

e-concepts

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Friendship Is Not the Same as Fellowship or Love

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[Some verses quoted here (from the NASB) will use the word “love” to designate “friendship.” But that is very unfortunate and confusing because there are (at least six) different words in the Bible that might be translated by the very broad English word “love.” This paper will show 2 different uses of the English word “love” in the Bible. When the word “love” is used as “agape love,” which is the concept of giving without expecting something in return, it should be translated as the word “love.” But other verses use the word “love” where it would better be translated as “affection.”]

Relationships in the Bible

The anatomy of relationships in the Bible might be expressed as having three basic elements: fellowship, friendship, and love.

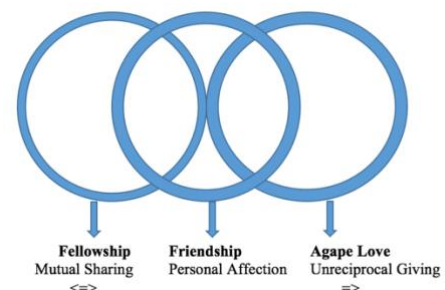
Fellowship is mutual sharing. It is all about reciprocation. Either it is giving, expecting a response, or responding to something given. The opposite of fellowship is stinginess, the unwillingness to give or reciprocate.

Love (agape love) is very different. Love is giving without an expectation of reciprocation. It has no expectation of a return for a gift. Although it may hope for good things to happen later, it is giving without any thought of return for the gift itself. The opposite of love is hate, taking without the expectation of reciprocity.

Hate is a big subject, with 92 references, in the Bible. Surprisingly, the concept of *hate* is not contrasted with love in the Bible. But it is contrasted with friendship. And when *hate* is contrasted with *friendship*, it has the idea of **having a passionate prejudice against** someone or something.

If you were of the world, the world would love [have affection for] its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates [has a passionate prejudice against] you (John 15:19).

Fellowship is two-way. Love is one-way. Fellowship is not agape love. Agape love is not fellowship. Both may (or may not) exist at the same time but they are not the same thing. They are not the opposite of each other (the opposite of fellowship is stinginess, and the opposite of love is hate). But the two are mutually exclusive (non-overlapping) aspects of a biblical relationship.



Friendship on the other hand, can go two-ways, one-way, or no-way at all. Friendship is an affection which may either expect a return, or not expect a return, or have a subjective return in itself. And that's the major difference between biblical friendship and secular friendship. The secular definition of friendship is always two-way, "a relationship of mutual affection between two or more people" (Wikipedia). That concept of fellowship is also in the Bible. But the Bible recognizes a friendship that the world does not, or at least the world would use a different word for it.

Biblical friendship can be with those who do not, or cannot, reciprocate. Job said, "*All my associates abhor me, and those I love [have affection for] have turned against me*" (Job 19:19).

Notice, Job does not say those I "have loved [have affection for] or those I used to love [have affection for]" but "*those I (currently) love [have affection for] have turned against me.*"

As I indicated, Job is using the word which indicates those who *I have affection for*, those who I currently consider my friends, have turned against me.

David wrote the following about a man he considered a friend but was not reciprocating his friendship.

For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, Then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend (Psalm 55:12-13).

Without using any of the words we are discussing, David described a friendship for a man who did not return it. David considered the man who had *exalted himself against me* to be his *companion* and his *familiar friend*. Friendship is a personal consideration which might include, but does not require, reciprocation.

There is one more application of this. It is also possible to have a friendship affection for people who **cannot** return it. For example, suppose I become enamored with C.S. Lewis. After reading and rereading many of his books I might develop an affection for C.S. Lewis. This is **not fellowship** since there is no sharing going on. This is **not love** because I can do nothing for C.S. Lewis since he has been dead for many years.

Nonetheless, I can develop an affection for him from just reading his work. Possibly, I am just developing an affection for his writing, but it seems to go beyond that to an understand of the man himself. The Bible recognizes that as a form of friendship. That same non- mutual concept of friendship could be applied to a study of Noah, Abraham, Job, David, Daniel, or the Apostle Paul (any figure in the Bible except for God the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, since they are living and involved in our lives).