

"A STUDY OF  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$  IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE"

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to consider the word ἁγᾶπῆ as used in the Greek New Testament.

The thesis considers most importantly what Scripture itself tells the reader concerning the "God-filled" content of ἁγᾶπῆ . It is this author's prayer that his efforts are blessed by God in the personal lives of those who consider this thesis as well as in the lives of those whom they are called by God to serve.

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A HEARTFELT "THANK YOU" TO MY WIFE, LISA,  
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"A STUDY OF ἁγῶνη IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE"

The continuing challenge which faces any student of Scripture is understanding and then communicating clearly and exactly the wondrous message which God has seen fit to expound in His Holy Word. Edward Young wrote concerning this matter, "Indeed, one of the greatest services that anyone can render the modern church is to rescue the vocabulary of revealed religion from the eviscerating process to which such terminology has been subject for a good many years." <sup>1</sup> Although the usage of words may change considerably over the course of years, it must be remembered when studying Scripture that the words appearing in the Greek and Hebrew texts were not chosen merely by the whim of man's mind. They were words which were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as a revelation from God to man. Ultimately, they are not the words of Moses, prophets, apostles or evangelists, but they are in their fullest sense, the words of God. As Paul so aptly reminds us:

We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward J. Young, My Servants the Prophets, p 79.

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 2:12-13

Although it was the writer who moved the pen to record the words in written form, it was God who directed the mind and heart of the writers to record the words which were even to them at times somewhat of a mystery. When speaking concerning the gracious working of our God in connection with our salvation, Peter wrote :

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. <sup>3</sup>

With those facts in mind, questions concerning variations in style, vocabulary, and the point of view of the author should not trouble one's mind. God used numerous writers known and unknown by name to record the sixty-six canonical books of Scripture. God used their minds and hearts together with their vocabulary and intellect when recording through them the mysteries which he saw fit to convey to mankind. It is therefore, not unexpected to find variations of the type noted above. Since they are also his mysteries which were formerly unknown to the mind of man except for God's gracious working, it is further not unexpected to find the writers amazed at the messages which they were moved to convey in written form.

The challenge today many years after the original writing is to examine the actual usage of the words of Scripture first in their immediate contexts and then in the context of Scripture as a whole to determine the concepts which specific words are conveying to us from the mind of God. Such is the aim of this work as we study God's usage of the Greek word ἀγαπᾶν and its related verb form ἀγαπᾶω in the

<sup>3</sup> I Peter 1:10-12

light of his Holy Word. This study will be presented following this outline.

- A) An Introductory Investigation into the Subject on the Basis of Anders Nygren's Agape and Eros.
  - B) An Overview of the Various Words for "Love" Occuring in the New Testament.
  - C) A Study of the Usage of the Words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω When Penned by the New Testament Writers.
  - D) An Insight into the Qualities of Love Displayed in an Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 13. And finally,
  - E) Thoughts Concerning the Relevance of this Study to the Homiletical Treatment of Scripture.
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A) An Introductory Investigation into the Subject on the Basis of

Anders Nygren's Agape and Eros

Numerous works of varying length relating to this subject are available as one begins to approach this subject.<sup>4</sup> Among them are listed H. Drummond's "The Greatest Thing in the World" (1894), J. Moffatt's "Love in the New Testament" (1929), H. Preisker's "Die ur-christliche Botschaft der Liebe Gottes" (1930), J. Burnaby's "Amor Dei" (1938), M.C. D'Arcy's "The Mind and Heart of Love" (1945), C.H. Dodd's "The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel" and others in various languages. Numerous of these, especially D'Arcy (1945) and Burnaby (1938) were, however, reactions to another work which appeared earlier in time.

Agape and Eros, written by Anders Nygren, Bishop of Lund, first made its appearance in 1932. The book appeared in two parts. The first part consisting of a study of the Christian idea of love appeared in 1932. The second appeared in the year 1938 and expounded upon the history of the Christian idea of love. The total work in English translation consists of 764 pages of material. Since the usage of the words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω as they appear in Scripture is our aim, the first portion of Nygren's book is of greater relevance to the subject at hand.

That portion of Nygren's research can aptly serve as an introduction to our study. The translator's preface sets forth the author's intent in writing.

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<sup>4</sup>George Arthur Buttrick, ed., Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 3, p 178.

Part I of this work consists of a study of the Christian idea of love as it appears in the New Testament and in contrast to the Hellenistic idea. With this, both the starting-point for the history of the Christian idea of love is given and also the essential distinction between the two 'fundamental motifs' (Eros and Agape) which have left their impress upon it. That history is described in Part II up to the point where the problem of 'Agape and Eros' finds its natural solution in the Reformation. It is substantially the story of how a synthesis of these two 'motifs' was prepared, completed, and destroyed. In his original Preface to Part I the author explained why he had chosen the Reformation as his terminus ad quem. It was not that the Christian idea of love had had no history since the Reformation, nor that the problem of 'Agape and Eros' had ceased to exist as a result of the solution then found for it. It was rather because the development of Christian thought about love had proceeded along somewhat different lines, and could not very suitably be discussed under the heading of 'Agape and Eros'.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout his writing Nygren speaks of the "fundamental motif" which is expressed with the use of the words in question. Concerning the use of that "label," the author writes:

The primary associations of the term are perhaps with the realm of art. The fundamental motif is that which makes a work of art into a unified whole, determines its structure and gives it its specific character. It is the constant theme that constantly recurs in new variations, imparting its own tone and colour to the whole. But broad and indefinite statements like these are insufficient to show the precise sense in which we are using the term 'fundamental motif'. For this purpose the following definition may be given: A fundamental motif is that which forms the answer given by some particular outlook to a question of such a fundamental nature that it can be described in a categorical sense as a fundamental question. ... When we speak of a fundamental motif we are moving in the realm of those comprehensive, ultimate questions ... The fundamental motif is the answer given by some particular type of outlook to one or more of these questions.<sup>6</sup>

A demonstration can be noted from the author's method of approaching the historical development of the word ἀγάπη in the second part of his book. When tracing the history of the Christian idea of

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5 Anders Nygren, AGAPE AND EROS, p vii.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p 42-43.

Agape from New Testament times through St. Augustine and the Middle Ages and then onward to the writings of Luther, Nygren "examines what is noblest in the great antitheses of Catholicism and Protestantism by asking, What does each mean by Divine Love?"<sup>7</sup> When asking that kind of question of each successive generation beginning with the writers of Scripture, the church fathers and those contending for the faith at the time of Luther, Nygren notes Agape as the fundamental motif of Christianity which has undergone a type of evolution down through the ages. That process, Nygren further contends, has been affected by other questions such as "How is fellowship with God conceived; how is it supposed to be realized, in what does it consist?"<sup>8</sup> When seeking an answer to that question, Nygren offers his book as a study intended to trace the historical development of the "fundamental motif" of ἀγάπη as it has been expounded upon down through the ages and as influenced by the following concepts of "love."

The answers given to this question by Hellenism, by Judaism and by Christianity are conceived respectively in terms of Eros, of Nomos and of Agape. Man's desire for heavenly things, man's fulfilling of the Law and God's own love freely bestowed on the sinner - these are three different ways to fellowship with God. Eros, Nomos, and Agape - these are the fundamental motifs of Hellenism, Judaism and Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

In the sphere of these influences, Nygren believes that the fundamental motif of Agape developed. This evolutionary development is dependent upon situations round about the writer at any given point in time and place.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., cover page.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p x.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p xi.

While the historical development or usage of the word ἀγάπη following the writing of the New Testament canon may have changed, the usage of that word and its derived forms is most clear in the context of Scripture. When speaking of God's ἀγάπη as revealed in Christ, the author writes:

The full depth of divine Agape is not seen until it appears in "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here God's love is displayed in the redemption of lost, sinful men, who not only could not save themselves from sin and death, but deserved the very opposite of salvation - and can hardly be said to have been looking for the kind of salvation that was actually offered them. Both creation and redemption, therefore, are the work of "grace" or free, generous Agape. The Divine love that lets the sun shine and the rain fall on the just and the unjust and the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, are one and the same. Moreover, every genuinely Christian doctrine gives expression in one way or another to the thought of this love, from which also flows that essential principal of Christian ethical life: "Freely ye received, freely give." <sup>10</sup>

When writing concerning the essence of the word Agape, the author uses terms such as "spontaneous and unmotivated ... indifferent to value ... creative ... the initiator of fellowship with God." <sup>11</sup>

Having somewhat defined Agape with these terms, Nygren continues by applying those thoughts to the question of man's fellowship with God in the following manner:

... there is from man's side no way at all that leads to God. If such a thing as fellowship between God and man nevertheless exists, this can only be due to God's own action; God must Himself come to meet man and offer him His fellowship. There is thus no way for man to come to God, but only a way for God to come to man: the way of Divine forgiveness, Divine love. <sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p xii.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p 75ff.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p 80.

With that conclusion, the faithful student of Scripture can find no debate. As Paul so beautifully expresses that fact in his epistle to the Ephesian Christians:

God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves:<sup>13</sup> it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.

Bearing those thoughts in mind, Nygren declares Agape to be the Christian motif par excellence. For in the context of Agape is found the answer to the fundamental question of Christianity, "What is God?". Concerning that point the author writes:

Christianity replies with the Johannine formula: God is ἀγάπη. And to the ethical question, What is the Good, the "Good-in-itself?" the answer is similar: The Good is ἀγάπη and the ethical demand finds summary expression in the Commandment of Love, the commandment to love God and my neighbor. We have therefore every right to say that ἀγάπη is the centre of Christianity, the Christian motif par excellence, the answer to both the religious and the ethical question. Agape comes to us as a quite new creation of Christianity. It sets its mark on everything in Christianity. Without it nothing that is Christian would be Christian. Agape is Christianity's own original basic conception.<sup>14</sup>

Although they influenced one another in the historical development of their own fundamental motifs, Nygren correctly draws a sharp line between the concepts found in the terms Agape and Eros, one of Nygren's purposes for his book. As the author writes:

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 2:4-9

<sup>14</sup> Nygren, Op. Cit., p 47-48.

At this introductory stage it is most important to insist on the original absence of any relation between Eros and Agape. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, in his great work on Plato, has rightly expressed sharp condemnation of the common habit of confusing Platonic Eros with New Testament Agape. He says: "A brief but emphatic word of warning must here be given against the old but now no longer always harmless misunderstanding by which Plato's Eros is confused with the Agape to which Paul dedicates his 'Hymn of Love' in I Corinthians xiii... As the latter knew nothing of Eros, so the former knew nothing of Agape ... There cannot actually be any doubt that Eros and Agape belong originally to two entirely separate spiritual worlds, between which no direct communication is possible. They do not represent the same value in their respective context, so that they cannot in any circumstances be rightly substituted for one another." <sup>15</sup>

And yet again :

By representing it as the Agape of the Cross, Paul has given the Christian idea of Agape its highest and in a sense, final expression, and he has also clearly marked it off both from the legal piety of Judaism and from the Eros-piety of Hellenism. <sup>16</sup>

Although there are many thoughts set forth by Nygren which serve as wholesome food for thought when discussing the subject before us, there are also several observations which tend to disturb the reader. One such matter is found in the section of Nygren's writing dealing with the Johannine writings.

In a chapter titled "God is Agape" (Pages 146-159), Nygren declares that the final formulation of the Agape motif is John's writing of First John. He had noted that love is inseparably connected with fellowship with God in the Synoptic Gospels. He declares that one "cannot speak of love without speaking of fellowship with God, nor fellowship with God without speaking of love." <sup>17</sup> One implies the other. This is also the case when speaking of "love for one's

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p 31.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p 143.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p 146.

neighbor and love for enemies, for the meaning of that also is determined by its connection with God." <sup>18</sup> Paul then enlarged upon that theme by speaking more eloquently concerning God's ἀγάπη.

Nygren writes:

In Paul the connection between God and Agape is even more firmly established. What Agape is we come to know only through God's way of dealing with us; and the supreme manifestation of God's Agape is the Cross of Christ. "God commandeth His own ἀγάπη toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Paul is convinced that it is God who acts in Christ. When Christ dies for us who are weak, ungodly, sinful and enemies, this is the supreme revelation of Agape; but it can just as truly be said to be the supreme revelation of God. In the Cross of Christ, God and Agape are seen to be one; Paul has learnt from the Cross that God's mind and will towards us men is mere love and that Agape and God are quite simply inseparable. <sup>19</sup>

While Nygren sees in the Synoptic Gospels and still more clearly in Paul the thought of God and the thought of Agape "closely associated as to be virtually identified," <sup>20</sup> the formal step of declaring that "God is Agape" (I John 4:8,16) was finally declared by John. As Nygren tells us:

Whereas the Pauline "Agape of the Cross" gives the supreme description of the content of the primitive Christian Agape motif, the Johannine "God is Agape" gives the supreme formal statement of it. Nothing greater can be said than this: God is love... <sup>21</sup>

Nygren then goes on to note that many of the characteristics of Agape which are found in the rest of the New Testament are found also in the Gospel and Epistle of John. He further states that the Synoptic idea of Agape agrees with John's writings which speak of God's love "as manifested in two directions: towards God and towards men." <sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p 146.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p 147.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p 147.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p 148.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p 148.

While one can hardly debate the content of Nygren's writings at this point, there is a subtle undercurrent which seems to be almost silently implied in his writing. Although one must proceed with the greatest care when faulting a writer for what he does not say [other than that more might have been said for the sake of clarity], the author seems to imply the evolution of a word in Scripture which seemed to occur almost without the careful guidance of the Holy Spirit. As has been noted, the Synoptic Gospel writers, as well as John and Paul, were moved to write as God directed them. It is God who fills the words of Scripture with their meaning and not simply one writer personally developing the thoughts of another. If John has a way of expressing a concept which is different from that of Paul or the Synoptic Gospels, one can not simply infer that a change in meaning had occurred in the evolution of a word and that John and someone else are at odds with one another. More correctly speaking, Nygren could have spoken of the Holy Spirit filling the term ἀγάπη with yet another concept or the Holy Spirit speaking of the same concept in yet other terms. Rather Nygren speaks as if John weakened strong statements that "God is Love" with momentary lapses in his writing due to the Hellenistic influences and environment in which John found himself existing. Letting Nygren speak:

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Nor does the Johannine view of love display the strict unity and consistency that we found in Paul, for at many points there is a certain doubleness to be observed in what John says about Agape. Just when the Agape motif is brought to its highest expression it is also in a peculiar way weakened down. This raises the very difficult question of the general spiritual environment in which the Johannine writings and their conception of Agape arose. It has been commonly held that the environment might be described as Hellenistic-Oriental; and in recent times the matter has been complicated by a wide-spread tendency to associate the Johannine literature with the much-discussed Mandaean religion. If such a Hellenistic environment could be historically proved we should once more have an example of an encounter between Agape and Eros. In the Johannine idea of Agape we should see the Agape of primitive Christianity set in an environment of Hellenistic Eros and this environment might in some measure explain the modifications that can be observed in the Johannine conception. As the Hellenistic, or, alternatively, the Mandaean, theory is historically very dubious, however, we must let this mention of it suffice and in the account we shall give of the doubleness that is characteristic of the Johannine idea of Agape we must rely solely on the evidence furnished by this idea itself. We can do so the more readily since our present study is principally concerned with the question of its typical structure and this can be satisfactorily answered without waiting for the question of its environment and origin to be settled.<sup>23</sup>

Nygren then continues by expounding upon the three examples which in his opinion display the

duality of the Johannine idea of Agape ... : (1) in the Johannine "metaphysic of Agape" and its relation to spontaneous, unmotivated love; (2) in Christian love for "the brethren" and the particularism that is closely connected with it; (3) in the question of love for God and love for the world.<sup>24</sup>

If the purpose of this study was to offer a comprehensive scrutiny of Nygren's work, it would surely be in this area of his work<sup>25</sup> that one would spend much time. However, more important at this point would be a few pertinent comments concerning the conclusion which Nygren reached after conducting his study of the above "problems" as he sees them. Nygren wrote:

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p 150-151.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p 151.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p 146-159.

Now it can, of course, rightly be said that there need not be anything more in the Johannine passage quoted above than a certain vagueness of expression and terminology, so that we should not be justified in drawing any conclusions from it with regard to the meaning of Agape in John. Yet even with this qualification there is still a certain difference between the Johannine and the Pauline idea of Agape. Agape is a less sharply defined term in John than in Paul and the purity of the Agape motif is not so consciously guarded as to exclude the possibility of such modification as that suggested above ... the Johannine conception of love represents in a measure the transition to a stage where the Christian idea of love is no longer determined solely by the Agape motif, but by 'Eros and Agape'. The Agape-metaphysic, the particularism, the uncertain position between unmotivated and motivated love, the modification in the direction of acquisitive love - all these contribute in their various ways to that development. Furthermore, even if the attempts to interpret Johannine Christianity in essentially Oriental-Hellenistic terms should prove unsuccessful, it still remains that John's use of such terms as "light," "life," "know," "spirit," "glory," which can easily strike a Hellenistic-Gnostic note, creates a spiritual environment in which there would be at least some points of contact for the otherwise alien Eros motif. 26

Attributing to Scripture's holy writers a certain "vagueness of expression and terminology" influenced by the heathen environment in which that writer lived and worked suggests that the Holy Spirit who caused the writer to write is also imprecise and vague in his work of inspiration. In a veiled manner of speaking, Nygren is indicating that although John proceeded with great eagerness to advance the "fundamental motif" with the declaration that "God is Love," yet John simply used the wrong words in the examples referred to as "duality of John." That manner of approaching Scripture and the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration is in conflict with what Scripture clearly teaches concerning the doctrine of inspiration.

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26 Ibid., p 158-159.

Rather than questioning the precision of the God who speaks through his inspired Word, Nygren would be on a sounder foundation if he would question his own previously conceived ideas searching for his own failings in evaluating the text.

One further thought might be added. Nygren tends at times to dissect smaller portions of Scripture from the entire context of Scripture creating supposedly great and complex problems. Having found in the Synoptic Gospels the heart of Agape, Nygren is then troubled by John's method of speaking.

Nygren states:

*That it is* no imaginary difficulty is shown by the fact, among others, that in John we sometimes find - especially where God's love for the disciples is concerned - a clause explanatory of the love, introduced by "because," as in xvi.27: "The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me." The Johannine idea of Agape thus actually occupies a somewhat uncertain position between unmotivated and motivated love.

When separating this passage from the context of Scripture as a whole as well as also from John's own writings, a "problem" might seem to be present which in the context of Scripture can be explained without difficulty at all. The context of Scripture as a whole formulated by the same Holy Spirit precisely defines the doctrines which God would set before us for our salvation.

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Summary Thoughts: Although Nygren offers basically sound "food for thought" concerning the concept which God has implanted into the word ἀγάπη as it is used in Scripture, there are comments concerning the writing of John which call into question the author's basic belief concerning the doctrine of inspiration. With Nygren's wholesome thoughts in mind, let us proceed to the Scripture itself as we continue our study of God's inspired use of the words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω .

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B) An Overview of the Various Words for "LOVE" Occuring in the  
New Testament<sup>27</sup>

There are basically three words which are used in the Greek to convey the concept of "LOVE." They are ἀγάπη, φιλία and ἔρως. Beginning with the least important, ἔρως is the Greek word which is used to express the kind of love which involves sexual desire; a wordly kind of passionate sensual longing. The word was said to be a popular word in ancient Greek philosophical discussions concerning what one linguistic expert referred to as the "upward longings to the eternal and divine"<sup>28</sup> in connection with the idol worship of Corinth. The word carries with it the stain of sexually unclean practices observed in the worship of idols. It is probably the closest Greek word that could be used to describe much of the loving with which our present world seems obsessed under the banner of sexual freedom. It is probably due to the stain of uncleanness associated with the use of the word in Greek that the New Testament writers were moved by the Holy Spirit to avoid the word altogether.

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<sup>27</sup>W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich (ed.), A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p 5.

<sup>28</sup>G. Johnston, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, III, p 169.

The most frequently used Greek words for love in Scripture are ἀγάπη and φιλία . Both words are found in their noun as well as their verb forms. ἀγάπη appears in its noun form 111 times in the New Testament and is not used as a noun in only three books, Mark, Acts and James.<sup>29</sup> The KJV adds confusion by translating ἀγάπη 84 times with the word "love" and then translating the same Greek noun with the word "charity" 27 times following Vulgate's "caritas." φιλία as a noun is found only once in the New Testament in James 4:4 where it speaks negatively concerning "love" for the world, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship ( φιλία ) of the world is enmity with God?". I John 2:15 communicates that same message when it urges us to "love ( ἀγάπη ) not the world, neither the things that are in the world." The verb forms of these two nouns, ἀγαπάω used approximately 125 times in the New Testament and φιλέω used approximately 40 times, are frequently occurring words used to speak concerning both the kinds of loving that God does and does not desire.

In addition to the noun and verb forms describing "love," there are numerous noun and adjective compounds with φιλία prefix, such as, lover of children ( φιλότεκνος ), lover of husbands ( φίλανδρος ) love of brethren ( φιλαδελφία ), lover of God ( φιλόθεος ), lover of the good ( φιλάγαθος ), and then by contrast, love of money ( φιλαργυρία )

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<sup>29</sup> Numerical occurrences of given words throughout this study have been tabulated with the help of Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible by James Strong.

lover of pleasure (φιληδονος) and lover of oneself (φιλαυτος).

The noun and verb forms of φιλια, both frequently used in ancient classical Greek, denote the affection of a friend, a personal kind of attachment for another. The verb αγαπαω seems to present a similar kind of "loving" coupled with what one linguist referred to as a "deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety."

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance notes under the Greek word φιλεω :

from φίλος ; to be a friend to (fond of [an individual or an object], i.e. have affection for (denoting personal attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling; while αγαπαω is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety: the two thus stand related very much as θελω and βουλεμαι ...; the former being chiefly of the heart and the latter of the head)...

A most special and comforting truth becomes evident when one begins a study of the Greek noun which the Lord saw fit to move the writers to use in the form of αγαπη. The linguistic scholars are uniform in their agreement that the noun, αγαπη does not appear in Greek writing prior to the dating of the New Testament. One "unquestioned"<sup>30</sup> example is presented as an example of the usage of the noun from a pagan source noting the word's "lack of history" outside Scripture. Gingrich in his Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament speaks of that example as the "Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum VIII, '37,11,6-IIIAD" (ed. JJE Hondius I-IX, 1923-38) which is dated

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<sup>30</sup>Gingrich, Op. Cit., p 5. Although the noun form was used by God in Scripture for his sacred message and seems to have been kept unpolluted from the world prior to writing of the Greek New Testament, the verb form appears in the writings of Homer (8th century B.C.), Plato, Aristophanes and others. Its use in the New Testament text ultimately displays its God-exalted meaning for us as Christians.

III A.D.<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that this reference of later origin in time would only add weight to the conclusion that ἀγάπη is a uniquely Christian word of New Testament origin which the world also began to adopt for its use as the years passed. Whatever the context might be, the word is found in writings later than those of the sacred texts. God moved the writers to "use" the word ἀγάπη as his own word for his special kind of love; a love which had no connection with the polluted love which was known in the Greek-speaking world at that time. It's that term which God himself then filled with his own exalted meaning through the inspired writers. God has made it so important in its Scriptural usage that it comes to us as a technical term used to describe that special emotion which he has for his followers, as well as the emotion which he would have his followers express in their relationship with him, with their fellow believers and with the world around them. Whether or not the

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<sup>31</sup>The following is added as a note of interest concerning the editor of a well used book in our circles. In a letter dated August 8, 1982, F. Wilbur Gingrich wrote the following concerning my inquiry: "You will find a set of the Supplementum Epig. Gr. in any real good classical library within a convenient distance of your home. Stanford University would have it, I am sure, but so would others. I am quite ignorant of California geography; I was never in the state. If you can locate this collection you can get hold of the reference and see what kind of a context it is in. You may even find some of the other reference to papyri given in the lexicon." Gingrich presently resides at 1502 N. 12th in Redding, Pennsylvania, 19604.



unearthing of future papyrus upholds this present "lack of history" is irrelevant. For the meaning which God places upon it as he uses it in Scripture finally determines its meaning as far as the Christian is concerned. When speaking concerning God's ἀγάπη, Scripture frequently pictures an intense emotion of God's "heart" toward mankind which moved God to give of himself in order to possess us as his own. One of the clearest passages expressing this love is recorded in I John 4:8b-10, "God is Love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." John the inspired writer reminds us that God is Love and that he saw fit to give us his own Son that he might possess us as His people. I John 3:1 emphasized that love of God toward us when it speaks of God's bestowing his blessings upon us that "we should be called the sons of God." Paul describes God's ἀγάπη -love" for us when he writes without using the word "love," "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Ephesians 1:3-4). God's love moved him to give of himself in that he chose us in order that he might possess us as his own. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul prays that the Ephesians might be able to "comprehend... what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of

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Christ." That he describes as being intimately connected with God's "granting ... according to the riches of his glory" (God's love expressed in his giving of himself) in order that "Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith" (God's love expressed in his desiring to possess us as his own). That same characteristic of God's "ἀγάπη-love" is expressed again in Ephesians when Paul exhorts us to "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (Ephesians 5:2).

The Lord would see his people emulate that same kind of love in their relationship with him, with their fellow believers and with even their enemies in the world. Speaking to Christians who are "not to love ( ἀγαπάω ) the world," Christians who are not to spend their time, talents and treasure striving to possess the ideals of the ungodly world (I John 2:15), he says, "He that saith, I know him and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (I John 2:4-6). Our Spirit-produced sanctified living is to be obsessed with the desire to give of ourselves for the Lord's glory in order that we continue to possess him in our heart as our Lord and Savior. Quickly we add concerning that desire to possess him, that the desire to be in communion and fellowship with the Lord as his people, is a desire which God alone by his grace has placed within our

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heart. Also the power to live that desire is the gift of God's grace alone! This same concept is then found in the passages which urge us to show that same "ἀγάπη -love" not only toward God, but toward our fellowmen. Paul praises the Ephesian Christians saying, "I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints" (Ephesians 1:15). Paul is commending them for giving of themselves for their fellow Christians in keeping with their desire to possess God-pleasing communion and fellowship with them. Concerning this desire to possess continually a God-pleasing communion and fellowship, Paul speaks very plainly when he urges us, "I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3). The chapter continues by telling us that God has given us gifts to be used faithfully "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of faith ..." (v.12-13a). Love motivates us to give of ourselves in order to continue growing together in the fellowship of believers. This is the kind of "love" of which Jesus speaks when He tells us, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35). God's "ἀγάπη -love" is an expression of God's gracious heart extended toward mankind with a purpose; namely, to bless us through fellowship with him.

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The very rich meaning which is found in the noun ἀγάπη can also be kept in mind when the verb form is used. When God exhorts us to "love our enemies" (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:17), he is urging us to reach out to them in love, giving of ourselves in order to possess or win them for the Kingdom of God with the same emphasis that is found in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-21. God's special kind of loving can also then be applied to the verb in John 3:16 which speaks concerning God's loving all the world. Note, however, that unlike the use of the noun in Scripture, the verb form ἀγαπάω is also used of the sinful kind of loving which the ungodly world expresses. One example is found in Luke 11:43 when it warns, "Woe unto the Pharisees! For ye love (ἀγαπάω) the uppermost seats in the synagogues and greetings in the market place..." Here too the Pharisees were giving of themselves in order to possess, but not for God and his cause, rather for themselves and their own glory! Care should be applied in connection with possible translations of ἀγαπάω outside Scripture (Homer, Plato, Aristophanes and others as noted on page eighteen of this thesis), since pagan writings obviously would not contain the wealth of "heavenly" thought found in the Scripture when God is speaking of Christians and their loving.

It is that God-filled definition of love concerning which God the Holy Spirit moved the writers to speak. Let us remember that God's special kind of "ἀγάπη-love" is that perfect love which is only present in human beings when the Holy Spirit is creating or strengthening faith.

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C) A Study of the Usage of the Words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω When  
Penned By the New Testament Writers

Although no great hidden meaning can or should be forced upon Scripture due to the number of times a specific word is used by specific writers, the usage of the words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω in the New Testament canon sheds light on the study at hand. One notes after searching a concordance<sup>32</sup> of the Bible that:

the verb is more frequent than the noun, of which there are no occurrences at all in Mark, Acts, Titus, James, or I and II Peter. Distribution among the users of the term is approximately as follows; Jesus, ten per cent; Paul, twenty-eight per cent; John (Gospel and three letters), thirty-three per cent; sub-Paulines (Ephesians and the Pastorals), thirteen per cent; and the remainder, sixteen per cent. It is thus significant that John, who accounts for one tenth of the New Testament, provides one third of the references to love.<sup>33</sup>

Substantiating in part the study set forth in the previous section of this paper, the Interpreter's Dictionary continues:

The great New Testament word for "love" is ἀγάπη; the adjective is ἀγαπητός. Φιλία occurs only once in James 4:4 ("friendship with world;" cf. Romans 8:7; I John 2:15). The usual verb is ἀγαπάω; less common is φιλέω . . . It is doubtful if any distinction should be made between these verbs (cf. Matthew 23:6 and Luke 11:43; John 3:35, and 5:20, 11:3, 5; 19:26 and 20:2; 21:15-17). Originally ἀγάπη seems to have meant "satisfaction," "sympathy," or a hospitable spirit";

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<sup>32</sup>James Strong, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, p 637-639.

<sup>33</sup>G. Johnston, Op. Cit., p 168.

whereas the commoner φιλία denotes the affection of friend or of kinsman; each denotes painless love. Contrasted with both is ἔρως, which denotes sexual desire, passionate aspiration, sensual longing. Despite the use of ἔρως in philosophical discussion for "upward longing to the eternal and divine," New Testament writers avoid the word. Ἀγάπη (the noun) is almost never found in pre-Christian Greek (one example in the Berlin Papyrus 1869), but it occurs some twenty times in the LXX for the Hebrew לֶחֶם .<sup>34</sup>

Several comments are in place at this point in regard to the above thoughts. Although the quotation expresses another meaning for the word ἀγάπη "originally," the lack of sufficient pre-Christian examples as proof would seem to imply a lack of documented evidence to uphold that theory. As has been shown, Scripture does not substantiate any contention for any other "original" meaning than that cited in the previous section of this paper. Secondly, a variety of thoughts and conclusions come to mind in light of the remarks noted above concerning a distinction between the verbs φιλέω and ἀγαπάω. A number of conclusions could be made. One could conclude, as the Interpreter's Dictionary does, that "it is doubtful if any distinction should be made between these verbs." On the basis of the few examples cited, this might seem to be a correct statement. However, as has been noted in the previous sections of this study, the overall usage of the words in the context of Scripture usually offers a primary meaning of the Greek words which is a more specific and distinctive meaning; a meaning truly worthy of definition number one in a dictionary. Exceptions to the general rule are then truly limited exceptions to the generally accepted meaning of the word in question.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p 169.

An explanation is then in place in connection with the examples cited. Contending to uphold the previous section of this paper, one could conclude that the Gospel writers were confused temporarily in their use of the word at that point in their writing in much the same way one might misspeak supplying a similar word for another but in a context that doesn't fit that word. Such a conclusion would obviously offer great problems in connection with the doctrines of inspiration and God. To contend for that explanation, one would also be forced to conclude in the light of Scripture (II Peter 1:21; II Timothy 3:16; I Corinthians 2:13) that the Holy Ghost who guided the writers was also confused and in error when he inspired the writers in their writings. A more acceptable explanation is that there is indeed a distinctive, primary meaning for each of the words, ἀγαπάω and φιλέω. However, God for His own reason speaks of the Father's "love" for the Son in John 3:35 with the term ἀγαπάω, while on the other hand speaks of the same Father's love for his Son with the word φιλέω in John 5:20. John 5:20 by no means lessens the intensity and purpose of the Father's perfect love nor is Jesus by any means questioning his Father's love for him. God is merely using the word φιλέω to express a relationship which does exist between the Father and the Son, a relationship expressing a love not differing in intensity and thereby inferior, but rather a love with a different objective in this context. Concerning this same point, Luke 11:43 also shows that the word ἀγαπάω as well as φιλέω can be used on occasion by the Holy Spirit to speak of the intense sinful desires of

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the evil minded Pharisees as they strove to possess ever greater glory for themselves. The Holy Spirit isn't limited by the restraints which the mortal mind would force upon our words of communication.

While it is extremely important to note the context of a word in Scripture when determining the message which God is conveying in the printed word, it is finally God who can and does offer limited exceptions to the general meanings of words. Thus the hermeneutical principle is again upheld which proclaims that the primary meaning of a word is to be used to interpret Scripture unless the context of the word in its specific verse and chapter or in the context of clear teachings in the remainder of Scripture dictates some other usage.

With those thoughts in mind, ἀγαπή and ἀγαπάω will now be investigated as they appear in the various New Testament contexts to determine if the contexts uphold the definition advanced in the previous section of this paper. To pursue that question, the following outline will be followed:

The usage of the words ἀγαπή and ἀγαπάω:

- 1) in the Synoptic Gospels;
  - 2) in the writings of John;
  - 3) in the Pauline writings; and finally
  - 4) in the remaining epistles of Scripture.
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1) The Usage of the Words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω in the Synoptic Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels use the words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω a total of only twice as a noun and twenty-three times in its verb form. Matthew's Gospel<sup>35</sup> uses these words numerous times when recording the Sermon on the Mount in chapters five through seven. That sermon contains numerous words spoken by Jesus to believers concerning the living of their faith to the glory of God. Among them one finds the following passages:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt LOVE (verb) thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, LOVE (verb) your enemies, bless them that curse you, ... For if ye LOVE (verb) them which LOVE (verb) you, what reward have ye? (verses 43, 44, 46).

Christ is here speaking concerning the everyday living of our love in the world. We are to love one another for the purpose of winning and keeping as our brothers and sisters in Christ not only those whom we call "friends," but also those whom we might classify as "enemies." In this section as well as in Matthew 6:24 which speaks concerning the inability of serving two masters ("either he will hate the one and LOVE (verb) the other"), Matthew's usage of the word conforms to

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<sup>35</sup>The word ἀγάπη appears only once in Matthew's Gospel in Matthew 24:12. The verb form appears 7 times in Matthew 5:43, 44, 46; 6:24; 19:19; 22:37, 39.

the concept of loving as the giving of oneself for the purpose; in this case for the purpose of winning and keeping one's own in the bond of Christian unity. This is also seen when Matthew speaks in a similar manner in chapter nineteen verse nineteen ("thou shalt LOVE (verb) thy neighbor as thyself"), chapter twenty-two verse thirty-seven ("thou shalt LOVE (verb) the Lord thy God with...") and chapter twenty-four verse twelve where Matthew uses the noun form to tell us that in the last days of this world's history, "the LOVE (noun) of many shall wax cold." It is also interesting to note in Matthew's Gospel, that he twice uses the word φιλέω when reproving the Pharisees who "LOVE to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corner of the streets" and "who LOVE the uppermost rooms at feasts" (23:6). The Pharisee's "love" is something quite different in motivation and purpose from that which the Christian should be living.

Mark was moved by the Holy Spirit to use the word ἀγαπάω only five times with the noun form never occurring. The verb form appears in Mark 12:30,31 and twice in verse thirty-three with one isolated occurrence in Mark 10:21. Mark chapter ten records in the context of the verb ἀγαπάω the account of the rich man who voiced the question: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (verse seventeen). After summarizing the law, Jesus heard the man respond, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth" (verse twenty). Offering an insight into Jesus' heart, the Holy Spirit records through the hand of Mark, "Jesus beholding him LOVED (verb) him and said..." (verse twenty-one). Jesus loved him.

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Jesus reached out to him through the words which he then spoke. That love had a purpose. His purpose was winning this man for his heavenly kingdom. Jesus said: "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: And come, take up the cross and follow me" (verse twenty-one).

The only other occurrences in Mark appear in chapter twelve verses thirty through thirty-three. When speaking with a scribe concerning the "first commandment of all" Jesus said:

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt LOVE (verb) the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely, this, Thou shalt LOVE (verb) thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Catching the weight of Jesus' words, the scribe responded, "...there is one God, ...to LOVE (verb) him with all the heart, ...and to LOVE (verb) his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (verse thirty-three). The Holy Spirit uses the same word  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\alpha\omega$  when recording the words which the man used to summarize Jesus' words. One could presume that the man was merely a good listener and parroted the words of Jesus. But in light of Jesus' response ("Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God," verse thirty-four), the Holy Spirit is revealing that the process of bringing this man to faith in Jesus as his Savior was beginning to take place in his heart.

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Luke's use of the words under consideration is slightly more extensive. The noun form appears once in Luke 11:42. Here Jesus warns, "Woe unto you, Pharisees! For ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs and pass over judgment and the LOVE (noun) of God: these ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone." The love which has its source and perfect example in Jesus and has the purpose of winning souls for eternity is a love not found in the mind or heart of the Pharisees. The verb form appears thirteen times in Luke's writings.<sup>36</sup> Chapter seven records four in one chapter. Luke seven verse five speaks of the love of the centurion who "LOVETH (verb) our nation and hath built us a synagogue." Verse forty-two speaks of the creditor who forgave two debtors, one with a large debt and another with a smaller debt, concerning whom Jesus asks, "Tell me, therefore, which of them will LOVE (verb) him most?" Applying the obvious answer to the event before them, Jesus said concerning the woman anointing his feet, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she LOVED (verb) much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same LOVETH (verb) little" (verse forty-seven). In each of these examples, their love expressed itself toward others in a very outward manner and with a very definite purpose corresponding with the use of the words in the previous examples.

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<sup>36</sup>The thirteen occurrences in Luke are 6:27, 32 (four), 35; 7:5, 42, 47 (twice); 10:27; 11:43; 16:13.

While speaking concerning "loving" your enemies (verse twenty-seven and thirty-five), Jesus said in chapter six verse thirty-two, "If ye LOVE (verb) them which LOVE (verb) you, what thank have ye? for sinners also LOVE (verb) those that LOVE (verb) them." Believers and unbelievers alike can express love (ἀγαπάω) for others in this world. Their love in both cases expresses itself in some manner toward others with a meaning or purpose although the motivation in the case of the former is quite different from the latter. Although the motivation is different and, as a result, the value of the love before God is just opposite one from the other, the concept of the word ἀγαπάω in all four examples in this verse remains the same.

The book of Acts penned by the writer Luke never records either the noun or verb form. No special meaning can be drawn from that fact other than that the Holy Spirit didn't offer the occasion or move Luke to use those specific words in the book of Acts.

It is clear, therefore, that the concept of the words ἀγαπή and ἀγαπάω is used in a similar manner in the Synoptic Gospels.

God's love causes him to reach out to a world lost in sin with the aim of saving mankind. God sets that love before the eyes of his people as an example to be emulated in their dealings with friend and foe for the purpose of winning or keeping them for him. Let us now compare that fact with John's Gospel and epistles.

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2) The Usage of the Words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω in the Writing of John  
(the Gospel of John, I John, II John, III John and Revelation)

It is very easy to understand why John has been referred to as "the Apostle of love."<sup>37</sup> He uses the Greek words under study more frequently than all the other Gospel writers.<sup>38</sup> The Apostle John speaks at length concerning the love which God has for his people and the love which we as his children in turn should have toward God and one another. It is a love which in all cases involves giving of oneself as we desire to remain in communion with the Lord and with

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<sup>37</sup>Nygren, Op. Cit., p 147.

<sup>38</sup>The Gospel writer uses the noun and verb form in his writings in the following locations:

- a) the Gospel: noun forms - 7 occurrences: 5:42; 13:35; 15:9, 10 (twice), 13; 17:26  
verb forms - 34 occurrences: 3:16, 19, 35; 8:42; 10:17; 11:5; 12:43; 13:1 (twice), 23, 34 (three); 14:15, 21 (four), 23 (twice), 24, 26, 31; 15:9 (twice), 12 (twice), 17; 17:23, 24, 26; 19:26; 21:7, 20
- b) I John: noun forms - 18 occurrences: 2:5, 15; 3:1, 16, 17; 4:7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16 (three), 17, 18 (three); 5:3  
verb forms - 28 occurrences: 2:10, 15 (twice); 3:10, 11, 14 (twice), 18, 23; 4:7 (twice), 8, 10 (twice), 11 (twice), 19 (twice), 20 (three), 21 (twice); 5:1 (twice), 2 (twice)
- c) II John: noun forms - 2 occurrences: verse 3, verse 6  
verb forms - 2 occurrences: verse 1, verse 5
- d) III John: noun forms - occurs once: verse 6 (KJV - "Charity")  
verb forms - occurs once: verse one
- e) Revelation: noun forms - occurs once: Rev. 2:19 (KJV - "Charity")  
verb forms - four occurrences: 1:5; 3:9; 12:11; 20:9

one another. This "giving of oneself" is our living a sanctified life through the power which God has given us through the Holy Spirit working in us through the Word and Sacraments. When reproving the Jews who sought the opportunity to kill Him, Jesus proclaimed himself to be the Son of God and declared that they "have not the LOVE (noun) of God in" (John 5:42) them. Speaking to like-minded people, Jesus added, "If God were your Father, ye would LOVE (verb) me" (John 8:42). Expressing his oneness with his Father as he willingly sacrificed himself that we might be his own, Jesus proclaimed, "Therefore doth my Father LOVE (verb) me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:17) and again in John 14:31, "that the world may know that I LOVE (verb) the Father and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do". That great love was also expressed in the world when he reminds us that "Greater LOVE (noun) hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). That kind of giving for us that we might be his own is then ours to emulate as he tells us to "LOVE (verb) one another" (John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17). Our love for Jesus involves hearing and obeying; "If ye LOVE (verb) me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15) and "If a man LOVES (verb) me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23), "Continue ye in my LOVE" (noun) (John 15:9).

John's use of the words ἀγάπη and ἠγάπων can clearly be seen in reading the epistle of I John. In I John, the noun form appears 18 times and the verb form, twenty-eight times, more than any other book of the Bible. John writes using the noun form, "whoso keepeth his

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word, in him verily is the LOVE (noun) of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (2:5). A mark of the Christian's fellowship in Christ is the obedience of Christ's commandments. Whoever is a doer of God's Word has experienced the motivating power of God's love in his heart and is expressing that love for God with his life. Living our love for God excludes making the world and its concerns more important than our God. "LOVE (verb) not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man LOVE (verb) the world, the LOVE (noun) of the Father is not in him" (2:15). As the children of God who love the Lord above all else (Exodus 20:3-6; Matthew 22:37), we are motivated by his love for us to live in love. As John reminds us, "Behold, what manner of LOVE (noun) the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (3:1). What our love for God should be is seen in verse sixteen and seventeen where the Holy Spirit offers us the picture of God's love and then exhorts us to emulate that love in our life with the words:

Hereby perceive we the LOVE (noun) of God, because he laid down his life for us: And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whosoever hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the LOVE (noun) of God in him? (3:16-17)

And again in chapter four:

Beloved, let us LOVE (verb) one another: for LOVE (noun) is of God; and every one that LOVETH (verb) is born of God and knoweth God. He that LOVETH (verb) not knoweth not God; for God is LOVE (noun). In this was manifested the LOVE (noun) of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is LOVE (noun), not that we LOVED (verb) God, but that He LOVED (verb) us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so LOVED (verb) us, we ought also to LOVE (verb) one another. No man

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hath seen God at any time. If we LOVE (verb) one another, God dwelleth in us and his LOVE (noun) is perfected in us. (4:7-12)

The same concept of love expressed in the Greek words ἀγαπᾶω and ἀγαπῆ shines forth brightly in John's writings. They are words which describe God's reaching out to us through the suffering, death and resurrection of our Savior, as well as his constant watching over us physically and spiritually. His love has as its purpose his desire to unite a world of sinners with him through the blood of Christ that we might live for him in time and live with him throughout all eternity. That love which he first showered upon us that we might be his own is a love which is to serve as our motivation for Christian love and service for him. His love motivates us and gives purpose and meaning to our lives as we do all to the glory of our Heavenly Father. This is the love that John expresses through his writings. This is the love which the Christian should emulate and which the unbeliever lacks in regard to motivation and purpose. And finally, it is this concept which unites all four Gospels as they write under the guidance of the Holy Spirit concerning Christian love with one united heart and voice! Even I John 2:15 fits this understanding of God's ἀγαπῆ-love where we hear Jesus urging us not to give of ourselves for the purpose of espousing the world's godless aims. In that sense God tells us "Love not the world." Rather the Christian gives of himself in this world to win sinful mankind for heaven.

A brief note might be added at this point concerning the "problem" which some scholars have noted between love of which the Synoptic writers speak and the love of which John speaks. Nygren for instance is quite disappointed with John's failure to speak concerning a kind of Christian love referred to by the Synoptic writers

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which includes specifically love also for those classified as "enemies."

Nygren writes:

Of love to enemies there is no longer anything said at all. This clearly means that neighborly love has lost something of the meaning it has in the Synoptic Gospels, where love to enemies is neither an arbitrary addition to the demand for neighborly love nor an incidental sharpening of it, but an essential and inseparable feature of Christian love. Here, then we have a repetition of the peculiar duality of the Johannine idea of love. That which from one point of view represents an enhancement of the idea of Agape appears from another point of view to constitute a danger to it. Just because love in John is limited to the narrower circle of "the brethren," it is able to develop a far greater warmth and intimacy than it otherwise could; but this limitation involves for Christian love the risk of losing its original unmotivated character and of being restricted to the brethren to the exclusion of outsiders and enemies. <sup>39</sup>

As has been noted previously and as is commonly accepted, drawing conclusions from silence makes for even greater problems many of which are not based on reality. Accepting Nygren's logic would be as foolish as a husband or wife assuming that their mate doesn't love them any more simply because they didn't hear those words from the lips of their mate in the hours of one particular day. Since John nowhere in his writing refutes the God-given directive to "love your enemies," one is much safer in assuming that John simply was not moved to touch on that particular aspect of Christian love as the Holy Spirit guided him to do his writing. Thus an apparent "problem" with John proves to be more of a "problem" in the mind of Nygren and like-minded critics rather than real "problems" in the pages of God's Word!

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<sup>39</sup> Nygren, Op. Cit., p 154.

3) The Usage of the Words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω in the Pauline Writings

Paul's use of the words ἀγάπη<sup>40</sup> and ἀγαπάω<sup>41</sup> is evident in all of the thirteen epistles generally credited to the hand of Paul with the exception of the book of Titus where only the noun form appears. The noun form is used seventy-three times in all thirteen books, while the verb form is used thirty-four times in eight of the thirteen epistles, no examples being found in Philippians, I Timothy, Titus and Philemon. As was noted previously, no special significance can be placed upon the absence of these words in specific epistles. The Holy Spirit simply did not move Paul to use that word in the context of specific epistles.

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<sup>40</sup> Paul's use of the noun form ἀγάπη; 73 occurrences:  
 Romans 5:5,8; 8:35, 39; 12:9; 13:10 (twice); 14:45 (KJV - "Charitably"); 15:30  
 I Corinthians 4:21; 8:1 (KJV - "Charity"); 13 (All "Charity"); 1, 2, 3, 4 (twice), 8, 13 (twice); 14:1 ("Charity"); 16:14 ("Charity"); 16:24  
 II Corinthians 2:4, 8; 5:14; 6:6; 8:7, 8, 24; 13:11, 14  
 Galatians 5:6, 13, 22.  
 Ephesians 1:4, 15; 2:4; 3:17, 19; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2; 6:23  
 Philippians 1:9, 17; 2:1, 2.  
 Colossians 1:4, 8; 2:2; 3:14 ("Charity")  
 I Thessalonians 1:3; 3:6 ("Charity"), 12; 5:8, 13  
 II Thessalonians 1:3 ("Charity"); 2:10; 3:5  
 I Timothy 1:5 ("Charity"); 1:14; 2:15 ("Charity"); 4:12 ("Charity"); 6:11;  
 II Timothy 1:7, 13; 2:22 ("Charity"); 3:12 ("Charity")  
 Titus 2:2 ("Charity")  
 Philemon verses 5, 7, 9

<sup>41</sup>Continued on page 39

When reading in the epistles of Paul, one notes no variation from the definition of ἀγάπη advanced earlier in this study. Paul's use of the word is consistent with that set forth in the Synoptic Gospels and the writings of John. The epistle to the Romans serves as our example. Paul writes concerning the changeless love which God has for us when he reminds us that "the LOVE (noun) of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given unto us" (ch. 5:15)... and that "God commendeth his LOVE (noun) toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (ch. 5:8). Offering us hope and confidence, the Holy Spirit caused Paul to consider the question, "What shall separate us from the LOVE (noun) of Christ?" (ch. 8:35), that is, from Christ's changeless and perfect love for us. After enumerating several possibilities, the Holy Spirit then provides the comforting answer,

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<sup>41</sup> Paul's use of the verb form ἀγαπᾶω : 34 occurrences:  
 Romans 8:28, 37; 9:13; 9:25 (twice - KJV "beloved"); 13:8 (twice), 9  
 I Corinthians 2:9; 8:3  
 II Corinthians 9:7; 11:11; 12:15 (twice)  
 Galatians 2:20; 5:14  
 Ephesians 1:6 (KJV - "beloved"); 2:4; 5:2, 24, 25 (twice), 28 (three),  
 33; 6:24  
 Philippians: None  
 Colossians 3:12 (KJV - "beloved"); 3:19  
 II Thessalonians 1:4 (KJV - "beloved"); 4:9  
 II Thessalonians 2:13 (KJV - "beloved"); 2:16  
 I Timothy: None  
 II Timothy: 4:8, 10  
 Titus: None  
 Philemon: None

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that LOVED (verb) us; for I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the LOVE (noun) of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:37-39).

Christ reached out to us while we were dead in our sins. He offered himself for us on his cross, purchasing our salvation and now keeps us as his own for time and eternity through the gracious working of his Holy Spirit. That is the love of which Paul writes in his description of love in chapter twelve. Paul writes:

Let LOVE (noun) be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. (ch. 12:9-13)

And again in chapter thirteen verse ten:

LOVE (noun) worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore LOVE (noun) is the fulfilling of the law.

Luther describes the meaning of this thought most succinctly when he wrote:

First of all there is God's Word. After it follows faith; after faith, love; then love does every good work, for it does no wrong, indeed, it is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:10).<sup>42</sup>

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians offers yet another beautiful picture of the love of God for us, a love which he would also see in us as his children. Paul begins his epistle with words of encouragement concerning our election as the children of God in Christ.

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<sup>42</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Works, "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," vol. 36, p 39.

Clearly Paul paints for us a picture of God's giving of himself for the purpose of reuniting his fallen children with him, their merciful heavenly Father. Describing the first steps in his winning us for eternity, Paul writes, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in LOVE (noun)" (chapter one, verse four). That love which God extended to his children affected the thoughts, words and actions of God's people as they attempted to live their life to his glory as his children, as well as winning others for Christ. As Paul writes, "I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and LOVE (noun) unto all the saints" (chapter one, verse fifteen). The Ephesians are urged continually to keep in mind God's love as a living example for their love toward God and one another as Paul writes:

God, who is rich in mercy, for His great LOVE (noun) wherewith He LOVED (verb) us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (2:4-5).

Paul prayed for the spiritual welfare of the Ephesians. His prayer was truly a good work bearing witness to the love which God had placed in his heart. He asked for the Ephesians

that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in LOVE (noun) may ...know the LOVE (noun) of Christ, which passeth knowledge (3:17-19).

They were encouraged to live God's kind of love in their dealings with their fellow Christians when Ephesians tells them to:

speak the truth in LOVE (noun), growing up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth,

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according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in LOVE (noun) (4:15-16) ... Walk in LOVE (noun) as Christ also hath loved us and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour (5:2) ... Husbands, LOVE (verb) your wives, even as Christ also LOVED (verb) the church and gave himself for it (5:25).

Paul was also guided by the Holy Spirit to write concerning the characteristics of love in I Corinthians thirteen, a chapter which will be considered in the following section of this study. But whatever the verse might be in Paul's writings, the usage of the words ἀγάπη and ἀγαπᾶω corresponds with that which is found throughout the entire New Testament. There is no evolutionary development of those words evident in Scripture which would set the Synoptic Gospels, John, or Paul at odds with one another. Our study merely offers further proof concerning the unity of Scripture as inspired by the selfsame Holy Spirit as He moved holy men of God to write.

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4) The Usage of the Words ἀγαπᾶν and ἀγαπάω in the Remaining Epistles of Scripture (Hebrews, James, I Peter, II Peter, Jude)

Only sixteen examples<sup>43</sup> remain in Scripture for our consideration in this section of Scripture. The writer to the Hebrews displays an understanding of the concept of ἀγαπᾶν which is the same as that found in the rest of the New Testament. He writes, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of LOVE (noun), which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister" (6:10). And again:

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto LOVE (noun) and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: And so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Peter's writings bear witness to that same usage of the words ἀγαπᾶν and ἀγαπάω. Peter encourages the suffering Christians to whom he writes to continue on faithfully in their believing and its fruits, their love for God and for one another.

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<sup>43</sup>The noun form occurs six times: Hebrews 6:10; 10:24; II Peter 1:7 (KJV -"Charity"); Jude verses 2,12 (KJV-"Charity"), 21; the verb form occurs ten times in Hebrews 1:9; 12:6; James 1:12, 2:5, 8; I Peter 1:8, 22; 2:17; 3:10; II Peter 2:15.



Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye LOVE (verb)... seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye LOVE (verb) one another with a pure heart fervently (I Peter 1:6-8,22).

A genuine, sincere, selfless love for others is what the Lord would see demonstrated in the lives of his people as they live their lives to his glory and the furtherance of his Kingdom (confer also 2:17; 3:10; II Peter 1:7). Ἀγαπᾶω can on a few occasions be used when referring to the selfish desires of the ungodly as they pursue their godless ends. That can be seen when Peter voices a warning concerning "cursed children who have forsaken the right way and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the Son of Bosor, who LOVED (verb) the wages of unrighteousness" (II Peter 2:15). The false prophets and their misguided followers expressed with their lives a selfish desire to pursue in their ignorance their godless ends to their own destruction. Again we note the selfish objectives of the ungodly as they attempt to satisfy their own self centered passions.

James was writing to a group of Christians who was suffering under numerous trials. Yet inspite of their suffering, James offered them words of comfort and strength stressing the living of Christian virtues such as joy, patience and faith. In that context, he tells them,

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Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that LOVE (noun) him (James 1:12).

When speaking of false pride in regard to discrimination against those who are of lowly means in life, James writes:

Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?...If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt LOVE (verb) thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well; but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin and are convinced of the law as transgressors. (James 2:5,8).

While there are only three passages in the Epistle of James in which the words under study are used, James is obviously concerned about the Christian's life lived in love toward God and his fellow man. It is also interesting to note that James speaks in a manner very similar to John concerning the world. John wrote:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (I John 2:15).

In a similar tone, James wrote by the Spirit's guidance:

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4:4).

James obviously understands the responsibility of the Christian living in response to God's great love. Although he had not been given the opportunity to use the word directly, he surely speaks concerning the kind of concerns that would interest those who were attempting by God's grace to live their life in love toward God and their fellow man.

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A concluding word might also be said about the three remaining occurrences of the noun as they appear in the writings of Jude. Jude uses the noun form on three occasions, never using the verb form. Jude began his message with the words, "Mercy unto you and peace and LOVE (noun), be multiplied" (Jude 2). The epistle was written in order to encourage Christians to "contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (verse three). In keeping with that aim, Jude warns them of spiritual danger:

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of CHARITY (noun), when they feast with you, feeding themselves with fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruits withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;... (verses eleven and twelve).

Concerning the "feasts of charity" referenced to in Jude, the following thoughts are in order:

THE AGAPE (is) the name commonly used to denote the 'love feasts' of the early Christians, the meals provided by church members for religious fellowship and especially for charity to the poor and the widows of the Christian community. The custom derives from the earliest days of the church and may well be rooted in the common meals of Jesus with his disciples, or in such instances of his ministry as the feeding of the multitude (Mark 6:34-44; 8:1-9 and parallels)...By the middle of the second century, the agape meal for fellowship and charity, generally held in the afternoon or evening, had been definitely separated from association with the sacramental rite of the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. The only reference in the NT to the agape in this distinct sense is in Jude 12 (with which one should compare the variant reading ἀγάπαις - ἀγάπαις in a parallel passage of II Peter 2:13). The technical use of the term "agape" for these meals is attested by Clement of Alexandria (The Instructor II.1ff) and in Tert. Apol. 39:16: "Our supper is called "love" (dilectio) by the Greeks." Clement also applies to the agape the Pauline title "Lord's Supper" (The Instructor II.2.33); and the same designation for the

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agape occurs in the Latin and Coptic versions of Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition 26.5. <sup>44</sup>

The words of Jude echo the same warning as that of Paul in I Corinthians 11:17ff. where Paul reproves the Corinthians for an improper celebration of the Lord's Supper and the fellowship meal which preceded it. Paul is no doubt referring to the same kind of meal spoken of in Jude which was eaten by the early Christians in connection with their worship services. The meal was an opportunity to express and foster Christian love for one another within the family of believers. Hence, the title, "love feast" (NIV) <sup>45</sup> or "feasts of charity" (KJV) are fitting titles.

In the examples cited from the books of Hebrews, James, Peter and Jude, the use of the words in question for the most part supports the usual meaning and usage ascribed to the words throughout the other portions of the New Testament previously studied. II Peter 2:15 offers what might be referred to as somewhat of an unusual exception. As has been noted above, the "cursed children...loved the wages of unrighteousness." The concept found in the word ἀγαπή is still evident in that they were giving of themselves in order to possess something. Unlike the majority of examples one could cite using the word ἀγαπή, the "cursed children" were not working for the glory of God, but for their own godless ends. Basically, however, Jude, Peter and James are speaking of the same kind of love which Paul and John as well as the Synoptic Gospel writers were moved to write by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>44</sup>M.H. Shepherd Jr., The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 1: "The Agape." I, ed. G.A. Butterick, p 53-54.

<sup>45</sup>Gingrich, Op Cit., p 6.

Summary: In this portion of my study, I have endeavored to search Scripture with the purpose of defining more precisely the concepts advanced in a more general manner previously in this paper. I have noted that not every book or writer has expressed all that there is to know concerning love. Specifically, the absence of the words "love your enemy" (not in the sense of being pleased with their sin, but rather with the intent of winning them from sin) in John's writing serves as an example. Yet when the Word of God is studied as an inspired unit produced in written form under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit, then specific conclusions can be reached concerning the beautiful and wondrous concept which God has created in the word ἀγαπᾷ. On the basis of our study undertaken from that point of view, the following conclusions can be advanced:

- 1) The Greek word ἀγαπᾷ is a word by means of which God's perfect and eternal kind of love is expressed.
  - 2) ἀγαπᾷ expresses a concept which has no connection with the polluted love which was known in the Greek speaking world at that time.
  - 3) ἀγαπᾷ is virtually a technical term which the Holy Spirit filled with his own heavenly meaning which can be more deeply appreciated by human reason when viewed in the light of Scripture as a united whole.
  - 4) ἀγαπᾷ expresses God's "feelings" toward man as well as his actions.
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- 5) God's ἀγάπη is extended with the definite purpose of offering to mankind the very best which God has to offer; namely, perfect fellowship with God.
  - 6) God's ἀγάπη was translated from feelings toward mankind into actions when in eternity he conceived the plan for our salvation and then in time sent his Son to be our Savior. That love is still evident to us as we hear him calling additional members into the family of believers through faith in Jesus Christ.
  - 7) God's ἀγάπη -love is further evident in the relationship which exists within the Godhead, specifically between the Father and the Son as it finds clear expression in Scripture.
  - 8) God's love for mankind is further presented in Scripture as a pattern to be emulated by God's people in time as they strive by God's grace to lead their lives to his glory.
  - 9) God's ἀγάπη is not found in the heart of man by nature. As with all other Christian virtues, it must be created within man's heart through the working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.
  - 10) God's ἀγάπη -love is to be evident in our relationships with others in our world whether they are members of the family of believers or unbelievers as well as toward those that are one's enemies; and finally,
  - 11) In what proves to be the exception rather than the rule, the concept evident in the verb form ἀγαπᾶω is used on occasion by
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the Holy Spirit when referring to the strong desires of the godless. In those few cases in question, the context proves that the emotions, motivations and purposes are not in keeping with God's desires.

With those thoughts in mind, let us consider I Corinthians 13, which offers a further insight into the qualities of God's great love, qualities which he desires to see expressed and lived in our lives as his people.

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