

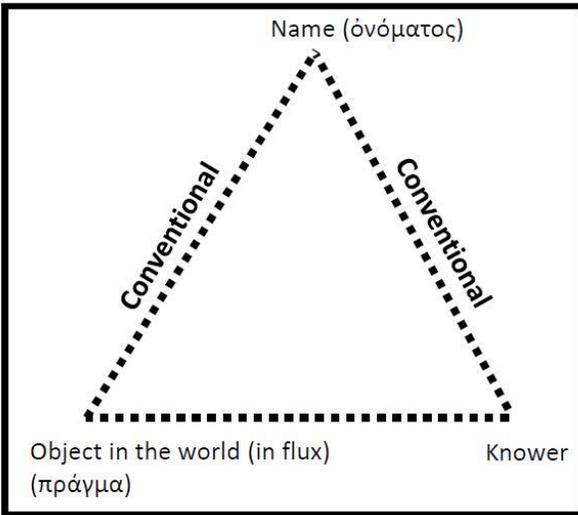
Daily Life with Christ. Love-3: Understanding the objective, universal, never-changing, eternal nature of love—Philosophy of Language and Hermogenes.

One might reasonably ask, “What in the world does love have to do with the philosophy of language?” Everything! especially for Bible-believers who engage in serious biblical word studies of love in order to understand the true nature of love. This methodology is very common in Bible churches and is a result of modernism in what is called the Linguistic Turn (part of modern anti-realist philosophy). This method is not the method found in the Bible or in classical church history.

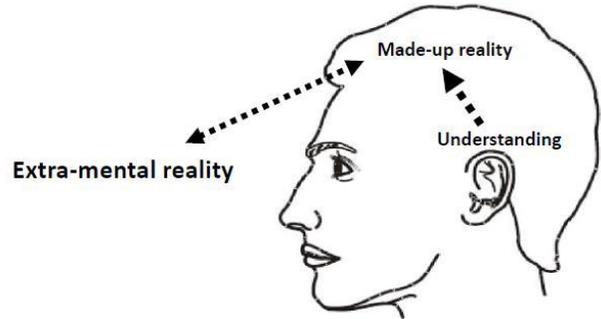
The reason it is important to start with philosophy of language is because exegetical preachers commonly teach that the way you get to the reality is to examine the word in the original languages. However, as I have pointed out, this simply will not work for the same word in the original is used in a variety of ways in the Bible. I have noted how *agapao* is used of God’s love (John 3:16), the unbeliever’s love for darkness/sin/evil (3:19), those who love the LORD (2 Tim 4:8), and Demas’ love for the world (4:10). Attempts to build reality on words opens the door to all kinds of idealistic beings of reason rather than actual beings in the extra-mental world.

Let us look at another common example of a preacher who has fallen prey to idealism as he uses this platonic method of “biblical exegesis.” There are at least four different words for love in the Greek. Based on this fact, many preachers try to teach that each of these words always carries a univocal meaning in every context—the meanings of these words platonically just follow the words around wherever they go. For example, “exegetical” preachers commonly teach that *agapao* love is a high spiritual love whereas *philo* love is the love of emotions and thus it refers to a lower and often bad love. However, in Revelation 3:19 Jesus says “Those who I love (*philo*), I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.” Does this mean that Jesus had an emotional and thus a lower love for the Laodiceans? If *agapao* is a higher kind of love, why doesn’t Jesus use it of His love for those He disciplines? This Platonic method of “exegesis” is but one example of what is known as the illegitimacy of totality transfer. It is unbecoming for any pastor to teach such nonsense.

Now that I have explained why we start with philosophy of language in our study of love and provided another example of how the common platonic method of using words for obtaining reality is false (recall that Plato did not believe we could directly see universals—like love—in the sensible world; for him our knowledge comes first from the mind, not the extra-mental world—like many in the Reformed movement today), let us move to Hermogenes. In the Hermogenian philosophy of language, the person makes up his own words as well as his own reality (the dotted lines indicate lack of solid correspondence).



Hermogenian Philosophy of Language



The Hermogenian philosophy of language revealed in Plato's *Cratylus* is one of conventionalism. As depicted in the illustration above, this position teaches that the relationship between a thing and its name is *by convention*. The dotted lines indicate a lack of solid correspondence between the knower and extra-mental reality, and between the knower and the name/word. This means that everything is by convention. Each "knower" can make up whatever word he wants for anything, and he can even make up the nature of things in the world as he wishes. We can see this conventionalism in our own time when things that are evil are called good and good evil. Extra-mental "reality" or "truth" here is solely based on the individual's feelings and preferences. It is how he feels about words and reality—he can call things as he wishes. He is the determiner of language and reality. For example, in conventionalism a man committing adultery could call his act of adultery as an act of love (changing the meaning of love) or call his paramour as his lover (instead of his adulteress) because of how he feels. We live in a country that is saturated with this kind of conventionalism—both outside and inside of the church. If one does not agree with a political leader today, he may be summarily called a hater of America and a socialist. If one does not think that being "gay" (is "gay" really the best description of a person's sexual orientation or does "homosexuality" more accurately describe the reality of sexual orientation?) is the natural order (in objective reality), he may be called a vile bigot or homophobe. Words and reality are completely made up—no relation to objective reality at all. In contemporary Christianity, some of the largest churches in this country are pastored by men and women who teach a victory in Christ that is totally antithetical to what the Bible actually teaches, and the way reality is—it is totally made-up. Many flock to these churches because what is more important to them is how they feel rather than what is real—Truth! Like Hermogenes, they make up their own words for their Christianity, world, and their own version of reality. Understanding of love, licit and illicit, in all of these examples are completely made up by the "knower." It is not difficult to see how impossible it is in a Hermogenian worldview for anything to be objective—objectively true! It is manifestly impossible for love in this system to be universal, objective, eternal, never-changing, or even real. As a matter of fact, in this system, love is totally made-up. What is worse is that in this self-deception a person can easily love evil and think he is loving good as he makes up his own world.

of values and love. May God help us! He is, after all, a God of grace and Truth! Grace and Truth cannot be separated.

Grace and truth,

Pastor Don