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## **“God is love” - Why does the New Testament have four different words for love?**



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*This fragment of John's gospel is in the library at Manchester University. It is written on both sides showing that it is a copy, and not the original. The fragment is known as P52, the Rylands fragment, and it is dated between 117AD and 138AD, making it the oldest surviving copy of any portion of the New Testament.*

Modern languages have far, far more words today than ancient languages. So it is that there are less than 6000 words in the ancient greek of the New Testament whereas there are over 200000 english words in use today. The ancient greek of the Bible is called “koine greek”.

Therefore the ancient greek in which the New Testament of the Bible was written, the koine greek, contains around just 3% of the words of our language. What that means is that ancient languages only contain important, essential words. There really are not enough words in an ancient language to duplicate unnecessarily.

Almost all of the Old Testament in the Bible is written in ancient Hebrew and it is the New Testament of the Bible that is written in koine greek and not ancient Hebrew at all.

The Ancient Hebrew is nothing like modern Hebrew and even 200 years before Jesus Christ the Jews themselves translated the Old testament scriptures into greek because hardly anyone knew ancient Hebrew as a language, whereas greek was the common trading language of the time and widely known and used.

Even in the Bible we have a reference in John's gospel that indicates that Jesus Christ and his disciples are likely to have spoken greek alongside their native aramaic language. In

the Gospel of John at chapter 12, in verses 20 to 26, we are told that Jesus and disciples met and talked with some Greeks.

So it is that, entirely as expected, ancient Hebrew of the Bible only has one word for love. Yet, in spite of hundreds of thousands of words in modern English there is equally only one word for love in English, with the possible exception of “friendship”. However, koine greek (the greek of the New Testament) has four different words for love.

**Eros**, from which we get the modern English word, “erotic” and “eroticism”, is the old greek word for sexual love.

**Storge** is the ancient greek word for family-love, love of your children, your brothers and sisters, love of your parents.

**Philia** is friendship type of love.

**Agape** is caring love.

Since ancient languages only contain important, essential words, so it is that the four words in koine greek are both DIFFERENT and important.

You can now see that the four types of different love described in the Bible and that they are noticeably different from each other. In modern English we achieve the same end by using an adjective to describe what type of love:

**Eros** = “sexual love”.

**Storge** = “familial love”.

**Philia** = “friendship type of love”.

**Agape** = “caring love”.

The phrase “God is love” only appears once in the Bible and it is not even in the Gospels of the New testament. The phrase “God is love” is actually in one of the letters of the New Testament. In the letter 1 John chapter 4 at verse 8 it says:

*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

Yet that is not a good translation because the phrase “God is love” uses the word **Agape**. It is not sexual love at all. The phrase is telling us that God cares for us by loving us, i.e. caring for us. Christians should therefore care for others, just as God cares for us.

Christianity is the ONLY faith in which GOD dies for us and GOD gives us forgiveness so long as we believe in our Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour. That’s just how much God cares for us, i.e. loves us, that God even died for us.

St Paul says in Romans chapter 8:

*<sup>7</sup> The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.*

As St Paul wrote in the letter to the Romans at chapter 5:

*<sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...*

We are told in the Bible that we are all made in God's image. Therefore we are all equal and equally valuable. So we are all made in God's image and we are all being transformed to be more and more Christ-like if we accept Christ as our Saviour and accept His work in our lives.

And as it says in Romans chapter 8:

*<sup>1</sup> There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

God's caring love for us isn't just in the New Testament but even right at the beginning in creation have you ever noticed that when God has to expel Adam and Eve from out of the Garden of Eden it is then that God gives them each a coat to keep them warm? That is how much God cares for each of us – God cares for us always.

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