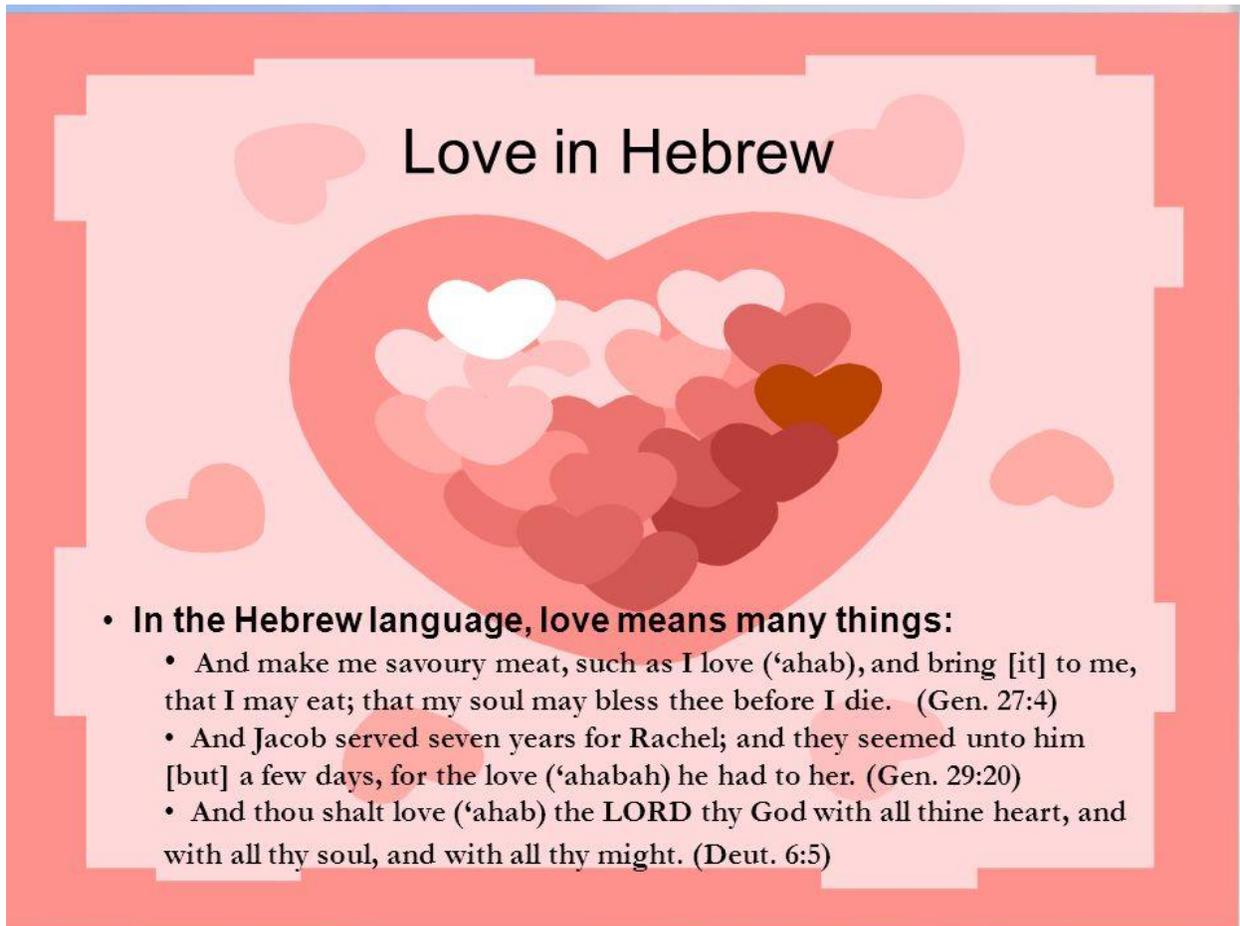


Daily Life with Christ. Love-8: Understanding the objective, universal, never-changing, eternal nature of love—Philosophy of Language: The Failure of the Linguistic Turn (Old Testament refutation of the exegetical idea of making words in the original Hebrew the foundation for objectivity in interpretation).



Love in Hebrew

- **In the Hebrew language, love means many things:**
 - And make me savoury meat, such as I love ('ahab), and bring [it] to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die. (Gen. 27:4)
 - And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him [but] a few days, for the love ('ahabah) he had to her. (Gen. 29:20)
 - And thou shalt love ('ahab) the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. (Deut. 6:5)

It is my contention that 99% of evangelical Bible-believing Christians today are unable to give an account of how anyone could ever obtain objective interpretation of the Word of God. This does not mean that they are wrong in their beliefs. For they are correct in many elements of their faith: e.g., the Bible is God's Word, God has demonstrated His love on the Cross, Jesus Christ is Incarnate God, and a person is saved by grace through faith apart from works (Eph 2:8-10).

However, due to the absorption of modern philosophical thought, modern Christians are now in a position where they are unable to explain how they can be sure of their interpretation of Scripture—how they can be guaranteed of objective interpretation.

It was this cultural subjectivity that motivated many Bible movements to follow the methodology modern philosophy by taking the Linguistic Turn. In philosophy, the Linguistic Turn was the

result of failed attempts to account for or obtain objective understanding of reality as such. Having rejected classical metaphysics, philosophers lost their objective grounding which they tried to correct through language. However, the Linguistic Turn in philosophy has turned out to be an unmitigated disaster.

The Linguistic Turn in Bible movements—the attempt to find objective meaning in the original languages/words of Scripture rather than reality itself—is also an unmitigated disaster. The only difference is that those in philosophy realize the disaster whereas many in the Bible movement have not realized the failure of this methodology. Unfortunately, they live in deception, which is often promoted by many exegetical pastors who also live in the deceptive thinking that one can find objective meaning through language as such—by studying the original languages. The world of idealism is no place for Christians to live, especially those Christians who are serious about Truth, about understanding the Word of God.

In the last article, I noted the failure of the attempt to find objective reality of love in the New Testament through the Greek word *agape*. Contrary to those who say that the Greek is a technical language with words like *agape* that *only* refers to one kind of love, we noted that *agape* is used in a variety of ways: e.g., for God's love for all of mankind, man's love for man, man's love of evil/darkness, and man's love for all kinds of things in the world. As a matter of fact, *agape* is as varied as our English word "love" today. There is a metaphysical reason for this that I will discuss in the future. The point or question here is: how can one build objectivity on words in the original if those words have such multivocal meanings? How can one build any objective, univocal meaning on *agape* if *agape* is multivocal enough to refer to divine love, human love, and human love for evil?

We have the same problem in the Old Testament. The same Hebrew word (אהב, '*ahab*) refers to God's love for His people, His people's love for Him (Dt. 6:5), the love of man toward man (Lev 19:18), the love of father for son (Gen 22:2), love for food (Gen 27:4) and money (Ecc 5:9) as well as illicit, evil sexual love (Jer 22:20; Eze 16:36) and love for evil (Psa 52:3).

As a matter of fact, '*ahab* is even used of sexual lust that resulted in rape. After Amnon raped Tamar, the author of 2 Samuel writes, "*Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love ('ahab) with which he had loved ('ahab) her. And Amnon said to her, "Arise, be gone!"*" (13:15). Did Amnon really love her? We want to say "no." But the answer according to metaphysical realism and the Bible is yes and no. We want to say that love is always a good thing, and all agree that his rape of her was an inhumane despicable act. If love is always a good thing, what about those who love evil (Psa 52:3)? Seems like language is anything but univocal. Given the flexibility of language, even in the original Hebrew and Greek, how in the world could anyone assert that they can reach ultimate meaning of reality and Scripture by language?

It is not difficult to see why the Linguistic Turn has been such a dismal failure in philosophy as well as in many of the best intentioned exegetical movements. This does not mean that understanding the original languages is not helpful in the metaphysical grasping of objective meaning in ultimate reality—for reasons I will explain later.

There is only one way to obtain objective meaning of “love” that fits perfectly with the way love is used in the Old Testament, New Testament, and today’s culture. It is way of metaphysics which starts with reality as such and not words, concepts, or definitions. In the end it comes down to idealism (where one starts with words) or realism (where one starts with beings). Either we are realists who live in the reality of beings, which we clothe with words; or we are idealists who live in the reality of words, which we clothe with beings.

Advancing in Truth,

Pastor Don