**LOVE**: Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary: from   
Accordance Bible Concordance Computer program

An inner quality expressed outwardly as a commitment to seek the well-being of the other through concrete acts of service. Love is a central biblical concept for defining the relationship between God and humans.

***Torah***

The book of Deuteronomy summarizes the saving history of God’s relation with Israel as the expression of Yahweh’s freely bestowed love. Yahweh chose Israel and brought them out of Egypt because he entered into covenant with and loved their ancestors (Deut. 4:31-37). The entire narrative of the calling, election, covenant, and promises made to the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12-50) is hereby declared to be the story of God’s unmerited love, bestowed on Israel as a self-motivated act of grace.

Although Yahweh was selective in choosing Abraham and his descendants out of all the peoples of the world (Deut. 19:14-15), God’s protection and providential care extends to the outsiders of society, even foreigners (v. 18; cf. Exod. 23:9). God’s primary and ultimate aim in forming a people was to be a source of blessing to everyone (Gen. 12:2-3), through whom all nations will be taught about Yahweh’s will for everlasting peace (Isa. 2:2-4). Israel was commanded to show concrete acts of love to their enemies and not to retaliate against those who wronged them (Prov. 24:29).

***Prophets***

The prophets, especially Hosea and Jeremiah, depict Yahweh’s love for Israel in terms of family imagery. Israel is Yahweh’s adopted son, on whom Yahweh bestowed his fatherly care by redeeming him from Egypt and providing for him along the way (Hos. 11:1-4). Israel is also the wife whom he loves (Hos. 3:1).

God demands that the Israelites have an intimate relationship with God characterized by “steadfast love” (or “loyalty”; Heb. *hΩesed≈*) and “knowledge of God” (Hos. 4:1-2). But to Yahweh’s disappointment Israel’s love is as fleeting as the morning dew (Hos. 6:4-6), misdirected as sexual promiscuity with Canaanite gods in the fertility cult (3:1; 4:10–14; cf. Jer. 2:20-25; 3:6-10).

Where restoration of the relationship looks impossible, God’s love transcends human love. God is the Holy One whose compassion will restore his lost son (Hos. 11:8-9; cf. Jer. 31:15-20), healing him and enabling him to return to Yahweh (Hos. 14:1-8[MT 2–9]; cf. Jer. 3:21-4:1). Likewise, Yahweh will woo back his lost bride and establish an everlasting marriage (Hos. 2:16-23[MT 18–25]). Similarly, Yahweh will bring his discouraged people out of exile because of his great love for them (Isa. 43:4-5). His momentary wrath, or judgment, will fade before this compassion and everlasting love.

***Synoptic Gospels***

In the NT God’s love (Gk. *agaépeä*) for humans is enacted through Christ, and made effective through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God’s love is evident through the work of Jesus, who does acts of mercy such as healing the sick and accepting the unacceptable by eating with tax collectors and sinners, and forgiving their sins. In the parables Jesus presents God as one who bestows his love, mercy, and forgiveness as acts of undeserved grace (e.g., Matt. 18:23-35; Luke 15:11-32). Those who receive God’s compassionate forgiveness are also expected to treat others with the same love.

The Great Commandment is the summary of the OT law, a double command to love God and neighbor (Matt. 22:34-40 par., quoting Deut. 6:4; Lev. 19:18). In the Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus defines the neighbor as one who shows compassion beyond religious and ethnic boundaries (Luke 10:29-37). Love is doing good even to those who do not love you, even to your enemy (Luke 6:27-36).

***Johannine Writings***

In the works associated with John, God’s love is clearly articulated. God’s love for the world is demonstrated by sending his Son, Jesus, to die for the sins of the world that those who believe in him might have life (John 1:29; 3:16; cf. 20:31). Those who belong to the Son love him, and show their love by keeping his commandments (14:15), summarized as the commandment to love one another (15:12).

Because of God’s great act of love, believers ought to love one another (1 John 4:10-11). Those born of God are enabled to love him and keep his commandments by faith (1 John 5:1-5), because love is an essential defining characteristic of God. The love that the believer shows is “perfect love,” God’s love which has reached its perfection, or goal, in loving others (1 John 4:17-18). Believers show God’s love by concrete acts of service which meet real human need, just as Jesus showed God’s love by laying down his life for them (1 John 3:16-17).

***Pauline Letters***

For Paul, love starts with the “God of love and peace” (2 Cor. 13:11) whose gracious act of reconciling love is revealed in Christ. Nothing in creation can separate the reconciled one from this love (Rom. 8:35-39).

According to Paul “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14). Paul’s famous description of Christian love in 1 Cor. 13 also could be regarded as a portrayal of Christ.

The power to love comes from God alone. The Holy Spirit pours God’s love into the believer’s heart, producing love as the foremost fruit of the Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22), which sets believers free from the power of sin by manifesting the love of Christ in their lives (Rom. 8:1-9).

In summary, God’s love is the unmerited acceptance of all people expressed in concrete acts of providence and salvation. Through faith in Christ the Christian is enabled to love with the love of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.