

LOVE A WAY OF ACTING, NOT FEELING

People can get all messed up when they talk about “love.” If you listen to what disc jockeys, movie actors, and paperback authors keep peddling, you could get the idea that love is some kind of special feeling.

Hogwash. That’s too superficial, too shallow. The concept of love which the Bible reflects has a little more substance and depth.

According to the Bible, love isn’t so much a feeling as it is a way of acting. Love is a way of treating people.

This can be checked out by following the pattern in some key books of the Bible, starting with the book of Hosea in the Jewish scriptures.

Hosea was the one prophet who capitalized on the idea of love. He contended that the Lord’s love for his people was something like his own love for his wife.

You see, Hosea had married a prostitute. He later divorced her for her unfaithfulness, but then accepted her back.

As he saw it, the Lord had acted in a similar way by choosing an unworthy people to be his own. Furthermore, he would continue to keep them as his own even though he might have to punish them for their unfaithfulness.

That kind of love isn’t a feeling as much as it is a way of dealing with people.

The Christian scriptures offer another picture of that kind of love in action. The Gospel of St. John, chapter 13, is a pointed example.

There Jesus gives his disciples their instructions. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another,” he said. “Even as I have loved you, that you love one another (verse 34).”

The kicker here is not his nice words about love, but the way he demonstrated what that meant. During supper he took off his clothes, put on a slave’s apron, and worked his way around the table with a basin of water washing everybody’s feet!

One more example should be enough—the so-called “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13. It would appear that in that this chapter St. Paul is quoting an almost poetic hymn about love.

But it’s worth noting that Paul never defines his terms. He does not explain what love *is*. Rather, he suggests how love *behaves*. A loving person acts patiently and kindly, never jealously or boastfully, not arrogantly or rudely (verse 4).

The upshot of all this is to show that the Bible’s understanding of a common idea, in this case “love,” has a lot more to offer than might first be supposed.

Contrary to much popular opinion, love isn’t just a tender feeling. Love, according to the Bible, is the ways people act toward other people.

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