



Introduction

- God's *agape* love is many times presented as the ideal love.

Greek Words for Love

- *Eros* refers to sensual or sexual love.
- *Philia* refers to love between friends or brotherly love.
- *Agape* initially referred to an inward attitude of satisfaction with something. *Agape* was used to translate the Old Testament Hebrew for God's love into Greek. By the time the New Testament was written, it was the most popular word used for love in the New Testament.

Agapeo

- *Agapeo* and the noun *agape* refers to an act of the will.
 - God's love, and by extension Christian love, cannot be tied exclusively to the *agapeo* word group.
1. There are good non-theological reasons for the increase in usage of *agapeo*. There was confusion among the Greek words for "to kiss" and "to impregnate" which caused *phileo* to gain the meaning "to kiss" as well as "to love." Thus, another word was needed for love, which led to the use of *agapeo*.
 2. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it is not clear that *agapeo* always refers to some type of higher or less emotional form of love. In the narrative of Amnon and Tamar both *phileo* and *agapeo* are used. Also, it is clear Amnon's love for Tamar was not some type of noble love, but a purely selfish love.
 3. The Gospel of John tells us two times that the Father loves the Son. John 3:35 says,

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. (John 3:35 ESV)

Then in John 5:20 we read,

For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. (John 5:20a ESV)

In John 3:35 the Greek verb is *agapeo*, and in John 5:20 the Greek verb is *phileo*.

4. The meaning of a word is guided by the context. While it is true *phileo* has a wider range of meaning than *agapeo*, that has no bearing on its actual use. It is the context that defines and limits the meaning of the word love.
5. If we just consider Christian love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13 we see that *agapeo* cannot be just limited to willed love. Paul says that someone can give their bodies to be burned or can give all they



have to the poor, and they can do these things without love. These are so-called loving acts but, given you can will to do them without love, this means Christian love cannot be reduced to just doing good things for others. By extension, *agapeo* cannot just refer to a willingness to do something for someone else.

6. It is possible that understanding *agapeo* to refer to a willed love separate from emotion but committed to another person's good was influenced by a misunderstanding of the impassibility of God.

Agapeo and Impassibility

- Impassibility is related to the affections of God.
- If we just say that God has affections, we may be implying that God is affected by things, events, or people outside of himself.
- If we ignore God's affections, we might wind up with a God that is cold, remote, and uncaring.
- The affections we have in common with God are similar but are not the same.
- The Reformed tradition developed the doctrine of impassibility.
- The Latin word *passio* means suffering or passion so adding the "im" in front negates the suffering or passion. Impassibility is not an attribute of God, but an understanding of God's immutability with respect to his affections.
- Many theologians argued that allowing God to have any feelings would imply that God is susceptible to being influenced by people or events outside of himself.
- For God, love is not an emotion or feeling.
- Any evidence in the Bible that God has passions must be considered as anthropopathism. Anthropopathism applies human emotion to God.

The Affective Element in God's Love

- The Bible does not support the idea that God has no true affection at all.

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son. (Hosea 11:1 ESV)

My people are bent on turning away from me,
and though they call out to the Most High,
he shall not raise them up at all. (Hosea 11:7 ESV)

How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me;



my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my burning anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and not a man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.
They shall go after the LORD;
he will roar like a lion;
when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west;
they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,
and like doves from the land of Assyria,
and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD. (Hosea 11:8–11 ESV)

- Psalm 78:40
- Ephesians 4:30
- Isaiah 62:5
- Exodus 32:10
- Isaiah 54:8
- Psalm 103:17
- 1 John 4:11

The Sovereignty and Transcendence of God

- God is completely sovereign.
 - Jeremiah 32:17
 - Proverbs 16:33
 - Ephesians 1:11
 - Isaiah 46:10
- God is sovereign over who is saved.
 - Acts 13:48
 - Ephesians 1:4-5
 - 1 Timothy 5:21
- God's sovereignty does not lead us to fatalism.
 - The doctrine of compatibilism says God's sovereignty and our responsibility are compatible.
 - Genesis 50:19-20
 - Acts 4:27-28
- Not only is God sovereign, he is also immutable, that is, he does not change.
 - Malachi 3:6
 - God is completely unchanging in his being, purposes, plans, and perfections, but this does not mean God cannot interact with those in time and space.



- In 1 Samuel chapter 15 God says he regrets making Saul king in verses 10 and 25. However, we read in verses 28 and 29,

And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” (1 Samuel 15:28–29 ESV)

- We must maintain biblical compatibilism.

A Rightly Constrained Impassibility

- The Bible is clear that God is wrathful, and God expresses love.
- An inadequate solution is to say that the immanent Trinity, which refers to the transcendent God in himself and the internal working of the Trinity, is utterly impassible, and the economic Trinity, which focuses on God’s actions in relation to his creation, suffers, including suffering because of love.
- We cannot separate God’s emotions, including his love, from his knowledge, power, and will.
- God controls his affections; his affections do not control him.
- God’s affections flow from who he is, they do not define who he is.
- Impassibility does not exclude emotion or affections in God, but impassibility ensures that God’s immutability is maintained when thinking about the personal aspects of God.

Conclusion

- It is not wrong to understand that there are differences between the words.
- The differences between the words are not the primary consideration when interpreting a passage that uses these words, context is more important.

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. (John 3:35 ESV)

For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. (John 5:20a ESV)

- In John 3:35 the Greek verb is *agapeo*, and in John 5:20 the Greek verb is *phileo*. There is no difference in meaning between the two verses and there is no indication in John 5:20, where *phileo* is used, that the Father is more emotional than in John 3:35, where *agapeo* is used.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do



you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15–17 ESV)

- What grieves Peter is Jesus asks him the third time if he loves him.
- The context does not support using the nuances between the words to interpret the passage.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. (2 Peter 1:5–7 ESV)

- Brotherly affection translates *philadelphia* and love translates *agape*.
- The difference between *phileo* and *agapeo* must be recognized.
- We cannot add distinctions in the text because of word distinctions if the context does not support it.
- God’s love is not a purely unemotional, willed love, but also includes affection.
- God’s impassibility ensures that God’s immutability is maintained without sacrificing his personal aspects.