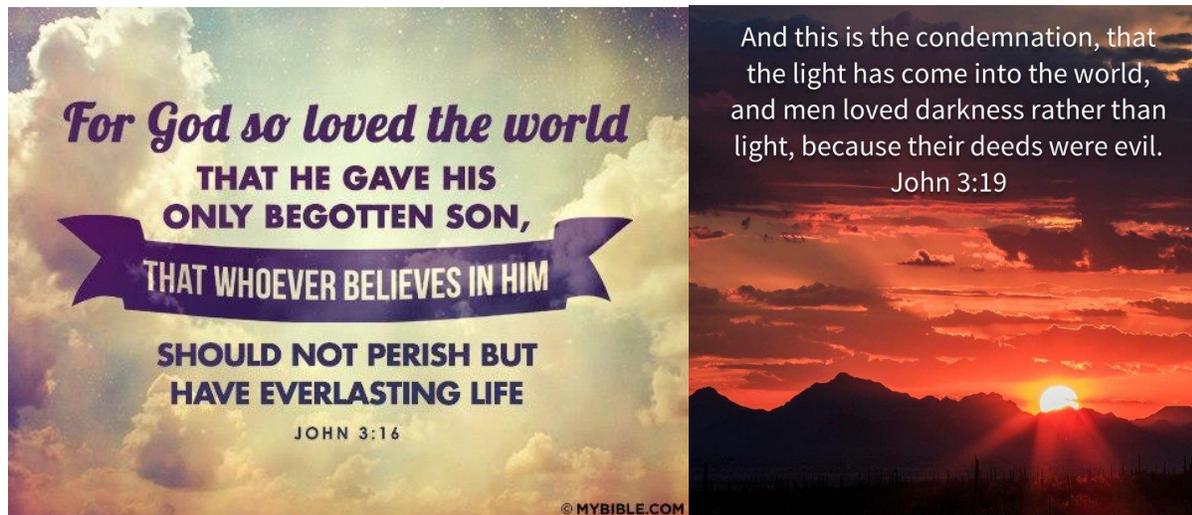


Daily Life with Christ. Love-17: Understanding the objective, universal, unchanging, eternal nature of love: Obtaining objective foundations for the love in John 3:16 (God loves/agapao the world) and John 3:19 (Man loves/agapao darkness).



(Online copy at <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/031718.pdf> and <http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>).

George: You said that I was an Idealist—that my foundational realities are created in my mind—because I build reality on words rather than reality as such. When I asked you how in the world could I be an Idealist when we both agree on so many Christian doctrines, you said it was because of the power of the human intellect, at times, to override my framework of Idealism. Could you give me an example . . . from Scripture?

Stephen: Sure. Let us start with your idealistic system of interpretation. You claim objectivity based on three principles: isagogics (understanding the time in which Bible was written), exegesis (in your case, getting meaning from words), and categories (comparing Scripture with Scripture). While I will be the first to admit that these are excellent tools for Bible study, they are all very relative as far as meaning as such. Universal truths cannot be acquired by grounding them in culture, language, or induction. Yet because you have an intellect, you can still abstract universal truths in spite of your “scientific” (Baconian induction rather than metaphysical) system.

George: Like I said, can you give me an example from Scripture?

Stephen: Sure, take John 3:16 and John 3:19 where we have God’s pure, perfect, and holy love for the world and we have man’s corrupt love for darkness. In your system, you should be able to tell the difference between God’s holy love and man’s unholy love, for example, by exegesis of the word for love, *agapao* . . . but the problem is that the same word refers to both loves. . . God’s and man’s . . . good love and evil love is described by the same word. Isagogics, the attempt to find the meaning according to the time in which it was written, is no help (such a

methodology also reducing the meaning of the Bible to a particular culture . . . it lacks the transcendence needed for universal truth). Moreover, your inductive system is of no help because there does not exist a group of passages in the Bible that give a rich metaphysical account of God's love or a love for darkness. All you have, at best, are nominal descriptions. Love is not comprehensively and universally defined in the Bible . . . some passages say man loves evil and others say that love is patient, kind, and is related to faith and hope. In sum, the idea that you get the meaning from the original is a myth and it is harmful because it keeps believers from exploring the metaphysical richness of the true nature of love—God's and man's. Of course, this does not mean that believers in these systems do not enjoy God's rich love. It just means that they are mixed up, as evidenced by the fact that they cannot tell you why *agapao* is used of two different kinds of love in the same context, without any qualifiers. They hold to their system because that is all they have. They are able to maintain the system through the language games of their denominations (e.g., some hold to Stoic views of love as expressed by nomenclatures like "relaxed mental attitude" or "impersonal love," while others see love as all about their subjective, human "emotional feelings").

George: So how do you get to objective meaning, if not by language? How do you get to the objective meaning of the love in John 3:16 and John 3:19 that is not totally dependent on language?

Stephen: By the universal and undeniable law of being and the law of contradiction. In sum, the love that is predicated of God is according to the being of God. In other words, the meaning of the love of God is based on the nature of God, not *agapao*. We start with the being of God: Esse, Pure Act, infinite, pure, omnipotent, omnipresent, timeless, wise, good, simple (not composed). We understand the nature of God from creation (Rom 1:20) and from His actions on the Cross ("demonstrated," Rom. 5:8) and revealed in the Bible. As far as the meaning of love in John 3:19, we understand the meaning of that love according to the being of the unbeliever. And we understand the being of the unbeliever from creation and from the Bible. By predicating the love according to the being rather than the original languages, or culture, or the selection of certain passages according to one's Bible community, we derive universal principles that always apply. In other words, God has one nature that does not change, and man has one metaphysical nature that does not change, so this enables us to have universal and undeniable principles based on the beings in reality. Given the law of non-contradiction, these loves cannot be anything but these loves.

George: You said I was mixed up but can still get things right—which is why we agree on so many things—because of the power of the intellect to abstract natures from reality. What do you mean?

Stephen: Well . . . you do know—due to the power of your intellect to abstract natures from reality—that God's holy love and the unbelievers' unholy love is not the same even though your system does not account for that difference. You know this because you really are oriented to beings as such. You know this as intuitively as you know that a leathery shoe is a good and a non-leathery steak is good—they are both good, the difference is in the nature of the being—the same principle is true of love—the type of love depends on the being, not the word, culture, or

related passages. For the Realist, meaning is not in the mind, meaning is in the thing, what is (metaphysics), objective reality as such.