism existed in Jewish culture before John the Baptist made baptism the central custom of his ministry. Before the use of baptism in the New Testament, those Jewish rituals were often used to cleanse Gentile proselytes.

1 Peter 3 explains that baptism corresponds to the deliverance of Noah and his family through the water. In that passage, Peter instructs that it is not the removal of filth from the flesh (neither literally nor figuratively) but the "appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" that saves us.

John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance from sin. Believers would be baptized for a spiritual cleansing while

confessing their sins (Matthew 3.) For John, there was also an emphasis placed on repentance. His challenge to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him was to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance.”

John baptized with the water in the Jordan River, but prophesied that one would follow him who would “baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Repentance and baptism are steps in a transformation that we see hinted at in old testament prophecies, taught by Jesus, and taught by the apostles. This idea of being transformed is also referred to as being born again.

Although *palingenesia* (G3824) is not used by Jesus during his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, it shares a root word and an intention. *Palingenesia* is a word that means regeneration or rebirth. During the famous conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus told him that one must be born again to enter the kingdom of God.

Paul talks about this individual regeneration in Titus 3:5, “...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” It’s easy to hear echoes of Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus in Paul’s words to Titus.

Individual salvation and transformation is without question a major theme in the bible narrative, but Jesus ties our *palingenesia* to something much larger.

In Matthew 19:27-30, Peter asks Jesus what will be received by those who have left everything to follow the Lord. Jesus reassures his disciples that “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.”

Jesus promises this will happen in “the new world” (ESV). The word translated “the new world” in the ESV is also translated “regeneration” in other versions, all coming from the Greek *palingenesia*.

Jesus turns the word into a proper noun, and in so doing connects our salvation to the restoration/regeneration of all things. This large-scale resetting of creation is what Paul speaks about in Romans 8:18-25. God will be made all in all, and the creation will be renewed. Amen.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

How does knowledge of *teshuba* help you in understanding the Christian act of repentance?

Can *teshuba* be a congregational act?

Why is baptism such an important act?

Does knowing that our salvation is part of a larger overall scheme strengthen or weaken your faith?

Lesson Nine: *pistis* & *charis*

One good reason to study these Hebrew and Greek words is to better understand the contexts of their usage. Often we insert our own definitions and cultural understanding when reading biblical texts. There may be no better example of this than what will be reviewed in this lesson: *pistis* & *charis*, or faith & grace respectively.

I first read about the Roman concept of *pistis* & *charis* in *Misunderstanding Scripture with Western Eyes*, a 2012 book by E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien. Dr. David DaSilva also discussed the concept in his book *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation*. I recommend reading the *pistis* & *charis* excerpts from those books to gain a better understanding of the idea.

First off, these words are not poorly translated. *Charis* (G5485) has a few different definitions, but within our study the best is: good will, loving-kindness, favour. Of its 156 appearances in the KJV, it is translated "grace" 130 times. When we use the word grace, we typically mean one of two things: an elegance of movement or speech, or an undeserved gift.

Pistis (G4102) can mean either a conviction of belief, or fidelity or loyalty. *Pistis* is more difficult for modern Western readers because the context is not always as helpful when deciphering what we are reading. Our tendency is to define faith as a strong belief and faithfulness as a behavior based on that belief.

To better understand Paul's usage of *pistis* & *charis* we need to first understand the patron and client relationship in Roman culture.

A patron was a person of means, a person of authority, or a person who, in some way, sat in a more advantageous position than the client. The patron offers a gift to the client. This may be a simple business dealing or something more impactful. Regardless, the patron is under no obligation to offer assistance to the client. This is *charis*, or what we would call grace.

The client receives the gift from the patron, understanding that they are not deserving of it. The patron had no obligation to offer the gift, but the client accepted an obligation along with receiving it. Unable to repay the gift, the client is expected to show *pistis*, faith/loyalty, to the patron.

Faith, in this context, has little to do with belief. It has more to do with behavior required after assuming an un-payable debt. In a patron-client relationship, the client may be expected to give honor to the patron, increasing their social standing and reputation.

Further, the client is expected to honor requests from his or her patron. Richards and O'Brien used an example of a client who was a baker. The baker had lost his entire family business in a fire. His business was rescued by a patron. Later in the story, the patron had an urgent need for bread for a banquet. The request was relayed to the baker who was expected to fulfill the request as a faithfulness to the patron.

DaSilva explains, the larger the gift from the patron, the greater the obligation of the client. A large gift of charity obligated the recipient to a large amount of faith/loyalty in return. For the baker whose business was rescued, a late-night call for bread was well within reason.

Understanding the patron-client relationship gives us a more biblical understanding of the *pistis-charis* verses in the apostle Paul's writings.

Look at Romans 6:1-14. Although the word *pistis* isn't in this context, the concept of *pistis & charis* is evident. The expectation of God (our patron) who bestowed the ultimate gift (*charis*) is that we will respond with more than belief, but with faith (*pistis*.)

As part of our faith response we first ought to agree to glorify God's name. Praising Him and telling others about Him. Specifically, we ought to tell of God's charitable grace toward us. We were in a desperate condition, lacking the ability to save ourselves from sin. God used his position, means, and authority to save us.

DaSilva points out our obligation to God includes an obligation to others. Romans 13:9-10 makes clear that God expected us to love others from the beginning, referring to the commandments given to Moses.

Understanding *pistis & charis* amplifies our understanding of love, especially as Paul teaches it. What we read in Romans 13 and 1 Corinthians 13 is that godly love is filled with actions toward the recipient of our love.

To conclude, let's consider Ephesians 2:8-9 in light of our new understanding of *pistis & charis*: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

It is impossible for us to obligate God. We are not of means or advantageous position. We can offer nothing to Him. Therefore our faith cannot earn us anything.

That is precisely Paul's point. We cannot earn the gift that was given before our faith, nor can we repay the debt by virtue of our faith. We are perpetually clients to our patron, God. Our faithfulness to Him is precisely all that He has required of us in response to His precious gift.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

How does the Roman concept of patron-client change your understanding of faith and grace?

Does this understanding challenge the notion of faith and works as a means of salvation? Why or why not?

Describe the difference between your faith in God and your faithfulness to God.

What act of faith could you add or improve in your life?

Lesson Ten: *pneumatikos*

Have you ever heard someone describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious”? It’s an odd phrase that carries with it an air of rebellion. When someone wants the benefits of a religious relationship without the obligation to a deity or religious group, they may describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious”.

It won’t surprise you to learn that the biblical concept of being spiritual cannot be disentangled from religion. *Pneumatikos* (G4152) is the Greek word that we translate into “spiritual.”

The root of *pneumatikos* is *pneuma* (G4151), which simply means spirit. *Pneuma* doesn’t always refer to the Holy Spirit or anything divine. In Ephesians 6:12 it is used by Paul to refer to “wicked spirits.” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon explains that the spirit of a being is the rational part, akin to God, that acts like an organ that animates and controls a person.

Despite our modern intrigue with the word, spiritual only occurs twenty-eight times in the ESV New Testament. It is used almost exclusively by the apostle Paul (Peter uses the adjective three times in his first epistle.)

Pneumatikos is used by Paul to modify everything from food and drinks to the law. The one that usually gains the most attention is the idea of spiritual gifts. Reading that early Christians had abilities to heal, speak in tongues, and prophecy is understandably interesting. But even during that

time, Paul emphasized that other things were more important and more enduring: faith, hope, and love. So within this study, we’ll narrow our focus down to our spiritual selves (i.e. spiritual people) and the spiritual body.

In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul has just finished explaining that he preached nothing among the brethren there except Jesus Christ and him crucified. The reason for only preaching the simple message is explained in verses six through sixteen; in short, they weren’t mature enough to hear “lofty speech or wisdom.”

Paul wasn’t insulting the Corinthians when he said this. It was a simple matter of fact. They were still human-minded. Those higher spiritual lessons the Corinthians craved were for more spiritually minded people. “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” (verse 13)

Paul’s words are chosen carefully. Instead of saying he and his colleagues are teaching spiritual truths, he says they are “interpreting” spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. What is the differentiation between those who are spiritual and those who are not?

Paul explains in verse twelve that they had “received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” The Corinthians didn’t need to be spiritually minded to understand the saving power of Christ. They had accepted that and were saved through their obedience and submission to Jesus.

Having the Spirit of God, being spiritually minded, is likened to having the mind of Christ. Throughout the first letter to the Corinthians, it is evident they were convinced of their spiritual maturity. Paul is simultaneously defending his apostleship and humbling the members of the church there by explaining their lack of spiritual discernment.

It takes the Spirit to be spiritual. The benefits of being spiritual extend far beyond the ability to comprehend difficult teachings. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that having the Spirit of God within us enables us to be resurrected just as Jesus was. Having the Spirit of God is an identifier of those who belong to Christ.

Finally there is the difficult teaching of the spiritual body in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49. The Corinthians were convinced the physical body had no bearing on their spiritual selves. Their spirits simply resided in this body for the time being, to be freed by Christ at the Resurrection.

Paul is challenging both the notion that they were spiritually advanced and the notion that the current physical body is inconsequential. Paul begins his argument with examples of specially equipped natural bodies: bodies for humans, animals, birds, and fish. He will end his argument with the example of Jesus's resurrected body (which had physical attributes.)

In between those two bookends, Paul contrasts the physical body with the spiritual body. The Corinthians would agree that the natural body is perishable, dishonorable, and weak. But Paul's language didn't say those bodies disappeared. He said

the natural body is sown one way, but raised as something different. It was not discarded. It was transformed.

The final contrast Paul uses is between Adam and the resurrected Jesus. All men bear the image of Adam, that is, a physical, natural body with all its weaknesses, dishonor, and decay. But "we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."

Christians, shall bear the image of the resurrected Jesus. The key for the Corinthians, and for some of us, is to understand that this new image we bear only happens in the Resurrection. It is the "not yet" part of Paul's already/not yet eschatology. The spiritual body will certainly exist for we who are in Christ.

Some Suggested Discussion Questions

Can one be spiritual but not religious?

What is necessary for one to be spiritual?

Does Paul's challenging of the Corinthians' way of thinking have relevance to the modern church?

**How would you describe the spiritual body to someone?
Does this change any of your thinking?**