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# LOVE

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Love. It sounds so familiar, but yet it is so distant to many people in the world. Love is that one intangible that has more value than money itself, yet some have the belief that it can be bought and sold as commodities, not so. Love, the greatest gift that is freely offered to God's crown of creation, mankind. In this study of Love, we will look at its vast nature and all that it means to both God and humanity: what love is, and how to live it.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Love to both God and man is fundamental to true religion, whether as expressed in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Jesus Himself declared that all the law and the prophets hang upon love (Mt. 22:40; Mr. 12:28-34). Paul, in his matchless ode on love (1Cor 13:1-13), makes it the greatest of the graces of the Christian life--greater than speaking with tongues, or the gift of prophecy, or the possession of a faith of superior excellence; for without love all these gifts and graces, desirable and useful as they are in themselves, are as nothing, certainly of no permanent value in the sight of God. Not that either Jesus or Paul underestimates the faith from which all the graces proceed, for this grace is recognized as fundamental in all God's dealings with man and man's dealings with God (Joh 6:28 f; Heb 11:6); but both alike count that faith as but idle and worthless belief that does not manifest itself in love to both God and man. As love is the highest expression of God and His relation to mankind, so it must be the highest expression of man's relation to his Maker and to his fellow-man.

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## I. The Theological Base of Love<sup>2</sup>

Love is considered one of the three primary theological [virtues](#) along with faith and hope. Throughout the centuries of theological writing, the analysis of love has centered on love as self-giving *agapē*. The nature of *agapē* has moved through a progression of emphases. As (1) *benevolence*, that is to love the unlovely and the unlovable, *agapē* is the generous, altruistic, compassionate love that values the [neighbor](#) self-forgetfully, in a self-disinterested concern for his or her welfare. It is in no way dependent on the recipient's merit or worth, but only on the lover's generosity. As (2) *obedience* that acts to love the other because of role, command or moral imperative, *agapē* is the faithful, willing obedience to the moral imperative to act for the good of the neighbor in fulfillment of the command of Christ. As (3) *self-sacrifice* that seeks to love the other at the lover's expense—the other's need comes first—*agapē* is self-sacrificial service to the neighbor, which puts the other's needs above one's own, even at great cost to the self. As (4) *equal regard* that perceives the other as equally worthy, even as one knows the self to be precious and of irreducible worth *agapē* is thus both an act of the will—to exercise compassion toward the other without reservation—and an act of the heart—to value self and other unconditionally.

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<sup>1</sup> Evans, William. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

<sup>2</sup> Augsburger, David. Article on Love from the Complete Book of Everyday Christianity.

In the biblical world there were at least *five words used to designate forms of love*, although only three of these appear in the New Testament:

- (1) *eros*, the search for an object in aesthetic, passionate or spiritual love;
- (2) *philia*, the preferential bond of affection, [friendship](#) and social solidarity;
- (3) *storgē*, the caregiving love of compassion;
- (4) *agapē*, the non-preferential, self-giving love of equal respect; and...
- (5) *koinōnia*, which is love in the mutuality of community, in the sharing of the common life in covenant and commitment (see [Fellowship](#)).

The fifth love is more than a search for an object (*eros*) or altruistic self-giving (*agapē*); it is an expression of mutuality in which giving and receiving are united (*koinōnia*). This is the authentic word for Christian love, the end of the trajectory of the multiple words (*eros*, *philia*, *storgē*, *agapē*, *koinōnia*). The word *koinōnia*, from *koinos* “in common,” expresses the fellowship-creating drive toward mutuality, the fellowship-fulfilling goal of equality, the fellowship-celebrating joy of community, the fellowship discipline of impartiality: “May the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the *love* of God, and the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit be with you all” ([2 Cor. 13:14](#), emphasis added).

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## II. What is Love?<sup>3</sup>

### A. *Definition*

While the Hebrew and Greek words for "love" have various shades and intensities of meaning, they may be summed up in some such definition as this: Love, whether used of God or man, is an earnest and anxious desire for and an active and beneficent interest in the well-being of the one loved. Different degrees and manifestations of this affection are recognized in the Scriptures according to the circumstances and relations of life, e.g. the expression of love as between husband and wife, parent and child, brethren according to the flesh, and according to grace; between friend and enemy, and, finally, between God and man. It must not be overlooked, however, that the fundamental idea of love as expressed in the definition of it is never absent in any one of these relations of life, even though the manifestation thereof may differ according to the circumstances and relations. Christ's interview with the apostle Peter on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (Joh 21:15-18) sets before us in a most beautiful way the different shades of meaning as found in the New Testament words *phileo*, and *agapao*. In the question of Christ, "Lovest thou me more than these?" the Greek verb *agapas*, denotes the highest, most perfect kind of love (Latin, *diligere*), implying a clear determination of will and judgment, and belonging particularly to the sphere of Divine revelation. In his answer Peter substitutes the word *philo*, which means the natural human affection, with its strong feeling, or sentiment, and is never used in Scripture language to designate man's love to God. While the answer of Peter, then, claims only an inferior

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<sup>3</sup> Evans, Williams. Ibid...

kind of love, as compared to the one contained in Christ's question, he nevertheless is confident of possessing at least such love for his Lord.

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## ***B. The Love of God***

First in the consideration of the subject of "love" comes the love of God--He who is love, and from whom all love is derived. The love of God is that part of His nature--indeed His whole nature, for "God is love"--which leads Him to express Himself in terms of endearment toward His creatures, and actively to manifest that interest and affection in acts of loving care and self-sacrifice in behalf of the objects of His love. God is "love" (1Joh 4:8,16) just as truly as He is "light" (1Joh 1:5), "truth" (1Joh 1:6), and "spirit" (Joh 4:24). Spirit and light are expressions of His essential nature; love is the expression of His personality corresponding to His nature. God not merely loves, but is love; it is His very nature, and He imparts this nature to be the sphere in which His children dwell, for "he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him" (1Joh 4:16). Christianity is the only religion that sets forth the Supreme Being as Love. In heathen religions He is set forth as an angry being and in constant need of appeasing.

### **1. Objects of God's Love:**

The object of God's love is first and foremost His own Son, Jesus Christ (Mt 3:17; 17:5; Lu 20:13; Joh 17:24). The Son shares the love of the Father in a unique sense; He is "my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa 42:1). There exists an eternal affection between the Son and the Father--the Son is the original and eternal object of the Father's love (Joh 17:24). If God's love is eternal it must have an eternal object, hence, Christ is an eternal being.

God loves the believer in His Son with a special love. Those who are united by faith and love to Jesus Christ are, in a different sense from those who are not thus united, the special objects of God's love. Said Jesus, thou "lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me" (Joh 17:23). Christ is referring to the fact that, just as the disciples had received the same treatment from the world that He had received, so they had received of the Father the same love that He Himself had received. They were not on the outskirts of God's love, but in the very center of it. "For the father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me" (Joh 16:27). Here *phileo* is used for love, indicating the fatherly affection of God for the believer in Christ, His Son. This is love in a more intense form than that spoken of for the world (Joh 3:16).

God loves the world (Joh 3:16; compare 1Tim 2:4; 2Pe 3:9). This is a wonderful truth when we realize what a world this is--a world of sin and corruption. This was a startling truth for Nicodemus to learn, who conceived of God as loving only the Jewish nation. To him, in his narrow exclusivism, the announcement of the fact that God loved the whole world of men was startling. God loves the world of sinners lost and ruined by the fall. Yet it is this world, "weak," "ungodly," "without strength," "sinners" (Rom 5:6-8), "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1 the King James Version), and unrighteous, that God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son in order to redeem it. The genesis of man's salvation lies in the love and mercy of God (Eph 2:4 f). But love is more than mercy or compassion; it is active and identifies itself with its object. The love of the heavenly Father over the return of His wandering children is beautifully set forth in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lu 15:1-32). Nor should the fact be overlooked that God loves

not only the whole world, but each individual in it; it is a special as well as a general love (Joh 3:16, "whosoever"; Gal 2:20, "loved me, and gave himself up for me").

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## 2. Manifestations of God's Love:

God's love is manifested by providing for the physical, mental, moral and spiritual needs of His people (Isa 48:14,20-21; 62:9-12; 63:3,12). In these Scriptures God is seen manifesting His power in behalf His people in the time of their wilderness journeying and their captivity. He led them, fed and clothed them, guided them and protected them from all their enemies. His love was again shown in feeling with His people, their sorrows and afflictions (Isa 63:9); He suffered in their affliction, their interests were His; He was not their adversary but their friend, even though it might have seemed to them as if He either had brought on them their suffering or did not care about it. Nor did He ever forget them for a moment during all their trials. They thought He did; they said, "God hath forgotten us," "He hath forgotten to be gracious"; but no; a mother might forget her child that she should not have compassion on it, but God would never forget His people. How could He? Had He not graven them upon the palms of His hands (Isa 49:15 f)? Rather than His love being absent in the chastisement of His people, the chastisement itself was often a proof of the presence of the Divine love, "for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb 12:6-11). Loving reproof and chastisement are necessary oftentimes for growth in holiness and righteousness. Our redemption from sin is to be attributed to God's wondrous love; "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Isa 38:17; compare Ps 50:21; 90:8). Eph 2:4 f sets forth in a wonderful way how our entire salvation springs forth from the mercy and love of God; "But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ," etc. It is because of the love of the Father that we are granted a place in the heavenly kingdom (Eph 2:6-8). But the supreme manifestation of the love of God, as set forth in the Scripture, is that expressed in the gift of His only-begotten Son to die for the sins of the world (Joh 3:16; Rom 5:6-8; 1Joh 4:9), and through whom the sinful and sinning but repentant sons of men are taken into the family of God, and receive the adoption of sons (1Joh 3:1 f; Gal 4:4-6). From this wonderful love of God in Christ Jesus nothing in heaven or earth or hell, created or uncreated or to be created, shall be able to separate us (Rom 8:37 f).

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## ***C. The Love of Man***

### 1. Source of Man's Love:

Whatever love there is in man, whether it be toward God or toward his fellowman, has its source in God--"Love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1Joh 4:7 f); "We love, because he first loved us" (1Jo 4:19). Trench, in speaking of agape, says it is a word born within the bosom of revealed religion. Heathen writers do not use it at all, their nearest approach to it being *philanthropia* or *philadelphia*--the love between those of the same blood. Love in the heart of man is the offspring of the love of God. Only the regenerated heart can truly love as God loves;

to this higher form of love the unregenerate can lay no claim (1Joh 4:7,19,21; 2:7-11; 3:10; 4:11). The regenerate man is able to see his fellow-man as God sees him, value him as God values him, not so much because of what he is by reason of his sin and unloveliness, but because of what, through Christ, he may become; he sees man's intrinsic worth and possibility in Christ (2Cor 5:14-17). This love is also created in the heart of man by the Holy Ghost (Rom 5:5), and is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). It is also stimulated by the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, more than anyone else, manifested to the world the spirit and nature of true love (Joh 13:34; 15:12; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:25-27; 1Joh 4:9 f).

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## 2. Objects of Man's Love:

God must be the first and supreme object of man's love; He must be loved with all the heart, mind, soul and strength (Mt 22:37 f; Mr 12:29-34). In this last passage the exhortation to supreme love to God is connected with the doctrine of the unity of God (Deut 6:4)--inasmuch as the Divine Being is one and indivisible, so must our love to Him be undivided. Our love to God is shown in the keeping of His commandments (Ex 20:6; 1Joh 5:3; 2Joh 1:6). Love is here set forth as more than a mere affection or sentiment; it is something that manifests itself, not only in obedience to known Divine commands, but also in a protecting and defense of them, and a seeking to know more and more of the will of God in order to express love for God in further obedience (compare Deut 10:12). Those who love God will hate evil and all forms of worldliness, as expressed in the avoidance of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (Ps 97:10; 1Joh 2:15-17). Whatever there may be in his surroundings that would draw the soul away from God and righteousness, that the child of God will avoid. Christ, being God, also claims the first place in our affections. He is to be chosen before father or mother, parent, or child, brother or sister, or friend (Mt 10:35-38; Lu 14:26). The word "hate" in these passages does not mean to hate in the sense in which we use the word today. It is used in the sense in which Jacob is said to have "hated" Leah (Gen 29:31), that is, he loved her less than Rachel; "He loved also Rachel more than Leah" (Gen 29:30). To love Christ supremely is the test of true discipleship (Lu 14:26), and is an unfailing mark of the elect (1Pet 1:8). We prove that we are really God's children by thus loving His Son (Joh 8:42). Absence of such love means, finally, eternal separation (1Cor 16:22).

Man must love his fellow-man also. Love for the brotherhood is a natural consequence of the love of the fatherhood; for "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1Joh 3:10). For a man to say "I love God" and yet hate his fellowman is to brand himself as "a liar" (1Joh 4:20); "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (1Joh 4:20); he that loveth God will love his brother also (1Joh 4:21). The degree in which we are to love our fellow-man is "as thyself" (Mt 22:39), according to the strict observance of law. Christ set before His followers a much higher example than that, however. According to the teaching of Jesus we are to supersede this standard: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (Joh 13:34). The exhibition of love of this character toward our fellow-man is the badge of true discipleship. It may be called the sum total of our duty toward our fellow-man, for "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law"; "for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law" (Rom 13:8,10). The qualities which should characterize the love

which we are to manifest toward our fellow-men are beautifully set forth in 1Cor 13:1-13. It is patient and without envy; it is not proud or self-elated, neither does it behave discourteously; it does not cherish evil, but keeps good account of the good; it rejoices not at the downfall of an enemy or competitor, but gladly hails his success; it is hopeful, trustful and forbearing--for such there is no law, for they need none; they have fulfilled the law.

Nor should it be overlooked that our Lord commanded His children to love their enemies, those who spoke evil of them, and spitefully used them (Mt 5:43-48). They were not to render evil for evil, but contrariwise, blessing. The love of the disciple of Christ must manifest itself in supplying the necessities, not of our friends only (1Joh 3:16-18), but also of our enemies (Rom 12:20 f).

Our love should be "without hypocrisy" (Rom 12:9); there should be no pretense about it; it should not be a thing of mere word or tongue, but a real experience manifesting itself in deed and truth (1Joh 3:18). True love will find its expression in service to man: "Through love be servants one to another" (Gal 5:13). What more wonderful illustration can be found of ministering love than that set forth by our Lord in the ministry of foot-washing as found in Joh 13:1-38? Love bears the infirmities of the weak, does not please itself, but seeks the welfare of others (Rom 15:1-3; Php 2:21; Gal 6:2; 1Cor 10:24); it surrenders things which may be innocent in themselves but which nevertheless may become a stumbling-block to others (Rom 14:15,21); it gladly forgives injuries (Eph 4:32), and gives the place of honor to another (Rom 12:10). What, then, is more vital than to possess such love? It is the fulfillment of the royal law (Jas 2:8), and is to be put above everything else (Col 3:14); it is the binder that holds all the other graces of the Christian life in place (Col 3:14); by the possession of such love we know that we have passed from death unto life (1Joh 3:14), and it is the supreme test of our abiding in God and God in us (1Joh 4:12,16).

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