

LOVE

There is no dispute about the importance of love in Christianity. Love is fundamental to God and a virtue of Christianity. Two words have been translated as love in the New Testament, **agape** and its variation **agapao** which occur 258 times and **phileo** and its numerous variations which appear 99 times. Much discussion and debate has been attributed to the differences between the two forms. Many Christian scholars purport agape to represent the higher form of love, a God-like love as opposed to phileo, a lower form of love more akin to the word like. The difference in meaning is brought into contrast in John 21:15-17 in the exchange between Jesus and Peter.

John 21:15-17

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love (agapao) me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love (phileo) you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.' Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love (agapao) me?' He answered, 'Yes Lord, you know that I love (phileo) you.' Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.' The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love (phileo) me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love (phileo) me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love (phileo) you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep."

Richard C.H. Lenski, the famous German Scholar gives a word study for John 21:15-17 which states that "agapao" is the higher form of love and "phileo" is akin to the English like. An examination of Scriptures does not wholly support this supposition. Scripture in general appears to support "agape" as a higher form of love than "phileo," but not necessarily as high as a God-like love. In contrast, Scriptures do not wholly support that "phileo" is as low a form as the English like. Like appears to be an inadequate expression for "phileo." Love is indeed a proper translation.

God the Father's love (*phileo*) for those who accept Jesus, His Son:

John 16:27

"No, the Father himself loves (**phileo**) you because you have loved (**phileo**) me and have believed that I came from God."

God the Father's love (*phileo*) for Jesus:

John 5:20

"For the Father loves (**phileo**) the Son and shows him all he does."

Severe penalty for not loving (*phileo*) Jesus:

1 Corinthians 16:22

"If any man love (**phileo**) not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."

These are but three Scriptures which strongly indicate that "phileo" is not as low a form of love as some would claim. God the Father uses "phileo" to express His as well as our love for Christ. The context of these scriptures indicates phileo being used by God to express a high form of love. Other uses of "**phileo**" include Christ's deep love for Lazarus (Jn. 11:3,36); a family's love for each other (Mt. 10:37); a persons love for his own life (Jn. 12:25); Christ's love for the Apostle John, (Jn. 20:2); the church's love for the apostles (Tit. 3:15), and God's love for his children (Rev. 3:19), a woman's love for her husband (philandros) and a woman's love for her children

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(philoteknos) (Titus 2:4). This is a compelling argument that "phileo" is not as low a form of love as some may think but indeed a very high form of God-like love.

Distinctions may have arose because other Greek words with the root "phil" often constitute a lower form of love. It is associated with being nice, friendly, kind, cordial and caring. The Greek word for friend is **philos** and appears 29 times with more than a dozen other "phil" translations such as "philadelphia" which translates "brotherly love," (1Ths. 4:9, Heb. 13:1), philostorgos as "kindly affectionate." (Rom. 12:10)

Philos: Mt. 6:5, 11:19, 23:6, 26:48, 14:44, Lk. 7:6,34, 11:5,8, 12:4, 14:10,12, 15:6,9,29, 16:9, 20:46, 21:16, 22:47, 23:12, Jn. 3:29, 11:11, 15:13-15,19, 16:27, 19:12, 20:2 Ac. 10:24, 19:31, 27:3, Jm. 2:23, 4:4, 3Jn. 1:14, Rev. 22:15

Philema: Lk. 7:45, 22:48, Rom. 16:16, 1Cor. 16:20, 13:12, 1Ths. 5:26, 1Pet. 5:14

Philadelphia: 1Ths. 4:9, Heb. 13:1, 1Pet. 1:22, 3:8, 2Pet. 1:7

Misc.: Lk. 16:14, 22:24, Ac. 17:18, 27:3, 28:2,7, Rm. 12:10,13, 15:20, 16:15, 1Cor. 11:16, 1Cor. 5:9, Col. 2:8, 1Ths. 4:11, 1Tm. 3:2, 6:10, 2Tm. 3:2,4, Tit. 1:8, 2:4, 3:4, He. 13:2, Jm. 4:4, 1Pe. 3:8, 4:9, 3Jn. 1:9

The context of "agape" and "agapao" in Scripture generally show it to be a high form of love. It does not, however, reveal it to be the consummate expression of love that can only come from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 5:43-44, 6:24, 24:12, Lk. 6:27,32, 7:42, 11:42-43, 1Jn. 2:15, 2Tim. 4:10, 2Pet. 2:15). In fact, some scriptures use agape love to imply a lower form of love, a selfish human love.

Agape love as used in Matthew 5:46 seems to express agape love as an inadequate form of love that even the Godless (tax collectors) posses:

Matthew 5:46

"If you **love (agapao)** those who **love (agapao)** you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?"

1 John 3:18

"Dear children, let us not **love (agapao)** with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

Agape is used to express a high form of love as in God's love for Jesus Christ:

John 3:16,35

"For God so loved (agapao) the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life ... The Father **loves (agapao)** the Son and has placed everything in His hand."

... But so is Phileo love used to express God's love for Jesus Christ:

John 5:20

"For the Father **loves (phileo)** the Son and shows Him all he does."

Agape and Phileo are both used to express God's Love.

God's love for His children:

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Hebrews 12:6

"Because the Lord disciplines those He **loves (agapao)**, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

Revelation 3:19

"Those whom I **love (phileo)** I rebuke and discipline."

Jesus Christ's love for Martha and Lazarus:

John 11:5

"Jesus **loved (agapao)** Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

John 11:3.36

"So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you **love (phileo)** is sick." ... Then the Jews said, 'See how He **loved (phileo)** him!'"

There appears to be more similarity in the two forms of love than difference. Let's look at how they stack up when contrasted.

1 Peter 1:22

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere **love (philadelphia)** for your brothers, **Love (agapao)** one another deeply, from the heart."

2 Peter 1:7

"And to godliness, brotherly kindness (philadelphia); and to **brotherly kindness (philadelphia), love (agapao)**."

Agape: Mt. 24:12, Lk. 11:42, Jn. 5:42, 13:35, 15:9-10, 13, 17:26, Rom. 5:5,8, 8:35,39, 12:9, 13:10, 14:15, 15:30, 1Cor. 4:21, 8:1, 13:1-4,8,13, 14:1, 16:14,24, 2Cor. 2:4,8, 5:14, 6:6, 8:7-8,24, 13:11,14, Gal. 5:6,13,22, Eph. 1:4,15, 2:4, 3:17,19, 4:2,,15-16, 5:2, 6:23, Phil. 1:9,17, 2:1-2, Col. 1:4,8,13, 2:2, 3:14, 1Ths. 1:3, 3:6,12, 5:8,13, 2Ths. 1:3, 2:10, 3:5, 1Tim. 1:5,14, 2:15, 4:12, 6:11, 2Tim. 1:7,13, 2:22, 3:10, Tit. 2:2, Plm. 1:5,7,9, Heb. 6:10, 10:24, 1Pet. 4:8, 5:14, 2Pet. 1:7, 1Jn. 2:5,15, 3:1,16-17, 4:7,8-10,12,16-18, 5:3, 2Jn. 1:3,6, 3Jn. 1:6, Jude 2,12,21, Rev. 2:4,19

Agapao: Mt. 5:43-46, 6:24, 19:19, 22:37,39, Mk.10:21, 12:30-31,33, Lk. 6:27,32,35, 7:5,42,47, 10:27, 11:43, 16:13, Jn. 3:16,19,35, 8:42, 10:17, 11:5, 12:43, 13:1,23,34, 14:15,21,23-24,28,31, 15:9,12,17, 17:23-24,26, 19:26, 21:7,15-16,20, Rom. 8:28,37, 9:13,25, 13:8-9, 1Cor. 2:9, 8:3, 2Cor. 9:7, 11:11, 12:15, Gal. 2:20, 5:14, Eph. 1:6, 2:4, 5:2,25,28,33, 6:24, Col. 3:12,19, 1Ths. 1:4, 4:9, 2Ths. 2:13,16, 2Tim. 4:8,10, Heb. 1:9, 12:6, Jas. 1:12, 2:5,8, 1Pet. 1:8,22, 2:17, 3:10, 2Pet. 2:15, 1Jn. 2:10,15, 3:10-11,14,18,23, 4:7-8,10, 4:11-12,19-21, 5:1-2, 2Jn. 1:1,5, 3Jn. 1:1, Rev. 1:5, 3:9, 12:11, 20:9

GOD'S LOVE

The scriptures declare the love of God just as strongly as they do His existence. To speak of love as an "attribute" of God is totally inadequate. The Scriptures declare that God "is" love.

1 John 4:8,16

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love ... And so we

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know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."

There are no equivalent statements in Scripture with respect to the other qualities of God's divine nature. Love is the highest characteristic of God. It is love which harmoniously encompasses and blends all other characteristics and attributes of God. God's love transcends kindness and benevolence. God is benevolent toward all His creation, but His love is directed toward humanity, the rational, personal beings God created in His image. God's eternal love has never been without its object of love.

John 17:22-23

"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

God's gracious love toward all men, saints and sinners alike, is strongly declared in both Old and New Testaments (Ex. 34:6-7, Isa. 63:9, Jn. 3:16, 1Jn. 4:10). God's love for his creation underlies all that he has done and is doing. God's love transcends human understanding. The highest proof and disclosure of God's divine love for humanity is through the Calvary event (Rom. 8:32-39).

Romans 5:8

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

1 John 4:9-10

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

The reality and power of God's love can only be apprehended under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

LOVE AS A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

Love is the preeminent virtue imparted to and produced by Christianity. The whole law and the prophets is summed up in love (Mt. 22:36-40, Gal. 5:14). Love however, does not render all other requirements inconsequential, but renders love as fundamental. The fundamental aspect of love expresses the spirit of the other requirements. When enlightenment and illumination is combined with love, it will lead to the observance of the others (Mt. 5:38-48, Jn. 14:15,21, 13:8).

In the old age of the Law, God expressed his love through Israel and the exodus event. In this new age of the Spirit, God expresses his love through Jesus Christ and the Calvary event. Through the Exodus event, Israel was the beneficiary of God's love through the law. In this age of Spirit, all humanity is the beneficiary of God's love through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the full and complete expression of God's love. Jesus Christ through the Calvary event has replaced the Law and the Exodus event as the reference point to express God's love. As God's love once redeemed Israel from the bondage of Egypt, God's love now redeems all mankind from the bondage of sin. (Jn 13:34-35, 15:10,12-14).

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Ephesians 1:5,7

"In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will ... In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."

John 13:34

"A new commandment I give to you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

The command to love is not new. The Old Testament commanded love for neighbor (Lev. 19:18, 34, Deut. 10:19, Mk. 12:28-34). What is new is Christ's command to love "as I" tell you, and to love "as I" have loved you. Love is given a new historical reference point and a new standard. Love is now defined in Christ.

Matthew 5:43-44

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'"

Throughout the New Testament we see our behavior is to be determined, shaped and structured by what Christ has done for us at Calvary. The imperatives on how we are to live our lives always points back to Christ, His death and resurrection as the perfect fulfillment and expression of love. Love is the highest motive for moral actions. Without love, all other motives fall short of furnishing the true stimulus of Christian living. As all sin roots itself in selfishness, true virtue springs forth out of love. Love is now defined through the cross of Christ and accordingly declared to be the chief test of Christian discipleship.

John 13:35

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

"Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church" (Eph. 5:25). Please note the new reference point for love. It does not flow from the love that God revealed in the Exodus from Egypt but in the love that God reveals through the death and resurrection to life in Yeshua haMachiah our Lord.

1Jn. 4:9-11

"This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

1 Jn. 3:16

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

It appears to be an exercise in futility to draw too sharp a distinction between the "agapao" and "phileo" forms of love. Christians are to imbue themselves and others in love; and agape and phileo are proper translations for love.