Translation of 1 John 3:16*

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1997 December 28

By translating just one randomly selected verse from John's first epistle, we hope to learn some of the letter's main ideas.

This sermon discussing the basics of Christianity was carried by itinerant missionaries sent to one or more churches in the Greek Asia Minor. By 100 A.D., almost no one who had personally interacted with Jesus the human was living. As the church, which started in Israel, spread throughout Greek-influenced regions, it sought to explain its message to the Greeks not familiar with Hebrew thought. During this time of transition, various heresies developed. The author addresses these heresies, producing a document describing Christian fundamentals.

1 Translating the Verse from Greek to English

I've translated the verse from the Greek alphabet to a Latin alphabet (omitting accents for both) and annotated the Greek words with English equivalents. See Table 1. Our goal is to write an English sentence most closely reflecting the meaning in the original Greek.

We explain two words using *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* by Spiros Zodhiates.

agape love, a word found only in revealed religion. Its benevolence is not shown by doing what the loved person desires but what the one who loves deems as needed by the loved one. Contrast with *philia*, i.e., friendship based on having common interests.

psyche breath, soul, life, person. Narrowly, it denotes the metaphysical or immaterial part of man's being. Sometimes it stands for the immaterial part of man made up of the soul and the spirit. Also, it can denote the life element through which the body lives and feels.

Let's translate the Greek into an English sentence. The Greek words *heper*, *psyche*, and *etheken/theinai* repeatedly occur. Our English translation should also use repeated words.

2 The Verse's Meaning

What does the verse mean? What did it mean to the sermon's recipients? What do we learn about its purpose from just this verse? What aspects does the author emphasize? Which ideas from the New Testament are included? Which are omitted? Which ideas from the Old Testament are included? Which are omitted?

What does the verse mean today? How do we deal with the verse's extreme language? How do we apply it in our lives?

Greek	Greek	English meaning
$\epsilon\nu$	en	in, by
$\tau o\nu\tau\omega$	toutos	this (as a noun)
$\epsilon\gamma\nu\omega\kappa\alpha\mu\epsilon\nu$	egnokaman	we have known, we have come to know, we have experienced (tense: perfect active indicative)
$\tau\eta\nu$	teu	the
$\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\nu$	agapen	love
$o\tau\iota$	hoti	that, because
$\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu o\varsigma$	ekeinos	he, it, other, she, they (all with special emphasis)
$\nu\pi\epsilon\rho$	heper	behalf, on behalf of
$\eta\mu\omega\nu$	hemon	us
$\tau\eta\nu$	teu	the
$\psi\nu\chi\eta\nu$	psychen	souls, lives, hearts, breaths of life
$\alpha\upsilon\tau o\upsilon$	autou	just here, of it
$\epsilon\theta\eta\kappa\epsilon\nu$	etheken	to set, put, place, lay down
$\kappa\alpha\iota$	kai	also, yet, and yet
$\eta\mu\epsilon\iota\varsigma$	hemeis	we (emphatic nominative)
$o\phi\epsilon\iota\lambda o\mu\epsilon\nu$	opheilomen	to owe, to be a debtor, to behoove
$\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$	heper	behalf, on behalf of (same as heper above)
$\tau\omega\nu$	ton	the
$\alpha\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omega\nu$	adelphon	brothers
$\tau\alpha\varsigma$	tas	the
$\psi\upsilon\chi\alpha\varsigma$	psychas	souls, lives, hearts, breaths of life (see psychen above)
$\theta\epsilon\iota\nu\alpha\iota$	theinai	to set, put, place, lay down (see etheken above)

Table 1: The verse written in Greek and a direct translation to English.

3 Other Translations

Compare our translation with these published translations.

American Translation (1935) We know what love means from the fact that he laid down his life for us; so we also ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

The Amplified Bible (1958) By this we come to know — progressively to recognize, to perceive, to understand the [essential] love: that He laid down His [own] life for us; and we ought to lay [our] lives down for [those who are our] brothers [in Him].

The words in brackets ([]) indicate clarifying words not present in the Greek.

Beck (1964) This is how we learned what love is: He gave His life for us. We, too, should give our lives for our fellow Christians.

Jerusalem Bible (1968)

This has taught us love—
that he gave up his life for us;
and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers.

King James Version (1611) Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

Living Bible (1971) We know what real love is from Christ's example in dying for us. And so we ought to lay down our lives for our Christian brothers.

New American Standard Bible (1963) We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

New English Bible (1961) It is by this we know what love is: that Christ laid down his life for us. And we in turn are bound to lay down our lives for our brothers.

New International Version (1973) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

New King James Version (1979) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

New Revised Standard Version (1989) We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Phillips Modern English (1958) We know and to some extent realize the love of God for us because Christ expressed it in laying down our lives for those who are our brothers.

Reader's Digest (1982) By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Revised Standard Version (1946) By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Today's English Version (1966) This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We, too, then ought to give our lives for our brothers.

Williams (1937) We know what love is from the fact that He laid down His life for us; and so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

4 Creating This Document

The secondary purpose of creating this document was to test my parent's Internet connection and the built-in tools of Microsoft's Windows 95. At first, I used Microsoft Works 4.5 to create a text file, which I emailed to my Stanford account. Using Window's telnet program, I accessed my Stanford computer account and used the typesetting program LaTeX to produce PostScript and PDF versions. LaTeX2HTML automatically converted the LaTeX file to produce the WWW page http://theory.stanford.edu/~oldham/church/1jn316/. Despite using a slow modem, the connection to my Stanford account was so fast, I used its superior text editor to modify the LaTeX file.