

Why *Agapao* Can Not Mean, “*The Unconditional, Divine Love of God*” - and *Phileo* Can Not Mean, “*Brotherly Love*”

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Love. This seems like an important subject area for Christianity. In fact, one could even contend it is a **core element** of the Christian faith. After all, the **first** commandment is the requirement to **love** God - with **all** our heart, mind, soul and strength (Mk 12:30). The second commandment requires us to **love** our neighbor as our self (Mk 12:31)! This “love” requirement covers all our vital relationships - toward self, neighbor and Creator! But the centrality of this “love doctrine” extends even further. The Bible states that love **fulfills the Law** (Ro 13:8-10 and Gal 5:14)! So, all the requirements of the Law of God ... are fulfilled **by love?!** It is evidently made up of **something** that has the ability to satisfy the requirements the entire Old Testament theocracy! This is worth thought, investigation and inquiry!

So, ... what is love? If we are to fulfill these commands, we need some kind of definition. How else can we know if we are meeting His requirements?

A Common Teaching

There are two New Testament Greek words often translated “love” in English. Here is a common teaching - maybe **the** common teaching - on the meaning of these two Greek words.

1) *Agapao* (verb); *Agapee* (noun). God is *agapee* (1Jn 4:8). As God Himself **is** *agapee*, and since He **is** divine, then it logically follows that **He acts** (the verb) in **divine love** - *agapao*. *Agapee* originates **in God**, and can never fail (1Cor 13:8). This is clearly the highest form of love. Therefore, many teach *agapao/agapee* means, “*the unconditional, divine love of God.*” It is also taught that non-Christians are separated from this love, but at conversion, one enters into this love. But, there’s more! The convert becomes *more than* just a simple **recipient** of this love from God. He/she now becomes **a conduit** for this “alien-to-the-world” love **to flow through**. With Christ **in** the Christian, the divine love of God can unconditionally flow toward **those around the Christian**. And since *agapao* as an act of God (unconditional and unfailing), the actions, or reactions, of the targeted object are ultimately irrelevant as this love is independent of human affectations.

2) *Phileo* (verb); *Philos* (noun). This is defined as “brotherly love,” or “man’s love.” It is the love expressed by unsaved people. Therefore, it is a **lesser form** of love than the divine *agapao*. Ultimately, it is a self-centered type of love that **does have conditions to it** - even if not readily detectable. As simply a human love, it is innately fickle and can be turned on and off as situations and conditions change. The transliterated word, Philadelphia (*philia* + *adelphphia* fem.), means, “the city of brotherly love,” and is often cited as an example of the meaning *phileo*.

This teaching sounds quite learned as it appeals to the original New Testament language. It is also quite appealing as it separates the pure and holy love of God from the fickle, corruptible affections that periodically emanate from the unsaved. This really does sound great! But the part about the Christian entering into God’s divine love (*agapao*) upon conversion - the love the world does not know - well, that is phenomenal. And when you add that the convert can become **a funnel** for this divine material to flow through - spontaneously, unconditionally, even divinely - to all those around - what a rush! The only problem with this teaching ... is that it is wrong. How

can I be so confident about this assertion?

I had been taught, and believed, the common teaching on the meaning of *agapao* and *phileo* (related above). It had come through Biblical scholars and was even taught in several denominations to which I had been exposed. I had no reason to doubt the accuracy of this teaching as I was just “a layman” and only knew English. And surely on such an important topic - Love - the teaching was correct. But then, I went to a Bible college. After completing my first year of “Beginners Greek,” I began reading the Gospel of John - the simplest of the New Testament Greek. In describing what happened next, I will now quote directly from my Ebook, “*Love and the Bible*” (pages 9-11, 13, and 19).

As I started in John, everything was going along quite well. Eventually, I came to John 3:16. “*For God so loved (agapao) the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...*” I thought, “*I know that word! That’s God’s love! That’s the love the world is incapable of generating!*” I had run across the stuff of legend! There it was - the powerful, exclusive, love **from** God - in all its purity and transcendency! A love generated from the deepest recesses of the heart of our benevolent Creator projected unconditionally **upon an undeserving world!** I thought, “*Wow! This is great!*” I excitedly continued my journey through John. Then, three verses later ...

I came to John 3:19. “*And this is the judgement; that the light has come into the world, and men loved (agapao) the darkness rather than the light....*” It took me a second, and then I said, “*Say, what?*” I read the verse again. I was stunned. Even now, twenty plus years later, that moment is still frozen in time. I thought, “*I did not read what I just read. This is an impossible statement. Men ... with divine love - for the darkness?! WHAT?? How can men divinely love darkness??*” I saw that *agapao* was in the Aorist mood and active voice, so I immediately went to my lexicon to make sure it was *agapao*. Sure enough ... it was. In disbelief, I read it again and inserted the definition for *agapao* I had been taught. “*... and men had a divine, unconditional love - the love of God, the love from God - FOR DARKNESS!!!*” The shocking reality then struck me - “*Agapao cannot mean divine love!! I have been taught error ... about love!!*” Aughhhhhhh. And is there a subject **more central** to Christianity than Love?? I’m telling you - alarms went off **everywhere!** A biblical understanding of love is critical - *to everything as far as Christianity is concerned!* We **are** commanded to love God, love our neighbor, love our wife, love our children, love the brethren, love life, love His coming - love our enemies!! We **are not** to love money, love the chief seats, love the first place ... love is all over the place - in attitudes, behaviors, actions and reactions. “*I have been taught error about ... LOVE!!!*” For me, this created an emergency of the first order. But, as this Ebook is interested in your input, I would like for you to now go to a poll I have on my website. It asks:

“The information I have just been exposed to has:

- 1) created an emergency of the first order,
- 2) simply pricked my interest,
- 3) created no emergency at all, or
- 4) has done nothing, as I don’t know what the heck you are talking about.”

The Search for Truth Begins in Earnest!!

God only has to say something *one time* for it to be forever true and fully empowered. But if we can find other corroborating witnesses in His word on a particular subject area, that will help **us** to be sure **we** correctly understand and represent His view on that topic. With that in

mind, I immediately grabbed my Greek concordance so as to examine every use of the word *agapao*. The verb form appears almost 150 times in the New Testament. Here are five of them.

2Ti 4:10 “Demas, having loved (*agapao*) this present world, deserted me...”

2Pet 2:15 “... they (false teachers) ... followed the way of Balaam ... who loved (*agapao*) the wages of unrighteousness.

Jn 12:43 “For they (the Pharisees) loved (*agapao*) the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”

Lk 11:43 “Woe to you Pharisees! For you love (*agapao*) the front seats in the synagogues, and (you love - *agapao*) respectful greetings in the market places.”

Lk 16:13 “No servant can serve two masters; for he will either hate the one, and love (*agapao*) the other You cannot serve God and mammon.”

There are sixteen uses of *agapao/agapee* in this vein. These will all be listed later.

“Ohhh ... What about *phileo*?”

Immediately, another word came to mind. “*What about phileo? Does that mean, ‘brotherly love’? Is it a human love inferior to agapao?*” Within minutes, I discovered that *phileo had nothing to do with brotherly love! NOTHING!!* In John 5:20, Jesus stated, “*For the Father loves (phileo) the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing...*” In this passage, *phileo is an activity between God the Father and God the Son!!* This “stuff,” is generated from inside God the Father and its target is God the Son! Man is completely outside the loop! I thought, “*Phileo cannot mean ‘brotherly love’ or some second rate man’s love! It can’t! Furthermore, how can it be inferior to agapao when it is generated by God Himself?*”

So, there I stood

So, there I stood, six years into my Christian experience - **with no idea what the Bible itself actually taught about love!** What a betrayal! I had naively relied upon the integrity of those Greek “scholars” in my past - *and I propagated their error - their false teaching - their heresy!* And the errant material dealt with - **Love!** What a subject to be screwed up on! After the feelings of shock, anger, and grief ... came cool resolve. A journey was launched for me the day I ran across the statement that “*men loved (agapao) the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil*” (Jn 3:19).

My Starting Point

While I did not know what the Bible *did* teach on this subject, I did know this. *Agapao could not mean* divine love, and *phileo could not mean* brotherly, or man’s, love. ***So, I already did know more than my “teachers” knew on the subject!*** That encouraged me a little bit. Things could only get better - if God would grant me the wisdom, understanding and insight needed to grow into truth. So, I asked Him for that assistance. That was my starting point. If this sounds reasonable to you, maybe you could take a moment and ask the same.

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Here is a listing of all the “profane uses” of *agapao* and *agapee*. Plug in the common teaching’s definition of “divine love,” and you will see it is impossible for *agapao/agapee* to mean, “divine love.”

Evil (or Neutral) or Non-Divine *Agapao* (verb) Uses:

Only loving those who love you (Mt 5:46).

Two masters - hate one and love the other - can choose *agapao* for money over God (Mt 6:24).

Sinners also love those that love them (Lk 6:32 - this is two uses in one breath!).

Which released debtor will love the releasing lender most? (Lk 7:42).

Pharisees love the uppermost seats **and** respectful greetings (Lk 11:43).

Men loving darkness (Jn 3:19).

Pharisees loving the praise of men more than the praise of God (Jn 12:43).

Peter being asked if He loved Jesus “more than these” (Jn 21:15).

Demas having loved this present age (2Ti 4:8).

Balaam who loved the wages of unrighteousness (2Pet 2:15).

Admonition to not love the world. **If one does**, the love of the Father is absent (1Jn 2:15).

Not to love with word or tongue, but in deed and truth (1Jn 3:18).

Evil or Non-Divine *Agapee* (noun) Uses:

Love of many that grows cold (Mt 24:12).

Leaving **first** love (Rev 2:4).

The Bible teaches:

***Agapao* and *Agapee* are routinely expressed by man (saved and unsaved) and also by God.**

***Agapao* (verb) displayed by God:** “... for God *loves* a cheerful giver.” 2Cor 9:7. This use can be found in dozens of other passages.

***Agapao* (verb) displayed by saved man:** “He that *loves* his brother abides in the light ...” 1Jn 2:10. This use can be found in dozens of other passages.

***Agapao* (verb) displayed by unsaved man:** “... men *loved* darkness rather than the light ...” Jn 3:19. Also see, Mt 5:26, Mt 6:24, Lk 6:32, Lk 7:42, Lk 7:47, Lk 11:43, Jn 12:43, 2Ti 4:10, 2Pet 2:15, 1Jn 2:15, 1Jn 3:18 and Mt 24:12. A couple of these are injunctions to Christians to direct *agapao* in the right direction (e.g., 1Jn 2:15 and 1Jn 3:18).

***Agapee* (noun) in reference to God:** “God commended His *love* toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Ro 5:8, plus dozens of other examples.

***Agapee* (noun) in reference to saved man:** “...and walk in *love*, just as Christ also loved you ...” Eph 5:2. (This is the passage where the noun and verb **are not divorced** - “**just as** Christ **also** loved (*agapao*) you!” The same stuff!

***Agapee* (noun) in reference to unsaved man:** “And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s *love* will grow cold” (Mt 24:12). See also Revelation 2:4.

The truth is, *agapao* abounds all around us, being practiced by sinners and saints alike. And it is directed towards animate **as well as inanimate** objects! It is practiced towards money, towards places of honor, and towards the world! Once you understand what *agapao* is, you will begin to recognize its presence all around you. The Bible does not list every use of expressed *agapao* in its pages. But it gives enough examples to set us on the trail to see its expressions and activities in this world. You see, *agapao* does abound - whether you see it or not, whether you understand what it is or not, or whether you are willing to acknowledge it or not. And sinners exude it in all directions as they “*agapao the darkness!*” (Jn 3:19).

Phileo

Here are some passages where *phileo* is used - and can not mean “brotherly love,” or a “man’s love.” Plug in either definition, and you will see it is impossible for the common teaching to be correct.

The Father’s love for the Son (Jn 5:20).

Jesus’ love for Lazarus (Jn 11:3).

The Father’s love for the disciples (Jn 16:27).

Jesus’ love for John (Jn 20:2).

Jesus’ love for His own (Rev 3:19).

The Bible teaches:

***Phileo* is routinely expressed by man (saved and unsaved) and also by God!**

***Phileo* displayed by God:** “Those whom I *love*, I reprove and discipline.” Rev 3:19. See also Jn 5:20, Jn 11:3, Jn 11:36, Jn 16:27a, and Jn 20:2.

***Phileo* displayed by saved man:** “Greet them that *love* us in the faith.” Tit 3:15. See also, Jn 16:27b, Jn 21:15,16,17, and 1Cor 16:22 (a critically important use to be examined in detail later).

***Phileo* displayed by unsaved man:** “Outside ... (is) everyone who *loves* and practices lying.” Rev 22:15. There are seven other uses like this. See Mt 6:5, Mt 10:37 (twice), Mt 23:6, Lk 20:46, Jn 12:25, and Jn 15:19.

As you can see, it is *impossible* for *phileo* to mean, “brotherly love.”

So, *agapao* and *agapee* are expressed by man (saved ***and unsaved***), and by God. *Phileo* is also expressed by man (saved and unsaved), and ***by God!*** Man and God display ***both***.

I hear many of you now asking, “*So, what does agapao/agapee mean? And what does phileo mean? And why are so many ‘Greek scholars’ in error on what the Bible teaches about love?*” Well, the intent of this Article has been to expose that *agapao/agapee* can not mean, “*the unconditional, divine love of God*” - and that *phileo* can not mean, “*brotherly love.*” This has been done by simply quoting Bible passages that confound such definitions. Even those who have no knowledge of New Testament Greek can see these definitions are impossible - thus refuting the common teaching about biblical love. In order for you to find out what these Greek words actually do mean - and why so many “scholars” are in such tremendous error - you can download my free Ebook, “*Love and the Bible*” at my Website in the Author Bio. Of course ... maybe an accurate understanding of what the Bible actually does teach about love is not really that important....

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