

## A Little Bit of Greek

Session 3: Love in the New Testament

In person at Wai 'alae Baptist Church

Online via Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82863271187?pwd=TnVHK2ZGNkFqY28wa0lxV3hpQ1h5UT09>

**Meeting ID: 828 6327 1187**

**Passcode: 494627**

You might have heard the teaching that the Greeks had four different words that can be translated as “love” in English. That would not be correct. There are more than four words. Here are a few.

- *Storge* – natural or filial love
- *Eros* – love that is strongly connected to romance or sexual attraction, but can also refer to the appreciation of beauty beyond the physical
- *Philautia* – self love. 2 Timothy 3:2. The New Testament has another opportunity to use this word, but instead Paul uses *agape* (Eph. 5:28)
- *Philia* – love between friends
- *Agape* – Originally used to mean love for one’s children or between spouses. Christians used to express God’s love

You might also have heard that the New Testament predominantly uses only two of these forms – *agape* and *philia*. That would be correct. Forms of *agape* far outnumber usages of forms of *philia*.

You might also have heard that in the New Testament *agape* always means God’s perfect, unconditional, eternal love and *philia* is always used to mean something inferior – more like love between brothers. That would be incorrect. Here is what we find instead.

- *Agape* often means God’s perfect love.
- *Agape* is also used to refer to love in general.
- *Philia* can be used to refer to “brotherly love”
- *Philia* and *agape* also appear to be used interchangeably at times.

This should not surprise us, but it often does. Languages often use the same word to mean different things and to use different words to mean the same thing. To confuse you even more, sometimes words can have two different meanings that are opposites.

- Strike                      In baseball “to miss”      In everywhere else “to hit”
- Bound                      “homeward bound”      “bound to an oath”
- Fast                        “held fast”              “ran fast”
- Trim the tree              Add to a tree or take away from a tree
- Dust                        Add or remove?

How do we know the difference? Context.

**Words do not get their meaning from the dictionary. They get their meaning from context.**

We must avoid taking one meaning, even the dominant one and forcing it into a sentence. We must also avoid reading all the possible definitions of a word and choosing one that best suits our interpretation.

Write one possible meaning of “fly.”

Now, put your meaning of “fly” into the following sentence.

***Time seemed to fly by for the fly who was flying along with friends and thinking, “Everything is so fly” until he realized his fly was open.***

The same word used five times in the same sentence with five different meanings – yet you can almost effortlessly understand the sentence. How? Context.

The same is true in Greek. We cannot force a definition into a sentence or think that a word “always” means the same thing. We must always pay attention to context.

### ***Agape and Philia***

These words occur in various forms in the New Testament. *Philia* is often used as a compound word.

αγαπη  
αγαπαω  
φιλεω  
φιλια

For these notes, the transliterated nominative form will be used.

#### Usage of *agape*

If the following is true *Agape* – *always means God’s unconditional love*

How do we make sense of these sentences from the Bible?

**“If you *love (agape)* those who *love (agape)* you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners *love (agape)* those who *love (agape)* them.” Lk. 6:32 (cf. Mt. 5:46)**

It seems the benefit is obvious if you love with unconditional love those who unconditionally love you. Isn’t this what Jesus tells us we should do?

How can sinners love each other unconditionally with God’s love?

These verses suggest that you can have God’s unconditional love for objects.

*Agape* for money – Mt. 6:24, Lk. 16:13

*Agape* for darkness – John 3:19

*Agape* the best seats – Lk. 11:43.. Similar statements in Mt. 6:5, 23:4 and Lk. 24:6 use *philia*.

*Agape* gain from wrongdoing – 2 Peter 2:15

Yet in 1 John 2:15, believers are told not to love the world. Cf. 2 Timothy 4:10

<sup>12</sup>And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. Mt. 24:12

How can the love that never fails (1 Cor. 13) grow cold?

<sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

<sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Lk. 7:42-47

Here Jesus says that "unconditional love" is based on conditions.

<sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.— Rev 12:11

What is meant by agape here?

### Usage of Philia

We find a similar situation with *philia* if we try to make it always mean "love among friends" or "brotherly love."

In John 15:13, when Jesus talks about love for friends, he uses agape instead of *philia*.

The New Testament uses *philia* for love of people and objects, good and bad.

Lover of money – Lk. 16:14, 1 Tim. 3:3, 6:10, 2 Tim. 3:2, Heb. 13:5

Lovers of self – 2 Tim. 3:2

Lover of good – Titus 1:8

Loves falsehoods – Rev 22:15

Love between children and parents - Mt. 10:37

Love life – Jn. 12:25

One of the more puzzling uses is when Mary and Martha said (Jn. 11:3) and later the Jewish people (Jn. 11:36) think Jesus has *philia*, not *agape*, for Lazarus.

Here are other uses of forms of *philia*.

Jn. 15:19, Phil. 4:8, Titus 3:15, Heb. 13:1

**Forcing meaning into Bible verses also creates problems when the two words occur together or when one is used in a context when the other is typically used.**

In 1 Peter 3:8 – <sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, **brotherly love**, a tender heart, and a humble mind – *philadelphos* takes the place where *agape* might appear in similar lists (Cf. Gal. 5:22)

<sup>22</sup> Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere **brotherly love**, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

Τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν ἡγνικότες ἐν τῇ ὑπακοῇ τῆς ἀληθείας εἰς **φιλαδελφίαν** ἀνυπόκριτον ἐκ καρδίας ἀλλήλους **ἀγαπήσατε** ἐκτενῶς,

In English the words occur right next to each other, but in Greek they are separated.

1 Thess. 4:9 has a similar combination that Paul uses.

Now concerning brotherly love (*philew*) you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love (*agape*) one another, <sup>10</sup>for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

These two usages would seem to suggest that when a form of *philia* is used in the word *philadelphia* that the New Testament writers considered it synonymous with *agape*.

<sup>2</sup> For people will be **lovers of self, lovers of money**, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not **loving good**, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, **lovers of pleasure** rather than **lovers of God**, <sup>5</sup> having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. 2 Tim. 3:2-4

All are compound words built from *philia*.

<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Rom 12:9-10

*Agape* is used in verse 9 and forms of *philia* are in verse 10 twice.

Several times, Paul tells husbands to *agape* their wives. But in Titus 2:4, he tells Titus to instruct the older women to instruct the younger women to be *φιλάνδρους* (husband lovers – *philandrous*).

Why does Paul want men to *agape* and women to only *philei* their spouses?

What are the main options when translating *agape* or *philia*?

- The author has a specific, different reason for using each word.
- The author is using the words interchangeably.
- In compound forms, the preferred word is *philia* and the preferred verb or noun is a form of *agape*.

We can now consider the restoration of Peter at the end of the Gospel of John.

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** (*agape*) me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I **love** (*philia*) you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” <sup>16</sup> He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** (*agape*) me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I **love** (*philia*) you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you **love** (*philia*) me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him **the third time**, “Do you **love** (*philia*) me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I **love** (*philia*) you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

In this passage,

- Jesus uses *agape* in his first and second question.
- Peter uses *philew* in each of his responses.
- Jesus uses *philew* in his third question.
- John notes that Peter is grieved because he is asked the same question three times.

What should we conclude?

- The words are being used interchangeably
- Different words are being used to communicate different meaning.

### Other Uses of Agape

**Mt** 3:17, 5:43, 44, 12:18, 17:5, 19:19, 22:37, 39, **Mk.** 1:11, 9:7, 10:21, 12:3, 30-33, **Lk.** 3:22, 6:27, 6:35, 7:5, 10:27, 11:42, 17:24, 26, 20:13, 21:20, **Jn.** 3:16, 3:35, 5:20, 5:40, 8:42, 10:17, 11:5, 12:43, 13:1, 23, 34-35, 14:15, 21, 28, 31, 15:9-12, 17, 16:27, 17:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, **Rom.** 1:7, 5:5, 8, 8:28, 35, 37, 39, 9:13, 25, 13:8-10, 14:15, 15:30, **1 Cor.** 2:9, 4:21, 8:1, 3, 13:1-13, 14:1, 16:14, **2 Cor.** 2:4, 8, 5:14, 6:6, 8:7-8, 24, 9:7, 11:11, 12:15, 13:11, 14, **Gal.** 2:20, 5:6, 13-14, 22 **Eph.** 1:4, 6, 15, 2:4, 3:17, 19, 4:2, 15, 16, 5:2, 5:25, 6:23-24, **Phil.** 1:9, 16, 4:1, 2:1, 2, **Col.** 1:4, 13, 2:2, 3:14, **1 Thess** 1:3-4, 3:6, 12, 5:8, 13, **2 Thess** 2:10, 16, 3:5, **1 Tim.** 1:5, 14, 2:15, 4:12, 6:11, **2 Tim.** 1:7, 13, 2:2, 3:10, 4:8, 10 **Titus** 2:2, **Phile** 5, 7, 9, **Heb** 1:9, 6:10, 10:24, 12:6, **Jam** 1:12, 2:5, 8, **1 Pet** 1:7-8, 2:17, 3:10, Pet 4:8, 1 Pet 5:14, **2 Pet** 1:17, **1 Jn** 1:3, 2:5, 10, 15, 3:1, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 23, 4:7-9, 10-12, 16-21, 5:1-3, **2 Jn** 1, 3, 5, 6, 3 Jn 1, 6, **Jude** 2, 12, 21, **Rev** 1:5, 2:4, 19, 3:9, 19

Beloved – Acts 15:25, Rom. 11:28, 12:19, 16:5, 8, 9, 12, 1 Cor. 4:14, 17, 10:14, 15:58, 2 Cor. 7:1, 12:19, Eph. 5:1, 6:21, Phil. 2:12, 4:1, Col. 1:7, 8, 3:12, 4:7, 9, 14, 2 Thess 2:13, 1 Tim. 6:2, 2 Tim. 1:2, Philemon 1, 16, Heb 6:9, James 1:16 19, 2:5, 1 Peter 2:11, 4:12, 2 Pet 3:1, 8, 14, 15, 17, 1 John 2:7, 3:2, 21, 4:1, 3 Jn 1, 2, 5, 11, Jude 1, 3, 17, 20, Rev 20:9