THE QUESTION

What makes Christian love for one another different from ordinary human love?

Asked by a THF member on April 11, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 11 numbered quotations · the 20 early Christian passages and 128 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-makes-christian-love-for-one-another-different-from-ordinary-human

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Christians love one another because Christ first loved them and commanded them to love as he did. Early writers say believers see each other in Christ and as God's images, not by the flesh. Natural love is affection for friends and family; Christian love reaches further, even to enemies, and seeks others' salvation.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 8

Christ's love is the pattern and command

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In Tatian's harmony of the Gospels, Jesus gives his followers a new command. They are not told simply to be kind, but to love one another in the same way he loved them. He adds that this love is how the world will recognize his disciples. The starting point is his love, not our feelings.

1

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.""

later in the same passage

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.""

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 45 (c. 150–180 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 9, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 2 OF 8

It flows from the blood Christ gave

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Rome roots Christian love in what Jesus did. Out of love, Christ gave his blood, his flesh and his soul for us. Those who have received that love are to keep his commands. So Christian love is a response to a gift already given, not a trade between people who like each other.

2

"Let those who have love in Christ keep the commandments of Christ."

later in the same passage

"In love, the Lord has taken us to Himself. Out of the Love He bore us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave His blood for us by the will of God; His flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians*
THF's updated English

Source 20, page 7 **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 3 OF 8

Believers see each other in Christ

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Ignatius tells Christians not to look at one another in a worldly way, by looks, rank or family ties. Instead they are to love each other in Jesus Christ, copying God's own way of acting. In another letter he gives a reason: each person bears the image of God. That is a different basis from natural liking.

3 “Do you all then, imitating the same divine conduct, show respect to one another, and let no one view their neighbor in a worldly way, but do you continually love each other in Jesus Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Magnesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

4 “Love one another in the Lord, as you are the images of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistles of Ignatius* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 5, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 8

Natural affection differs from spiritual brotherly love

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Clement of Alexandria names two kinds of love. Natural affection is the warm bond we feel toward friends and household. Brotherly love, in his sense, is love toward those who share the same Spirit. He does not call natural love bad; it follows from love. But Christian brotherhood rests on a shared spiritual life, not on blood or friendship.

5 “Natural affection is a kindred habit exercised in the love of friends or of those in the household. And if the real man within us is the spiritual man, philanthropy is brotherly love toward those who share in the same spirit.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 2.9 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 12, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 8

Christian love reaches even those who hate

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Letter to Diognetus says the world hates Christians, yet Christians love those who hate them, the way the soul cares for a body that fights it. Athenagoras makes a similar point to pagan readers: Christians do not love only their friends. Love that only returns love is common; love for enemies marks Christ's people.

6 “The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and loves the members; Christians likewise love those that hate them.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Mathetes,** *Epistle to Diognetus* (c. 80–200 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

7 “who, moreover, carry our kindness so far that we do not love only our friends”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Athenagoras,** *A Plea for the Christians* 12 (c. 170–190 AD) **Source 10, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 8

True love seeks the salvation of others

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The account of Polycarp's death says he waited to be handed over, as the Lord did, so others could follow his example. It then gives a short definition: real love wants salvation for all the brothers, not only for oneself. Christian love aims at a person's eternal good, not just at present comfort.

8 “For true and well-founded love involves not only wishing for one's own salvation but also for all the brothers.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 7, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 7 OF 8

It copies Christ's humble service

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Apostolic Constitutions tell deacons not to be ashamed to serve the needy. Their reason is that the Lord of heaven and earth suffered for us, even to the cross. If he did that, serving others should not seem too hard. Christian love is modeled on Christ's own lowly, self-giving service.

9 “If, therefore, the Lord of heaven and earth underwent all His sufferings for us, how then do you find it hard to minister to those who are in need?”

later in the same passage

“Therefore, we also ought to serve the brothers, in imitation of Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** **Source 18, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
(c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 8 OF 8

It looks ahead to God's kingdom

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Christian love also has a future in view. A sermon from the early church urges believers to love one another so that all may reach the kingdom of God. Cyprian adds that love is the bond of the brotherhood and will last forever with God in heaven, long after this life ends.

10 “Therefore let us love one another, so that we may all attain the kingdom of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *Second Epistle* 9 (c. 88–99 AD) **Source 3, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

11 “Love is the bond of brotherhood, the foundation of peace, and the firm support and security of unity. It is greater than both hope and faith.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 16, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages mostly describe Christian love; they say little about how non-Christians thought about their own love.
- Clement of Alexandria treats natural affection as good, so the passages do not teach that love among non-Christians is worthless.
- They do not set out a full list of every reason Christians love one another.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 20 early Christian passages and 128 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–20, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 21–78, in Bible order), then 70 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *20 passages from 12 writers*

Mathetes, *c. 80–200 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Epistle to Diognetus* **Quote 6, page 4** world also hates Christians, though it is not harmed, because they reject pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and loves the members; Christians likewise love those that… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Epistle to Diognetus* (1885 English) “what is the affection which they cherish among themselves… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome, *c. 88–99 AD · source 3*

3 *Second Epistle* 9 (1885 English) **Quote 10, page 5** “we have an opportunity of being healed, let us yield ourselves to God that heals us, and give to Him a recompense… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 4–6*

4 *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** “ye all then, imitating the same divine conduct, pay respect to one another, and let no one look upon his neighbour after the flesh, but do ye continually love each… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Epistles of Ignatius* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “one another in the Lord, as being the images of God… [continues online] **read ›**

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6 *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English; on point 3) “us all therefore love one another in harmony, and let no one look upon his neighbour according to the flesh, but in Christ Jesus… [continues online] **read ›**

Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · source 7*

7 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “it is the part of a true and well-founded love, not only to wish one’s self to be saved, but also all the brethren… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Diatessaron* 46 (1885 English; on point 1) “15:12 This is my commandment, 29 that you love one another, as I loved you… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Diatessaron* 45 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “13:35 By this shall every man know that you are 22 my disciples, if you have love one to another… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 10*

10 *A Plea for the Christians* 12 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “moreover, carry our benevolence to such an extent, that we not only love our friends (for if you love them, He says, that love you, and lend to them that… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *Stromata* 3 (on point 1) Ephesians 4:20-24, according to the likeness of God. Therefore become imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Stromata* 2.9 **Quote 5, page 3** “affection, on the other hand, is the preservation of good will, or of affection… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 13*

13 *To Scapula* 1 (1885 English; on point 5) “all love those who love them; it is peculiar to Christians alone to love those that hate them… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 14–17*

14 *Treatises* (on point 1) “the rewards of Christ, who said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you," John 15:12… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 1) “4:32 And the Lord has bidden us with His own voice, saying, This is my command, that you love one another… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 11, page 5** “Charity is the bond of brotherhood, the foundation of peace, the holdfast and security of unity, which is greater than both hope and faith, which excels both good works and… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Treatises* (1885 English) “This unanimity formerly prevailed among the apostles; and thus the new assembly of believers, keeping the Lord's commandments, maintained its charity… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 18*

18 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 9, page 5** “53:11 For when He had taken a towel, He girded Himself… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · source 19*

19 *Homilies on Philippians* (1885 English; on point 1) “Christ says, By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 20*

20 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “him who has love in Christ keep the commandments of Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

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THE BIBLE *58 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

21 **Leviticus 19:17** You shall not hate your brother in your mind. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and you shall not bear sin because of him. **read ›**

22 **Leviticus 19:34** The resident foreigner who comes to you shall be among you as the native, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were resident foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. **read ›**

23 **Joshua 23:11** So take great care to love the Lord our God. **read ›**

24 **Proverbs 12:10** The righteous has compassion on the lives of his cattle, but the inward parts of the ungodly are unmerciful. **read ›**

25 **Isaiah 13:13** For the heaven will be enraged, and the earth will be shaken from its foundations, because of the wrath of the anger of the Lord of hosts, in the day when his wrath comes upon it. **read ›**

26 **Isaiah 13:21** But wild beasts will rest there, and the houses will be filled with howling; and sirens will rest there, and demons will dance there, **read ›**

27 **Isaiah 14:1** And the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and they will rest on their land; and the resident foreigner will be added to them, and will be added to the house of Jacob. **read ›**

28 **Isaiah 14:13** But you said in your mind, ‘I will go up to heaven; I will set my throne above the stars of heaven; I will sit on a lofty mountain, on the lofty mountains toward the north; **read ›**

29 **Ezekiel 41:9** and the breadth of the wall of the side chamber on the outside, five cubits; and the remaining spaces between the side chambers of the house, **read ›**

30 **Daniel 12:10** Let many be chosen out and made white and refined by fire and sanctified; and let the lawless act lawlessly; and none of the lawless shall understand, but those of understanding shall understand. **read ›**

31 **1 Esdras 4:25** And a man loves his own wife more than father and mother. **read ›**

32 **Judith 8:24** And now, brothers, let us show our brothers that their life hangs on us, and that the sanctuary and the house and the altar rest upon us. **read ›**

33 **Wisdom of Sirach 10:20** Among brothers their leader is honored, and those who fear the Lord in his eyes. **read ›**

34 **Wisdom of Sirach 13:15** Every living creature loves its like, and every man his neighbor. **read ›**

35 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:1** In three things I was made beautiful, and I stood up in beauty before the Lord and men: harmony among brothers, and friendship among neighbors, and a wife and husband who suit each other. **read ›**

36 **Wisdom of Sirach 40:24** Brothers and help are for a time of trouble, but above both an act of mercy will deliver. **read ›**

37 **3 Maccabees 2:33** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

38 **4 Maccabees 9:23** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

39 **4 Maccabees 13:13** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

40 **4 Maccabees 13:21** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

41 **4 Maccabees 13:23** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

42 **4 Maccabees 13:25** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

43 **4 Maccabees 13:26** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

44 **4 Maccabees 13:27** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

45 **4 Maccabees 14:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

46 **4 Maccabees 14:13** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

47 **Luke 7:9** When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude who followed him, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel.” **read ›**

48 **John 1:2** He was in the beginning with God. **read ›**

49 **John 2:10** and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now!” **read ›**

50 **John 13:34** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. **read ›**

51 **John 13:35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” **read ›**

52 **John 15:12** This is my commandment, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. **read ›**

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53 **John 15:17** I command these things to you, that you may love one another. **read ›**

54 **Romans 1:31** without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, irreconcilable, unmerciful; **read ›**

55 **Romans 12:10** In love of the brothers be tenderly affectionate to one another; in honor prefer one another, **read ›**

56 **Romans 12:13** contributing to the needs of the saints, and given to hospitality. **read ›**

57 **1 Corinthians 13:8** Love never fails. But prophecies will be done away with; tongues will cease; knowledge will be done away with. **read ›**

58 **1 Corinthians 14:1** Pursue love and earnestly desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. **read ›**

59 **1 Corinthians 16:24** My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen. **read ›**

60 **Galatians 6:2** Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. **read ›**

61 **Ephesians 4:32** And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God also forgave us in Christ. **read ›**

62 **Ephesians 6:23** Peace be to the brothers, and love with faithfulness, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **read ›**

63 **Colossians 3:14** Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. **read ›**

64 **1 Thessalonians 4:9** But concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you. For you yourselves are taught by God to love one another, **read ›**

65 **Hebrews 13:1** Let brotherly love continue. **read ›**

66 **1 Peter 4:8** And above all things be earnest in your love among yourselves, for love will cover a multitude of sins. **read ›**

67 **1 Peter 5:14** Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to all of you who are in Christ Jesus. Amen. **read ›**

68 **2 Peter 1:7** and in godliness, brotherly affection; and in brotherly affection, love. **read ›**

69 **1 John 3:11** For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another— **read ›**

70 **1 John 3:14** We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He who does not love his brother remains in death. **read ›**

71 **1 John 3:16** By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. **read ›**

72 **1 John 3:17** But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, then closes his heart of compassion against him, how does God's love remain in him? **read ›**

73 **1 John 3:23** This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he commanded. **read ›**

74 **1 John 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. **read ›**

75 **1 John 4:11** Beloved, if God loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another. **read ›**

76 **1 John 4:20** If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? **read ›**

77 **1 John 4:21** This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should also love his brother. **read ›**

78 **3 John 1:5** Beloved, you do a faithful work in whatever you do for the brothers and for strangers, **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *70 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Psalms 119:9

Proverbs 2:3 · 3:23 · 4:10

Isaiah 43:19

Jeremiah 5:8

Micah 6:6

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Matthew 5:16 · 5:20 · 5:24 · 5:25 · 5:46 · 6:24 · 8:22 · 20:26 · 20:28
Mark 10:2
Luke 6:27 · 6:30 · 6:32 · 6:34 · 9:60 · 12:58 · 16:13
John 1:6 · 5:24 · 5:28 · 13:4 · 14:6 · 15:13 · 17:11
Acts 1:14
Romans 3:8 · 6:14 · 6:15 · 6:16 · 7:24 · 10:2 · 10:4 · 10:19 · 11:11 · 12:9
1 Corinthians 1:24 · 2:9 · 9:25 · 9:27 · 13:4 · 15:32 · 15:34
2 Corinthians 5:1 · 5:7 · 6:18 · 11:13
Galatians 5:13
Ephesians 2:5 · 4:20 · 5:1 · 5:5 · 5:22
Philippians 3:20
Hebrews 1:1 · 10:26
1 Peter 2:11 · 3:18 · 4:6
1 John 1:6 · 2:4 · 2:18 · 3:3
Revelation 2:6

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What makes Christian love for one another different from ordinary human love?” on April 11, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY