



HELPS Word-Studies

An excerpt from *The Discovery Bible* by HELPS Ministries.

26 *agápē* – properly, *love*, centering in moral *preference*. In secular ancient Greek, 26 (*agapē*) likewise focuses on *preference* as does the verb (25/*agapaō*) – in antiquity meaning "to *prefer*" (TDNT, 7). In the NT, 26 (*agapē*) typically refers to *divine love* (what God prefers).

26/*agapē* ("God's *love*, what He *prefers*") has *moral (spiritual) content* which always "makes *distinctions, choosing* its objects *freely*" by God's *revelation* (TDNT). God's love (26/*agapē*) operates in the believer as they *prefer what God prefers*. Accordingly, *biblical love* (26/*agapē*) is always *God-defined* – *never neighbor-defined* nor *self-defined*. God alone determines (reveals) love because "*God is love*" (1 Jn 4:8,16).

It is a logical fallacy that a statement *must be also true* in reverse. For example, "God is love" – but "*love is not God!*"

1 Jn 4:8: "The one who does not love does not know God, *for God is love* (26/*agapē*)" (NASB).

For lengthy discussion on God's nature (attributes) see 2316/*theos* ("God").

1. 26/*agapē* ("love, divine *preference*") describes all of God's being and actions. Love (26/*agapē*) always seeks a person's *highest (eternal) good*, i.e. as it is in keeping with *what God prefers*. For the believer this is *the affirmation of what the Lord affirms, and the rejection of what God hates* (cf. Ps 97:10).

Reflection: Love in Scripture is not a *thing* nor an "it," but rather the Lord extending *Himself*, through faith (4102/*pistis*, "His inbirthed *persuasion*").

2. 26/*agapē* ("love, divine *preference*") "involves recognition and *judgment of value*, whence its frequent nuance of '*preference*.' The verb *agapaō* most often means '*value, set great store by, hold in high esteem*'; . . . it is essential to charity [love] to *manifest* itself, to *demonstrate* itself, to *provide proofs, to put itself on display*; so much so that in the NT it would almost always be necessary to translate *agapē* as '*demonstration of love*'" (C. Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, Vol 1*, 1994, 11-13, italics added).

[Before the NT, Greek did not frequently use the term *agapē*, but when it did it suggested "moral preference."]

3. *Biblical love* centers in *moral preference* and hence for the believer means "the *preference* reflecting God's will" as revealed through *faith* (4102/*pistis*, "the persuasion of God about what He *prefers*"). Accordingly, *faith* (4102/*pistis*) and *love* (26/*agapē*) are directly connected.

- Gal 5:6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but *faith* (4102/*pistis*) working *through* (1223/*dia* with the genitive case) *love*" (NASB).

1223 (*dia*) portrays *love* as the intermediary agent which completes God's inbirthing of *faith to its consummation*. The Lord's gift (inworking) of *faith* – the source-revelation – consummates *through* God's *love* so the believer can act as *His hand extended* (1 Jn 4:17). Divine *love consummates* divinely-given *faith*.

- 2 Tim 2:22: "Now (continuously) flee from youthful lusts and (continuously) pursue righteousness, *faith* (4102/*pistis*), *love* (26/*agapē*) and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (NASB).
- 1 Jn 5:3,4: "³For this is *the love* (26/*agapē*) of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our *faith* (4102/*pistis*)" (NASB).
- Rev 2:19: "I know your deeds, and your *love* (26/*agapē*) and *faith* (4102/*pistis*) and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first" (NASB).

Reflection: The believer is called to live in God's *love* (26/*agapē*), see Jude 21 – i.e. displaying God's preferences acquired through *faith*. Accordingly *faith precedes love*: God first births His *persuasion* within and the believer then "puts Him on display" – "through (the power of His) *love* (26/*agapē*)" – see Gal 5:6 (Gk text). See also the important sequence of theological terms in 2 Tim 2:22.

Love (26/*agapē*) is also directly connected therefore with living in "God's *preferred-will*" (2307/*thelēma*) – see: 2 Cor 8:5,7,8; Eph 1:4,5; Col 1:8,9; 1 Jn 2:15,17.