

multiply

Four Greek Words for “Love”

Adapted from Precept Ministries International

1. Φιλέω (*Phileō*)

a. Definition:

- i. *Phileō* is a companionable love.
- ii. This love speaks of affection, fondness, or liking.
- iii. Kenneth Wuest says, “It is a love that is called out of one’s heart as a response to the pleasure one takes in a person or object.”¹
- iv. *Phileō* is a love that responds to kindness, appreciation, or love. It involves giving as well as receiving; but when it is greatly strained, it can collapse in a crisis.
- v. *Phileō* is a higher love than *eros* because it is our happiness rather than my happiness.
- vi. This love is called out of one’s heart by qualities in another.

b. Usage:

- i. It is used in a number of times in its noun and verb forms in the New Testament.
- ii. In John 21:15-17, it is contrasted with *agape* love.

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2. Ἀγάπη or Ἀγαπάω (*Agapē* or *Agapaō*)

a. Definition:

- i. *Agapē* is called out of one’s heart by the preciousness of the object loved. It is a love of esteem, of evaluation. It has the idea of prizing. It is the noblest word for love in the Greek language.²
- ii. *Agapē* is not kindled by the merit or worth of its object, but it originates in its own God-given nature. God is love.
- iii. It delights in giving.
- iv. This love keeps on loving even when the loved one is unresponsive, unkind, unlovable, and unworthy. It is unconditional love.
- v. *Agapē* desires only the good of the one loved. It is a consuming passion for the well-being of others.

¹ Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), Vol. III Bypaths, pp. 111-113

² Wuest, pp. 111-113

- b. Usage:
 - i. There are only a few known occurrences of this word love outside of the bible. In other words, this word was not used very often in extra-biblical writings.
 - ii. It is used approximately three hundred and twenty times in the New Testament.
- c. Selected References: John 3:16, 3:35, 13:34, 14:15, 15:9, 15:13; Romans 5:5, 13:8-10; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 3:17, 4:2, 4:15, 5:2, 5:25; Col. 3:14; 1 Thess. 3:12, 4:9-10; 1 Peter 4:8

3. Στοργή (*Storgē*)

- a. Definition:
 - i. This love has its basis in one's own nature.
 - ii. *Storgē* is a natural affection or natural obligation
 - iii. It is a natural movement of the soul for husband, wife, child or dog.
 - iv. It is a quiet, abiding feeling within a man that rests on something close to him and that he feels good about.
- b. Usage:
 - i. In the New Testament *storgē* appears in the noun or verb form with the prefix "a" and therefore negates the love and means without this type of love. It is translated in Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3:3 as "unloving" (without natural affection, KJV).
 - ii. In Romans 12:10, *storgē* is compounded with *philos* and is translated "devoted" (kindly affectioned, KJV).
- c. References: Romans 1:31, 12:10; 2 Timothy 3:3

4. Ερως (*Eros*)

- a. Definition:
 - i. This love is erotic love
 - ii. *Eros* is a love of passion, an overmastering passion that seizes and absorbs itself into the mind.
 - iii. It is a love that is an emotional involvement based on body chemistry.
 - iv. The basic idea of this love is self-satisfaction.
 - 1. Though *Eros* is directed towards another, it actually has self in mind. For example: "I love you because you make me happy."

2. The foundation of this type of love is some characteristic in the other person which pleases you. If the characteristic would cease to exist, the reason for the love would be gone, the result being, "I don't love you anymore.
3. *Eros* looks for what it can receive. If it does give, it gives in order to receive. If it fails to get what it wants or expects, bitterness or resentment could develop.

b. Philosophy:

- i. The philosophy of *eros* is that being loved depends on being attractive in some way to another person.
- ii. Because of this dependency, *eros* would be considered a conditional type of love.

c. Usage:

- i. *Eros* is not used in the New Testament.
- ii. *Eros* is not used in the Septuagint. (The Septuagint, abbreviated LXX, is the Greek translation of the Old Testament.)