

The "Greek Game"

"A Little Learning Is A Dangerous Thing"

Timothy S. Morton

Any believer who reads much modern "Christian literature" (commentaries, expository works, study guides, or even devotionals), will invariably be confronted with references to "the original Greek." Even in their messages many preachers often feel compelled to "educate" their hearers with references to the "original Greek," "enlightening" them with their "superior grasp of the original languages." These men (and women) with their books and messages, by referring to "the Greek" as the ultimate biblical authority, are by implication stating the English Bible (KJB) is **not wholly sufficient for the pursuit of the full meaning of God's word.** To "really understand what God has to say," they insist, "one must study or at least consult the **original Greek.**" Your author has heard preachers from the pulpit insist, "The English language cannot convey the full meaning of the original so one must consult the wonderful and precise Greek text to fully grasp what God has said." Translation: "If you don't know Greek, it is impossible for you to really know the Bible."

In this article we will examine some of the claims and methods of these "Greek addicts," and see how they stand up to clear statements of the Bible.

Methods of Madness?

Your author has not had any formal training in Greek or any other foreign language. **He makes no claims to "scholarship" or "higher education," but he does claim to be a born again Christian, have a pure Bible (AV 1611), and have a measure of "common sense."** He has never claimed to be anything other than "common." When he was first saved he was adversely influenced by those who appeal to the Greek, but gradually the Lord (some would say the Devil) began to show him the fallacy and hypocrisy of many of these self professing "authorities." He learned the methods and tactics they used to destroy a believers confidence in his English Bible were not based on scriptural principles but mainly on misguided zeal and humanistic logic fueled by bloated egos.

There are generally three categories of believers who appeal to "the Greek" (or Hebrew) to "correct" or "amplify" the KJB.

1. University professors, scholars, and others with advanced degrees in Hebrew and/or Greek.
2. Ministers who have had SOME (sometimes very little) formal Greek/Hebrew training.
3. Ministers and believers who have had NO formal Greek/Hebrew training (that is, essentially anyone not in #1 and #2).

Nearly all the "authoritative" material written on the original languages (lexicons, dictionaries, word studies, etc.) were written by persons in group #1 (Strong, Brown,

Driver, Biggs, Thayer, Robertson, Kittell, Wuest, etc.). **Persons in groups #2 and #3 nearly always quote the works of those in group #1 as their authority for "going to the Greek."** They apparently feel they don't have the knowledge or ability to make an independent judgment about the very source they are quoting to change the English Bible.

Nearly without exception those of group #1 fall into what we call the "**Autograph Only**" camp. By "Autograph Only" we are referring to people who content **ONLY** the original autographs (and by necessity the original languages") are the pure, inerrant, and infallible word of God and thus, **all copies and translations are inferior.** [See our article, [The Arrogant Assumptions Of The Autograph Only](#), for more on this issue.] That none of the original autographs have existed for nearly two millennia, making God's pure word unavailable to man according to their doctrine, has no affect on them. In fact, they imply this "unfortunate absence of God's pure word" actually justifies their existence. They imply they are more valuable to the common, ignorant Christian because with their "superior knowledge and abilities" they are equipped to relay what IS available of God's word to man. Not only are they needed to define or explain the Greek words, they are also essential to determining the best Greek text.

Contrary to the implication the term "the Greek text" carries in books and lexicons, **there is more than a single Greek text.** A reference to the "Greek text" can be to any one of **thirty some** compiled texts. Some of the texts have as many as 5000 differences between them. Needless to say, **"scholars" cannot agree on which text is best** and often they **disagree on the translation of certain Greek words.** The world of Christian scholarship is by no means a word of unanimity, each "scholar" seems to have his own "preferences" thus they can't come to a consensus. This is why there are over thirty compiled Greek texts and over 100 English translations, and no two read the same! Greek/Hebrew scholarship is not always as concrete and consistent as many are lead to believe. **Very little is a certainty in their philosophical world;** it is ruled more by subjective preferences and opinion than they care to admit.

In this short work we are going to briefly examine the methods preachers and others use to "correct," "explain," or "amplify" the English Bible with "The Greek." As we will see, many of those who practice "the Greek game" are merely **repeating something they read or heard, doing very little or no personal study of their own.** Others practice it, it seems, mainly for the **appearance of "scholarship"** or education "quoting Greek" may bring. Still others, who are fairly knowledgeable of Greek follow it, but they still **cannot produce a tangible final authority in any language.** And still others, who appear to have innocent motives, are simply **gullible** enough to believe the "Greek game" is sound.

[Lessons In Lunacy](#)

Your author has heard several ministers "correct" or "amplify" the Bible with their (usually very limited) understanding of Greek. Often they will refer to "the Greek," **apparently just to "look good" or appear "scholarly," because there "rabbit trail" to the Greek adds nothing to the text.** For instance, we recently heard a preacher (who claimed to have some Greek training) teaching from Romans

12:2 say, "The word "prove" in this verse is "dokimazo" in the Greek and it means "to try" or "to test." We instantly thought, "Why is he wasting time on this? That is the very definition of "prove" in English." Others who heard him told us they thought much the same as we did—the guy was a "SHOW-OFF"! Why venture off into "Greekland" to **prove nothing** unless it is for some personal gain? Maybe they have to quote some Greek every now and then to justify spending thousands of dollars on their education? They need to prove they got something for their money. We have found some 60 year olds are as likely to "show-off" as a 6 year old. They both love the attention.

More often, though, the "Greek addicts" will refer to the Greek to "correct" the KJB claiming it adds "vital information not found in the English text." These "nuggets," they claim, can only be found by those who delve into the superior Greek language, and if they are unequipped for that themselves, they should heed someone (like them) who is equipped. Obviously, these arrogant, egomaniacs believe one must come to them or someone like them to have what God wants them to have from His word. To hear them say it, it is impossible for one to get the "full meaning" from any translation.

Below we will examine a couple typical "Greek nuggets" that are commonly used to "prove" the KJB either is an "erroneous" or "weak" translation.

Are Christians "Born Again"? John 3:3

John 3:3 is a verse often quoted by the "Greek junkies" to show an "error" in the KJB. This verse deals with the precious new birth and is thus a favorite passage for those who wish to show their "superior Greek knowledge." First, we will look at the verse as the "Greek peddlers" do and then examine their conclusions in the light of the Scriptures. A typical comment on the verse goes as follows:

In John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodemus, "**Ye must be born again,**" but the Greek word for "**again**" is "anothen" (#509) and should be translated "**from above**" as it is elsewhere in the KJB. [After saying this they usually go into a bing thing about how the new birth originates from God above, which in a sense it does] In fact, the same Greek word, "anothen," is translated "from above" in the very same chapter. Look at John 3:31! Thus the King James translators made a blunder in translating "anothen" as "again" in verse three.

Smooth aren't they? Some of them probably sell used cars on the side. First consider the blatant arrogance of their words. They claim (often from only reading one book or hearing one "scholar") to have a better grasp of the Greek language and syntax than 48 highly trained and gifted translators who went over every verse of their work a minimum of 13 times! True the translators stated in a "side note" in the first edition of the KJB that "from above" is a possible translation, but "**again**" is what they placed in their God honored text.

Instead of examining the reasons the KJ translators used the word "again" in John 3:3, these "Greekophiles" criticize the Bible God used for much of the last four

centuries and the men who translated it. **They don't hesitate to exalt themselves for a for a brief moment of "glory"** at the expense of others much more capable and godly than they, and worse than that, their criticism may cause a weak or new believer to cast doubt on the integrity of the word of God as found in the English Bible! "Beware the Scribes"!

Let's look at some of the implications of the "Greek-mongers" charges:

1. If "born again" is changed to "born from above" then the birth could easily be interpreted as "philosophical birth" (like the "birth" of a new idea or concept or something "born" of adversity) instead of a **literal** birth.
2. Nicodemus's questions in verse 4 make little sense if "born from above" is used. Why would Nicodemus ask, "**can (a man) enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born**" if Christ was referring to merely a birth "from above"? Nicodemus knew Christ was not referring to some metaphysical birth from above but to an actual, literal rebirth! He did not even know the birth was not a physical birth until Christ explained it in verses 5 and 6. Hence, the term "born again" is the correct term for the context.
3. "Born again" is by no means a mistranslation of the Greek word "anōthen." "Again" or "anew" is listed by all lexicons we know of as a valid translation of the term. And even if it wasn't, would that mean it is in error? Of course, not. God is very capable of preserving His words in the manner in which He wants man to have them.
4. "From above" in 3:31 is the proper translation of "anōthen" considering the context, but that doesn't mean the term must always be translated as such. Anyone who speaks any language should know **some words have many different meanings**. Look in any English dictionary for thousands of examples. Context is very important and the KJ translators understood this.

"Born again" is much to be preferred over "born from above." The term best fits the context and clearly identifies the birth as a true, literal rebirth of an individual unto everlasting life. All the misguided hype one hears from the "Greek-junkies" only confuse the text.

Once your author, after hearing John 3:3 "corrected" for the "umpteenth" time, decided to do a little "word study" of his own with the verse. If these "Greek-addicts" believe **equipped with only a "Strong's" concordance and a Bible they can correct any Bible** [In a newspaper debate with one of them we were told anyone with a Strong's can find the errors in ANY Bible simply be looking up the words!], why didn't we see just how far this "correction" could go! Why stop with just changing one word, why don't we change more?

Below we will engage in a little experiment with John 3:3 taking the "Greekophiles" tactics a little farther than they dare.

Here is John 3:3 with Strong's numbers indicating the Greek words:

Jesus <2424> **answered** <611> (5662) **and** <2532> **said** <2036> (5627) **unto him** <846>, **Verily** <281>, **verily** <281>, **I say** <3004> (5719) **unto thee** <4671>, **Except** <3362> **a man** <5100> **be born** <1080> (5686) **again** <509>, **he cannot** <1410> (5736) <3756> **see** <1492> (5629) **the kingdom** <932> **of God** <2316>.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, set back in your chair and watch as we play THE GREEK GAME! Let's consult "Strong's" (or "Youngs") and see how the same Greek words are translated elsewhere in the KJB.

"**Iesous**" ("Jesus," #2424) is only translated as "Jesus" in the AV so it will remain for our purposes.

"**Apokrinoma**" ("answered," #611) is always translated a "answered."

"**Kai**" ("and," #2532) is also translated as "also" 515 times, "even" 108 times, "both" 43 times, etc.

"**Epo**" ("said," #2036) is translated "speak" 57 times, "tell" 41 times, "bid" 5 times, etc.

"**Autos**" ("him," #846) is also translated "them" 1148 times, "her" 195 times, "it" 152 times, etc.

"**Amen**" ("verily," #281) is also translated "amen" 51 times.

"**Lego**" ("I say," #3004) is also translated "speak" 61 times, "call" 48 times, "tell" 33 times, etc.

"**Soi**" ("thee," #4671) is also translated "thou" 14 times, "thy" 4 times, etc.

"**Ean me**" ("except," #3362) is also translated "if not" 16 times, "but" 3 times, etc.

"**Tis**" ("a man," #5100) is also translated "certain" 104 times, "some" 73 times, "any" 38 times, "anything" 24 times, etc.

"**Gennao**" ("born," #1080) is also translated "begat" 49 times, "bear" 2 times, "bring forth" 1, etc.

"**Anothen**" ("again," #509) is also translated "above" 5 times, "top" 3 times, "from the first" 1 time.

"**Dunamai**" ("cannot," #1410) is always "cannot" with #5736.

"**Eido**" ("see," #1492) is also translated "know" 282 times, "wist" 6 times, "perceive" 5 times, etc.

"**Basileia**" ("kingdom," #932) is always "kingdom."

"**Theos**" ("God," #2316) is also translated as "godly" 3 times.

Now, in view of the above, using KJB usage of the same terms, let's build a "revised" and "corrected" version of John 3:3.

"Jesus answered **also tell her**, Verily, **Amen I call** unto thee, **If not certain bringforth from the first** he cannot **know** the kingdom of the **godly**."

How's that for a "preference"? **We can defend our interpretation with the same "logic" the "Greek-addicts" use.** We have the same basis for every word we changed. We simply used another translation of the same Greek word according to KJB usage. You say you don't like our "preference"? Then try this one:

"Jesus answered **even and bid them**, **Amen**, Verily I **speak** unto **thou**, except a man **bear from above** he cannot **perceive** the kingdom of God."

Don't like this one either? **Why not?** Some of you reading this are gullible enough to follow someone when they make one or two changes in the KJ text using the same method, **why not accept even more of the same?** We went to "the Greek," doesn't that speak for itself? Think about your answer a couple days before you email us. We simply used the same approach to an extreme to show the lunacy of such a destructive method. Many who make these type of changes don't know anymore about Greek than you do.

Imagine what we could do if we didn't limit our definitions to KJB word usage or even if we wanted to use another Greek text. The passage could be rendered unidentifiable. The "Greek Game" is a game by the vain and/or ignorant played on the gullible and/or ignorant. Both groups are deceived. In spite of all their professed knowledge, **neither can produce a pure Bible.**

Is It "Love" or "Love"?

John 21:15-17

Another tactic of the "Greekmongers" is to reveal "shades of meaning of the original Greek text" or "nuggets" which are "impossible" to find in the English text. The quintessential passage to "prove" this is John 21:15-17 where they **contrast one Greek word for "love" with another Greek word.** The game here is they claim the Greek word "agapao" (#25) means a deep, selfless, divine love while the term "phileo" (#5368) refers to a weaker friendly or affectionate type of love. The Greek-lovers" build a dramatic and "powerful" message contrasting these two (self-defined) Greek terms, "enlightening" the ignorant, common believer of their grasp of the "original text." There is only one problem in their elaborate exposition, it is based on nothing but **pure speculation!**

Here is how it works. First here is John 21:15-17:

15 "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord: thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

After reading the passage the "scholar" then identifies the difference in the Greek words for "love" and then defines these two terms as mentioned above (almost always referring to something he read or heard, not to personal study). [Often the entire basis for this "exposition" is a small commentary or radio "scholar," the

pseudo scholar simply believes their contention without checking it out and then uses the new found "truth" himself.] His delivery goes something like this:

"Once we get to John 21:15 the constraints of the English language unfortunately conceal a great lesson from our Lord. We must consult the original Greek text to realize the full meaning of this bountiful passage. In verse 15 the Lord actually asks Peter,

"Peter ... lovest ("agape") thou me. (With a deep, intimate, selfless love) **more than these"** (vs. 15)?

Then Peter responds, **"Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love ("phileo") thee."** (With a casual, friendly type of love.)

The Greek "expert" then points out that the Lord, not receiving the answer that He desires, asks again.

"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest ("agape") thou me" (vs. 16)?

Peter, it is then pointed out, is unwilling to commit himself to such a deep relationship so he responds again.

"Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love ("phileo") thee."

At this point the "Greek expert" points out that a saddened Saviour gives in to Peter's lack of commitment and changes His own choice of Greek words to "phileo," questioning even Peter's casual "devotion."

"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest ("phileo") thou me" (vs. 17)?

This sudden change supposedly shocks Peter into seeing his own spiritual infidelity to the Lord. Thus, saddened he answers. **"... thou knowest that I love ("phileo") thee."**

Our false teacher then points out to his audience that there is no way to attain such depth of meaning from this passage using only the feeble English. Only the "wonderful Greek" can provide such insight.

Now, after having been "enlightened," lets examine these lofty claims in light of the Scriptures.

"Phileo," supposedly the weaker "love," is found several times in the gospel of John. If it only refers to "affection" or a "fondness" type of love as the Greek-junkies claim, then surely it is used as such elsewhere, isn't it? Let's see. Its first use is in John 5:20,

"For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel."

Are we to believe that the Father only had a fondness and friendly love for His Son? Is the reason He shows Him all things because he likes Him as a friend? "Agape" is the term used in John 3:35 to describe the Father's love for the Son. Did the Father's love weaken since then?

Look at John 11 at verses 3 and 36 concerning the death of Lazarus. Verse 3 says, **"Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."** Was Christ only fond of Lazarus? In verse 5 John says Christ **"agape"** loved him. When Christ was at his tomb He wept and the Jews remarked, **"Behold how he loved ("phileo") him (11:36)!"** Would they say this if they only perceived Christ's "love" as only casual and not deep or "divine"?

In John 16:27 we find, **"For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God."** Is God only "fond" of those who are "fond" of His Son? Does He love His disciples with a weaker love than He loves the world (John 3:16)?

Here, is an interesting contrast. Compare the terms for "love" in John 13:20, 20:2 and John 21:7 in your Strong's or Young's. In all three verses John is referred to as the disciple **"Jesus loved,"** but what is significant is in 13:30 the word is **"agape,"** in 20:2 the word is **"phileo"** while in 21:7 the word is **"agape"** again! Did Christ's love for John weaken between 13:20 and 20:2 and then grow again by 21:7?

Below are some more verses where **"phileo"** (or closely related words) is translated "love*." You come to your own conclusions as to whether they refer to a friendly love or fondness instead of full love.

Matt 10:37 "He that loveth father or mother..." (Is the love for one's parents normally only a fondness?)

Rev 3:19 "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten..." (Does Christ only correct those He has some affection for?)

John 12:25 "He that loveth his life..." (Do people only have some affection for their life?)

I Cor 16:22 "If any man love not the Lord..." (Is a fondness for the Lord enough?)

Titus 2:4 "Women to be sober, to love their husbands...children..." (Maybe in America many women are only fond of their husbands and children, but is that the Bible way?)

Considering the above, it is abundantly clear to us the Bible uses the terms "agapao" (agape) and "phileo" as **essentially synonymous** and thus the "Greek Nuggets" in John 21 are nothing but subjective speculation by the "Autograph Only" used more for vain rhetoric than for truth. If the KJB made such a blundering oversight in this passage **why haven't many of the "superior new translations" "corrected" it?** The ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, etc., don't (the ASV actually omits part of verse 17). The NIV says "truly love" for "agapao" but this makes Peter out a liar if he didn't truly love Christ because he answers Christ's questions in verses 15 and 16 (where "agapao" is used) with "yea...."

Even Thayers Greek Lexicon doesn't make the great distinction the "Nugget preachers" do in their preaching.

25, agapao {ag-ap-ah'-o}
perhaps from agan (much) [or cf 5368];
TDNT - 1:21,5; v
AV - love 135, beloved 7; 142
1) of persons
1a) to welcome, to entertain, to be fond
of, to love dearly
2) of things
2a) to be well pleased, to be contented at
or with a thing

5368 phileo {fil-eh'-o}
from 5384; TDNT - 9:114,1262; v
AV - love 22, kiss 3; 25
1) to love
1a) to approve of
1b) to like
1c) sanction
1d) to treat affectionately or kindly, to
welcome, befriend
2) to show signs of love
2a) to kiss
3) to be fond of doing
3a) be wont, use to do

Notice how both terms can be translated as both "love" and "to be fond of"! Actually "agapao" has "to be fond of" **before** "to love dearly"! Obviously, this "Greek Nugget" is nothing but "**fool's gold.**"

Before we end this section, please understand, we are not necessarily saying the terms "agapao" and "phileo" can ONLY be defined as synonymous in every circumstance, especially during the first century. Who knows what subtle difference in meaning these terms **may have had** when used in different ways or circumstances. The scholars who profess to know these subtle differences are simply very presumptuous. I doubt if many of them could identify subtle differences in the meaning of some English words my grandparents used in mid 20th century Appalachia, not to mention words of a "dead" Greek language spoken nearly two millennia ago! **God preserved His words the way He wants us to have them and in the KJB** (and most other translations) both terms are translated as "love." Any notion they represent different degrees of love in the Bible are pure speculation.

Who Should You Believe?

Some of you may be thinking, "Why should I believe a nobody from nowhere like "Morton" over my favorite preachers, radio teachers, authors, etc., who are educated and scholarly?" The answer is, **you shouldn't!** You shouldn't believe a word we or anyone else tells you without proving their words with the Scriptures. The Bible insists believers "**prove all things**" and that simple statement includes everything and everyone, including your favorite preachers. Those who accept "truths" just because they tickle the ears or sound good are **dangerously gullible**. This is the main reason there are dozens of Fundamentalist denominations or groups in America today. Each claim to follow the Bible yet they all have somewhat different beliefs. Our hope with this article (as well as all the others we have on our site) is that it present enough information for the interested reader to **search the matter out himself** and personally come to a biblical conclusion. We don't expect anyone to be simple or gullible enough to believe something just because we said it.

We realized many years ago in our ministry that the vast majority of Christians received their biblical knowledge, **not from personal study**, but from believing the words of others (preachers, books, media, etc.). Those who believe the truth were blessed by hearing someone who taught them the truth. However, those who believe things not Scriptural were unfortunate in that they heard someone who taught error. But in both cases neither personally studied the issues out as they are commanded. Some are deceived and some aren't, but **both are guilty of scriptural neglect** by not proving the words they heard.

However, that a blood bought believer would in many cases abandon the very Bible that led them to Christ (KJB) for the sophistry of a "scholar" without even looking the matter up for themselves is utterly amazing. Why would one forsake the very words that gave them life? The Bible warns believers of how **"good words and fair speeches can deceive the hearts of the simple,"** yet most appear to be unguarded. Normally, anything from the lips of a "scholar" or a personable preacher is accepted without a second thought. Just after the preacher (knowingly or unknowingly) pulled a "snow-job" on them using the "Greek," your author has heard people say while leaving a service things like, "Wasn't that message so rich?", "The pastor really knows the Bible?" , etc. It's a wonder these gullible believers haven't been carried away by the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses since they are so easily duped.

Our final authority is the **King James Bible**. Any "bible," book, preacher, etc., that **agrees** with it we accept, but only in the area of agreement. Any person or thing that disagrees with it we cast aside. If we were native Greeks speaking Kione Greek (none have existed for many centuries) we would go to the Greek Text behind the KJB for our final authority, but since we are English speaking Americans we go to **God's final authority in English, the King James Bible of 1611**. God is able to preserve His word in the manner he wants us to have it, and we contend He has done so. **If you can't accept our final authority, then find one you can accept**, but if you follow the "Autograph Only" you are without hope, for their supposed ultimate scriptural authorities (the original autographs were never compiled into one volume) vanished from the earth many centuries ago rendering all their scriptural appeals essentially worthless.

When one thinks about it, it is scary how easily and readily many will "correct" the Bible. Instead of resisting all attempts to change the precious words, they change them themselves. We realize they actually believe they are "amplifying" God's word or otherwise expounding it, but they are deceived by their own conceit. **God has used the King James Bible more than He has used any Bible in any language**, including the idolized "original Greek." Every major revival during the last 400 years was not started with the Greek, but with the KJB. In fact, the Greek has not been the instrument of any significant revival since the first century! Think about that a few days! All revivals have been the result of God's **translated** word.

Though there are many other places where the "Greek-addicts" show their conceit and presumption, these two represent the nature of their claims. These people utterly refuse to be in subjection to any Bible in any language—they are their own final authority.