

## Love and the Bible

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*If you think love is an important topic to Christianity, you owe it to yourself, and the world around you, to learn God's teaching on this subject. It is amazing how confused the teaching is on this vital topic. You are about to embark on a fascinating study, and like all correct Bible understandings, it is tremendously liberating.*

Love. This seems like an important subject in Christianity. 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* of one's 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 legal requirements of the Law of God are fulfilled *by love*? It is evidently made up of *something* that has the ability to even 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? Before proceeding, I want you to write down *your* definition of "*love*." Nobody will ever know what you write down unless you decide to share it. Don't over analyze - just write. If you need a starting place, try asking yourself, "*When I say to someone, 'I love you,' what do I mean?*" Is it an indefinable feeling - a spontaneous, uncontrollable warmth that wells up from deep inside to then be directed at the object of affection? Well, even that gives some kind of definition to it! I hope you do this so you can see if your definition changes *after* you have finished this ebook. That will be one way to measure if your time here was well spent.

Well, now that you have written your definition, and I have written mine, here's the bad news. Our definitions are ultimately irrelevant. "*Say it ain't so!*" But, it is so. Alas, only God's definition means anything as it is *by that definition we will be judged*. *He alone* will decide if we have loved Him, our neighbor, or our self. And He will use *His* definition! Any other opinion on what constitutes love is, even now, null and void. So, we *need to be sure* we know His definition. That is the goal of this treatise. But don't throw away your definition yet!

I want to first relate the teaching I received as a young Christian. You may, or may not, find parallels with what you have been taught. Intertwined with this teaching, I will relate relevant experiences to this subject. Again, you may, or may not, find parallels in your own experience. I will then take you to a defining moment that launched me into an objective study into the Biblical topic of love. Against that backdrop, I will discuss this subject in many ways which I believe will be of interest.

### Setting the Stage for the Search

In April of 1977, a very confused young man walked into a coffeehouse ministry called The Greenhouse. He was involved in many nefarious activities that found him living totally estranged from God. By the time he walked into The Greenhouse, he had

been reading the Bible for six months, with the last six weeks being most intense. He had become intrigued with its contents ... but, a huge cloud hung overhead. He rightly understood he was in huge trouble with its Author, but had no idea if this could be corrected - or not. Added to this crushing weight was a lack of meaningful life purpose. And activities that had at one time brought some measure of relief, no longer delivered. All this was taking a heavy toll. And even if all did go well - so what? After forty or fifty years - then what? "*What is the point? Success? To what end?*" Maybe a few of his song titles will give you the idea. "*Dead End,*" "*Fightin' for Light,*" "*The Harder I Look, The Less That I See,*" "*Even Even Seems Odd,*" and "*Played Out.*" The lyrics reveal the descent of a young man being beaten down by life. Questions, but no answers. And when answers do not come, the weight becomes heavier. The young man ... was me.

I walked into The Greenhouse - a sinner indeed. So, what kind of reception did I receive? Well, I found myself surrounded with smiling faces *that wanted to know all about me!* They wanted to know where I came from, how I found The Greenhouse, how long I had been in the area ... I was welcomed with open arms! I was introduced to everyone there, and after the music, Bible study, and fellowship time, it was clear they were looking forward to my return! Wow! What a night! I felt - LOVE - from people who had never laid eyes on me before! They wanted no money, made no demands, the doors were opening to a new world - and it was *love unconditional!* Right? Well, let's see. Have you ever walked into some church and received a somewhat similar warm welcome? And that same level of love and acceptance continued ... right?

Let's now examine The Greenhouse's teaching on love - their "*Biblical*" definition(s). Again, this may, or may not, be a teaching you have heard ... so this may, or may not, relate to you. While these definitions are prominent in the Presbyterian Church of America, Southern Baptist circles and the "independent" Christian Church, I am not sure how pervasive this teaching is elsewhere. So, what was I taught in those early days about love?

## A Common Teaching

**Agapao** (verb); **Agapee** (noun). According to The Greenhouse (and others), these Greek words denote the unconditional, divine love of God. 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*. This is clearly the highest form of love. In our natural state we are separated from this love, but when we become a Christian, we step into the flood of God's divine, unconditional love. But, there's more! Once a Christian, we not only *receive* this love from God, but now we can become a conduit for God's love *to flow through us*. With Christ *in us*, divine love is shed abroad *in us*, and we can now be used by God to unconditionally love *those around us*. *Agapee* is an unconditional love that originates *in God*, and can never fail (1Cor 13:8). The actions, or reactions, of the targeted object is irrelevant. *Agapao* as an act of God - is independent of human affectations. Is any of this sounding familiar?

**Phileo** (verb); **Philos** (noun). This is brotherly love - man's love. It is a *lesser form* of love than the divine *agapao*. It is the love expressed by unsaved people. Ultimately, it is a self-centered type of love that *does have conditions to it* - even if they are not readily detectable. Therefore, it is innately fickle and can be turned on and off as situations and conditions change. The Greenhouse often pointed to the word, Philadelphia, which means the city of brotherly love, as an example of the meaning

*phileo.*

**Eros.** This is the Greek word for sexual love. Because this word never appears in the New Testament, The Greenhouse staff summarily dismissed this word. What a great breadth of knowledge they displayed! They not only taught about love from the New Testament record in its original language, *but they even knew Koine Greek that did not make it into the New Testament!* Impressive!

This all sounds great! Especially the part that, as a Christian, we not only enter into the *divine love* of God that the world does not know, but, now *we can become a funnel for this divine material to flow through us* as we spontaneously, unconditionally, divinely love those around us! What a rush! When a new person came to The Greenhouse, the staffers were convinced they were functioning in the *agapee* of God. They were loving unconditionally - expecting nothing in return. And the feelings were so warm and genuine. I know they thought, "*What a powerful feeling to have this divine love falling from the Throne of Grace through me to these sinners! How great it is to be used by God like this!*"

Unfortunately, I taught this in my early days. After all, *I was being pointed to the original language!* And all the learned teachers and preachers around me were speaking **with one voice** on this subject. Some not only had Seminary degrees, but one even headed a church *with thousands of members!* So, how do I now know this teaching is error? What makes me *so sure* this teaching about "*Love*" is wrong - *indeed false teaching?* Well, before laying out the case for your examination, I want to relate a puzzle that made me begin to wonder if something was amiss about this teaching. See if you can relate to this experience in some way.

### **But, Before the Puzzle ....**

When I was a student in one of the seminaries I attended, I shared the forthcoming information with one of my professors after he had presented this *agapao, phileo, eros* teaching to the class. When I pointed out the fabulous truth you will soon be privy to, he was taken aback and visibly shook. His theology on *Christian love* was shattered. But, by the next class period, he was back to normal! He had run to a resident Greek "*scholar*" and came back with a half-baked presentation that was an obvious tortured attempt to keep this erroneous teaching alive. When he presented his lame rationalization to the class, it was obvious to all that he was not even buying his own presentation. I didn't have to say a word and he concluded by saying he would have to look into it more. I do not know if he ever did, or if he is still teaching this heresy about - Love! I ask again, "*Is love an important Christian subject?*" Is it? Love! Love! Love! Everybody talks about it! The world sings about it! Movies are laced with it! Multitudes of novels revolve around it! Poetry drips with its theme! Love! Love! Love! The world cries out for this stuff! Young, old, male, female - Asian, Caucasian, African, Indian, Hispanic, Jewish - all languages, all cultures, all ages (and all future ages as well) - write about, and cry out for, this stuff called - *LOVE!* But, what is it? You may have noticed I just used the word, "*heresy*" for this common teaching. Can I back up such a charge? Or am *I* the heretic?

My first mission is to take *myself* to the place of accurate information. If I gain understanding on the Biblical definition of love, it will help me understand God's activities *toward me* - and events in my life *may* make more sense. Moreover, an accurate understanding of Christian love will help me understand my responsibilities toward God ... and man.

If you investigate the upcoming material thoroughly, it will affect every relationship you have - current and future! It will also cause you to look back at previous relationships when you thought you acted in love - *but didn't!* And this material will even affect your relationship with God Himself. Wow! What bold assertions! But, if I can deliver ... doubts will be replaced with repentance, changed lives ... and reformed fellowships!

### **The Puzzle**

Let's return to The Greenhouse. From the first visit to five years later.

That first night, I was directed to the Visitor's Class. It was an in-depth gospel presentation. I had been reading the Bible for months, but could not figure out what God was requiring of me. That class put all the pieces *of that puzzle* together. By my second visit, a marvelous change had occurred in me. I had called upon the Lord. I returned to The Greenhouse - as a new creation! Life had come! Joy had come! Hope had come! And now, I was even their brother! An eternal brother in the eternal family! That was twenty-six years ago (as of this edit, forty-two years) and counting. But although The Greenhouse solved that puzzle, over time *they created another*.

Over the next five years, this is what The Greenhouse staff witnessed from that young man (me). In the first eighteen months, original Christian music flowed from his guitar. He wrote several tracts, and used them to begin hundreds of witnessing contacts. He witnessed to the county jail inmates on Saturday mornings. He started a Saturday night Bible study, and attended The Greenhouse every Tuesday and Thursday night bringing many new people with him. This was in addition to a full time job. Then an area Christian Drug Rehabilitation Program offered him a position on staff. That was the next couple of years. His duties included teaching, counseling, and public speaking. And he showed up at The Greenhouse every week with a van full of young men. Then this brother - part of the fruit of their labor - went on staff at the only Street Gospel Mission in the area. Again ... teaching, counseling, presenting his new songs four nights per week, and public speaking. This was a two-year assignment. Then, when that Mission closed, some Bible college recruiters from another state showed up, looking for him to attend their College with the way paved to attend seminary. So, what is the point of this rehearsal of history that no one (except God) is even remotely interested in? Well, let's talk about love.

Before the out-of-state move, I broke away from packing to go by The Greenhouse to say farewell. Judgment Day would probably be the next time paths would cross (and it still looks that way). It was in the afternoon and "*the meeting*" was with the main staff fellow in the driveway. All he could do - was to continually glance at his watch. The rest of the staff was not at all interested in saying good bye. There was no great surprise at this, as all the staff had progressively grown colder and colder as the years had gone by.

As I drove off, this *new puzzle* crystalized. The first night I attended The Greenhouse, *agapao* love, the divine, unconditional love of God poured out from these people. Now, five years later, the spigot *was totally turned off!* So, here was The Puzzle: "*What happened to the agapao love that channeled through The Greenhouse staff - that unconditional, divine love that **never fails** (1Cor 13:8)?" Five years earlier, I walked in *unsaved* ... but now I walked away as a Christian. I was free of drugs, alcohol, cursing, all kinds of sexual misdeeds, lying, employee thefts ... and replacement activities included*

all that I cited above. I thought, “*Does God love me less now than the first night I came here? Newcomers are still greeted warmly and enthusiastically - just like I was five years earlier! Yet now, this agapao love, this unfailing divine love of the eternal Creator for me ... has vanished!*”

Fortunately, my relationship with God has never been founded upon the behavior of man. Therefore, I did not *really* wonder if God loved me or not. That determination was based upon grounds separate from The Greenhouse. It also helped that I had a clear conscience in my five years of interaction with The Greenhouse staff. But *even if I had sinned against the staff*, wasn't the divine love coming through them ... *unconditional*? In short, I smelled a rat. A dead one. A big, fat dead one. I didn't know exactly where it was, but I knew it was somewhere in the house.

So, ... let me ask you a question about *your* Christian experience. Does any of this have a familiar ring? Have you ever attended a church where you were *initially* “loved,” but then the subtle rejection began - finally culminating in you knowing you weren't wanted around? *What is this “love?”* The people exercising it *really believe they are exhibiting God's agapao love* - yet, it dries up along the way! Have you ever found yourself in a puzzle like this? Well, if not, one day you likely will.

Truth be known, this is not a puzzle of God's making. It's the result of false teaching. Learning the truth solves puzzles. Unfortunately, when faced with a puzzle, many people fall back on the crutch, “*there are many interpretations!*” rather than bringing a puzzle before God and asking Him about it. While He may not solve it the next day, He is quite interested in leading His own *into all truth*. After all, He has already given the most treasured Object of His affections for our redemption. So, to grant us some area of truth is *a mere crumb* from His table. I, for one, will most happily receive any crumb He wants to drop in my direction. Each *crumb of God* is packed with life, joy, light, liberty - eternal power - and blasts to oblivion all the combined riches this world can muster! Now, back to my story.

## The Clue

My first 5 years of Christianity was closed, I had said all my good byes ... and I was off to Bible College! Just before leaving, the student recruiter mentioned this little side note. “*Oh, yeah. Your first year, you have to take New Testament Greek.*” I said, “*Greek! You never said anything about that!*” He responded, “*Ah, don't worry. If I can pass, anybody can. You'll be okay.*” Yeah, right. I had always felt I was a *practical* Christian - a hands-on ministry worker, not an academic. I felt I would benefit my brothers by my practical works and, in turn, would be fed by brothers with the scholarly training.

The Bible College plan was that I would complete my undergraduate degree in two years (with transferred college work). But a little glitch arose. The Bible College only stayed open for *one* more year. When something goes down in flames, it's hard to avoid some burns. When that year ended, I was *through with the academic scene*. After my final exam, I was busily pitching all my books and notes. Then I received a phone call from my Greek teacher. He said, “*Robin, I have just finished grading the final exams, and I wanted you to know you got the highest grade in the class. It's been a real pleasure having you, and I know you are going to continue with your Greek studies!*” As I hung up the phone, I chuckled (there were only four class members), but then I paused in my pitching duties, reflected for a second, and said to myself, “*Well, maybe I'll hang on to*

*my Greek stuff.”*

I independently studied the Greek for the next eight years before taking Greek II in a formal setting. What a tremendous tool this has been. Every *hour* spent in this endeavor has never yielded a *minute* of regret. But, initially, after my Bible College year, where was I to start? Well, I had been taught that John’s writings contained the simplest Greek. So, that is where I started. I bought an interlinear Greek New Testament and covered up the English as I tried to read the Greek. When I got stumped on unfamiliar vocabulary, I would peek at the English word below. When I found something interesting, I would investigate by going into my Lexicon, or syntax studies, etc. A whole new world of interest and challenge unfolded, and still is, some 40+ years later. “So, (you ask) ...*what about LOVE?*”

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 of God in all it’s 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 was so excited! I then continued my journey through John. Then, three verses later ....

I came to John 3:19. “*And this is the judgment; 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, forty 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. 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, chief seats, 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 for you, answer this for yourself:

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. Anyone can do this easily.

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*” - whatever it is - is generated from inside God the Father and its target is God the Son! Man is completely out of the loop! I thought, “*Phileo cannot mean ‘brotherly love’ or some second rate man’s love! It can’t! And how can it be inferior to a divine agapao when it is generated by the divine Father Himself? Aughhhhhhh!*” I felt sick. Incidentally, I have spelled “*aughhhhhhh*” with seven “*h*”s. Seven is a number of completeness. I felt completely sick.

### 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).

### False Teaching - and False Teachers

While I was a *victim* of false teaching, I proceeded to *teach that trash*. I had *propagated false teaching* in the Name of Jesus Christ. At what point does God decide He has a *false teacher* on His hands? There is a line somewhere. Do not presume you know the answer to that. You do not. Nor do I. You may have some *opinion*, but God alone actually knows where He draws that line. It is like trying to determine when a person passes from *stumbling* in a sin area to *practicing* that sin. Extremes may be obvious, but

multitudes dance around those lines. For example, Galatians 5:20 tells us that those who practice outbursts of anger will not inherit the Kingdom of God. So, what constitutes *the practicing* of outbursts of anger resulting in eternal disqualification from inheriting the Kingdom of God? That is more than “*the million-dollar question*” - it is “*the eternal destiny question.*” If one commits this “*deed of the flesh*” once a day does God label such a one a *practitioner* of this disqualifying sin? But what if one commits this sin *every other day*? Is that practicing it? What if it is committed *once a week*, or *once a month*? Is that “*practicing*” it as far as God is concerned? Remember, the correct answer determines if a person spends eternity in Heaven - or in Hell. Can *you* accurately answer this question? And even if we pretended you could, can you also accurately pinpoint for us when one is *practicing* immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, envies disputes, dissensions, factions, drunkenness, carousings, and other similar damning practices of Galatians 5:19-21? So, at what point do I depart from carrying a false teaching - *and become a false teacher*? This is no trifling matter. This is not just some academic inquiry to be bantered about. The strongest words of damnation are reserved for **false teachers**.

I have often told individuals it would be better to die as a whoremongering drunk, having never uttered a word about God, than to die with a rap sheet filled with misrepresentations about The Creator. Think of it this way. Let's say the headquarters of a huge company is housed in the middle of your city. Two men are standing outside the building, and you ask them about the products and services of that company. The first man says he really does not know, and walks away. But, the second man launches into great detail about the company's product lines, service commitments, and warranties. But, ... he is mistaken on all points. Which of these two will provoke the President of the company to greater wrath? False teachers are in the greatest peril **of all** with God. For me to realize I had falsely represented God, not only caused great grief over misleading my audiences, but also *great alarm*. And the subject matter? Love! Yes, I was taught error by those leading me, but *I am ultimately responsible for what I propagate in the Name of Jesus Christ*. I repented then and there. I shut my mouth on this subject until I had sought God on this matter and honestly studied to arrive at some legitimate conclusions.

### **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.

### **Eros**

Oh yes ... one other little point. *Eros* is indeed associated with sensual desire and passion - sexual love. The Greenhouse, and others, got that one right. But, as *eros* does not occur in the New Testament - whoopee! The one that doesn't matter ... they got right.

### **The Lexicons**

A lexicon is basically a dictionary. There are many Greek lexicons by many different authors. Some give a relatively short definition for a word, while others go into great depth. The more in-depth works examine the root of a word and expound on the earliest uses of the word, even predating a Biblical use of the word by as much as a thousand years! Over time, most words develop nuances and take on new duties. The study of non-biblical Greek writings can be quite helpful in understanding the disposition of a word by New Testament times. For example, in our own language, consider the word “bread.” At one time, it probably just meant - bread. But, along the way, it picked up the meaning, “food” in a general sense. Later it picked up a slang use, meaning “money.” This word has developed a circle of potential meanings. When a writer uses this word, we need to look at the context, plug in potential meanings, in the attempt to come to an honest conclusion on the author’s intention. This might be fairly easy to figure out *today*, but if we were *two thousand years in the future looking back on that writing*, it might not be so easy. That is what we are trying to do as we work with the New Testament Greek. As a further complication, this is an extinct type of Greek language. While most Greek lexicons are fairly objective in their definitions, sometimes lexicographers obviously stray into subjective opinion. This can be discerned by comparing the work of several lexicons when studying a given word. Conflicting definitions flag you to a more careful, and prayerful, investigation. The study of the words *agapao* and *phileo* are great cases in point. Lexicons conflict with each other in very substantial ways. Here is a brief synopsis.

- 1) First, all *do agree* the verb, *agapao*, was used by “*the profane writers*” of the Greek Classics. But, the noun, *agapee*, did not appear until its use in the LXX (Septuagint, about 150 BC by Jewish translators). This *fact* becomes extremely important to many lexicographers, and theologians alike. This will be discussed in detail in an upcoming segment.
- 2) Next, all *do agree* that *phileo* is found in pre-Biblical uses, often in the Classics. The noun, *philos*, was also common. This fact (of commonality) also becomes quite important to many lexicographers and theologians. This too will be detailed in the upcoming segments.
- 3) Unfortunately, lexicographers *disagree* on the meaning of *agapao* and *phileo*. I am sure that is what you wanted to hear! Some lexicographers assert that *agapao* and *phileo* are used *interchangeably* ... in other words, they mean the same thing. Others believe each word is distinct in meaning and carefully placed by God in His word for specific purposes. Some assert *agapao* is activity arising from the will, while *phileo* is more emotion based. So, what *is* the meaning of *agapao* and *phileo*?

Before answering this, I think now is the time to list *the different ways* these words are used. I then want to discuss The Romanticized View versus The Non-Romanticized View (my contribution to Systematic Theology :). I will then forward what I believe to be accurate definitions.

***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, meaning it can be directed in the wrong 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! You will see why I am making this point later.

**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.

As you can see, it is *impossible* for *Agapao/agapee* to mean, “*divine love.*” Plug **that meaning** into each verse, and you will see the nonsense.

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

***Phileo* (verb) 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* (verb) 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* (verb) 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.

Again, you can see it is *impossible* for *phileo* to mean, “*brotherly love.*” Plug **that meaning** into each verse, and here too, you will see the nonsense. So, why do “*Greek scholars*” say *phileo* is a “*brotherly*” love? Wait until you see what happens with “*philos*” (n) in compounded word forms.

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***. Much more ahead!

## **The Romanticized View**

**“What the heck are you talking about?”**

An understanding of this section will explain how (and why) the Bible’s teaching on love has become twisted. Let’s first define “*Romanticism.*” When the concept of romance arises, what comes to mind? Some think of candlelight dinners where time is suspended and two people share thoughts and feelings in a magical, other worldly, environment. Others think of the Romantic period when virtuous knights participated in great adventures of danger and intrigue - being motivated by a pure love in some noble

quest. Still others think in literary terms, when artists threw off the straight jackets of paternalism and puritanism - for freedom of expression in feelings, form, and subject matter. But for my purposes here, I am using this term in a more sterile sense. *Romanticism is a notion, or ideal, that is maintained in spite of genuine, contrary fact.* The one embracing the errant notion is *emotionally bound* to it, so it is difficult to reason with them. A Romanticist uses *selective* facts and excludes facts *contrary* to the fancied notion. One in such a position must experience an explosion to the romanticized ideal for a reassessment to occur. For example, it took *the total collapse* of The Third Reich for adherents to question the romanticized notion that their race was the master race. How could “*the superior*” race fall to “*inferior*” ones? Concerning the subject matter here, for me the John 3:19 was the explosion.

I must say, it is a bit ironic I am opting for a sterile definition of romanticism ... and then apply that to love! May the discerning reader and the disciplined in thought understand and prosper!

### **It All Begins With Agapee (n) - A “Clean Word” for the Romantic**

At one time, many believed the New Testament was written in a “*heavenly Greek.*” It was a brand new, holy language from heaven, unsullied by man. This was assumed because this form of Greek was unknown. But when archeologists began finding land deeds, shopping lists, and other “*profane*” documents written at this same time in the “*heavenly Greek*” language they soon concluded the New Testament was actually written in the *common language* of the day! So it is now called Koine (common) Greek. I share this because some Bible “*scholars*” still cling to remnants of this “*heavenly Greek*” romanticized notion. The treatment of *agapao* and *phileo* are the classic case in point. They want God’s love to be totally separate from the pollutions of man. God is “*clean,*” and if they cannot keep the rest of the New Testament Greek “*heavenly,*” they are going to keep His love heavenly. But how can this be accomplished? Well, the noun, *agapee*, presents the opportunity. The verb, *agapao*, was used by the profane writers of the Greek Classics, but the noun, *agapee*, never was. Thus, some lexicographers decided *agapee* is a “*clean word*” reserved for God (and by God). He can then infuse it with His own meaning (with the help of lexicographers and scholars) - and introduce an attribute that was somewhat previously veiled ... His love.

“*God is agapee*” (1Jn 4:8). With this single use of *agapee*, divinity is infused into this word. *Agapee* is more than just an attribute of God - it is *the very nature of the eternal Creator Himself* - indeed the very heart of God. This “*fact*” alone makes *agapee* the undisputed, de facto, highest form of love. Romanticists (lexicographers, scholars, populists, and whoever else loves this notion) then infuse this word with all the moral qualities of God. Humanity is forever moved outside this word - because “***God is agapee!***” - not man. And where He is, it is. Many Romanticists maintain this love has no bounds or limits because God has no bounds or limits. This love, because God Himself is this love, trumps everything. This sounds great! It is no wonder this romanticized ideal is so popular! Those who hold this ideal have romanticized a subject that *easily* succumbs to romantic notions anyway - LOVE!

But why don’t the Romanticists, and their lexicographers, apply their same romanticized system to other words like wrath (*orgee*), anger (*thumos*), jealousy (*zeelos*), and lust (*epithumos*)? You will see why I ask this question in due course. But, first ....

### **The Divorcing of a Noun (*agapee*) and a Verb (*agapao*)**

Maybe this divorcing of primary meaning between a noun and its verb is a legal use of language and I just do not know it. But even if it is, the use of *agapee* in Matthew 24:12 **alone** brings the Romanticist's meaning of *agapee* into question. "And because lawlessness is increased, the love (*agapee*) of many will grow cold." Let's even assume Jesus is speaking about the love of *saved* people growing cold. How can *agapee* **from God** grow cold? Even if the saint had smothered it in sin, the *agapee* itself, being from God - even being God - *can't* grow cold! Then in Revelation 2:4, after several citations of praise, Jesus said to the angel of the church of Ephesus, "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love (*agapee*)." This is another challenging use of the noun, *agapee*. The desertion of a *first* love insinuates there is a second ... or third ... or fourth love (*agapee*) out there for the taking. But there can only be *one* divine love. Can divine love compete with other divine love? This is problematic for the honest Romanticist. But even more contrary is Ephesians 5:2. "Walk in love (*agapee* - noun) **just as** Christ also loved (*agapao* - verb) you." Looks like the same stuff to me. There's no divorcing of the noun and verb in meaning here.

Romanticists build a theology of God's love from the absolute need that this noun and verb be divorced in meaning and use. Matthew 24:12, Revelation 2:4, and Ephesians 5:2 form a three stranded rope refuting such a step. But, Romanticists take it and then create casualties along the way.

### **The Verb *Agapao* - The Romanticist's First Casualty**

The Romanticist's portrayal of the love of God is exciting, stimulating and sounds glorious. But, as is consistent with all romance, *emotion* drives the "logic." The first casualty is the verb, *agapao*. You would think Romanticists would disown this verb when the *fourteen* "errant" uses of *agapao* are exposed in the list below. They must not realize their divorce between noun and verb *must* occur, if their myth has any hope of survival. But currently, the verb *is blurred in* with the romanticized meaning assigned to the noun, *agapee*, as the verb is presented *as action* from God. That is why John 3:19 ("men loved, *agapao*, the darkness") shocked me so. That is *action* from men - *evil men!*

I am really surprised some copyist did not substitute *phileo* in the twelve passages that contain the fourteen "illegal" uses of *agapao*. But, this romanticization may be such a recent invention that the Greek texts did not have any real opportunity to be corrupted. I guess The Romanticist views these rogue uses of *agapao* as Scriptural error - if even "seen" at all. But if seen, these contrary uses of *agapao* are enemies to be avoided, ignored, rationalized, railed against or suppressed. Experience has taught me that Romanticists who teach the romanticized position, are so emotionally invested, they are what I call "*hardened Romanticists*." This seems to be an oxymoron, but hardened Romanticists are immovable. Their romanticized notions *are ideals* that appeal to their sense of beauty that God is entirely *separate* from sinners - especially His love. Any challenge to this romanticized position is ignored or rationalized away. Emotion rules and a search for truth is secondary assuming it exists at all.

### **The Non-Romanticized View**

Lexicographers in this group *do acknowledge* the lack of predated New Testament material as they attempt to assign meaning to the noun, *agapee*. But rather than invent some notion that is imposed on this word, they take a more linguistically sound approach.

For starters, they do not divorce the noun from its verb in primary meaning. Then they carefully evaluate the context of each occurrence of each word (*agapee*, *agapao*, *philos*, and *phileo*). This is a great aid in determining the meaning of any word. So, ... what do each of these words mean? Below is a comprehensive Non-Romanticized definition for each word gleaned from several lexicons. I will then list some passages where each word is found with the hope you will then go to those verses and “*plug in*” the possible definitions and see what makes sense.

### ***Agapao Means ...***

The primary meaning of *agapao*; “*to value, or esteem, because of a perceived intrinsic worth.*” It is a *respect* or *honoring* because of the target’s perceived inherent worth. Ensuing actions arising from *agapao* are *acts of the will* - not emotion. That is why it can be *commanded*, as feelings are *not required* for its expression. This is crucial for understanding *agapao*. The perceived value of the target generates *deferment toward the object*. This often creates a careful and faithful devotion toward the object of *agapao*. This “*respect*” for the perceived object *can* create feelings, but these feelings are secondary and are not required for the expression of *agapao*. Additionally, *agapao* never leaves the realm of *control by the will*, even if feelings do become present. Feelings never dominate.

### ***Phileo Means ...***

The primary meaning of *phileo*; “*to cherish.*” It is *packed* with emotion. Some define it, “*to like, to be fond of, or to delight in.*” In some contexts it is also translated, “*to kiss*”! It is the word for intense endearment. The noun form, *philos*, means, “*friend, or a congenial associate, a kiss.*” *Phileo* is the *warmth of love* for which everyone craves. It is the love of emotion, the love of affection - and emotional response is ignited by the object. While there are two passages that indicate employment of the will (to be discussed shortly), *phileo* highlights the emotional aspect of love.

If you think *phileo* means, “*brotherly love*” or “*human love*,” you must get this out of your mind. *Phileo* has ***no meaning*** of “*brotherly*” or “*human*” in any way. This will soon be seen below.

## **A Simple Listing of the Good, and the Bad - Which is Often Ugly (at least to the Romanticist)**

Maybe this is the time to simply list some good and bad *agapao* loves and some good and bad *phileo* loves by topic. This is interesting and “etc.” means there are other similar passages in that particular vein.

### **Good *Agapao* (verb) Uses:**

Toward your neighbor (Mt 5:43, etc.).

Toward your enemies (Mt 5:44, etc.).

Toward God (Mt 22:37, etc.).

Jesus toward the rich young man (Mk 10:21).

The Roman Centurion toward the Jewish nation (Lk 7:5).

The forgiven, immoral woman’s love toward Jesus (Lk 7:47).

The one forgiven little, who loves little (a *little agapao*?? Discussion ahead!) (Lk 7:47).

God toward the world (Jn 3:16).  
The Father toward the Son (Jn 3:35, etc.).  
Children of the Father toward Jesus (Jn 8:42).  
Jesus toward Martha (Jn 11:5).  
Jesus toward His disciples (Jn 13:1, etc.).  
Jesus commanding the disciples to love one another (Jn 13:34, etc.).  
The obedient toward Jesus (Jn 14:23).  
The Father toward those obedient to the Son (Jn 14:23).  
The Son toward the Father (Jn 14:31).  
Christians toward God (Ro 8:28).  
God toward Jacob (Ro 9:13).  
God toward non Israelites (Ro 9:25).  
God toward a cheerful giver (2Cor 9:7).  
Paul toward the Corinthians (2Cor 11:11, etc.).  
Jesus toward Paul (Gal 2:20).  
Husbands toward wives (Eph 5:25, etc.).  
Christ toward the Church (Eph 5:25).  
Christians toward each other (1Thess 4:9, etc.).  
Christians toward Christ's appearing (2Ti 4:8).  
Jesus toward righteousness (Heb 1:9). Note this is directed at a "*thing*."  
Anyone toward life (1Pet 3:10). This is another "*thing*."  
John toward his audience (2Jn 1).  
John toward Gaius (3Jn 1).  
Martyrs not loving their life even unto death (Rev 12:11).  
Towards the beloved city (Rev 20:9). Another "*thing*."

**Good Agapee (noun) Uses:**

Love of God (Lk 11:42, etc.).  
Disciples having love for one another (Jn 13:35, etc.).  
Jesus' love for disciples (Jn 15:9).  
Jesus abiding in the Father's love (Jn 15:10).  
The love of laying down one's life for his friends (Jn 15:13).  
God's love for Christians (Ro 5:8, etc.).  
Love of Christ (Ro 8:35, etc.).  
Love without hypocrisy (Ro 12:9).  
Love does no evil to neighbor (Ro 13:10).  
Love fulfills the Law (Ro 13:10).  
The Love of the Spirit (Ro 15:30).  
Paul towards the Corinthians (1Cor 4:21).  
Love builds up others (1Cor 8:1, etc.).  
Love is patient, kind, not jealous, etc., ... and never fails (1Cor 13:4,8). This passage examined shortly.  
The greatest of faith, hope, and love - is love (1Cor 13:13).  
Pursue love (1Cor 14:1).  
The God of love (2Cor 13:11).  
Faith works by love (Gal 5:6).  
By love serve one another (Gal 5:13).

Fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22).  
Speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15).  
Labor of love (1Thes 1:3).  
The breastplate of love (1Thes 5:8).  
Receive the love of the truth (2Thes 2:10).  
To provoke into love (Heb 10:24).  
Love covers a multitude of sins (1Pet 4:8).  
Kiss of love (1Pet 5:14).  
God is love (1Jn 4:8).  
Dwell in love (1Jn 4:16).  
No fear in love (1Jn 4:18).

**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). Two uses in one breath again!  
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 not to 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).

**Good Phileo (verb)Uses:**

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).  
The disciples love for Jesus (Jn 16:27).  
Jesus' love for John (Jn 20:2).  
Peter's love for Jesus (Jn 21:15).  
Various Christian's love for Paul and company (Tit 3:15).  
Jesus' love for His own (Rev 3:19).

**Evil Phileo (verb)Uses:**

Pharisee's cherishing public praying (Mt 6:5).  
Cherishing father or mother more than Christ (Mt 10:37).  
Cherishing son or daughter more than Christ (Mt 10:37).  
Pharisee's cherishing the place of honor at banquets (Mt 23:6).

Pharisee's cherishing the chief seats in the synagogues (Mt 23:6).  
Pharisee's cherishing respectful greetings in the marketplaces (Mt 23:7).  
Pharisee's cherishing the title, "Rabbi" (Mt 23:7).  
Cherishing one's own life (Jn 12:25).  
The world cherishing its own (Jn 15:19).  
The cherishing of lying (Rev 22:15).  
The cherishing of practicing those lies (Rev 22:15).

But the concept of *phileo* does not end with these words. *Philos*, the noun, is *compounded* with many other words. This is where we find *the root of the violation* of the verb *phileo*! We will come back to this following a deeper discussion on *agapao*.

**Good *Philos* (noun) Compound Word Uses:**

To cherish good men - *philagathos* (Tit 1:8).  
To cherish brothers - *philadelphia* and *philadelphos* (Ro 12:10, etc. and 1Pet 3:8).  
To cherish one's husband - *philandros* (Tit 2:4).  
To cherish mankind - *philanthropia* and *philanthropos* (Acts 28:2, etc. and Acts 27:3).  
To cherish God - *philotheos* (2Ti 3:4).  
To cherish hospitality/strangers - *philoxenia* and *philoxenos* (Ro 12:13, etc. and 1Ti 3:2).  
Tender affections - *philostorgos* (Ro 12:10).  
To cherish one's children - *philoteknos* (Tit 2:4).  
A cherished honor - *philotimeomai* (Ro 15:20, etc.).  
Courteous or affectionately minded - *philophronos* and *philophron* (Acts 28:7 and 1Pet 3:8).

**Evil *Philos* (noun) Compound Word Uses:**

Cherishing silver/money/covetous - *philarguria* and *philarguros* (1Ti 6:10 and Lk 16:14, etc.).  
Cherishing of one's self - *philautos* (2Ti 3:2).  
Cherishing of pleasures - *phileedonos* (2Ti 3:4).  
Cherishing strife - *philonikia* and *philonikos* (Lk 22:24 and 1Cor 11:16).  
Cherishing preeminence - *philoprotuo* (3Jn 9).  
Cherishing worldly "wisdom" - *philosophia* and *philosophos* (Col 2:8 and Acts 17:18).

These evil cherishings create a particularly dangerous situation. Love has passed from the realm of *will* into the realm of *emotion*. If we develop a cherishing for things that damn us, this is big trouble. Only the intervening power of God can demolish these intense emotional bonds. Cherishing any of the things listed under "Evil *Phileo* Uses," or "Evil *Phileo* Compound Word Uses," is *worse* than catching a lethal disease. A lethal disease kills the body. These lethal cherishings eternally damn the soul. Look through that list again. Each "*problem cherishing*" is worthy of a sermon - or a series of sermons.

**Now, For a Closer Look at *Agapao/Agapee* - The Choices We Make!**

An examination of the "definition" of *agapee* (noun) in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a is now in order.

"Love (*agapee, n*) is *patient*, love is *kind*, and is *not jealous*; love does *not brag*

*and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into an account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things; love (agapee, n) never fails."*

One goal I have, is to demonstrate that *agapee does not require the presence of familial emotions* and is fully under the control of one's will. The practice of *agapee* is completely based upon choice. But "*a practice*" of *agapee* requires action. And guess what *action* is? *It is a verb* - which, in this case, is *agapao*! The noun and verb cannot be divorced. So, let's go back through this passage.

*You can choose to be patient toward another without liking that person. You can choose to be kind without an emotional bond.* In fact, you probably do both of these things *all the time!* You are practicing *agapao* at those moments! No warm fuzzy feelings are required! If you sense you are *jealous* towards someone, *you can choose* to rebuke yourself and make yourself repent of this perverted evil. Again, it is not required *that you like this person* in order to right yourself. "*Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can stand before jealousy?*" (Pro 27:4). If you repent, you will be practicing *agapao*! If you practice *agapee* towards another, you will not be a *braggart* or be *arrogant* towards them. When you perceive this high mindedness in yourself towards another, *you can choose* to repent of this self centered, over evaluation of self - *and it is not required that you like the person* you have been a braggart or arrogant toward! If you find you are *acting unbecomingly* towards someone, *you can choose* to rebuke yourself for your misconduct. This can be done without an ounce of "*like*" towards that person. *You can choose* to seek the welfare of another, instead of seeking your own - and this can be done even if you *dislike* the individual! To be sure, it is easier to do these things if you like someone, but "*if you only agapao those who agapao you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners agapao those who agapao them.*" (Lk 6:32 - oops! There is one of those *agapao* uses that Romanticists *must excise* from the mouth of Jesus. "*He has misused this word!*" Friends, you are going to have to make some decisions on this subject of love. Either some gushy, errant, flesh-driven notion is going to survive, or you are going to get before God and ask Him to teach you *His definition* of love.) *Agapee is not easily provoked.* This word means, "*not easily incited*" - or "*quick to receive a charge against.*" *You can choose* to act otherwise. When a provocative report is brought to you, *you can choose* to "*examine all things carefully*" (1Thes 5:21), realizing the fact that "*the first to present his case seems just, until another comes and questions him*" (Pro 18:17).

But, now let's turn the tables and assume **you** are the one violated. *You can choose* not to take into account *this wrong suffered*. It may be hard, but you can deal with *your will* and make yourself rise above the offense. "*Agapee covers a multitude of sins*" (1Pet 4:8). And it is not required that you *like the person you choose* to practice this towards. Liking them is a totally separate and even *irrelevant issue!* *Agapee/Agapao* addresses **your** will, and how **you choose** to conduct **yourself!** Let's keep going through the 1Corinthian 13 list. *You can choose* not to rejoice in unrighteousness, but *rejoice with the truth*. (If you find you are doing otherwise here, your eternal destiny is at stake. God hates evil, and for one to rejoice in it - this is big trouble. And "*evil*" is more than murder, or stealing, or lying. It also includes fleshly impatience, jealousy, rudeness, bragging, arrogance, self-centeredness, etc., ... gleaned from the list above. My point? We have a lot of *behavioral choices* to make - and those choices have *nothing* to do with the

other party!) *Agapao* is an act of *our will* - and is not dependent upon the actions of those we are commanded to practice *agapao* toward. That is why God can, and does, *command this* of us. When we see our choices do not align with *agapao*'s demands, we can change course.

But let's go further. *You can choose* to practice these things *to enemies* - even if you *emotionally hate* them! Wow! What an outrageous claim! Well, go through the list in 1Corinthians 13 again. This time, place in your mind's eye someone you deeply despise. You *can* be patient, and kind, and not arrogant towards that person, as well as reject jealousy ... and all the rest! Go through the list! Would it be *easy* to practice *agapao* towards one you emotionally disdain - even hate? No. But possible? Yes. You would need power from God, but I know He is willing to assist in this matter if He expects this behavior from you ... and me (I hate the last two words of that sentence). You see *agapee* "*bears all things.*" It "*believes all things*" and "*hopes all things*" - like a Saul becoming a Paul. And *agapee* "*endures all things.*" There is great longsuffering in *agapee*. *You can choose* to act, and react, in these manners *at all times*. If you do not, it is because you have decided on another course of action because ... *agapee* "*never fails.*"

I used to say that I could not control my anger. I really believed that. Then I ran across a little pamphlet where the author stated he could prove within a minute *that I can* control it. He then asked something to this effect. "*If you were in a tirade and the President of the United States knocked on your door, would you continue the rage - or stop?*" I knew I would stop. "*See, you can control your anger!*" Similarly, the reason we do not practice *agapao* is because we decide not to. *Agapao* is an internal and controllable *choice* on our part. There is great liberty in understanding this truth. We can obey and please God without needing some flighty and elusive warm fuzzy feeling. That also explains how God *can command* that we love!

Here is a great key to being able to consistently practice *agapao*. If we decide that *each person* has an *intrinsic worth separate* from any behavior, we can practice *agapao* towards them *at all times*. And what might that intrinsic value be? If we assume that each person still retains being made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), even after the fall (Gen 5:2), then those shared characteristics (planning, creativity, communications, emotions - who knows what all) though lethally defiled still separates that person from anything else on the globe. We can develop an intrinsic *respect* for each person on that basis - especially in light of God's ability to turn Saul's into Paul's. That is how we can *agapao* even enemies! Warm feelings are not required in that entire list from 1Corinthians 13. Tough stuff, but with God's assistance, we can do this. That is why *agapao* never fails.

Having said all this, *agapao* can occur in an environment of familial feelings even though it is now obvious to you it does not have to. The *unsaved* practice *agapao* around us constantly and it is often couched in the realm of familial feelings. And that is easy. If you *like* someone, it is *easy* to be kind to him/her. You don't feel jealous or arrogant either. You are not rude and you want to see that person do well. You always grant the benefit of the doubt, you practice patience and even cover errors! *When you like someone*, *agapao* is easy - even natural. Sinners practice it toward each other constantly. Have you ever worked a job where co-workers overlooked, and even covered, the errors *of those in the clique* - while at the same time tried to get others fired for the same offense? They could have decided to practice *agapao* towards those they didn't like, but they chose otherwise because their *apapao* is based upon a prerequisite of liking the target of their

*agapao*. These are very small people. Do local churches have people who do this?

*Agapao* is also regularly practiced by sinners who have genuine respect for someone - or something - even if no genuine familial feelings exist or are necessary. A truly content employee may have this toward superiors - or his/her company. The well being of both results in the employee's well being. So, when occasion presents itself, all the applicable characteristics of *agapao* are exhibited.

The truth is, *agapao* abounds all around us ... practiced by sinners and saints alike. Sinners exude it in all directions as they “*agapao the darkness!*” (Jn 3:19). As just noted, it can be directed toward animate as well as *inanimate* objects! The target can be money, places of honor, or the world or “*the things in the world*” (1Jn 2:15)! Millions and millions of *agapao* targets populate this world! The Bible makes no attempt at defining all those targets, but it does give enough examples so we can see its expressions all around us. You see, *agapao* by sinners abounds whether you see it or not, whether you understand what it is or not, or whether you are willing to acknowledge it or not. Boy, the “*scholars*” (Romanticists) are really screwed up on their love teaching ... nothing divine about it.

### **And Guess What ... *Agapao* is Conditional!**

Actually, *agapao* is conditional. The prerequisite for the exercise of *agapao* is that the target must possess a *perceived, intrinsic worth*. That must be present for *agapao* to be triggered. It does not matter if the target actually *does* have value or not; the only requirement is that the one exhibiting *agapao* *perceives an intrinsic worth in the target object*. It is an interesting phenomenon that people often set great worth on some goal, and devote themselves to it, but once obtained, there is a great letdown as it is discovered the perceived value *is an illusion*. This is often the story of the one who has gained fame, or money, or some power position. The Pharisees loved (*agapao*) those chief seats! But those seats of power have long since evaporated. How valuable were they in actuality?

Concerning God's *agapao* toward the world, it is because He sees an intrinsic worth in “*the world*.” And what is that *intrinsic* worth? Obviously, it is people. That is what (who) Jesus died for. Our worth must lie in our basic design. It sure isn't based upon our performance. So, based upon the *condition* of an inherent value, God exercises *agapao* toward us. That is our only commendation.

### **Are There Degrees of *Agapao*?**

Yes, there are degrees of *agapao*. When Jesus dined with Simon, the Pharisee, He asked Simon which debtor would love (*agapao*) the debt releasing lender *more* - the one who had been released from a small debt, or the one released from a huge one. When Simon said the one who had been forgiven the great debt would love (*agapao*) the lender *more*, Jesus responded, “*You have judged correctly*” (Lk 7:36-50). This passage **alone** debunks the myth of *agapao* being “*the unconditional, divine love of God*.” Is one who had been released from a big debt going to have a *big* unconditional divine love, while the one released from a small debt has a *littler* unconditional divine love? And there is no indication Jesus is referring to two Christians anyway. He was simply talking about two indebted people! On another occasion, Jesus asked Peter if he loved (*agapao*) Him “*more than these*” (While this is *possibly* a reference to the other disciples, I think Jesus is pointing toward the nets and/or fishing. Peter would not have been able to immediately

say, “Yes, Lord ...” if this referred to the other disciples. There is no way Peter could know *their* hearts - but nets or fishing ... he could respond [Jn 21:15]). Jesus was asking Peter to rank his *agapao loves* - against competitors! In 1Peter, Christians are admonished to “**fervently agapao one another from the heart**” (1Pet 1:22). This insinuates it's possible one can practice *agapao* in a less fervent way. In examining all the uses of *agapao* in various contexts, it does appear the intensity can be light - to quite intense. But *agapao* never leaves the realm of the will. Our emotions are always present (we constantly live in some kind of emotional state), but in *agapao*, **the will** is always the predominant force. *Fervent agapao* is more of a call *to devotion and duty* because it is *the right thing to do* - as opposed to a call for warm gushy feelings of love. It is a call to be *extremely patient*, or *extremely kind*, etc. These are all still acts of the will - just more intense.

### **So ... Did The Greenhouse Practice *Agapao* Towards Me?**

So what was the “*stuff*” I felt at The Greenhouse on that first night? And I did feel something! Was it *agapao*? Well, with the passing of a little time, the answer became clear. When one has *agapao* toward another, which must be developed through *self evaluation* and *internal rebukes*, it **never** fails! So, what was that “*stuff*” poured out on me that first night? Well, since the only word now left for Biblical love is *phileo*, maybe that is what it was. After all, they taught that *phileo* was “*brotherly love*” - a human love inferior to *agapao* and, by default, a potentially fickle beast ... right? Not so fast!

### **Now for a Closer Look at *Phileo***

As stated earlier, the primary meaning of *phileo* is “*to cherish*.” In some contexts, it is translated “*to kiss*.” The noun, *philos*, means “*friend, or a kiss*” Obviously, to even the most casual observer, this word is permeated with feelings. All lexicographers readily concede this. So let's ask some questions about *phileo*.

#### **Three Questions With Three Short Answers.**

**Question one:** “Does *phileo* mean “*brotherly love*?” No. *Phileo* has nothing to do with a meaning of “*brotherly love*.”

**Question two:** “Is *phileo* simply a human love?” No. *Phileo* is **not** exclusively expressed by humans. God also expresses it, so it *cannot be downgraded* to merely a human love.

**Question three:** “Is *phileo* capable of failing - being innately fickle, turning on and off?” No. *Phileo*, like *agapao* does not fail. **Both are a true love.** Genuine *phileo* *automatically fulfills* all the particulars of *agapao*, and, once arrived at, it is as steadfast as is *agapao*.

#### **Same Questions With Expanded Answers.**

**Question one:** “Does *phileo* mean, 'brotherly love?'” No. *Phileo* has nothing to do with a meaning of 'brotherly love.’” This part of the romantic myth has been propagated by **a compound word** that involves the noun, *philos*. Follow this closely.

*Philos* (n) is often compounded with other words. *Agapao/agapee* is never compounded. I do not know if there is any significance to this, but *I do know* that when one understands the proper meaning of *philos* and sees with what words it is compounded, extremely interesting discoveries come forth. When *philos* is compounded

with another word, it means a cherishing/friending/kissing of the word now glued to *philos*. Here are all compounds in alphabetical order. While several have a “circle” of potential meanings (depending upon context), for the sake of brevity I will give the primary one. Some of these are a bit “wooden.” I also note the noun's gender even though the gender designation is often irrelevant. We often refer to a ship as “*her*.” The ship is not a female. English and Koine Greek share this type of language oddity in places.

- Philagathos* = *Philos* + *Agathos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of good” - **1 use**.  
*Philadelphia* = *Philia* + *Adelphai* (fem noun) = “a cherisher of the brotherhood” - **5 uses**.  
*Philadelphos* = *Philos* + *Adelphos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of a brother” - **1 use**.  
*Philandros* = *Philos* + *Aneer* (masc noun) = “cherish a husband” - **1 use**.  
*Philanthropia* = *Philia* + *Anthropia* (fem noun) = “a cherisher of mankind” - **2 uses**.  
*Philanthropos* = *Philos* + *Anthropos* (adverb) = “humanely, kindly” tenderly human - **1 use**.  
*Philarguria* = *Philia* + *Arguria* (fem noun) = “a cherisher of silver” - **1 use**.  
*Philarguros* = *Philos* + *Arguros* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of silver” - **2 uses**.  
*Philautos* = *Philos* + *Autos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of self” - **1 use**.  
*Phileedonos* = *Philos* + *Eedonee* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of pleasure” - **1 use**.  
*Philotheos* = *Philos* + *Theos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of God” - **1 use**.  
*Philonikia* = *Philos* + *Nikia* (fem noun, mixed?) = “a cherisher of contention” - **1 use**.  
*Philonikos* = *Philos* + *Nikos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of arguing” - **1 use**.  
*Philoxenia* = *Philos* + *Xenia* (fem noun, mixed?) = “a cherisher of a stranger” - **2 uses**.  
*Philoxenos* = *Philos* + *Xenos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of a stranger” - **3 uses**.  
*Philoprotuo* = *Philos* + *Protuo* (participle) = “cherishing first place or pre-eminence” - **1 use**.  
*Philosophia* = *Philos* + *Sophia* (fem noun, mixed?) = “a cherisher of wisdom” - **1 use**.  
*Philosophos* = *Philos* + *Sophos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of wisdom” - **1 use**.  
*Philostorgos* = *Philos* + *Storgos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher, naturally affectionate” - **1 use**.  
*Philoteknos* = *Philos* + *Teknos* (masc noun) = “a cherisher of children” - **1 use**.  
*Philotimeomai* = *Philos* + *Timeomai* (verb) = “to cherish honor, a cherished ambition” - **3 uses**.  
*Philophronos* = *Philos* + *Phronos* (adverb) = “kindly minded” - **1 use**.  
*Philophron* = *Philos* + *Phron* (masc noun) = “courteous, kindly minded” **1 use**.

A few of these words transliterate directly into English. *Philadelphia* (the city of “brotherly love”), *philanthropy* (a humanitarian, a lover of mankind), and *philosophy* (the love of wisdom).

### Some Facts - As You Can See ....

- *Philos* is a totally separate word from every one of the 16 words it is compounded with. The words it is compounded with in the New Testament are: **good, brother, husband, mankind, silver, self, pleasure, God, contention, stranger, pre-eminence, wisdom, affections, children, honor** and **mind**. Only 1 of the 16 words (or 2 of the 23 if you include all gender uses) is “brother.”

- *Philos*, in compound, appears 34 times in the New Testament. Six times the compound is *adelphia* (sister) or *adelphos* (brother) and *the other 28 compound uses* are with the other words listed above.

### Whoops!

“*Scholars*” and Romanticists have some other problems - big language problems. For starters, **the verb**, *phileo*, is *never* compounded with any other word. It just means, “*to cherish.*” So, in order to make it mean, “*man's love,*” or “*brotherly love*” one must reach **to the noun**, *philos* - but only if it compounded with “*man*” or “*brother*” - which creates a word wholly different word from *philos* itself! Not only do the words “*brother*” or “*man*” (both nouns in their own right) have nothing to do with the meaning of *philos*, the noun, to then impose the meaning of the compound nouns, *philanthropos* or *philadelphos*, on the **verb** *phileo* is truly linguistic insanity.

So, why didn't these “*Greek scholars*” and Romanticists pick one of the **14 other words** *philos* can compounded with, and weld one of them permanently to *phileo*? They could have said, “*Phileo means, 'love for goodness,' or 'husbandly love,' or 'love of silver,' or 'love of self,' or 'love of pleasure,' or 'love of God,' or 'love of arguing,' or 'love of strangers,' or 'love of wanting first place,' or 'love of worldly wisdom ... or affections ... or children ... or honor ... or of the mind.'*” Why “*brotherly love*” or “*man's love*” - and the other 14 dismissed?

There are only two possible answers.

1. Ignorance.
2. Deliberate abuse of the Greek for a preconceived end - i.e., to propagate a pious, romanticized myth.

And if this wasn't enough, these language corruptors reverse course from what they do with *agapaolagapee*. **There** they **divorce** the verb, *agapao*, from the noun, *agapee*, for the “*unconditional, divine love of God*” mythical meaning. But, **here**, they **marry** the verb *phileo* to the noun, *philos* (but only a selected compound form that itself creates an entirely new word distinct from the actual noun, *philos*.) What a syntactical turn! This results in a reckless handling of God's word (2Tim 2:15).

**Question two:** “*Is phileo simply a human love?' No. Phileo is **not** exclusively expressed by humans. God also expresses it, so it can not be downgraded to merely a human love.*” We already addressed this partially above, but let's explore this more. The two verses below forever answer this.

Jn 5:20 “For the Father loves (*phileo*) the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing ....”

Jn 16:27 “For the Father Himself loves (*phileo*) you, because you have loved (*phileo*) Me ....”

Concerning *phileo* emanating from Jesus, consider the following passages. I am stating these separate from the Father's *phileo*, as some may want to say Jesus' expression of *phileo* was a function of the *human part* of His nature - thus only being a human love. However, the two passages above immediately and forever refutes the myth

that *phileo* is a human love inferior to *agapao*. Anyway, here is *phileo* expressed by the pre-resurrected **and** post-resurrected Jesus.

Jn 11:3 “Lord, he (Lazarus) whom You love (*phileo*) is sick.”

Jn 11:36 “So the Jews were saying, ‘Behold how He loved (*phileo*) him!’”

Jn 20:2 “So she ran and came to ... the other disciple whom Jesus loved (*phileo*) ....”

Rev 3:19 “Those whom I love (*phileo*), I reprove and discipline ....”

I should not have pandered to this errant “*human side of Jesus*” notion as I just did. The word *phileo* **cannot, and does not**, mean, “*human*” or “*brotherly*” love. Such pollutions destroy an accurate understanding of these passages where Jesus *did express* an intensive cherishing for objects of His affections. He *cherished* Lazarus, and John, and whoever He references in the Revelation passage. He *cherished* them - more than just *agapao* for them! But I am getting ahead of myself. Wait until you see how this point affects a correct understanding of the encounter between Peter and Jesus in John 21:15-17! That is coming up!

**Question three:** “*Is phileo capable of failing - being innately fickle, turning on and off?*” When exercised by God, (or in His Spirit) the answer is, “*No.*” *Phileo*, like *agapao*, does not fail. Both are a true expression of love. *Phileo* automatically fulfills all the particulars of *agapao*, and, once arrived at, it is as immutable as is *agapao*. On the other hand, errant cherishing by unsaved man, fleshly Christians and fallen angels will ultimately fail - or at least be cut off so no further opportunities exist to exercise those cherishings. The agent behind any of these expressions of love ultimately determine the durability of any love. More on this a bit later.

*Phileo* is a different form of love, being more emotional in nature. Therefore, it does not compete with *agapao*. In fact, *agapao* is *phileo*’s indispensable *base*. No one truly cherishes (*phileo*) someone or something without a genuine respect (*agapao*) also being present. That is why *phileo* never fails! Its base is *agapao* which never fails!

I also believe that if *agapao* is expressed long enough towards an object, it is not unusual for *phileo* to develop. Sometimes this is extremely good, and sometimes this is extremely bad. When the *phileo* realm is reached, one’s will has been principally supplanted with emotional bonds. If directed towards Christ, this is fantastic, *and is indeed essential* (as will be seen), but *phileo* misdirected - the outcome is absolute disaster. This was touched on earlier under the listing of “*Evil Philos Compound Word Uses.*” These are really worth studying - and warning about.

### **Are There Degrees of *Phileo*?**

Just like *agapao*, there are degrees of *phileo* - I think. But, then again ... maybe not. The reason I state there *may be* degrees of cherishing is because of this statement by Jesus. “*He who cherishes (phileo) father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who cherishes (phileo) son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*” (Mt 10:37). But here's my question. If one has developed a true cherishing of Jesus, how can *anything* rival that? Stated another way, if one cherishes someone (or something) *above* Christ, does a genuine cherishing of Jesus even exist? Maybe I am really missing something here. As an emotion, if I cherish something, I cherish it. There is no competition with anything else I cherish, as it stands alone in its own “*space*” if you will.

Nothing threatens it, as this is a spontaneous, emotional, attachment that separates that object from any other object. And I see myself as cherishing different things *from different foundations*. As an example, I have two daughters. I genuinely cherish them both. I have told each daughter they have a place inside of me that cannot be challenged. They are in competition with no one (not even each other) - "*and that's just the way it is.*" But I have *not* developed a cherishing for them *from a foundation* of delivering me from a purposeless, futile, destructive life. Jesus did that. My daughters have *not* taught me great spiritual truths on the nature of man or the character and agenda of God. Jesus is doing that. The cherishing I have for Jesus *arises from a different foundation* than that of my daughters. I have *not* held Jesus as a newborn infant and witnessed the miraculous stages of childhood development into young adulthood. My daughter(s) possess that realm. To me, an important element of the essence of cherishing is discovered when the foundations are examined that give it rise. And the fact that the Lord *wants His daughters "to cherish their husbands and children"* is evidence He is not threatened by such activity (Tit 2:4). So, cherish well and cherish much. Right cherishings make life good.

### **Is Agapao the Highest Form of Love?**

Stated another way, "is *phileo* inferior to *agapao*?" The answer is either, "Yes," or "No." Only one answer is correct. Romanticists say, "Yes!" to both questions. "*Agapao is the highest form of love, and phileo is the inferior of the two.*" The Non-Romanticist says, "No!" to both questions. "*Agapao is not a higher form of love, and, phileo is not an inferior form of love.*" But this does not end the matter. In the Non-Romanticist group, there are *two camps!* One camp believes these two Greek words are *equal* (therefore interchangeable) while the other camp is convinced *phileo is actually the higher form of love!* Let's investigate.

In my early study of these words, I did not want to pit them against each other in any way. Each word *stood alone* with a different meaning, point and thrust. I did not want to overreact to the heresy I had been subjected to and automatically take the opposite position. But, it soon became obvious that *phileo*, as the more *emotionally intense* word, was the "*warm stuff*" of love which so many of us crave! And as you now know, the errant teaching has *agapao* as the more intensively affectionate word - *exactly backwards!* So, is it possible more emotionally intense word, *phileo*, is actually a higher form of love than *agapao*? Do they have that backwards, too? Wow! What a question! Can you even believe this is now the contemplation? Well, let's see.

This is a tough question. Here is my qualified answer. I think these are different forms of love - with a different purpose and thrust. I also think both can be expressed with equal intensity. A person can exercise *agapao* with tremendous fervor - yet all the while being directed by one's will. This might be akin to an intense respect - evidenced by honor and duty with unswerving obedience and deep devotion. *Phileo*, on the other hand, can be just as intense, but its emphasis is on emotional attachment. It may well be that *phileo* is actually an *emotional extension* of *agapao* because to cherish someone or something already fulfills all the calls of *agapao* (as stated earlier). But one thing I am certain about - *phileo* is definitely **not** inferior to *agapao*. So now, *agapao* is the word on trial! The best case scenario for *agapao* is that *might be equal* to *phileo*, but, at worst, *agapao* may actually be the "*inferior*" of the two! Can you believe that is now the trial? Let's examine the case for *phileo*'s superiority.

Some suggest that because *agapao* is commanded, that makes it **inferior** to

*phileo*. We are *commanded* to love God (Mk 12:30), love our neighbor (Mk 12:31), love our enemies (Mt 5:44), love one another (Ro 13:8), love our wives (Eph 5:25), *not* to love the world (1Jn 2:15), etc., etc., etc. This is all *agapao*. As an act of the will, one can choose, or refrain, exercising *agapao*. But *phileo* is *past the reach of command*. It is *stronger* than where a command can reach, and that makes it the higher form of love. At first blush, this seems to have merit. However, the flaw with this argument are two passages that indicate *phileo can be* a function of the will. “*Let love (phileo) of the brethren continue*” (Heb 13:1). The other passage is in Titus. Older women are to teach the younger women to love (*phileo*) their husbands and their children (Tit 2:3,4). This *is taught* and, at some level, is an appeal *to the will* of younger women. These are in the imperative mood, which is primarily to command action. But even if this is to be understood as an injunction (more an appeal than command), it is still directed to the will.

But, there are two passages that may indicate *phileo* is indeed the higher form of love!

### **Jesus and Peter - Denials and Restoration**

Just before the crucifixion, three times Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Hours earlier, he had adamantly asserted he was ready to die with Jesus rather than deny Him (Mk 14:29-31). He was extremely aggressive in proclaiming his loyalty toward Jesus *no matter what*. Following Jesus’ arrest, and the worsening trial progressions, Peter proceeded to fail miserably. He first crumbled before a servant-girl who kept the door (Jn 18:17). She had been studying him intently and asserted that Peter had been with Jesus. He immediately denied knowing Him (Lk 22:56,57 and Mk 14:66-68). A little later, this same maid followed Peter onto the porch, and began saying to bystanders that Peter had indeed been with Jesus. Peter denied this again (Mk 14:69,70) - but this time with an oath! He *swore* he was telling the truth (Mt 26:72)! Then a little later, some bystanders pointed to his Galilean accent as evidence of his connection to Jesus. At this point he began to curse and swear, “*I do not know this fellow you are talking about!*” (Mt 26:74 and Mk 14:70,71). Many think this cursing and swearing meant cussing. While there may have been some incidental cussing in this exchange, *the cursing part* was more likely a call by Peter *to have curses fall upon him* if he was lying about his association to Jesus. *The swearing* was another oath - a vow he was telling the truth. He may have even been calling, “*God as my witness*” - or swearing by His Throne (Mt 23:16-22). But regardless of the accuracy of this last point, one thing is absolutely clear. Peter’s denials were loud and clear. And it was actually more than just three denials - it was *three episodes* of denials. Then the cock crowed, and Jesus turned and looked at Peter (Lk 22:61). Never has a dagger been thrust deeper into the heart of any man. Never.

If you work through the resurrection accounts *with an eye on Peter*, you can sense the damage he incurred by his massive failing. A festering sore laid beneath the new reality of joy, hope and power offered by a resurrected Christ. Peter’s horrific denials would not let him fully enter into this new scene ... having occurred just days earlier. With this backdrop, let’s work through this passage by the lake.

“*So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love (agapao) Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love (agapao) Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He said to him*

*the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love (phileo) Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love (phileo) Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love (phileo) You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'* (Jn 21:15-17).

Here is how the Romanticist presents this passage. Jesus' first two inquiries ask Peter if he has a divine love (*agapao*) toward Him. Peter weakly acknowledges this, sheepishly scuffing the sand at his feet, and without being able to look Jesus in the eye, he says he has a brotherly love (*phileo*) for Him. But the third time, Jesus even challenges this claim - and that is why Peter is grieved. Jesus is asking, '*Peter, do you even have this lower form of love for Me? It's clear you do not have agapao (the denials proved that, as it, and you, failed), so I am coming down a notch and asking you if you even have a brotherly love - a fickle human love - for Me.*' And by this Peter is restored? Brethren, this is not the scene at all! Now let's look at a corrected understanding of *agapao* and *phileo* and reexamine this conversation. Keep in mind the original Greek had no punctuation marks, so all punctuation is at the discretion of the translator. Those marks should be determined by the weight of the words with their proper meanings and context.

Here is the solid accurate language take. The first two times, Jesus is asking Peter if he looks at Him as One intrinsically worthy of respect - as valuable. Peter's response is aggressive. "*Yes Lord! But You are much more than that to me! You know that I cherish You!*" The first two times this claim was left unchallenged. But, after the a second time, Jesus *did challenge this assertion* by one who had previously overstated himself. "*Simon ... Do you indeed cherish Me?*" This is what grieved Peter. Even though he had miserably failed him on the night of the trials, Peter knew he adored the Lord of Glory. But with the failures of his recent past, how could he prove this? How could he back up this claim? He couldn't. All he could do was throw this assertion at the feet of Jesus, and say, "*Lord, You know all things - You know I cherish You - You know I adore You - and You know what I am saying is true!*" That is the Peter I know. Obviously humbled, but still the brash, out-front, assertive Peter of the New Testament. I **know** this is the scene. Jesus used this discussion to assist putting the limb back in joint (Heb 12:13). He let Peter know He had work for him to do - with heavy associated costs. This was a very firm conversation by Jesus, complete with rebukes, but it was intended to assist Peter in getting straightened out and moving forward. And it succeeded. Even though Peter still made some massive blunders later (Gal 2, especially verse 14), he still produced mightily for the Lord *he cherished!* Not only can you see many things Peter did in the Book of Acts, but he also was used by God to write two tremendous letters of the New Testament. Oh ... to be so used!

Still not convinced of *phileo's* superiority to *agapao*? Well, let's look at another passage, one with an *eternally critical use* of *phileo*.

### **1 Corinthians 16:22 - A Critical use of *Phileo***

*"If any one does not love (phileo) the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha."* This is a command and should be translated, "*he must be accursed.*" Eternal damnation awaits anyone who does not *phileo* the Lord! I think this is something we might want to be sure we understand.

God **commands** all people to *agapao* Him - to consider Him intrinsically valuable and worthy of respect. As *the Creator*, that alone justifies such a demand. This is not about our feelings. This is about His position and power. It's a call to right thinking - that

He is the Boss about everything. But, as far as *cherishing* Him ... He does not *command* that (*phileo*). But, if that emotional bond is absent, *we are doomed*. The goal of Christianity is for individuals to know God! “*And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent*” (Jn 17:3). As we get to know God, cherishing Him will develop. We will begin to see how He works with His own tirelessly - even though failing Him regularly. We will see how He faithfully grants pardon and offers to share Himself with the most undeserving of creation. As we learn more of His ways, we see an astounding wisdom. His creative abilities are stunning. His attention to detail is beyond measure. He creates purpose and meaning in places where there is none. And the certainties of His future assertions bring hope and encouragement and courage to the present. But it does take time and experience to grow into a cherishing of One from whom *we were initially separated!* This is all part of a person developing his/her own relationship with the God of the Bible. But, a word of warning. I believe it will be quite common on Judgment Day, that many will find they cherished a *God of their own imagination*. I must know the God of the Bible - not some “*God*” I think He ought to be.

When all is said and done, *phileo* and *agapao* may simply be two completely different forms of love that do not compete with each other at all. But, it is clear - in a love competition - this is *agapao*'s only hope. It's hope toward *phileo* - is a tie.

### **It is Time to Take a Risk**

The forthcoming material may be misunderstood. The “scholars” and Romanticists may use these next statements to tenaciously hang on to the myth that *agapao* **means** divine love. So here goes.

Any action of God, by default, is divine. It cannot be otherwise. When God exercises *agapao*, it is divine. But, when He exercises *phileo*, that too is divine. When He exercises jealousy (*zeelos*) that is divine. So, too, **wrath** (*orgee*), **anger** (*thumeo*), and **lust** (*epithumia*)! Activity by God is always divine. But, the word, “*orgee*” does not mean, “*divine wrath*.” It does *not* mean, “*the unconditional, divine wrath of God*.” It just means, “*wrath*.” Any solid linguist knows this. But the fabricated love doctrine, adds “*the unconditional, divine ...*” to the word “*agapao*.” This is an illegal assault to the meaning of the word, “*agapao*.” Let's look closer at “*zealous*,” “*orgee*,” “*thumos*,” and “*epithumeo*.”

**Zeelos displayed by God:** “For I am jealous over you with a *godly jealousy*” 2Cor 11:2.

**Orgee displayed by God:** “He who does not obey the Son, shall not see life, but the **wrath** of God abides on him” Jn 3:36.

**Thumos displayed by God:** “He also will drink of the wine of the **wrath/anger** of God” Rev 14:10.

**Epithumeo displayed by God:** “I have **earnestly desired** to eat this Passover...” Lk 22:15. (Normally translated “*lust*”).

No lexicographer takes the word for jealousy (*zeelos*), wrath (*orgee*), anger

(*thumos*), or lust (*epithumia*) and assigns the meaning of “*divine*” to any of these words. Why? Maybe the reason can be found below (Look familiar?).

**Zeelos displayed by God:** In this case, it is Paul who is jealous, but refers to it being the same as God’s jealousy. “For I am **jealous** over you with a *godly jealousy*” 2Cor 11:2.

**Zeelos displayed by saved man:** “But if *you* have bitter **jealousy** ... in your heart ...” Ja 3:14. This is a negative jealousy by a Christian whereas Paul’s (above) is positive. Christians can do either.

**Zeelos displayed by unsaved man:** “Now the deeds of the flesh are obvious, which are ... **jealousy** ...” Gal 5:19,20.

**Orgee displayed by God:** “For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ...” Rom 1:18.

**Orgee displayed by saved man:** “Be **angry (wrathful)**, and yet do not sin” Eph 4:26.

**Orgee displayed by unsaved man:** “For the **wrath** of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” Ja 1:20.

**Thumos displayed by God:** “... seven golden bowls full of the **wrath (anger) of God**, who lives forever and ever” Rev 14:7.

**Thumos displayed by saved man:** “Let all bitterness and **anger** and wrath be put away from you ...” Eph 4:31.

**Thumos displayed by unsaved man:** “And all in the synagogue were filled with **rage (anger)** as they heard these things ...” Lk 4:28.

(Actually, *orgee* should be translated, “*wrath*” as it is more of a predisposition or attitude whereas *thumos* is more of an outburst, thus “*anger*.” Ephesians 4:31 above lists both words as two separate dynamics - which they are.)

**Epithumos displayed by God:** “With **desire (lust)** I have **desired (lusted)** to eat this Passover ...” Lk 22:15. This was stated by Jesus.

**Epithumos displayed by saved man:** “... having the **desire (lust)** to depart and be with Christ ...” Phi 1:23. This is Paul.

**Epithumos displayed by unsaved man:** “And the world is passing away, and also its **lusts** ...” 1Jn 2:17.

As you can see, all these words, just like *agapao*, are used in reference to both God *and* man. Each word, just like *agapao*, can be used in both positive and negative ways and can be divinely, or profanely, exercised. Therefore, these words, just like *agapao*, cannot have “*divine*” as part of their meaning. Why doesn’t some lexicographer try to assign the meaning of divinity to *zeelos* (jealousy), *orgee* (wrath), *thumos* (anger), or *epithumos* (lust) as part of that word's basic meaning? It's because they know that is incorrect. Yet, “*scholars*” and Romanticists have no hesitation doing this to *agapao* and (in a negative way) to *phileo*. They twist these words for a pious - indeed errant - love doctrine.

Stated another way, *agapao* and *phileo* are both morally neutral words - just like *orgee*, *thumos*, *zeelos* and *epithumia*. When God exercises any of these words, the activity **is divine** not because the words *mean* that - *but because the One exercising the activity is divine*. When the unsaved act in *agapao*, *phileo*, *orgee*, *thumos*, *zeelos* or

*epithumia*, these all are **non-divine** actions. The **actor** determines the morality, or immorality, of the activity – not the word.

Coming back to *agapao/agapee*, and *phileo/philos*, as previously stated, these *are practiced* around us all the time by the saved and unsaved! Many murderous leaders intensely practice *agapao* and *phileo*. How often has it been discovered that extremely violent people have a kind, even tender, side? This is actually quite simple to explain. These “*leaders*” impute an intrinsic worth toward *some* people (or things), but not others. They often love (*agapao*) and cherish (*phileo*) their families, pets, armies ... or hit men. Great patience and attention are granted these valued entities, but are totally withheld from others. Hitler practiced *agapao* towards darkness with great fervor, and probably had great *phileo* towards himself and a lot of other things ... like preeminence, his Third Reich, or his Aryan philosophy. *Agapao* and *phileo* exist in huge quantities all around us. But these expressions of *agapao* and *phileo* **fail**. Either physical death ends these loves or Christian conversion ends these loves. They will die one way or the other.

But, doesn't 1Corinthians 13:8 assert, “*Love (agape) never fails ...*”? Yes, it does say that. But, let's look again at these passages.

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.*”

And what about the passage that gave birth to this entire ebook:

“*And this is the judgment, that ... men loved (agapao) the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil*” (Jn 3:19). Will/did any of these loves prevail - or are they all doomed to a spectacular fail?

Did you think you would read anything like this when you started this ebook? It may be an appropriate exercise to take a moment and list all the evil *agapao* and *phileo* loves you can think of. Maybe pick a person and analyze their priorities and activities. For example, from all I can tell, I think Hugh Hefner loved (*agapao* and *phileo*) his life, and would have extended it eternally. How many sinners love - *agapao* **and** *phileo* - preeminence, chief seats, money, respectful greetings, the praise of men, praying in public, pleasures, and all kinds of darkness! My friends, *agapao* and *phileo* teems all around us! For the unsaved, these are loves that lead to, and end in, death.

### **If I Haven't Stretched Your Thinking Yet ... Well, This May Now Be the Time**

So, what are words anyway? They are symbols meant to communicate something. In order to achieve understood communications between the sending party and the receiving party, both must attach the same meaning to that symbol. Sometimes this is easy. The word, “*chair*” or “*rug*” or “*gloves*” are objects that are easy to point to and agree on what the word means. But, when attempting to establish an agreed upon

understanding of some abstract notion like, “*justice*” or “*fairness*” ... or “*love*” - (metaphysical concepts versus physical concepts), problems arise.

Agape/agapao, is just a word. But, it is a symbol used in the attempt to convey a dynamic that is important both to God and to man. This symbol is being asked to carry a very heavy load. In Greek, we have seen it is used toward animate objects (God, neighbors, brothers, enemies, etc.), but also toward inanimate objects (the world, darkness, chief seats, respectful greetings, etc.). In English, we do the same thing. Sometimes we direct “*love*” towards the animate (my family, my dog, my Mom, etc.), but sometimes towards the inanimate (my job, hot dogs, traveling, etc.)

This symbol, whether in Koine Greek or American English, is called upon to carry a heavy and important load. This hard-to-quantify dynamic - to love, or to be loved - is exceedingly important to the well being of any person. That is why I have been laboring over it - with the hope of getting some parameters around it or objective definition to it - if possible.

But even in this effort, there can be an evasive nature to the love dynamic. Sometimes, we don't pick up on it when it is directed towards us. For example, even as a Christian, I have asked God before, “*What do You mean that You love me? This event sure doesn't look like it.*” Other times, I am sure there are people who have loved me, but, I missed it. And sometimes, even opposition against me may actually be rooted in love towards me - but I saw it, and labeled it as something else entirely. But, when love is truly absent, at some point, that is usually known without doubt. The search on this topic of great import has been quite a task, which led to this ...

### ... Question from a Reader

One reader asked how my forwarded definition of *agape/agapao* fit with the passage in Romans, “*and hope does not disappoint, because the love (agape) of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (Rom 5:5). I am not sure I fully understood what she was looking for, but I do know investigating this passage has been profitable. The first thing I told her is that it is always a danger to force some previously formed position onto a passage when a question like thus arises. So with that as the starting point, I applied myself to this passage. **If** my basic definition of *agape/agapao* is correct - “*to place value upon someone, or something, because of a perceived intrinsic worth*” - resulting in an honoring, respecting, deferring or devotion towards the object (with varying degrees of intensity), then does that make sense in the Romans passage above? Let's see.

To begin, this “*agape*” (noun) in Romans 5:5 is possessed by God Himself. So just as “*God is love (agape)*” in 1John 4:8 as *one* descriptor of Him, we now are told that same love is poured out within our hearts. So with 1Corinthians 13:4-8 as an outline of how this agape plays out (patient, kind, not jealous, braggart, arrogant, etc), then that is what God has poured out in us.

Secondly, this “*poured out*” love is depicted as a very aggressive action. “*Poured out*” is a compound word, ekkechutai = en + ekcheo, meaning, “*to pour out, to shed blood, to gush out, to spill, to scatter, to give largely or liberally.*” It is also in the perfect tense which means a completed past action with results continuing into the present. The third person singular here points to God Himself as being the actor in this in us. So, what does this mean for us? Does God flood our hearts by His agape... and that is the end of it? Or, does this change us - thus impacting what we do and how we do it? What dynamic

is now experienced by one so innudated? Here are some of my thoughts.

This is an invasion by God that penetrates every aspect of our being. The end result is a realignment of our entire self so everything is prioritized correctly. Listen carefully here. As unsaved individuals, we exuded *agape/agapao* all the time - but, it was all misfires. We valued/prioritized/deferred to all manner of things constantly, but all was amiss. Before I became a Christian, it never *once* entered my mind to love God. And that is the first of all the commandments! And concerning loving my neighbor - any goodwill was still tainted with self-centeredness somewhere. But as a Christian with the love of God invading every point of our existence, we now can get all matters in proper alignment. So our relationship with Him, with neighbors, with spouse, with children, with money, with work, towards government, towards pleasure, towards enemies, towards troubles - everything is impacted as His valuations are shed abroad through our entire being. To think on this, to contemplate on this, to examine life in this vein - is extremely exciting. This is profoundly practical and this *is* the dynamic that makes us more and more like Jesus Himself. We see things the way He does. We put our energies where He does. We operate with proper “*weights and measures*” in all of life’s affairs. With the love of God being gushed out in us we think more like He thinks, we act more like He acts, we react more like He reacts. We are recalibrated, refocused, and balanced into the design He intended for each of us. Praise God.

This is a good time to revisit The Greenhouse.

### **So, ... Back to The Greenhouse One Last Time**

So, what was that “*stuff*” initially poured all over me? I could feel it - and it was truly something. But, it could not have been God’s exercise of *agapao* (as they asserted) - because it soon failed. Was it *phileo*? Did they cherish me? Is that worth a response? The root of the problem is that The Greenhouse “*leadership*” never did have a genuine respect for me (*agapao*), so how could they even begin to cherish me (*phileo*)? This scenario happens all the time in all kinds of settings. Unfortunately, it also often occurs in the church. Have you ever been part of a church *that initially warmly embraced you - only to later turn cold* toward you after getting to know you better?

Well, there is a name for this “*stuff*.” Unfortunately, the correct word to describe it is often used as a cuss word, but, instead of self censureship, let’s use the word properly. It is a bastard love. It is “*not genuine or authentic; it is inferior, spurious, or of uncertain origin.*” (dictionary definition). This “*stuff*” **is** quite real (that first night at The Greenhouse, I did feel something *very real*), but it soon dried up, evaporated and failed. Yet, those emanating this “*stuff*” declared, and truly believed, it was from God - His unconditional, divine, love! That makes this failed “*stuff*” more than just spurious - it is a fraud ... an imposter, because God does have *the real stuff* of love, *agapao and phileo*, for His children! And to make matters even worse, when this illegitimate love fails, it is often replaced by other stuff that is quite hostile. So, let’s attempt to pin down this “*love*” that arises from an “*uncertain origin.*” Here is my best shot.

I think this imposter - this conditional, fickle, warm, goo - arises from the deep recesses of the ego of the “*lover.*” It is a self-centered exercise designed to soothe that ego. These initially warm, concerned people believe they are *supposed* to be loving, so they **act** that way. And that is what it is - **an act**. Of course, they do not believe this is an act, as that would defeat the whole exercise! On the contrary, the “*loving one*” sees

himself/herself as a good person, a caring person, a vessel God is using, an obedient *Christian* son or daughter! And these “*lovers*” often delude themselves into believing their love, and all the associated feelings of warmth and acceptance towards those who fit their Christian profile, *is from God!* And they can be quite steadfast in this “*love*” - until crossed! It is at this point the fraud is exposed - and the spigot of “*love*” turns off! It fails. You may have crossed them *personally* (and may never know when or how) or you may have crossed them *doctrinally* (their teaching or practice) - thus stepping on a land mine - and the goo blows up. This “*love*” is neither *agapao* or *phileo*. It is truly illegitimate - but, even worse, it is an imposter. Unfortunately, the perpetrator of the fraud is often completely blind to the fraud *before or after the fact!*

While I may not have pinpointed the exact origin from which this imposter arises in the analysis just forwarded, I do know I am poking around in the right area. I am stabbing into that dark terrain called, “*the flesh.*” So, I guess this stuff actually does have “*a certain origin.*” You may be able to dig around and pinpoint more accurately the particular foundation(s) from which this stuff originates. But, by pointing you to “*the flesh,*” I have at least directed you into the correct field in which to dig.

### **In Concluding this ...**

“*The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can know it?*” (Jer 17:9). When rooted in God as the source, *agapao* and *phileo*, do not, and cannot, fail. Alternately, all flesh based expressions of *agapao* and *phileo* are ultimately doomed, but sometimes, they fail in real time as well. When rooted in fickle, self centered ground, see what happens when those standards and expectations are violated. These inferior expressions of *agapao* and *phileo* grade at F-. They earn a deep “F” because genuine respect for the target object - is vacated. Intrinsic value has evaporated. It may have existed for a season, but only a season. That is why it can be turned off!

### **So, What Are Some Practical Results of This Study?**

I will first answer this *Personally*, then suggest *Some Pointers for the Church*, and then make a few observations about *God’s exercising of love.*

**1)** *Just because teachers and preachers use Greek words in their presentations, that does not mean they know Greek.* The saying, “*a little knowledge is a dangerous thing*” is too mild here. In this case, “*a little **imagined** knowledge is an extremely dangerous thing.*” The accurate handling of God’s Word is more important than any of us can even begin to know. It is astounding to consider that one’s eternal destiny hinges upon properly integrating God’s Word into one’s life. *Saving faith* blossoms from a right understanding and positive response to His Words! (Ja 1:18, 1Pet 1:23, Jn 17:17, Eph 1:13, Eph 5:26, and 1Thess 2:13). Here, an extremely important subject area has been totally misrepresented.

**2)** *An appeal to original languages is often a power play by teachers/preachers.* This can be used to *intimidate* listeners, and cause a de facto submission. Those using the Bible’s original languages *seem to be* knowledgeable, and listeners, who have no knowledge of those languages, have no tools to then examine - or challenge - the assertions of these “*scholars.*” This is dangerous. I have no doubt Satan is well versed in Greek and Hebrew - for his nefarious ends. He does function as a messenger of light - and invents doctrines/teachings of demons (2Cor 11:14,15).

**3) *The source of the error of those propagating this false teaching on love (or any other error) is ultimately irrelevant.*** God warns that teachers are under a stricter judgement, so there should be few of them (Ja 3:1). Whether error emanates from malicious intent, or “*innocent*” ignorance, it finally matters not. Error is error and God is not there. One cannot grow spiritually through error.

**4) *I am responsible, and accountable, for what I present about God.*** The fact I had been under false teaching does not excuse my error. To plead, “*I was just teaching what I was taught! I didn’t know it was wrong!*” is not a defense that will stand on His Day. Error reaps no eternal reward - just fire.

Here are some personal behavioral impacts this study has had on me.

**1) *I can practice agapao without any “warm feelings” of love.*** I can be patient, kind, and all the rest of 1Corinthians 13 without waiting for, or feeling guilty for not having, some subjective, gushy “*feeling*” of love. This is great! I *can choose* to act, and react, in Biblical *agapao* towards brothers, enemies - and God! This is tremendously liberating! Hallelujah!

**2) When I perceive inside of myself that I am rejecting another person (usually an internal disdain for that person), I must stop everything, dig inside myself, and pinpoint why I feel that way.** If that rejection is groundless before God (which is usually the case), I must then rebuke myself - and at least *leave that person alone*. Then, when sanity rules, I can make myself practice patience, or kindness, etc., toward him/her and be found operating in the realm of *agapao*.

**3) I have found that if I practice agapao toward someone I naturally reject, a very strange transformation often occurs in me.** I begin to see that person in ways that initially escaped me. Had I not called myself into *agapao* - willed myself into *agapao* - I would have missed everything. Those things that originally “*put me off*” often recede from the forefront and a heartfelt respect actually does begin to grow. If practiced long enough, sometimes even *phileo* develops! When we marshal our will to operate in *agapao*, God opens our eyes to see more like He does. He sees changed people, potential in people, as well as talents, skills and strengths He has placed in them. I have found myself earnestly praying for people I originally wanted very little to do with. God changes *me* in this whole process.

### **Some Pointers for the Church:**

The church’s first responsibility is to accurately teach God’s *words*. Christians need to know each word’s definition as precisely as possible. It is my hope this ebook will find a place in this important duty. Love is a vital topic and the material presented here needs to sink deeply into the understanding of the saints - and deeply into the fellowship.

Next, the church fellowship should be the showcase of righteous expressions of both *agapao* and *phileo*. Too many people *are trying* to “*love*,” without understanding *God’s view of it*. There is a simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. Here are some basics.

A) Where genuine respect for others exists, *agapao* exists. This is evidenced by the practice of patience, kindness, and all the rest. Absent any of the disciplinary sins (1Cor 5:11), *agapao* is to be practiced toward each person from the first visit through the

last. The church should be a *safety zone* for anyone who is seeking spiritual information.

B) When it is discerned that someone is *not* operating in *agapao*, this must be addressed. The pattern put forth by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 provides the procedure. Sins are exposed, opportunity to repent is provided, the innocent are vindicated publicly (if it gets that far), and persistent “*felons*” are exposed and removed. Love (*agapao*) does not allow wickedness *to prevail* in the church.

C) If *agapao* is diligently pursued in the church, *phileo* will undoubtedly emerge. “*Hidden*” traits and abilities will come to the fore, many will profit, and endearment will result. This benefits both the giver and recipient. The true challenge for the leadership of a given church body is to create, and then diligently protect, an environment where *agapao* is fervent and *phileo* can grow.

Visitors to a church, or any Christian gathering, should be welcomed in the Name of Jesus. But, if you decide to function in such a way, *you are obligated to continue to represent Him consistent with His will and ways for the duration of their stay* - and that may mean the rest of their lifetime and yours! It starts with *agapao* - a deep and genuine respect for your visitors with the acknowledgment that God led that person into your realm of influence. As His representative, you must learn His “*rules*” for how to treat people that come to a place that bears His Name. 1Corinthians 13:1-8 coupled with an accurate handling of 1Corinthians 5: 9-13 along with Matthew 18:15-17 is a good starting place.

### **God’s Love Towards Humanity**

Much of what you are about to read may sound quite foreign. My views have developed after a considerable amount of time, thought and investigation - *after* the revelations about the meanings and uses of the words *agapao*, *agapee*, and *phileo*. I hope you carefully consider this material.

#### **“So, ... Does God ‘Love’ Everybody?”**

Recently, a woman I work with, had this on her back window: “*Jesus really DOES love you!*” Later I saw a church sign - “*Jesus loves you - and so do we!*” These declarations were talking about the warm, fuzzy, emotion based stuff we call, “*love.*” But, what if this is *not true*? What if He *does not* “*love*” everybody? If you declare He does and it turns out He does not, won’t you be guilty of *falsely representing* Him? And doesn't false witnessing make for a *false witness*? Just because you think He *should* love everybody, does that mean He does? Representing Him this fundamentally best be correct. I know *why* people want to declare that God loves everybody. It sounds great! And the proclaimer can feel good about this God! Everyone can be hugged and there is no reason for anyone to be mad at the proclaiming witness, or at God, in any way. But, *what if* God *does not* love everybody? I wish He did, but, as you probably already suspect, I am not so sure He does. In fact, I know He does not. But before putting forth the Biblical case, I want to relate a story.

At one time, I worked for a Japanese man. We had some interesting conversations. He was inquisitive about spiritual matters, but offended by this “*Christian*” message: “*Christians say, ‘God loves you,’ and ‘Jesus loves you!’ But if I do*

*not receive His Son, that God who loves me so much is going to throw me into a lake of fire and torture me forever and ever. I guess He will say, 'I love you ... but, because you did not receive my Son, I am going to fry you forever - and you will never have another chance to receive my Son. But ... I do love you!'*" He added, "What a peevish, babyish God you have; *'If you receive My Son, you will go to a wonderful place forever, but if you don't receive My Son, I will torture you forever!'*" This Japanese man understood his entire family was heading there, and his forefathers, who had never even heard of Jesus, were already there - at the hands of this God of love. To the thinking, non-Christian, a God who loves everybody, yet sentences the bulk of these loved ones to Hell - well, this is nonsense. Of course, I have heard many a preacher declare, "God does not send anyone to Hell. You send yourself there by rejecting His love, rejecting His Son, rejecting His good news message - by continuing as an unbeliever." But aren't all those things - sin? Didn't Jesus die to pay for our sins? I guess He only paid for certain sins. "But this is a gift from God. If someone gives you a gift, it is not yours unless you take it." So, if you recklessly fail to take this gift, isn't that just a sin of omission - failing to do something one ought to have done?

So, let me get this straight. The *agapao* of God that *never fails*, in the end - fails. And it fails *at the exact second we need it most* - the second we are exiting this life and entering eternity. Right then His patience, kindness, and all the rest runs out **forever** and the pardoning blood of Jesus is yanked eternally out of reach. So, if we reject His Son, neglect his Son, or didn't even know He had a Son, then we go to Hell. And this is *unconditional* love? Wouldn't *unconditional* love immediately pardon that rejection, or neglecting, or ignorance so everyone goes to heaven? Let's talk about Hell.

This is a place created by God. It will be eternally sustained by God. Satan did not create it and will never be the king of it. He will be occupying the worst place there. Satan will not be tormenting anyone. Jesus Christ is the King of Hell. He has the keys to it (i.e., Hades, which is Hell's precursor - Rev 1:18). Some maintain that because Hell was created "for the devil and his angels," human beings are not supposed to be there (Mt 25:41). But who are the ones to Jesus' left in Matthew 25, who are being sent there? *People* are assigned there *along with* the devil and his angels. Each sinner, man or angel, will occupy his/her/its proper place - each one according to each one's culpability as determined by God Himself. The same God who originally made this earth "very good" (Gen 1:31), and then later cursed its ground (Gen 3:17-19), and who will create a perfect new heavens and earth (Isa 65:17, 2Pet 3:13, Rev 21 and 22) - is also the One who has thought up, and created, the eternal lake of fire (Mt 10:28, Mt 25:41 and Rev 20:13-15). That place is the destiny of *billions* of moral beings (who are immoral) and they will be in unimaginable agony forever and ever. And God loves them? Why won't He give them a second chance somewhere along eternity's "time line?"

Every person in Hell will be constantly aware they need the work of the Son, so why not just create the circumstance for that opportunity? "After all, when we were on earth, there were so many impediments! Between economic pressures, family demands, illnesses, oppressive governments - well, it was a struggle just to survive. Concerning spiritual matters, there were false teachers, false religions, and seductive philosophies all over the place! 'Learned' religious people and theologians had different interpretations on everything! They couldn't even agree what love was - or if You wanted 10% of everything we earned! And our own sin blinded us and made us so short sighted! (Jn 9:41 and 2Pet 1:9). And then there was Satan, and his angels, who were so busy confusing us!

*Surely the great God of love understands all this **fully** and will undoubtedly give us another chance at some point! In Hell, our sin problem, **and the remedy for that problem**, has our full attention! That is all that is thought about - except for the agony in this place!"* (Lk 16:24).

And what about the myriads in Hell *who never heard of His Son in this life* - and yet they will be punished by their Creator - *who loves them* - forever and ever? Or, do you think everyone who never heard about this Son will be automatically pardoned? If you believe that, then you should stop all evangelistic outreach to countries and societies that have never heard about Jesus. If 100% of them will go to heaven anyway, why bring the message about the need to receive the Son - *and then doom the ones who fail to do that?* **You** are then responsible for sending some of them - maybe most of them - to this place of horrors, when they would have gone to heaven *if you had just left them alone!*

By the grace of God, there is one thing I do not believe I have ever done as a Christian. I have never participated in any joke about Hell. I've done a lot of stupid things, but that one is not on the list. The Bible's teaching on this matter is horrifying and beyond levity on any level - especially when I get a glimpse of the truth *that I deserve to be there*. Had I died before receiving Jesus Christ, I would be in Hades right now, with Hell on its heels. When I was 17, I got my foot crushed in a hydraulic lift on a tractor. I developed two kinds of gangrene, and lost most of my big toe and was on the way to losing half of my foot - possibly more. The pain of that crushed foot *was nothing* compared to what the Bible says Hell is going to be like. There is nothing about this subject that engenders jest. I do not want to stand before God with any joking about this matter on my record. So, ... does God loves everybody?

### **The Weak Jesus**

Have you ever read one of those "*love letters from Jesus*"? In them, Jesus aches for our love and is incomplete if we keep ignoring Him. He longingly reaches out to us with a tear in His puppy love eyes. He is a *frustrated lover*, waiting for our attention and love in return. *We* are in the power position, and *we* weigh Him in the balance and decide if He is worthy *of us* or not. *We* decide the fate of this longed for relationship. God just sits and waits, hopes and longs for ... us. He is love sick. *This Jesus is so weak*. He *needs* us, Heaven *needs* us, the Church *needs* us, eternity *needs* us! After all, *we* are so interesting and our company is so stimulating! But, in the end, if *we decide* He is not worthy of our love, He then decides, in the anger of a jilted lover, to cast us into Hell. So, maybe He doesn't look so weak after all. Now, ... He just looks spiteful.

Personally, I am astounded He wants anything to do with me. I had violently violated His will and ways before I became a Christian, and since becoming a Christian, I still sin against Him with alarming regularity. In fact, the more I learn of His definition of sin - well, it is incredible how much I sin in deed, word, and thought. You might think you are better than me, or a real catch. But you're not. Well, ... maybe you are. But, that's not saying much. If you compare yourself to *the perfect standard* He has *for you* - well, you are disgusting, too. When I called upon the Lord in 1977, I remember saying, "*I've been told I need to accept Your Son ... but **who am I to accept Him?** Is it possible **He will accept me?***" Now, in 2020, forty three years later – same refrain.

### **Esau ... the only person ever hated by God. Right?**

In Romans 9, Paul was discussing God's involvement in the descendants of Abraham. When discussing Isaac's twin boys, Esau and Jacob, we have this remarkable declaration about God's involvement in the affairs of man. "...for though the twins were not born, **and had not done anything good or bad**, in order that God's purpose **according to His choice** might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her (Rebekah), 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written, '**Jacob I loved** (agapao), **but Esau I hated** (miseo).' What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then (in conclusion), it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, **but on God who shows mercy**. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.' So then (in conclusion), He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?' On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say back to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right (authority) over the clay, to make **from the same lump** one vessel for honorable use, and another for dishonor? What if God, willing to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known, endured with much patience, vessels of wrath prepared (made) for destruction?" (Ro 9:10-22).

This passage brings up some very fundamental questions about God loving everybody. Did God love Esau? Well, some make the case *He actually did*. They contend this passage should read, "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I loved less.*" The accuracy of this translation depends on two things. First, there is one use of *miseo* that might mean, "love less." In Luke 14:26, Jesus said, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate (miseo) his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*" The other thirty-seven uses of this word in The New Testament definitely mean, "hate." But even if we suppose "*God loved Esau less,*" what is that about? That is partiality and placing one person above another - *even before birth!* Come on! Where is the fairness and justice, in that? If you opt for this position - that God did not hate Esau, but simply loved him less than Jacob - you have *thousands of questions to answer*. Here are nine. "*How much less did God love Esau, and in what ways - and why? Does, 'being loved less by God,' touch the salvation issue?*" This even raises serious questions about the nature of God Himself. "*Is it right He should love someone less - even before birth? How often does He do this sort of thing? Does His loving someone more or less than another impact one's success in this life? Does it impact eternal positions one might hold in heaven? What does it mean, in practical realities, to be loved less by God?*"

But a second thing the "God-loved-Esau-less" club is dependent upon, is eisegesis of the verse. In other words, ignore the rest of the passage. You see, after Paul makes the assertion, "*but Esau I hated,*" he immediately begins fielding attacks against such a position - that God would hate someone - even before being born! But Paul not only defends the right of God to do whatever He wants, he rebukes man for even challenging God on this. "*What if God, willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for, made for, even expressly fitted for destruction?*" (Ro 9:22). *Miseo* in this context means, "hate." But

even if you decide to turn away from this, what about this passage? “*The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and **the one** who loves violence, **His soul hates.***” (Ps 11:5). Proverbs 6:6-19 says, “*There are six things **which the Lord hates**, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him ... **a false witness** who utters lies, and **one** who spreads strife among brothers.*” These are individuals – that God hates.

If God can hate *one* person, can *He* hate another person and still be free of wrongdoing? Can He hate three or four and still be okay? If God can *hate* Esau before the poor fellow was even born, and God is free of wrongdoing, can He hate *a dozen people* before they are born, *or a million, or a trillion*, and still be without fault? A very weak argument about this passage is as follows: “*God already knew what Esau **would do** and what he **would be like** before he was born, because God knows the future! So even though Esau had not yet done anything good or bad, God was reacting to Esau **knowing what he was going to do.***” So, if God knew Esau was going to be such a foul person, then why create him in the first place? Why let him grow up, only to march into His wrath and eternal damnation? It seems to me a “*God loves everybody*” would require the guy never come into existence in the first place.

And what about Judas? What did Jesus say about him? “*It would have been **good** for that man if he had not been born*” (Mt 26:24). But he was born. If it would have been “*good*” that he not be born, why didn’t the God who loves him do that “*good thing*” for him? “*But, God didn’t make Judas betray Christ! Judas acted on his own free will!*” That has nothing to do with anything. No one says God made Judas do anything. But it is clear God knew what Judas was going to do before he was ever born. And how do I know that? Well, other than the assertion He knows “*the end from the beginning*” (Isa 46:10), consider this. God predicted many specifics *about the crucifixion* hundreds of years before it ever happened. Details as incidental as soldiers dividing His garments, and then casting lots for His clothing are foretold (Ps 22:18). For God to accurately enunciate such *incidental* details in the midst of a complex murder scenario, He surely knew in advance *all the characters* of the entire drama. God knew before the world was ever created who Judas was *and what he would do when he entered human history*. If Jesus states, “*it would have been **good** for that man if he had not been born,*” then I ask again: Why didn’t God, who loves him, *do that good thing for Judas*? At a minimum, He could have seen to it Judas was born at another time, or in a different place, so the betrayal opportunity never existed. But not only was Judas born in the wrong place at the wrong time - get this! Jesus chose Judas to be in His inner circle *knowing from the beginning* what Judas was going to do! “*For Jesus knew from the beginning ... who it was that would betray Him ... ‘Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?’ Now He meant Judas ... who was going to betray Him*” (Jn 6:64,70,71). Jesus meant it when He said it would have been better for him if he had never been born. Why didn’t Jesus say, “*Judas, after your dastardly deed, know that I love you and pardon you. Don’t despair and kill yourself!*” But it’s all deeper than this. Let’s return to Esau.

If God hated Esau because He knew what Esau would become, then we should ask, “*What kind of people do other people become?*” Answer: “*God looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there is anyone who understands, who acts wisely, who seeks after God. **Every one of them** has turned aside; together they have **become corrupt**; there is no one who does good, not even one*” (Ps 53:2,3. And read Ro 3:10-18 for God’s fuller appraisal). He says there is not *one* single human being who seeks Him. Everyone goes astray, seeking his/her own interests. Jesus did not entrust Himself to man,

as “*He knew what was **in man***” (Jn 2:23-25). He also said, “*What man is there among you, when his son shall ask for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake will he? If you then, **being evil**, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father, who is in heaven, give what is good to those who ask Him!*” (Mt 7:9-11). What is the assumed position? Man is evil - *all men are evil - every man*, past, present, and future - **is evil**. “*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags*” (Isa 64:6. I have been told this is a reference to menstrual rags). A fatal error millions make, is that they compare themselves *to others*, and think, “*I am not really so bad.*” Paul stated, “*We are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, **they are without understanding***” (2Cor 10:12). My point? If God decided to hate Esau based on future performance, then He will end up hating *every single human being because everyone's future performance is evil.*

All evildoing heads into the wrath of God. Every sin either meets the wrath of God on the cross, in Jesus' body, or else each sin will be sent into the fires of an eternal Hell - along with the perpetrator of the evil. While some sins are more heinous than others (with varying degrees of punishment), all sin is evil and not *one* sin will escape the wrath of God being exacted upon it - not one.

Some harbor the deep inner thought that they are in some way *better in nature* than Esau. Well, here is what God says to Christians *about themselves* before they became Christians. “*... You were formerly alienated, and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds ... You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which **you formerly walked** according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them, we too **all** formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging in the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, and were, **by nature**, children of wrath, **even as the rest***” (Col 1:21 and Eph 2:1-3). Esau is part of “*the rest*,” - and before salvation every Christian was originally part of “*the rest*.” In the illustration about the potter in Romans 9, he makes vessels of honor and dishonor *from the same lump!* (Ro 9:21).

By the way, when do you suppose Esau found out he was hated by God? Do you think he learned of this when he was 5, or 10, or 20, or 50? Maybe he only learned of it when he died. Maybe Esau will realize God had “*endured with great patience*” a vessel of wrath ... himself. And all God was going to do - was hold him responsible for his actions - nothing more and nothing less. Maybe this is the same story for all the unredeemed. Maybe they will not find out until death they were hated by God all along, just like Esau, even before they were born! And maybe the way this hatred will be manifested is by the simple exercise of justice. Everyone whom God deals with simply by justice will end up damned. Oh, ... I can hear gnashing teeth, and wrenching cries of anger - at me! And I must say, this is difficult for even me to hear or write! Well, more difficulties are on the way.

Clearly, God loves the ones He has decided to have mercy upon. But, does He also love those He has decided *not to have mercy upon*? Does He love those *He hardens*? If He loves everybody, why withhold mercy, or harden anybody anyway? So, does He love everybody - *except Esau*?

I believe the un-mercied, the hardened, and Esau are all part of the same cloth. They all stand on the left - the goats (Mt 25:33). This is hard material. It is hard to say

God does not love these people. But, I do not think He does. I also do not think He feels neutral toward them. While it is easy to think of God haters, it is hard to think of **God hating**. But I do believe Esau is not by himself. Everyone outside of Christ (from God's eternal view) abides with Esau.

### ***“So, Why Does God Love Anybody?”***

I can only come up with one answer. It's because He has decided to. It is sure not based upon performance. In our natural state, He calls us “*enemies*” (Ro 5:10). And, “*the intent, the inclination, of man's heart is evil from his youth*” (Gen 8:21). We are not remotely interested in *anything* He is interested in. All our priorities are alien and hostile to His. Even those He has chosen to have mercy upon, I can make the case that He really does *not* love them ... in one sense. See what you think of this.

What is one of the very first things God does when a person responds positively to the Gospel message? Well, along with forever removing that person's sins, He sends the Holy Spirit to live *inside* that person. The individual is born again and made a new creation (1Pet 1:23 and 2Cor 5:17). He/she is now “*alive to God*” (Ro 6:11). This new Presence creates “*a new self*” (Eph 4:24). The original person is now called “*the old self*” (Ro 6:6). The rest of the Christian experience has *one major goal* - putting to *death* this old self while simultaneously being conformed to the image and mind of Christ. This is not a *tweaking* or *reforming* of “*the old self*.” God has determined the original, natural person *is to be destroyed* one way or the other. You see, the only thing “*the old self*” does *is sin, sin and sin!* The first commandment is, “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” (Mt 22:37). Before salvation, no one obeys this first and foremost commandment - even once. God's goal is for the original person, me, who obeyed this command *0% of the time*, to be completely supplanted by a new person who obeys this command *100% of the time!* This plateau will be reached upon departing this age and sloughing off any remaining sin. The *glorified* saint will be the *complete opposite* of the person that existed the second before receiving Jesus Christ. That makes my point. He does not really love *me*, because the *natural me* He wants dead ... dead ... dead. The original me is to be totally destroyed, absolutely dismantled and completely demolished. Not a remnant *of me* will survive His assault. This is true for every single Christian. And that's the best thing - for me.

But, isn't one of the great love calls - to accept people *as they are*? At a minimum, you should at least love *the main part of them* - their personality, character, abilities, etc. And isn't a core problem in marriages the fact that one partner wants to *change* the other? The great counseling call is, “*Stop doing that! You must accept your partner as he/she is!*” But God's love towards me knows nothing of this philosophy. Nothing.

So, what is God's procedure in killing the old and bringing in the new? Well, He first *appeals* to the Christian to put to death the deeds of the flesh. “*For if by the Spirit, you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God*” (Ro 8:13,14). He *rebukes* the Christian regularly and exposes areas He wants corrected. But when that message falls on deaf ears, He employs other methods! *When* (not, “*if*”) the Christian decides to ignore verbal warnings, He disciplines the rebel. “*My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; For those the Lord loves, He disciplines, and He scourges everyone He welcomes as a son ... But if you are without discipline, then you are illegitimate children and not sons*” (Heb 12:5,6,8). His rebukes, disciplines and

scourgings are designed to create positive change, and are reserved for His sons. “*He disciplines us for our good, that we might share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*” (Heb 12:10,11). And the discipline can even be so severe that the Christian physically dies! (1Cor 11:27-32). He will **kill us** if that is what it takes to cause repentance and change. “*If it is with difficulty that the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?*” (1Pet 4:18). This total change is not some optional activity - *it is part of our inheritance!* (Heb 12:14). Absent this ... absent sonship.

Herein lies an exceedingly interesting, and terrifying, point. To begin, the only thing that makes God angry - is sin. Where sin is absent, God’s anger is absent. But He responds in two completely different ways toward those generating the sin. For the vessels of mercy, it is calculated *by God Himself* to cause positive change - so they “*might share His holiness*” (Heb 12:10). But non Christians are never *disciplined* by God. All that awaits them is *punishment*. God's anger toward the sinner is not designed to change them. If a year in Hell's torment caused even *a millionth of a percent of change* toward righteousness, then at some point, Hell would end, with the sinner righteous. So, there is a *redemptive* anger of God as well as a *non-redemptive* anger. Both are holy and righteous - yet with entirely different goals. If He sends His anger with the design to correct, one suffers, but wins. If, on the other hand, He sends His anger with the design to punish, one suffers, and is doomed. The distinction lies in whether one is a vessel of mercy or a vessel of wrath. Love is present - or absent. I do not believe I have ever heard anyone expound on this. Maybe I will develop this in a future article.

Concerning God’s determination to totally destroy my old self, in the deepest and truest sense, this really *is* love for *me*. He knows *I* must be destroyed - or else, I will be damned. He has decided to save me - from Himself! “*Who is adequate for such things?*” (2Cor 2:16 ). He does this because *He* has decided to have mercy upon me. Why? “*For He said to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it does not depend upon the man who wills, or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy .... So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires*” (Ro 9:15,16,18). That's the best I can come up with. It is not because of some special trait I possess or something. Nothing commends me above another. You know, most Christians can not even listen to this. It confounds them and violates everything known as “*God’s love.*” And if this passage is ever addressed, it is often accompanied with hand wringing and statements of how hard this is to understand. But, after some deep sighs, one rushes out from this great depth, brightens up, and announces, “*We still know He loves everybody! It's just our limited understanding, that we just can't figure this passage out right now. But, He will explain it all when we are on the other side!*” If you have already decided that God *loves everybody*, this passage is not hard to understand - *it is impossible to understand.* “*It must be a translation or transcription error - or something!*” But if you can simply read, this passage is not hard to understand at all. Terrifying, but not hard.

### **“But, Isn’t it Hypocritical ...”**

... *if God expects us to love our enemies, and yet He does not hold Himself to that same standard?*” There are a couple of ways to address this. To begin, we are to love *our* enemies. If it is *finally determined* that someone is *God’s enemy*, I do not see “*agapao*”

continued. But that *will not become certain* until Judgment Day. So, “*agapao*” never failing may be the call for the duration of this age. In this life, our enemies may be brothers (or sisters) in a pre-Christian state! When Saul was overseeing the stoning of Stephen, it would have been a real shame for a Christian assassin to arise and kill him. Not much later the enemy Saul, became the apostle Paul. This is probably one reason we are not to seek our own revenge, but instead we are to leave that to God (Ro 12:19-21). Only God knows who He has chosen to have mercy upon, and when He is going to bring that person to salvation. But here is another way to look at this. Often, we may be a bit *premature* in our labeling of “*our enemy*.” If we control ourselves and practice *agapao* toward *perceived* enemies, we may find some are actually friends. We may learn very valuable things from them. Some of my “*enemies*” God has used to correct me - and expose things about me I did not want to see.

### **“But, What About John 3:16?”**

“For God so loved **the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). This statement is absolutely correct. So let’s look closer at it by means of short questions and answers.

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1) | 1) | Who wrote this?  |
| 2) | 2) | To whom was it written?  |
| 1) | 1) | What did that audience believe about themselves?                           |
| 2) | 2) | Next to salvation, what was (is) the greatest message of the New Covenant? |
| 1) | 1) |  |

Here are the answers.

- 1) One of Jesus' disciples, John, wrote this.
- 2) When he authored this, he had been designated an apostle *to the Jews*.
- 3) For a couple of thousand years, the Jews had been taught they were were the chosen people of God, and if anyone outside that people group wanted to come to the real God, they would have to come through the Jews. All the nations of the world, all the cultures, all the races, and all their histories were lumped into one pile - the Gentiles - the heathen nations.
- 4) The moment Jesus died, the veil of the Temple was ripped from top to bottom - and God ended that arrangement forever. The Temple, with its orders and procedures, was abandoned. Everything was turned inside out and upside down. The Law Covenant was over. John was explaining *to his fellow Jews* that God so loved *the world* - not just the chosen Jews (gosh, He was choosing back then too?), that He sent His Son - and a whole new set of procedures was enacted. Next to the Gospel message, this is the greatest message of the New Covenant. God so loved *the world* that He made this change.

Under the Old Covenant, virtually no one believes every single Jew was saved. Most agree a remnant was saved. While God has committed Himself to reaching into every nation, tribe, tongue, and family, it does not follow that every single one in each group is targeted for His mercy.

### **“But, What About 2 Peter 3:9?”**

Maybe we should start with verse 8. “*But do not let this one fact escape your*

notice, **beloved**, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards **you**, not wishing for **any** to perish, but for **all** to come to repentance” (2Pet 3:8,9). A first principle of proper Bible interpretation is to identify the audience being addressed (like above). In this case, Peter opens this letter by saying, “*Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours ...*” (2Pet 1:1). Peter is writing to *Christians*. In verse 8 and 9 of Chapter 3, I believe he is still speaking directly to Christians, *about Christians - not about all the unsaved peoples of the world!* “... beloved (his Christian audience of those with a like faith) ...*The Lord ... is patient towards you ...*” The following indefinite pronoun, “*any*” (functioning as an adjective) can, and probably does, refer to any of the ones (plural) constituting the “*you*” (plural) addressed throughout this whole letter. As an indefinite, that does not mean the reference is now *to all the unsaved peoples of the world*. It can still be referring to the group being addressed, and is a declaration applying to *any of them!* It is not unusual for an adjectival, indefinite pronoun to refer to a definite group. For examples, see Luke 1:5 (priests being the referenced circle), Acts 3:5 (money, or some sort of goods, being the referenced circle), and Philippians 3:15 (Christians of a different mind being the referenced circle). Examples of an indefinite applying to a very definite, and sometimes very small circle, abound.

So, “*the Lord is not willing any one of you all - any of you I have been writing to in this letter - to perish but for all to come to repentance.*” So, who is the “*all*”? Well, this phrase is introduced by *alla*, which is an intensive, superordinating (hyperordinating) conjunction - “*but.*” Therefore, this phrase adamantly refers to the “*any*” of the previous phrase. So, the Lord not only does not plan that any of the *any* perish, but that “*all*” of those “*anys*” should make room for repentance. So, the “*any*” and “*all*” are the same group.

Another translation problem has to do with the word normally translated, “*wishing.*” The Greek is *boulomai* - not *thelo*. *Thelo* means “*wishing*” or “*wanting*” - a passive kind of hoping. But *boulomai* is a strong word implying action. “*The Lord is not willing any of you perish*” - it implies planning or design. It is *not* His will, *His plan*, “*that any of you like-faithed Christians perish but, on the contrary, all of you like-faithed saints are to, koreo, make room for, give admittance to, and progress into - repentance; a changed mind.*” Christians are destined to have the mind of Christ - to think and reason like Jesus. Our value system, priorities, actions, and reactions are to be steadily progressing towards *a total synchronism* with Him. How else will we stand shoulder to shoulder with Him on Judgment Day and render eternal judgment on the unsaved, as well as the fallen angels? (1Cor 6:1,2). God is not willing any of us perish (and perish we must, if we do not have the mind of Christ). He is actively working in each of our lives so that every single thought will be brought captive to obedience in being Christlike (2Cor 10:5). God wants us to “*make room for*” our thinking to be changed (repentance), but when we decide *not* to make those accommodations, God will employ His methods (disciplines, as discussed earlier) to make sure His will (plan, *boulomai*) is not thwarted. He is not going to allow any of us to perish! That is what 2Peter 3:9 is saying!

The translation just forwarded *continues addressing Peter's audience* rather than addressing every single person in the world of every generation. Peter was working with *his audience* in this passage, and referencing how God was working with them. It seems strange he would suddenly leave them, throw out a net covering every human being on

earth - past, present, and future - and then abruptly return to a discussion about his audience's behavior in light of the impending destruction and recreation of this current earth and heavens. Read through 2Peter 3, the whole chapter, and keep in mind what I have presented here and see if it makes sense to you. The syntactical ground is solid.

### ***“But, As Creator ...***

*... doesn't He just love us all because He made us? Isn't it like the love we have for our own children?”* Well, what do we do with Esau, Pharaoh, even Satan ... or Hell? Why not just grant universal pardon and be done with it? Good fathers provide for their children - and they provide the most important things first. The most important thing every sinful creature needs is the blood of Christ so one's sin problem is eternally removed. Even as dull of hearing as I am, I know this is the most important truth that can be uttered. That blood secures eternal pardon and is the cornerstone of eternal life. With the sin problem removed - so also God's wrath, including death and all acolytes. Life, eternal life, is the only thing left. Any loving father would automatically provide the most obvious and critical need(s) for each child *before all else* - whether that child understood the act or not - or whether the child appreciated it or not. And that is exactly what He has done to each *“vessel of mercy.”* At the instant of salvation, each pardoned individual is at the start of *learning* what he/she has been saved from. Even 40+ years later, I am still absurdly darkened as to the immensity of the transaction God did for me. If God loves everybody as His precious and beloved children, what could possibly be holding Him back from simply applying the blood of Christ to each person - even fallen angels - and then enlighten them later on this great act of Fatherly need meeting? Could it be He doesn't love everybody? Could it be He is *not* everyone's Father? Could it be He does not view everyone as His child? At one time Jesus discussed this with the Pharisees. *“‘You are doing the deeds of your father.’ They said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me .... You are of your father the devil ...’”* (Jn 8:41,42a and 44a - go read the whole passage). And what is this about? *“... you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ ...”* (Ro 8:15b - 17a). Only those in Christ have God as their Father and are His children.

### ***“But, What About God Hating the Sin ...***

*... and loving the sinner?”* I knew you would be able to complete that sentence. We hear that all the time. But, the Bible *never* makes a statement like this when referring to the unsaved. In fact, I do not think I can find a passage that even *hints* at this concept toward the unsaved. But it sounds great. That way one can say, *“I love the homosexual, but I hate the same sex anal copulation.”* Or, *“I love Saddam Hussein and his sons, but I hate the mass murdering, raping and torturing.”* Or, *“I love abortionists, but I hate the dismembering of those unborn infants.”* Yes, the one who wants to feel all fuzzy and warm toward these sinners can say, *“I separate sin from the sinner, so I can love you, yet hate your sin - just like God does!”* He does? Psalm 11:5b says, *“The **one** who loves violence (sin), **His soul hates.**”* This doesn't sound like separating sin from sinner to me. Or Proverbs 6:16-19, *“There are six things which the Lord hates ...”* and here are three of

them; "... **a heart that devises wicked plans (sin) ... a false witness who utters lies (sin), and one who spreads strife (sin) among brothers.**" Even if you choose to dismiss "heart," what about the other two? These sinners are not separated from their sin. In fact, *their sin causes the hatred - for them!* Sin and sinner are two peas in one pod - *they are one!* In fact, as far as the unsaved are concerned, I do not think God *ever* separates the two. In Romans 1, when speaking of idolaters and homosexuals, He gives them over to "the lusts of their hearts," and "to degrading passions" as the sin and sinner are melded. Even His chosen people, when deciding to pursue sin, were judged by God. "You have ... delivered us (melted us) into the power of our iniquities" (Isa 64:7). I do not see God separating sinners from their sin. If anything, He melts them into it. So, how did people come up with this notion? Well, I believe it has arisen from one of two sources. Either our legal system, or else a misunderstanding of Romans 7:7-25.

The defense part of our legal system is built upon placing the blame for errant behavior away from the accused and on something else - anything else. The DC sniper, Lee Malvo, pulled the trigger, but the real culprit was *his obedient nature* towards his father figure, John Mohammed. John Hinkley shot President Reagan, but the real culprit was *the need to impress* Jody Foster. Congressman Janklow's *diabetes* caused him to speed, run a stop sign, and kill a motorcyclist. Defense lawyers blame upbringing, drugs, peer pressure, whatever they can dream up, to separate the act from the actor, or, in our case, the sin from the sinner. This cultural pollutant may have impacted some "theologians."

But it is more likely this comes from a misunderstanding of Paul's discussion about his fight with his sin. He is talking about a battle between "his inner man ... the law of my mind" versus "my flesh". He says, "I am doing the very thing I hate .... But if I am doing the very thing **I do not wish** (the key to this), *I am no longer doing it, but sin which dwells in me*" (Ro 7:15,20). While this passage is not the easiest to understand, I think it is describing the struggle of the saint (believer) with his sin. The **saint is separated** in some very real ways from the old nature - from sin. Our new self wants to obey God, *but our old self does not*. Of course, as discussed earlier, the fate of the old self is sealed. It has been judged and is being overpowered and destroyed. Unfortunately, this is not a once-for-all event, but, rather, a step by step destruction of the old self. The process is called sanctification. So, God does separate sin *from the saint*, and it is targeted for annihilation, but I see no evidence God separates sin *from the sinner*. This false separation may sound great, but "God separating the sinner from his/her sin" is just another facet of the romanticized ideal of God's love. It is a great injustice to let sinners believe God somehow separates them from their actions and deeds. It may give them a false sense of security as it downplays their dire position with God *because of their sins*. They need to know the naked truth of how God sees them outside of Christ. It is a horrendous picture. Real love for the sinner tells them the truth. Sin is the greatest of all enemies to one's well being. Sin forms a "certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which (is) hostile to us" (Col 2:14). This earned death warrant is not separated from any sinner.

### ***"So, Are There Any Grounds From Which God Can Love Anybody?"***

There is a foundation upon which God develops a basis for love. Ironically, it is from this same basis, His response of anger, wrath and individual hate for man arises. Please consider this carefully. (Yes, I did say, "individual hate.")

While no person, in his/her natural state, *is worthy* of God's love, each person still possesses *an innate worth*. There is a difference between *being worthy* and possessing *an innate worth*. No one, based on merit, has any grounds for attracting love from God. But what does give *potential* for favor is that we have been made in the image and likeness of God – or at least Adam was. “*Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness .... And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them*” (Gen 1:26,27). That's why I said “*at least Adam was*”, and, by presumption, Eve as well. But, *after the fall*, we are told: “*When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth*” (Gen 5:3). So, I am *assuming* his offspring (us) are still considered *by God* to be made in *His* image - thus an innate worth. But, it is possible we don't even have that going for us.

So, what does it mean to be created in His “*image*” and “*likeness*”? This is not spelled out in the Bible. So here are a few of my thoughts. Adam was made with many characteristics and abilities God Himself possesses. For example, God communicates, is creative, and plans things. So also Adam. God has emotional responses, and reasons in both the physical and abstract realms. So also Adam. Originally, Adam functioned *righteously* in those abilities - just *like* God, so, it's possible that is the “*likeness*” part. That is a guess. Originally, the *communicative image* was not fouled by lying, blame shifting, flattering, gossip, cursing, - or using God's Name in vain. Man used this image of God *like God does* in that he spoke only truth and for edification. The *planning image* was not fouled by schemes to take advantage of others, invent warfare, or fly planes into buildings. Man was to plan great and mighty things that would benefit everyone and everything touched by the plan. The *creative image* was not used creating slasher movies, self promoting books, or magnificently ornate parades featuring perverse sexual choices. After Adam fell, man lost the ability to practice these images consistent with God's likeness. We have twisted these abilities - *and that is the source of God's anger, wrath, and hatred!* The very thing giving us innate worth is also the very thing that draws God's wrath! We have taken these “*crowns*” and defiled them. He holds us accountable for this, logging every single violation by every single human being. Each violation requires *life* (blood) - either Jesus' - or our own!

But, Seth is said to be in the image and likeness *of Adam*. What I just presented keeps us in the image of God, but in the likeness of Adam. This may be a blunder. Maybe we have fallen so far that God does not consider any of Adam's descendants to be in *His image or likeness at all!* We are a lower form of life. Though morally accountable, we may be *innately* inferior to the original Adam in all ways. So, it is possible in our natural state ... we do not possess an innate worth.

So, here is where we are. No one is worthy of God's patience, kindness, goodness, etc. Sin has disqualified us from being worthy of that kind of activity from God. We may not even possess the innate worth for which I tried to make a case. We may have lost more at the fall than any of us realize. And it is not as though we were at one time good, and then went bad, and God wants to *restore* us to that former state. He says, “*(t)he intent, the inclination, of man's heart is evil from his youth*” (Gen 8:21). We came out of the womb internally (eternally) bent toward evil. All we need is time and nourishment to develop into the perverse creatures we are. Jesus put all this in perspective in one encounter. When addressed as “*good teacher*” by a man inquiring about how to inherit eternal life, Jesus rebuked him and the entire human race. “*Why do you call Me good? No*

*one is good except God alone*” (Mk 10:17,18). No wonder they crucified Him. When I hear unsaved people casually refer to Jesus as a good moral teacher and philosopher, I know they have never read what He taught and said.

### **Let’s Get to the Bottom Line!**

I want you to now forget all the theology, all the questions about fairness, and abandon your worries about the fate of people that have never heard (or ever will hear) about the Son of God. I even want you to forget all the discussion about the Greek words on love! Forsake all concern about God loving, or not loving, everybody. Abandon all philosophical, ethical, moralistic, problematic wrestlings on these matters. You can’t do anything about them anyway, and, besides, God will ultimately take care of His own business. So, go ahead and turn all that stuff over to Him, and let those concerns be His problems - at least for the next few moments. I want to talk to you - about *you*. I want to ask *you* some questions that I want *you* to answer between *you and yourself*. Write down your responses as you go.

1. *Should* God love you? Why?
2. Is there something special about you or something you have done that should attract love from God?
3. Do you see yourself as superior to Esau? If so, in what way(s)?
4. Do you think God owes it to you - to love you?
5. Who told you, “*God loves you!*”? How do you know he/she is correct?

Has anyone ever said, “*God loves you! And here’s how much!* (with arms outstretched like a cross).” If you have read to this point, I am not sure you will glibly accept this. Ask them about Esau and see what they say. We owe it to ourself to search out this matter with the One who really knows.

### **One More Question**

Do you think there are other people *worthy* of God’s love? Are there people *better than you* who merit God’s love - either by their behavior, or pious nature or something? I want you to really answer that before you read my response.

Now that you have, I have good news for you. Mary, John the Baptizer, the disciples, or the Apostle Paul - no one has an innate advantage *over you*. Initially, all of us are in Adam. In an act of God, solely based upon His determination of mercy *and love*, He made them “*new creations*” (2Cor 5:17). He “*calls into being that which does not exist*” (Ro 4:17). So, why *not* you?

## **So, What About Me?**

Well, I don't think I'm under any delusion that God *should* love me. There is nothing about me in character or conduct that should elicit such a response from Him. I deserve His wrath and Hell if anybody does. I was a healthy, young male living in the most prosperous country on earth with access to the message of God my whole life. I had all kinds of opportunity placed at my feet. So, what did I do with all that? I polluted myself with all kinds of foulness - mentally and physically. I had even spent two summers *selling Bibles* door to door - for the money. It was a big joke. I was a Bible salesman in the summer and a bartender in the winter. Ha, ha, ha ... real funny. So, why does He love me? Is there something about me that makes me different than Esau, or Judas, or Pharaoh? Is there some little spark underneath all my wickedness that would cause God to overlook all the garbage - and love me? The answer is a simple ... no. God, for His own reasons, decided to extend mercy to me. This was not owed. He could have hardened me just as easy. I am absolutely convinced, *and totally certain*, this extension of mercy has been an act of God that has nothing to do with anything about *me*. I am also sure this will be confirmed at the Judgment. Furthermore, I also believe that every single vessel of mercy *will be of that same conviction* when the events of that Day come down. Not one high thought will be able to raise its abhorrent head when those events begin unfolding. Not one. Whether it's Paul, Abraham, Mary, David, Ezekiel, Enoch, Daniel, or me - in this matter, we will all be on the same level. Of course, once this initial threshold is crossed, those saints will leave me in the dust, as their service, sacrifice, and behaviors toward God make my life look like a bad joke. So, why should God love you? What is it about you that should elicit this response from Him?

## ***“Man, Is This Guy Confused!”***

Right about now, many may be saying, *“This guy is all confused about God's love! He has tied himself up in knots, applying Western logic and word studies to an area of deep mystery. And he has forgotten about our free will and how we have the power to choose, or refuse, God. He also does not understand that we are now in The Age of Grace, and though God has not changed, His dealings with mankind has!”* Well, don't worry about me too much. I haven't forgotten any of those things. I have been flooded with those themes and may understand them as well as you. But, I think most of that thinking is part of the Romanticized myth of God's love, and does not honestly deal with many of the issues I have brought forward.

## **Conclusion**

I guess it is fairly obvious I am not inclined to declare to you how much God loves you. But what if I did declare that to you? How do you know ... that I know what I am talking about? I am just a person - not God. My hands are full in getting to know Him and learn how He really feels about me! I might *assume* He loves me, but I think the *“many”* in Matthew 7:21-23 really believed Jesus loved them. But, they will find out He does not. I wonder how many of that *“many”* declared to people all around them, *“God loves you!”* - just to discover they themselves were not loved by God! These are stunning contemplations as these are real people, real situations and real eternal destinies. And I think I am superior to them? Maybe this is part of what God means when we are

commanded to “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12). So, in my view, a full throated declaration to you that God loves you would be a *disservice* toward you. I am not God, and you need to find out *from Him* how He feels about you. This is such an astoundingly important matter *for you personally*, that I want to be completely removed from the midst of that determination. This must be settled between you and God alone *with everybody out of the way!* That *is* my love for you. It really is.

I would like to see every single person forgiven and made a new creation. I would even like to see Satan changed and redeemed. I am not the first in this desire. Origen, an early Church “*father,*” did believe “*God was in Christ reconciling **the world** to Himself, **not counting their trespasses against them***” (2Cor 5:19). And God reconciled “*all things to Himself ... through the blood of His cross ... whether things on earth or **things in the heavens***” (Col 1:20). Origen believed all people and even the fallen angels are pardoned! Obviously, I hold Origen mistaken in his conclusions, but I sure understand the wish! I have wishes, too. I wish all the pain and suffering, created by sinners, would be covered with the balm of pardon - and what has been done in the past, stay in the past. Couldn't the perpetrators of the wrongs seek pardon from their victims (and God), and be fully recreated in righteousness? Couldn't all victims of those wrongs be fully restored like Job was - but with *an eternal* restoration? Perpetrators would have an eternity to accomplish restitution - if that was even needed. I believe the blood of Jesus is powerful enough to pay for every sin ever spawned - even Satan's if God saw fit. I wish, in a great act of *unconditional love*, He would apply that blood to all - and Hell would be eternally extinguished as there would be no need for it. If God can save any of us, He can save all of us.

But, even if Hell does need to exist, I wish God would give everyone *there* another chance to get right with Him. Why does the positive response to the Gospel *have to occur in this life* - especially with the abounding confusion on these *eternal* matters? Why should *eternal* destinies depend upon decisions made in a darkened, *temporal* realm? He understands how sin blinds us, deadens us, confuses us, and enslaves us. And it is clear that everyone *will understand* what they should have done once on the other side of death's door! When speaking of His return, Jesus said, “*For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For, as in those days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand **until the flood came and took them all away**, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be*” (Mt 24:37-39). They *do understand once the curtain falls!* The rich man in Hades *knew what needed to happen* as he begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his five brothers “*lest they also come to this place of torment*” (Lk 16:28). But, that request was denied, as was his request for a cool drop of water. A great chasm *was fixed* between the two eternal realms. Who made that chasm and decided it is fixed with no exit eternally? “*It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb 10:31). But, actually, here is what I really want. I want God to have His way in all things. Not only is it going to turn out that way anyway, but I am also convinced His determinations will be the proper ones, the correct ones - indeed the *necessary* ones. My *real* wish is be found in total agreement with God, in every detail - here ... on Judgment Day ... and beyond. What's the alternative?

Judgment Day is going to be an absolute bloodbath. Only eight souls were saved in Noah's day - out of how many? At His return, it will be *like those days*. Think about this for a moment. Every sexually immoral person is going to Hell. Every adulterer,

homosexual, and fornicator. No one's opinion on these matters will mean anything. When you add all liars, idolaters, drunkards, and all who practice outbursts of anger, or jealousies, etc. ... well, *everybody* qualifies as a target of His wrath. Relative to the world's population, those finding pardon ... is how big? And God loves all those who will be part of His mass slaughter? "*And those slain by the Lord will be many*" (Isa 66:16).

I have written this ebook for my own self as much as anyone else. The material has been burning in me for years. I am not sure it will be of much value to unbelievers as they do not *believe* God's materials, and this stuff about God loving them, or not, is often just a curiosity at best. To run up to the unsaved and announce, "*God loves you!*" elicits a shrug of the shoulders, with an, "*Oh, that's nice.*" Or, they may think on it a bit more, and come to conclusions like my Japanese boss.

So, is this the end of the discussion about love - what it is ... and God's definitions of it? No. But, should the information here be included in those discussions? Yes. But, before going your way and re-entering your world with its activities and duties, revisit your definition of love at the start of this ebook. Has anything changed?

\* \* \* \* \*

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