

AGAPE Love

A different perspective on Christian Love

“The disciple whom Jesus loved” declared that **'God is Love'** - in both 1 John 4 vs 8 and 1 John 4 vs 16.

Jesus did not preach in Greek, but there seems to be no doubt amongst the early Christians responsible for taking Christianity to the Greek speaking world (including Paul) that **'agape'** was the most appropriate word for the love that was central to Jesus Kingdom message.

1John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God. 8 The one who does not love has not known God. For God is love.

This love, like God and like the Kingdom of God, is coinherent:

1John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

In sharing in the revelation and experience of the true nature of this agape love, we come to know and experience God. But if we do not know the King as agape love, we have no way of understanding the nature of His Kingdom.

Christians are often led to believe that **'agape love'** :

- was a new word coined by the early Christians, as they did not want to use any of the existing Greek words for love because of their associations
- received its definition from Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.
- is an “I make a choice to love you even if I don't like you” kind of love.

But is this true? Did 1 Corinthians 13 define the word 'agape', or did it merely qualify and redeem a word that was already known?

- **Agape love had a historical context.**
- **Agape love was already defined by the Greek Old Testament – The Septuagint - principally in the song of Solomon.**
- **Agape love is Song of Solomon love, and only the heart graced to apprehend Gods passionate and eternally "in love" kind of love can know God.**

A Kingdom consciousness is a constant state of being in love. The Sky is bluer and the grass is greener, and unlike human love this state of being in love is eternal and consequently cannot fade over time.

The Kingdom is manifested in our corporate experience of the coinherent and interpenetrating love of God. We love in proportion to the extent of our experiential knowledge (gnosis) that we are indeed in Christ (who is love) and Christ (who is love) is in us, and we are in each other.

We don't have to make ongoing choices -if we experience this Kingdom reality, the love of God constrains us.

Defining Agape love

Can we justify defining agape love as an 'in love' kind of love?

Christian 'agape' is certainly a kind of love distinct from any other love in human experience, but as we have stated, the noun 'agape' clearly existed prior to its use in the NT texts, and the word and its definition was well known to the Greek New Testament authors.

There are different words for love in the Greek including 'Phileo' - brotherly love, 'Eros' - erotic love, and 'agape'.

This standard Church line is pretty much summed up in the **Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church** and its definitions of both 'Love' and 'agape'.

In Christian Theology, the principle of God's action and man's response. Of the words used in Greek for 'love', neither philia (dutiful or filial affection) nor eros (passionate emotion) is adequate to the Christian conception, which the NT expressed as 'agape', a word hardly used before **except in the LXX**.....

Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (Love definition) (emphasis mine)

and

The word **which probably first occurs in the Septuagint**, is believed to have been coined by the sacred authors from the verb agapao to avoid the sensual associations of the ordinary Greek noun eros. It is used only twice in the synoptics (Matt 24 v 12 and Luke 11 v 42), but often in St John and Pauline (esp. 1 Cor 13) and Johannine epistles, and always of the love of God or Christ, or of the Love of Christians for one another.....

Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church ('agape' definition) (emphasis mine)

However, I believe this falls short of giving the full picture.

'agape' and the LXX

The LXX or Septuagint, was the Hellenistic Jews Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. It was the Greek Old Testament around in the time of Jesus and the early Church.

And the LXX is where the noun 'agape' first appears.

The verb agapao certainly was used in classical Greek literature, and is defined in **Liddell & Scott Intermediate Lexicon**:

-agapaô- [I] of persons, to treat with affection, to caress, love, be fond of.

But other than a few very obscure occasions - one alluding to the Egyptian goddess Isis, (agapê theôn, title of Isis, POxy.1380.109) and another an erotic pet-name of a naked woman on a 5th century BC earthenware pot, the abstract noun 'agape' was unknown.

Catherine Osborne, in **Eros Unveiled, Plato and the God of Love** states

Abstract nouns are not used in Greek so much as they are in English, and many ideas that we should express with a noun would normally come out better in Greek if we used a verb or participle instead. Why then, should anyone writing in Greek favour the noun **agape** when he could use the verb?

In stating that the use of Love as a noun was very rare in Classical Greek, Osborne also points out it was also even more rare in Hebrew thought. She also points out that the preference for the noun

over the verb is largely associated with Paul in the New Testament, and with the Song of Solomon in the Septuagint.

So then, if we go back to the Septuagint, and have a look at the 'agape' passages, we should be able to get some context for this word.

And when we do, we find that more often than not, the noun 'agape' refers to sexual love or at least a profoundly "in love" kind of love.

Agape Love in the Greek Septuagint

The Septuagint is the Greek Translation of the Old Testament known to the early Christian Church. Given the use of agape in Classical Greek was very rare, and the Septuagint was well known to the early Greek Christians, the Septuagint offers us an important clue in understanding the nature of God (God is agape) and the Kingdom of God that Jesus came preaching.

2 Samuel 13:15

καὶ ἐμίσησεν αὐτήν Ἀμνων μῖσος μέγα σφόδρα, ὅτι μέγα τὸ μῖσος, ὃ ἐμίσησεν αὐτήν, ὑπὲρ τὴν **ἀγάπην**, ἣν ἠγάπησεν αὐτήν. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ Ἀμνων Ἀνάστηθι καὶ πορεύου.

Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, and the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the 'agape' with which he had loved her.....¹

Ecclesiastes 9:1

Ὅτι σὺν πᾶν τοῦτο ἔδωκα εἰς καρδίαν μου, καὶ καρδία μου σὺν πᾶν εἶδεν τοῦτο, ὡς οἱ δίκαιοι καὶ οἱ σοφοὶ καὶ ἔργασίαι αὐτῶν ἐν χειρὶ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ γε **ἀγάπην** καὶ γε μῖσος οὐκ ἔστιν εἰδῶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος· τὰ πάντα πρὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν,

For all this I took to heart, even to make all this clear, that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. No man knows either 'agape' or hatred by all that is before them.

Song of Solomon 2:4

Εἰσαγάγετέ με εἰς οἶκον τοῦ οἴνου, τάξατε ἐπ' ἐμὲ **ἀγάπην**.

he brought me to his banqueting house and his banner over me was 'agape'

Song of Solomon 2:7

ὦρκισα ὑμᾶς, θυγατέρες Ἱερουσαλημ, ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἰσχύσεσιν τοῦ ἀγροῦ, ἐὰν ἐγείρητε καὶ ἐξεγείρητε τὴν **ἀγάπην**, ἕως οὗ θελήσῃ.

I adjure you, Oh daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the Roes of the field do not stir up or awaken 'agape' until it pleases.

Song of Solomon 3:5

Song 3:5 ὦρκισα ὑμᾶς, θυγατέρες Ἱερουσαλημ, ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἰσχύσεσιν τοῦ ἀγροῦ, ἐὰν ἐγείρητε καὶ ἐξεγείρητε τὴν **ἀγάπην**, ἕως ἂν θελήσῃ.

do not awaken 'agape' until it pleases

¹ If you are into hermeneutics the **law of first mention** would result in agape being defined in 2 Samuel 15 vs 13!

Song of Solomon 3:10

στύλους αὐτοῦ ἐποίησεν ἀργύριον καὶ ἀνάκλιτον αὐτοῦ χρύσειον, ἐπίβασις αὐτοῦ πορφυρᾶ, ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ λιθόστρωτον, **ἀγάπην** ἀπὸ θυγατέρων Ἱερουσαλημ.

He made its poles of silver, its back gold, its seat of purple, its middle was paved with 'agape' by the daughters of Jerusalem.

Song of Solomon 8:4

ὥρκισα ὑμᾶς, θυγατέρες Ἱερουσαλημ, ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἰσχύσεσιν τοῦ ἀγροῦ, τί ἐγείρητε καὶ τί ἐξεγείρητε τὴν **ἀγάπην**, ἕως ἂν θελήσῃ.

Many waters cannot quench 'agape', nor will the rivers overflow it. If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be scorned.

Song of Solomon 8:7

ὕδωρ πολὺ οὐ δυνήσεται σβέσαι τὴν ἀγάπην, καὶ ποταμοὶ οὐ συγκλύσουσιν αὐτήν· ἐὰν δῶ ἀνὴρ τὸν πάντα βίον αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ **ἀγάπῃ**, ἐξουδενώσει ἐξουδενώσουσιν αὐτόν.

many waters cannot quench 'agape' nor can floods drown it

The Septuagint passages speak for themselves, and fortunately not all authorities sweep the truth under the carpet.

One of the more intellectually honest presentations is found in **Hastings. J Dictionary of the Bible**.

Under the reference for **Love in the LXX** we read:

All these varieties of love, human and divine, may in the LXX be expressed by the verb agapao and noun 'agape'. In the story of Samson and Delilah agapao describes sexual relationship (Judges 16 v 4, 15) not to mention Solomon's legalised lust (3 K 11 v 2), besides expressing love in its higher reaches.... In the Greek Bible in the form that it must have been known to the NT writers, agapao does duty for every shade and variety of love, for divine pity and preference for Israel right down to erotic passion. It is true that agapao is not the only verb to express erotic love in the LXX, for there are also pro-aireomai and enthumeomai (Heb hshk ethelo hps); but it is very commonly used to render Hebrew hb when the context makes plain that this very type of love or passion is intended. Nor has agapao the monopoly for rendering what may be described as reasoning attachment; thus the more usual verbs for divine pity are eleeo and oikterio. The noun 'agape' is usually connected with sex, or at least with the love of women; or it is a passion comparable in intensity with hatred; it is not at all a higher love than philia. Indeed in the LXX agapao may be said to be a higher type of love than AGAPE (c.f. especially Hosea 11 v 4, Zephaniah 3 v 17, Jeremiah 38 (31) v 3)

The Kiss

The Kiss was foundational to the early Christian sharing of 'agape'. Initially in the Communal life of the believers, and later in the liturgy..

From the early texts it was not an 'I don't like you but I choose to love you' kind of 'charity' kiss!

- In the kiss of peace, the action of the Holy Spirit enabled Christians to meet in one body and one spirit in the divine and boundless love. ²

² The Divine Liturgy of Mark

- The kiss of peace was freely given between all members of the church, both male and female, it was given on the lips, and was described as mystical, a uniting together and a merging of souls³.
- Christian women would creep into prisons to 'kiss a martyrs bonds'⁴, and the kiss shared by martyrs before death was seen as a consummation of their martyrdom.⁵ Christians had an expectation of receiving the kiss in fullness on a saints reception in heaven after death.⁶
- Shared Prayer and the sacraments were considered to be incomplete without the exchange of the kiss. The kiss of peace was the seal of prayer.⁷ There were warnings about repeating a kiss merely to replicate the pleasurable feelings elicited, and warnings that the kiss should be given carefully and without defilement of thought.⁸
- By the kiss the strength of love was impressed. The mystery of the kiss of peace was that it was the kiss of the heart and soul, and it could not be given without faith and love⁹. The kiss of peace had a sweetness through faith, love, and affection¹⁰. The kiss soothed and levelled.¹¹
- The kiss of peace supernaturally gave grace and made peace. The kiss was a fuel for love, kindling a love in relationships implanted by spiritual grace, far stronger than the love associated with relationships implanted by nature.¹²
- The kiss was of a different character to kisses given in public by common friends. The kiss blended souls one with another, and courted forgiveness for them. The kiss spoke of souls mingled together, and the banishing of all remembrance of wrongs.¹³
- In the kiss souls were bound to each other. After an absence Christians would kiss each other, their 'souls hastening to mutual intercourse'. It was in the kiss of peace that the workings of the soul were declared most clearly.¹⁴
- In kissing a brother or sister a Christian was sacramentally sharing in the Church's kiss of Christ. The Church had kisses as a bride. This kiss of peace was described as a pledge of espousals and the prerogative of wedlock.¹⁵

The metaphor of the Bride and Bridegroom

The New Testament writers, did not as the modern Christian Church reconstruction has inferred, 'invent' a word for love that had no 'unsavoury' connotations. And if they were simply looking to communicate a simple doctrine brotherly love, there was always 'phileo' .

The simple reason the earliest Church chose agape is that like 'seed and soil', and 'word and hearing', Bride/Bridegroom love is the perfect kingdom metaphor.

Both Old and New Testament God/Human relationships have been described in terms of bride/bridegroom love.

Old Testament

Jeremiah 2 v 32, 3 v 20 , 31 v 32, Ezekiel 13 v 32, 16 v 7-8, Hosea 2 v 2,

New Testament

3 St Cyril of Jerusalem (315 -386 AD)

4 Tertullian (160 - 230 AD)

5 Martyrdom of St Perpetua 200 AD

6 Cyprian Epistle XV

7 Tertullian (160 - 230 AD)

8 Athenagoras (2nd Century AD)

9 Augustine

10 St Ambrose - Letter to his Sister XLI

11 Chrysostom Sermon XXX on Romans

12 St Augustine (354 - 430 AD)

13 St Cyril of Jerusalem (315 -386 AD)

14 St Augustine (354 - 430 AD)

15 St Ambrose - Letter to his Sister XLI

John 3 v 29, 2 Cor 11 v 2, Eph 5 v 32, Rev 21 v 2

In Jesus and the Kingdom of God, the character of bride/bridegroom love is redeemed and is undergoing a massive and positive transformation from the jealous, seemingly hopelessly frustrated relationship of the Old Testament, to actual present tense and mutually experienced coinherent "Kingdom within" love, with the confident hope of total and full consummation when the Kingdom comes in fullness.

Coinherent Love

John states not only that God is agape love, but we will be identified as Jesus disciples if we love one another.

The Original in Greek is rather different in construction and somewhat awkward when translated. It says if we "have love in one another"

Coming to grips with this awkwardness is however vitally important.

This passage introduces us to the concept of coinherent love.

Coinherence could also be understood as mutual interpenetration, and is the substance of the Trinity, and our inclusion into the Trinity.

Our inclusion into the coinherent love of the Trinity is the substance of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven.

John 17:21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. **22** And I have given them the glory which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one, **23** I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.

1Jo 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Paul also states this coinherence as the mystery of the Kingdom. We are in Christ and Christ is in us.

Col 1:26 the secret that has been hid from the ages and from the generations, but now was manifested to his saints, **27** to whom God did will to make known what is the riches of the glory of this secret among the nations--which is **Christ in you**, the hope of the glory, **28** whom we proclaim, warning every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect **in Christ Jesus**,

Unfortunately like being now seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, the coinherent interpenetration we share with God and with one another is unfortunately more a legal truth than an experiential truth.

We are coinherent through the action of Christ, but we don't experience it!

We dont have experiential knowledge.

Gnosis

Gnosis is the Greek term for experiential knowledge as distinct from second hand knowledge, or knowledge passed on.

Kingdom Gnosis comes through love (agape) within and without. Within – Through drinking love (drinking the Holy Spirit who is love). Without - Through being clothed with love (clothed with the virtues, the fruit of the Spirit who is Love).

Clothed with Love – Clothed with the Virtues

Being clothed with love is a primary key of the Kingdom of Heaven.

To be clothed with Love is to put on the wedding garment, without which it is impossible to enter the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Mat 22:12 And he said to him, Friend, how did you come in here without having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

It is analogous to being clothed with light, being clothed with our heavenly residence, putting on Christ, and receiving a Spiritual body.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the awareness and experience of the state of coinherence (mutual interpenetration) that we have **in** Christ and Christ **in** us. This is true Gnosis - the experiential knowledge that we are seated in heavenly places **in** Christ Jesus.

Eph 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love *with* which He loved us 5 (even when we were dead in sins) has made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are saved), 6 and has raised *us* up together and made *us* sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

It is where we experience the coinherence of the Trinity, and coinherence with eachother.

God is Love, God is Light. Love, like light, is comprised of a rainbow of colours. This rainbow of love is the Virtues. The fruit of the Spirit.

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, 23 meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 But those belonging to Christ have crucified the flesh with *its* passions and lusts. 25 If we live in *the* Spirit, let us also walk in *the* Spirit.

We are the Sons of God, the Sons of Light.

1Jo 1:5 And this is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

We are clothed with love as a seed is clothed with good soil. And in this soil the true incorruptible seed of who we are draws life, and we are born again in the Kingdom of Heaven with a body that comprises the substance of heaven, the virtues.

1Peter 1:22 Purifying your souls in the obedience of the truth through the Spirit to unfeigned love of the brothers, love one another fervently out of a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living Word of God, and abiding forever.

The fruiting of the Spirit is analogous with the sonship of God.

Clearly the Spirit is God. The Fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of God.

2 Corinthians 3:17 And the Lord is Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord Spirit.

The word for Fruit in Greek is Karpos. (καρπός) Things bring forth fruit after their kind.

Mat 7:16 You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?

The bottom line is that we can experience the Kingdom of heaven now.

Luk 17:20 And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered and said, The kingdom of God does not come with observation. 21 Nor shall they say, Lo here! or, behold, there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

We do not have to wait until our mortal body is placed in the ground. The key lies in a different kind of dying. Dying to the flesh. This has nothing to do with wearing a hairshirt and whipping oneself when we feel like the desires of the flesh are rising up.

It has to do with where our mind or consciousness (our Gnosis) is. If our consciousness is in our mortal life in the flesh or our eternal life in the spirit.

Rom 8:5 For they who are according to the flesh mind the things of flesh, but they who are according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace 7 because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can it be. 8 So then they who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of the One who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the One who raised up Christ from the dead shall also make your mortal bodies alive by His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 Therefore, brothers, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die. But if you through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Drinking Love – Drinking the Holy Spirit

We must be born again. We must drink of the Spirit until the spirit overwhelms our fleshly consciousness, and our fleshly consciousness or knowing is superceded by agape love consciousness.

Joh 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

We must understand ourselves no longer as our human body but as the incorruptible seed of who we are within the heart of the Father. The seed is our most fundamental consciousness or knowing.

We must choose the right soil to die within.

As a seed dies by breaking its outer covering and becoming naked in the soil, it is then able to drink in the nourishment of the soil. It is then in a position to grow and bring forth fruit.

Our flesh consciousness is the outer covering of the eternal seed or word of who we truly are. Die to the flesh consciousness and be reborn to a spirit consciousness, an agape consciousness. As we drink of the Spirit, we are clothed with love, clothed with the virtues as with a spiritual body and see what the eternal virtues see, experience what the eternal virtues experience.

We are then in a position to experience the intimate coinherence with God and each other that is impossible to experience in the flesh.

This is the inheritance of the sons of God. This is the Kingdom of God.

Thomas 28 Jesus said, "I took my place in the midst of the world, and I appeared to them in flesh. I found all of them intoxicated; I found none of them thirsty. And my soul became afflicted for the sons of men, because they are blind in their hearts and do not have sight; for empty they came into the world, and empty too they seek to leave the world. But for the moment they are intoxicated. When they shake off their wine, then they will repent."

Thomas 108 Jesus says: "Whoever will drink from my mouth will become like me. I myself will become he, and what is hidden will be revealed to him."

Thomas 13 ... Thomas said to him: Teacher, my mouth will not bear at all to say whom you are like." Jesus said: "I am not your teacher. For you have drunk, you have become intoxicated at the bubbling spring that I have measured out."

Song 5:1 I have come into my garden, my sister spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends; drink, yea, become intoxicated, O Beloved.

Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let the *one* hearing say, Come! And let the *one* who is thirsty come. And he willing, let him take of the Water of Life freely.

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