

SHAPED2LIVE

God-Centered Love

When you think of love, what comes to mind? What imagery or meaning do you apply to love? Have you ever considered why we "love" in the first place? If you had to define love, what would you say? Is there a wrong way to love?

The answers to these are essential as Christians because we base the security of our relationship with YHWH on a simple but powerful statement.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."

And not only this, but our perception and understanding of what love is or is not will not only dictate how we relate with our God but also how we view and relate to ourselves and others.

In this day and time, so much has been redefined. So much so that it has become a challenge to find any absolute truth. And in the absence of absolute truth. We have no truth at all other than what each individual determines what is truth to them. Which, in short, means that we do not have any absolute truth at all—

Do any of the following lyrics sound familiar to you?

"Love will make you do right. Love will make you do wrong." Al Green

"What's love got to do with it? What's love but a second-hand emotion." Tina Turner

"Loves too weak to define just what you mean to me." Prince

"I love you in a place where there is no space or time. I love you for my life. You're a friend of mine" Donny Hathaway

In these lyrics, you have some interesting views and perceptions of love with each based on the artist's views. Love that controls, a bit of disdain for love, love that is insufficient, and a love that seems to point to something eternal and gracious for what has been given.

For so long, we have applied the word love to a multitude of ideas, feelings, and things. We have levels of our particular love. We love our friends; we love certain foods, we love taking walks, we love coffee, we love our pets, we love reading, we love peace and quiet, we love certain music.

We apply the word love to so much. How do we determine what real love is or is not? Each of the things that are listed above in that abbreviated list, we can put in an earthly view category. Anything we put into that type of category; we also have to concede that it is temporary at best. And too fragile to base any kind of security on it.

SHAPED2LIVE

Don't misunderstand me. There is nothing wrong with liking these things and others that are not listed. But do we truly want to love them? In this study, we are going to explore love as the Greek culture defined it. The reason that I start here is that many of our ideas about love and how it is portrayed in the media are birthed from the very things that you will see. Then we will look at love as defined within Webster's 1828 dictionary, and finally, we will look at it from what YHWH says about it by looking at several scriptures.

LOVE AS DEFINED IN GREEK CULTURE:

1. Eros, or sexual passion

The first kind of love was eros, named after the Greek god of fertility, and it represented the idea of sexual passion and desire. But the Greeks didn't always think of it as something positive, as we tend to do today. In fact, eros was viewed as a dangerous, fiery, and irrational form of love that could take hold of you and possess you—an attitude shared by many later spiritual thinkers, such as the Christian writer C. S. Lewis.

Eros involved a loss of control that frightened the Greeks, which is odd because losing control is precisely what many people now seek in a relationship. Don't we all hope to fall "madly" in love?

2. Philia, or deep friendship

The second variety of love was philia or friendship, which the Greeks valued far more than the base sexuality of eros. Philia concerned the deep comradely friendship that developed between brothers in arms who had fought side by side on the battlefield. It was about showing loyalty to your friends, sacrificing for them, as well as sharing your emotions with them. (Another kind of philia, sometimes called storge, embodied the love between parents and their children.)

We can all ask ourselves how much of this comradely philia we have in our lives. It's an important question in an age when we attempt to amass "friends" on Facebook or "followers" on Twitter—achievements that would have hardly impressed the Greeks.

3. Ludus, or playful love

While philia could be a matter of great seriousness, there was a third type of love valued by the ancient Greeks, which was playful love. Following the Roman poet Ovid, scholars (such as the philosopher A. C.

SHAPED2LIVE

Grayling) commonly use the Latin word ludus to describe this form of love, which concerns the playful affection between children or casual lovers. We've all had a taste of it in the flirting and teasing in the early stages of a relationship. But we also live out our ludus when we sit around in a bar bantering and laughing with friends, or when we go out dancing.

Dancing with strangers may be the ultimate ludic activity, almost a playful substitute for sex itself. Social norms may frown on this kind of adult frivolity, but a little more ludus might be just what we need to spice up our love lives.

4. Agape, or love for everyone

The fourth love, and perhaps the most radical, was agape or selfless love. This was a love that you extended to all people, whether family members or distant strangers. Agape was later translated into Latin as caritas, which is the origin of our word "charity."

C.S. Lewis referred to it as "gift love," the highest form of Christian love. But it also appears in other religious traditions, such as the idea of mettā or "universal loving kindness" in Theravāda Buddhism.

There is growing evidence that agape is in a dangerous decline in many countries. Empathy levels in the U.S. have [declined sharply](#) over the past 40 years, with the steepest fall occurring in the past decade. We urgently need to revive our capacity to care about strangers.

5. Pragma, or longstanding love

The use of the ancient Greek root pragma as a form of love was popularized by the Canadian sociologist John Allen Lee in the 1970s, who described it as a mature, realistic love that is commonly found amongst long-established couples. Pragma is about making compromises to help the relationship work over time and showing patience and tolerance. There is, in fact, little evidence that the Greeks commonly used this precise term themselves, so it is best thought of as a modern update on the ancient Greek loves.

The psychoanalyst Erich Fromm said that we expend too much energy on "falling in love" and need to learn more about how to "stand in love." Pragma is precisely about standing in love—making an effort to give love rather than just receive it. With [about a third of first marriages](#) in the U.S. ending through divorce or separation in the first ten years, we should surely think about bringing a serious dose of pragma into our relationships.

SHAPED2LIVE

6. Philautia, or love of the self

The Greek's sixth variety of love was philautia or self-love. And clever Greeks such as Aristotle realized there were two types. One was an unhealthy variety associated with narcissism, where you became self-obsessed and focused on personal fame and fortune. A healthier version enhanced your wider capacity to love.

The idea was that if you like yourself and feel secure in yourself, you will have plenty of love to give others (as is reflected in the Buddhist-inspired concept of "self-compassion"). Or, as Aristotle put it, "All friendly feelings for others are an extension of a man's feelings for himself."

The ancient Greeks found diverse kinds of love in relationships with a wide range of people—friends, family, spouses, strangers, and even themselves. This contrasts with our typical focus on a single romantic relationship, where we hope to find all the different loves wrapped into a single person or soul mate. The message from the Greeks is to nurture the varieties of love and tap into its many sources. Don't just seek eros, but cultivate philia by spending more time with old friends, or develop ludus by dancing the night away.

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/health-happiness/2013/12/28/the-ancient-greeks-6-words-for-love-and-why-knowing-them-can-change-your-life/>

7. Storge (familiar love)

Storge is a natural form of affection experienced between family members.

This protective, kinship-based love is common between parents and their children, and children for their parents.

Storge can also describe a sense of patriotism toward a country or allegiance to the same team.

8. Mania (obsessive love)

When love turns to obsession, it becomes mania.

Stalking behaviors, co-dependency, extreme jealousy, and violence are all symptoms of mania.

<https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/02/14/the-8-ancient-greek-words-for-love/>

If you are like me, I find it amazing how we create so many facets to one word. One of the questions that begin to form is this. Why do we do this? Another question should ask ourselves, is it necessary?

As we think about this, let's move forward and see how love is defined within Webster's 1828 dictionary.

SHAPED2LIVE

WEBSTER'S 1828 DEFINITION OF LOVE:

LOVE,

1. In a general sense to be pleased with; to regard with affection, on account of some qualities which excite pleasing sensations or desire of gratification. We *love* a friend, on account of some qualities which give us pleasure in his society. We *love* a man who has done us a favor; in which case, gratitude enters into the composition of our affection. We *love* our parents and our children, on account of their connection with us, and on account of many qualities which please us. We *love* to retire to a cool shade in summer. We *love* a warm room in winter. We *love* to hear an eloquent advocate. The Christian loves his Bible. In short, we love whatever gives us pleasure and delight, whether animal or intellectual; and if our hearts are right, we *love* God above all things, as the sum of all excellence and all the attributes which can communicate happiness to intelligent beings. In other words, the Christian loves God with the *love* of complacency in his attributes, the *love* of benevolence towards the interest of his kingdom, and the *love* of gratitude for favors received.

Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind -

Thou shalt *love* thy neighbor as thyself. [Matthew 22:37](#).

2. To have benevolence or goodwill for. [John 3:16](#).

LOVE, noun

1. An affection of the mind excited by beauty and worth of any kind, or by the qualities of an object which communicate pleasure, sensual or intellectual. It is opposed to hatred. *love* between the sexes, is a compound affection, consisting of esteem, benevolence, and animal desire. *love* is excited by pleasing qualities of any kind, as by kindness, benevolence, charity, and by the qualities which render social intercourse agreeable. In the latter case, *love* is ardent friendship, or a strong attachment springing from good will and esteem, and the pleasure derived from the company, civilities and kindness of others.

Between certain natural relatives, *love* seems to be in some cases instinctive. Such is the *love* of a mother for her child, which manifests itself toward an infant, before any particular qualities in the child are unfolded. This affection is apparently as strong in irrational animals as in human beings.

We speak of the *love* of amusements, the *love* of books, the *love* of money, and the *love* of whatever contributes to our pleasure or supposed profit.

SHAPED²LIVE

The *love* of God is the first duty of man, and this springs from just views of his attributes or excellencies of character, which afford the highest delight to the sanctified heart. Esteem and reverence constitute ingredients in this affection, and a fear of offending him is its inseparable effect.

2. Courtship; chiefly in the phrase, to make *love* that is, to court; to woo; to solicit union in marriage.

3. Patriotism; the attachment one has to his native land; as the *love* of country.

4. Benevolence; good will.

God is *love* [1 John 4:7](#).

5. The object beloved.

The lover and the *love* of human kind.

6. A word of endearment. Trust me, *love*

BENEVOLENCE DEFINED:

BENEV'OLENCE, *noun* [Latin benevolentia, of bene, well and volo, to will or wish. [See Will.](#)]

1. The disposition to do good; good will; kindness; charitableness; the love, of mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness.

The *benevolence* of God is one of his moral attributes; that attribute which delights in the happiness of intelligent beings. 'God is love.' 1 [John 4:1](#).

2. An act of kindness; good done; charity given.

WILL DEFINED:

WILL, *noun* [See the Verb.]

1. That faculty of the mind by which we determine either to do or forbear an action; the faculty which is exercised in deciding, among two or more objects, which we shall embrace or pursue. The *will* is directed or influenced by the judgment. The understanding or reason compares different objects, which operate as

SHAPED2LIVE

motives; the judgment determines which is preferable, and the *will* decides which to pursue. In other words, we reason with respect to the value or importance of things; we then judge which is to be preferred; and we *will* to take the most valuable. These are but different operations of the mind, soul, or intellectual part of man. Great disputes have existed respecting the freedom of the *will*. *Will* is often quite a different thing from desire.

NOTE:

I wanted to take a closer look at benevolence and will, as pointed to in Webster's dictionary. You find this statement there. "*The disposition to do good.*" A "*natural fitness or tendency.*" In other words, **something within that influences the thought or motivation to do good**. And then you have "will." The "faculty of the mind by which we *determine* either to do or forbear an action."

Notice there is an ***influence*** to commit the act, but it takes ***the will*** to determine to do it—.

WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY?

Now that we have looked at what we will say is humanity's point of view when it comes to the concept of love. Let's look at a few scriptures to see if what God has to say about love is the same as what has been determined by humanity.

Matthew 22:37-40

"And He replied to him, You shall *love* the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (intellect). This is the great (most important, principal) and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall *love* your neighbor as [*you do*] yourself. These two commandments sum up and upon them depend all the Law and the Prophets."

{Agapao – *ag-ap-ah-o*: To love in a social or moral sense.}

John 13:35

"By this shall all [*men*] know that you are My disciples, if you love one another [*if you keep on showing love among yourselves*]." {Agape – *ag-ah-pay*: affection or benevolence}

{Benevolence: **1.** The disposition to do good; good will; kindness; charitableness; the love, of mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness. Webster's 1828 Dictionary}

SHAPED²LIVE

NOTE:

The word *keep* from the original language. – In Hebrew – {shamar – *shaw-mar*} and in Greek - {terreo – *tay-reh-o*}, are the words used mean to guard. With this in mind, it is interesting that we are to "guard" this love that we are to share with one another. Then the question that would follow is this. What are we to guard it from?

The simple answer is to guard it against anything that would cause you to *choose* to stop giving and operating in love towards another person. The hard part of this choice is that the decision has nothing to do with the other person's actions or choices.

John 14:15

"If you [*really*] love Me, you will keep (obey) My commands."

{Agapao – *ag-ap-ah-o*: To love in a social or moral sense.}

John 3:16

"For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He [*even*] gave up His only begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have eternal (everlasting) life."

{Agapao – *ag-ap-ah-o*: To love in a social or moral sense.}

1 John 2:15,16

"Do not love or cherish the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, **love for [of] the Father** is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh [*craving for sensual gratification*] and the lust of the eyes [*greedy longings of the mind*] and the pride of life [*assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthly things*]--these do not come from the Father but are from the world [*itself*]. "

{Agapao – *ag-ap-ah-o*: To love in a social or moral sense.} and {Agape – *ag-ah-pay*: affection or benevolence}

NOTE THAT GOD IS AFFECTION in the statement "love for [of] the Father is not in him."

SHAPED²LIVE

1 John 4:7,8

"Beloved, let us love one another, **for love is (springs) from God**; and he who loves [*his fellowmen*] is begotten (born) of God and is coming [*progressively*] to know and understand God [*to perceive and recognize and get a better and clearer knowledge of Him*]. He who does not love has not become acquainted with God [*does not and never did know Him*], for God is love. "

{Agapao – *ag-ap-ah-o*: To love in a social or moral sense.} and {Agape – *ag-ah-pay*: affection or benevolence}

NOTE THAT GOD IS AFFECTION— That is the Agape.

Ephesians 5:25

" Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, "

{Agapao – *ag-ap-ah-o*: To love in a social or moral sense.}

Let's look at a final set of scriptures found in Hosea 3:1-5

Hos 3:1 THEN SAID the Lord to me, Go again, **love** [*the same*] woman [*Gomer*] who is beloved of a paramour (*a lover, especially the illicit partner of a married person.*) and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins [*used in the sacrificial feasts in idol worship*].

Hos 3:2 So I bought her for fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley [*the price of a slave*].

Hos 3:3 And I said to her, You shall be [*betrothed*] to me for many days; you shall not play the harlot and you shall not belong to another man. So will I also be to you [*until you have proved your loyalty to me and our marital relations may be resumed*].

Hos 3:4 For the children of Israel shall dwell and sit deprived many days, without king or prince, without sacrifice or [*idolatrous*] pillar, and without ephod [*a garment worn by priests when seeking divine counsel*] or teraphim (household gods).

Hos 3:5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God, [*inquiring of and requiring Him*] and [*from the line of*] David, their King [*of kings*]; and they shall come in [*anxious*] fear to the Lord and to His goodness and His good things in the latter days. [*Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:24.*]

SHAPED²LIVE

NOTE:

In this passage of scripture, you find one of the few times that the Hebrew word **ahab** – *aw-hab*, **ahab** – *aw-habe*, meaning to have affection for (sexually or otherwise) is used. The rest refers to a mind that has set itself towards the other in valuing the other person, not because of what they have done to deserve it. But because *the one giving the love values the other*.

This is the opposite of what humanity's idea of what love is that often requires something to have been done for them first or some other connection like that of loving a family member or friend.

Please understand that love is not the absence of affection or passion, but they are not and should not be the motivating source of the love. Our affections and passions can change like the weather. It can be moved by if we like someone or don't like the person at a given moment as examples.

The absolute truth of it all is that **YHWH IS THE SOURCE BY WHICH WE EVEN HAVE THE ABILITY TO LOVE**. It is because of His love that influences and guides us that helps us to handle love and our affections properly.

Absent from an absolute God, all we have are unbridled human emotions with only glimpses of the good, that cause more problems for humanity than it ever helps.

So, whose love will you choose to operate in? Yours, or love that is founded in and expressed from and through YHWH?