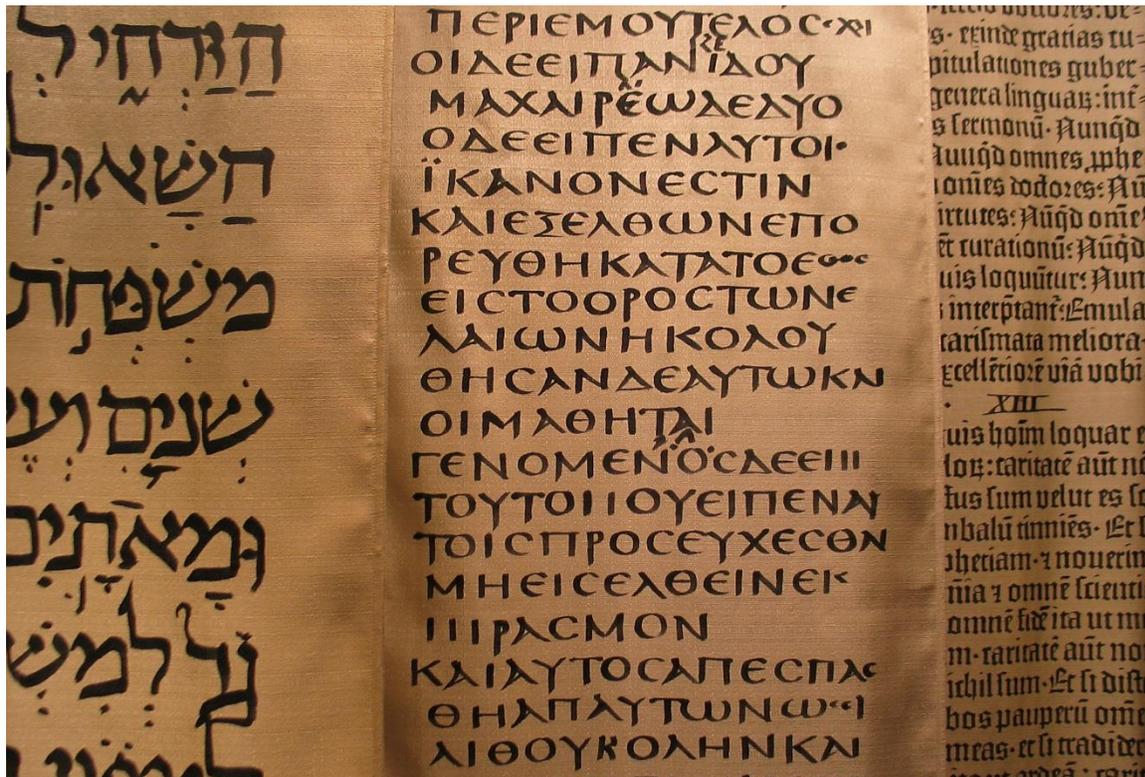


**Daily Life with Christ. Love-10: Understanding the objective, universal, unchanging, eternal nature of love—The failure of the Bible-onlyism’s Linguistic Turn (1).**



(Online copy

at <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/030518.pdf> and <http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>).

Let me say at the outset that I believe with fellow Christians that the Bible is the Word of God, that God has demonstrated His love in the Incarnation and the Cross, and that salvation is a gift available to anyone by faith in Jesus Christ apart from works (Eph. 2:8-10). I want to make this very clear because I am going to make some strong criticisms of contemporary Christianity’s approach to Truth and the Bible. Again, my problem is not with the core tenets of Christianity or with Christians as such.

My bone of contention is with modern philosophical methodology and thinking that Christians unwittingly have absorbed, and which have left Christians very vulnerable to the charge of irrationality and subjectivity. Because of the acceptance of the Linguistic Turn (LT), probably about 99% of Bible-believing Christians lack the ability to give a rational account of objective hermeneutics with regard to the Bible or such virtues as love. Recall that the LT is the movement in modern philosophy away from metaphysics to language in order to give an objective and rational account of reality as such.

There is also a LT that is common to contemporary conservative Christianity wherein Bible-believing Christians base ultimate reality on words in the Bible rather than extra-mental beings

as such. Like modern philosophy, much of conservative Christianity has turned away from classical metaphysics and turned to the original languages of Scripture in order to attempt to obtain objective interpretation on the Word of God. This claim can be seen in the assertion by some that they know exactly what the Bible means because they know the original languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. However, this claim is manifestly false and opens Christians up to all sorts of errors inherently found in Idealism.

As I have noted, there are only two foundations from which people operate: (1) a foundation on words/thoughts/concepts (LT, Cartesianism) from which one then projects onto beings/reality or (2) a foundation on beings (metaphysics) from which one then attaches words. Idealism always starts with words, concepts, arguments, whereas the Realist always starts with beings—only the Realist is directly connected to Reality as such. The world of the Idealist is always mediated by words—words that are connected with a whole structure of other associated words. The Idealist begins with the mind from which he creates all kinds of beings. The Realist begins with beings as such, and thus is the only one directly related to reality as such.

Given that this series deals with love, I would like to demonstrate the fallacy of the believer who thinks that the Linguistic Turn is a viable option for objectivity—in other words, his claim that he can understand the nature of love based on the original words of Scripture. I have decided to do this in a Socratic dialogue format with fictional characters. Hopefully, this will enable me to address common thoughts and objections in an easily understandable manner.

Characters in the dialogue: **George** is a Christian who is a Bible-only believer who has learned the original languages of Scripture. He reads his Bible in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. He has no need for any English translation, and thus he does not suffer from problems associated with faulty English translations. **Stephen** is also a Christian who also believes the Bible is the Word of God. He likewise understands the Bible in the original languages. However, Stephen is a Realist which means that he starts with beings and not with language as such for objective interpretation. They are both at the gym. George is sitting at a weight bench and notices Stephen walking by.

**George:** Hey, would you mind spotting me?

**Stephen:** No! Not at all.

**George:** By the way, my name is George.

**Stephen:** Please to meet you, I'm Stephen.

(They shake hands, after which Stephen spots George, which allows George to lift a heavier weight than he otherwise would be have tried).

**Stephen:** Good job! You did it all. I did not even help the lift. Do you come here often?

**George:** About 2 to 3 times a week. I come here after work.

**Stephen:** Where do you work? What do you do?

**George:** I teach biblical Greek and Hebrew at Oral Roberts University.

**Stephen:** Oh! So you are a Christian?

**George:** Yes! I am a Christian . . . I believe that Jesus died for my sins . . . and I am also a Bible-believer. I believe the Bible is the very Word of God.

**Stephen:** Wonderful! So do I!

**George:** Great! It is such a blessing to be able to read the Bible in the original languages, so I can get directly into ultimate reality.

**Stephen:** Ultimate reality in the original languages? Humm...interesting.

**George:** Yes, you know the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek and by knowing these languages, I can understand ultimate reality.

**Stephen:** How do words get you to ultimate reality?

**George:** Well, you see . . . for example, the New Testament Greek is very technical and so I do not suffer from all the ambiguity like we see in English. Consider how we use the word “love” in the English. We use it for loving food, candy, sex (licit and illicit “loving-making”), emotional highs, and a host of other things. Greek does not suffer from that problem—it has different words for love, like *phileo* for friendship love, and like *agape*, which refers to the highest spiritual love. I just love the exactness of Greek! I never have to worry about getting a wrong idea!

**Stephen:** Really?! How can *agape* refer to the highest spiritual life when it is also used for the love that unfallen man has for darkness (John 3:19)? In the same context, *agapao* (verbal form of *agape*) is used of God’s love (John 3:16) and man’s love for darkness (John 3:19). Also consider how in the same context, *agapao* is used for believers who love the Lord (2 Tim 4:8) as well as apostates’ (those who no longer love the Lord) love for the world (2 Tim 4:10). Moreover, throughout the Word of God *agape* is used for all kinds of “love” – from love of God to love of evil. It seems to me that Greek use is much like English use. In our English-speaking world, do we not talk about love for God, God’s love for man, man’s love for both licit and illicit sex (“love-making”), a person’s love for alcohol or illicit drugs, and unbeliever’s love for this world of darkness?

**George:** I still think that language is important. And God wrote the New Testament in Greek to give us precise spiritual information.

**Stephen:** I agree that language is important, but it is not ultimate reality. It points to ultimate reality. You cannot build ultimate reality on the foundation of language. And the Bible does not even provide a universal definition of love.

**George:** But God’s Word tells us what love, *agape*, is in 1 Cor 13 . . . 'Agape is patient, kind, is not envious, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, does not take into account a wrong suffered, thinks no evil, and is the culmination of faith and hope—faith, hope, and *agape* and the greatest is *agape*.'

**Stephen:** If ultimate reality is in the word *agape*, then what do you do with John 3:19, ‘but man having rejected God’s love (*agapao*), loved (*agapao*) darkness’? If ultimate reality is in the word then both God’s love and man’s love must be univocal, which means that God’s love is the same as man’s love for darkness, which would also mean that our love for darkness is the same as our love for God.

**George:** Everyone knows that love for God and love for darkness is not the same!

**Stephen:** Right, but it is the same word in the Greek! I just do not see how you could provide a univocal and universal meaning for the word love based on the original languages, given that the Hebrew and Greek words for love are used for both love of God and love for evil. As I mentioned even the Bible does not give a universal definition of love, a definition that universally applies to all instances of love?

**George:** Are you seriously suggesting that the Bible never really defines love as such?

**Stephen:** Yes! The Bible does not provide a universal definition of love that applies to all references to “love” in the Bible. You cannot define love based on word use. Love is a metaphysical reality, a reality below the domain of language (which is always multivocal). Only in metaphysics can one give a true definition of love that applies to all instances of love and explain why one word “love” can be used for both proper and improper love—God and evil.

**George:** I need to think about this . . . would love to talk more about this. Could I have your phone number? I still think that the Bible, which teaches that the highest command and the reason for life and even the Bible itself is to love God and others . . . in light of this, it certainly must be the case that it has a universal definition of love—especially when God Himself is called love/*apape* (1 Jn 4:8).

**Stephen:** I would love to talk to you more about this. By the way your mention of the fact that God is called *agape* makes your case even more untenable. But we can talk about that later . . .

[They exchange phone numbers and agree to continue the conversation later).

In His Matchless Grace,

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