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The Five Greek Words for Love

The following has been compiled from multiple internet sources.

"Love" in the Greek, is expressed by five distinct words having much more precise meanings than the single English word "Love":

The English language only has one word for love and it is used interchangeably for almost everything. We can say I love my spouse and I love Chocolate. Both are using the same word and it is only by the context that we can determine the difference. The Greeks, on the other hand, have five different words to describe love. Each word gives a different nuance to the word that helps us understand more fully its meaning.

EPITHUMIA - (**Pronounced:** ep-ee-thoo-mee'-ah) - is the Greek word for strong desire, which can have either a positive or negative connotation in the Bible. The positive connotation is usually translated strong desire, while the negative connotation is usually translated LUST. Lust is simply a strong desire that is perverted, corrupt, or otherwise contrary to God's will and plan.

Epithumia--In a negative sense, this word is translated lust, but it can also be used in a positive way to speak of legitimate desire. Physical desire should be a part of each marriage; an absence or minimizing of the sexual relationship is symptomatic of problem areas that need to be corrected like painful experiences in the past or tension and poor communication in the present. Marriage was divinely designed to create oneness between a man and a woman on every level, and the shared experience of sexual pleasure is an important form of love which enriches the other forms of love in a marriage union.

Scriptures using EPITHUMIA in the positive light (as "strong desire") include Luke 22:15, Philippians 1:23, and I Thessalonians 2:17.

Most scriptures use the word EPITHUMIA in the negative light, typically translated "lust", including the following:

Romans 6:12, I Peter 4:2, II Timothy 2:22, Romans 13:14, I Peter 2:10, II Timothy 3:6, Galatians 5:16, 24 I John 2:16-18, Titus 3:3, Ephesians 2:3, Jude 1:18, II Timothy 4:3, II Peter 2:18, Revelation 18:14, II Peter 3:3, I John 2:16, Colossians 3:5, Jude 1:16, I Peter 1:14, I Thessalonians 4:5, Titus 2:12, I Peter 2:11, I Timothy 6:9 and James 1:14.

EROS (ἔρως *érōs*) (**Pronounced:** air'-ohs) - is passionate love, with sensual desire and longing. The Modern Greek word "erotas" means "(romantic) love". However, eros does not have to be sexual in nature. Eros can be interpreted as a love for someone whom you love more than the philia love of

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friendship. It can also apply to dating relationships as well as marriage. Plato refined his own definition. Although eros is initially felt for a person, with contemplation it becomes an appreciation of the beauty within that person, or even becomes appreciation of beauty itself. It should be noted Plato does not talk of physical attraction as a necessary part of love, hence the use of the word platonic to mean, "without physical attraction". Plato also said eros helps the soul recall knowledge of beauty, and contributes to an understanding of spiritual truth. Lovers and philosophers are all inspired to seek truth by eros. The most famous ancient work on the subject of eros is Plato's Symposium, which is a discussion among the students of Socrates on the nature of eros.

Eros—physical, sexual, sensual love. From which we get the modern word erotic. Eros is about chemistry, physical attraction, passion, sexual desire, and romantic love. Eros is passion, not only of a sexual nature, but also of an aesthetic or spiritual nature, for what is conceived of as supremely beautiful and desirable. “That love between man and woman which is neither planned nor willed, but somehow imposes itself upon human beings, was called eros by the ancient Greeks. Let us note straightaway that the Greek Old Testament uses the word eros only twice, while the New Testament does not use it at all:” - Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI’s First Encyclical - “God is Love”.

STORGE (στοργή storgē) - (**Pronounced:** stor-ye or stor-ge) - means "affection" in modern Greek; it is natural affection, like that felt by parents for offspring. Rarely used in ancient works, and then almost exclusively as a descriptor of relationships within the family. It is the love of mother, father, brothers and sisters. This is a much stronger type of love and involves commitment. “Blood is thicker than water” and most people will do all they can to stand behind their families.

Affection (storge, στοργή) is fondness through familiarity, especially between family members or people who have otherwise found themselves together by chance. It is described as the most natural, emotive, and widely diffused of loves: natural in that it is present without coercion; emotive because it is the result of fondness due to familiarity; and most widely diffused because it pays the least attention to those characteristics deemed "valuable" or worthy of love and, as a result, is able to transcend most discriminating factors. Ironically, its strength is also what makes it vulnerable. Affection has the appearance of being "built-in" or "ready made", says C.S. Lewis, and as a result people come to expect, even to demand, its presence—irrespective of their behavior and its natural consequences.

As with eros, this Greek term does not appear in the Bible. However, many examples of family love are found in Scripture, such as the love and mutual protection among Noah and his wife, their sons and daughters-in-law in Genesis; the love of Jacob for his sons; and the strong love the sisters Martha and Mary in the gospels had for their brother Lazarus.

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PHILLIA (φιλία philía) - (**Pronounced:** Phil-ia) - which means friendship in modern Greek, a dispassionate virtuous love, was a concept developed by Aristotle. It includes loyalty to friends, family, and community, and requires virtue, equality and familiarity. In ancient texts, philia denoted a general type of love, used for love between family, between friends, a desire or enjoyment of an activity, as well as between lovers. This is the only other word for "love" used in the ancient text of the New Testament besides agape, but even then it is used substantially less frequently.

C.S. Lewis immediately differentiates Friendship Love from the other Loves. He describes Friendship as, "the least biological, organic, instinctive, gregarious and necessary of our Loves" - our species does not need Friendship in order to reproduce. He uses this point to explain that Friendship is exceedingly profound because it is freely chosen.

Lewis explains that true friendships, like the friendship between David and Jonathan in the Bible is almost a lost art. He expresses a strong distaste for the way that modern society ignores Friendship. He notes that he cannot remember any poem that celebrated true Friendship like that between David and Jonathan, Orestes and Pylades, Roland and Oliver, Amis and Amiles.

Philia—brotherly or friendship love. This where the city Philadelphia derives its name- "the city of brotherly love." Phileo is about companionship, camaraderie, partnership, mutual affection, or giving and receiving. Philia pertains to friends, freely chosen because of mutual compatibility and common values. "As for the term Philia, the love of friendship, it is used with added depth of meaning in John's Gospel in order to express the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The tendency to avoid the word eros, together with the new vision of love expressed through the word agape, clearly points to something new and distinct about the Christian understanding of love." - Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI's First Encyclical - "God is Love".

AGAPE (ἀγάπη agápē) - (**Pronounced:** ah-GAH-pee) - means "love" in modern day Greek, such as in the term s'agapo (Σ'αγαπώ), which means "I love you". In Ancient Greek it often refers to a general affection rather than the attraction suggested by "eros"; agape is used in ancient texts to denote feelings for a good meal, one's children, and the feelings for a spouse. It can be described as the feeling of being content or holding one in high regard. The verb appears in the New Testament describing, amongst other things, the relationship between Jesus and the beloved disciple. In biblical literature, its meaning and usage is illustrated by self-sacrificing, giving love to all--both friend and enemy. It is used in Matthew 22:39, "Love your neighbour as yourself," and in John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you," and in 1 John 4:8, "God is love." However, the word "agape" is not always used in the New Testament in a positive sense. II Timothy 4:10 uses the word in a negative sense. The Apostle Paul writes, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved (agapo) this present world...." Thus the word "agape" is not always used of a divine love or the love of God.

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Christian commentators have expanded the original Greek definition to encompass a total commitment or self-sacrificial love for the thing loved. Because of its frequency of use in the New Testament, Christian writers have developed a significant amount of theology based solely on the interpretation of this word.

Charity (agapē, ἀγάπη) is the love that brings forth caring regardless of the circumstance. C.S. Lewis recognizes this as the greatest of loves, and sees it as a specifically Christian virtue. The chapter on the subject focuses on the need of subordinating the natural loves to the love of God, who is full of charitable love.

“Agape—unconditional love. The word “agape” was not used commonly in ancient manuscripts, save the New Testament. Many scholars believe that early Christians used and possibly even coined the word. Agape is all about unconditional, selfless, and sacrificial love- the love displayed by God through Jesus. There is this underlying idea of total commitment to the object of love even if it doesn’t deserve or desire it. Agapic love is manifested when one person has much to give to another more needy. It is generous self-donation without concern for reward. “Of the three Greek words for love—eros, philia (the love of friendship) and agape—New Testament writers prefer the last (Agape), which occurs rather infrequently in Greek usage.” - Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI’s First Encyclical - “God is Love”.