

# What are the different types of love mentioned in the Bible?

There are at least four different Greek words that are used for “love,” but not all of them are found in the New Testament. (Actually, there are more than four Greek words for “love,” but usually it is these four that come up in discussions.)

The first Greek word for “love” is [eros](#), which refers to romantic or sexual love. From it we get the word *erotic*. This specific word is not used in the New Testament.

The second is [storge](#), which refers to familial love like that of a mother for her baby or of a brother and sister for each other. It is not used in the New Testament; however, the negative term *astorgoi* (“unloving”) is found in [2 Timothy 3:3](#) NKJV, *unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good*, and a similar term, *astorgous* (“no love” in the NIV and “without natural affection” in the KJV), is found in [Romans 1:31](#) NKJV. *undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful*;

The third Greek word for “love,” [philia](#), refers to friendship and comradery. This word is often translated as “friend” (one who is loved) in the New Testament.

Once, in [Romans 12:10](#) KJV, *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;* the New Testament uses the compound word *philostorgos*, which is translated in the NIV as “devoted . . . in love.”

Finally, [agape](#) is used to speak of God’s love that He has for the world and that Believers are supposed to emulate. This is the word for “love” that is most commonly used in the New Testament. For a while it was thought that Christians must have coined the word *agape* to speak of a godly kind of love that the Greek world knew nothing of. But the word *agape* was in fact in use in the Roman Empire, and it was not coined by Christians to communicate God’s love.

While these four terms do express different nuances of the concept of love, they cannot be pressed in every situation. At one time, many people thought that the Greek language had an almost mathematical precision. However, as more ancient Greek manuscripts are discovered (and as more careful research is done), we find that Greek is no more precise than most other languages. Many times, people use words in ways that are not technically correct, and strict definitions of words are not always honored.

The distinctions between the different kinds of love do not completely hold up within the New Testament itself. Jesus says in [Luke 6:32](#) NIV, *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.”* Here, the word translated “love” is *agape* throughout the verse.

How can sinners show God's love for each other? Jesus' point is that the kind of love sinners show for each other is not the selfless, sacrificial love that Believers are called to display. In [Luke 7:5](#) NIV, *because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.*" The centurion is described as one who loves the nation of Israel—once again *agape* is the love mentioned here.

Most words can have a range of meanings, but the specific meaning of any word must be determined from the context. English speakers use the word *love* in a variety of ways from "I love ice cream" to "I love my wife" and many other things in between. No one gets confused by this because we understand what kind of love is meant from the context. When *agape* is used in the New Testament, it is usually in conjunction with some other words to give clarity as to the kind of love intended. Much of the time, *agape* is modified by the phrase *tou theou* ("of God"). The godly quality of *agape* is found in the modifying phrase, not just in the word itself. The revolutionary nature of love in [1 Corinthians 13](#) is found in the description of it there, not in the word itself. The type of love in view will always be clarified by the context.

Christianity introduced a new kind of love to the world, but Christians used words already in existence to explain the quality of this love. Love was communicated primarily by their self-sacrifice in imitation of Christ, not only by the word *agape*.