



Exploring The Loving of Christ Through the Perspective of a Disciple

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Abstract

This article explores the theme of Christ's love as the central message of Scripture, highlighting its embodiment from Genesis to Revelation. The purpose is to explain that Scripture is the primary source of expressing God's love for the world through Christ. Using a biblical theological approach, this article traces how God's love drives His actions and demands a response from humans. This study yielded the main response, namely that believers must love God, their neighbor, the Savior, and their enemies. Likewise, discipleship rooted in God's love will have an impact on faith growth and spiritual maturity. In conclusion, believers as disciples of Christ must reflect on God's love as the basis for transforming Christian life personally and communally.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi tema kasih Kristus sebagai pesan utama Kitab Suci, dengan menyoroti perwujudannya dari Kitab Kejadian hingga Wahyu. Tujuannya guna menjelaskan bahwa Kitab Suci menjadi sumber utama dalam mengungkapkan kasih Allah bagi dunia melalui Kristus. Menggunakan pendekatan teologi biblika, artikel ini menelusuri bagaimana kasih Allah mendorong tindakannya dan menuntut respons dari manusia. Studi ini menghasilkan respons utama, yakni orang percaya harus mengasihi Allah, sesamanya, Sang Juruselamat, dan musuh. Demikian juga melalui pemuridan berakar pada kasih Allah akan membawa dampak pada pertumbuhan iman dan kedewasaan rohani. Kesimpulannya, orang percaya sebagai murid Kristus harus merenungkan kasih Allah itu sebagai dasar dalam mengubah kehidupan Kristen secara pribadi dan komunal.

Introduction

Biblical theology essentially seeks to understand the grand narrative of the Scriptures through key themes that weave together the Old Testament and the New Testament. One of the central themes that serves as a common thread throughout the entire Bible is the love of God, especially the love expressed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Gorman says that in the

prologue of the Gospel of John, the love of God for the world is clearly presented. The Word became flesh within the framework of realizing the eternal plan for the redemption of sinners (Gorman 2018). The love of Christ is not only the main motivation for salvation but also the fundamental pattern in the formation of the community of God's people and the life of the disciples. However, in many systematic and biblical theological literatures, discussions about the love of Christ are often sectoral and not comprehensive narratively from Genesis to Revelation. Jipp emphasizes that the four Gospels share the same theme regarding the Messianic work. Israel failed to carry out God's vision for the world. However, through Christ, the plan for the salvation of the world has been realized (Jipp 2020).

Several works have highlighted the importance of God's love as the foundation of salvation. Harold has studied God's love in relation to world evangelism. Through the preaching of the Gospel, the world can come to know God's love in Jesus Christ so that they may be reconciled with the Creator (Harold 2022). Berkhof says that humans are the object of God's love (Berkhof 2006). The theological basis is derived from John 3:16. Christ as the basis for the redemption of sins that removes obstacles to the manifestation of God's redeeming love in the forgiveness of sinners and their sanctification, by fulfilling God's justice and legal demands (cf. John 3:16). Cacho and de Castillo have studied God's love for teenagers in the Philippines during the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic. God as the main source of hope for teenagers. God's mercy is very real to them. God also gives His grace to sinners and restores them (Cacho and Del Castillo 2022). Byerly has proposed the relationship between God's love and Christian virtues. People who receive God's love can improve their mental health and indirectly enable someone to cultivate or maintain moral virtues (Byerly 2022). Furthermore, God's love can be observed in Augustine's great work on ethical thinking, which emphasizes the central roles of love and justice, and can serve as an important foundation in shaping a robust moral framework to address various ethical issues in today's world (Isma et al. 2024, 8). Jonathan Edwards, in his view, as explained in *Charity and Its Fruits*, true Christian virtue essentially stems from a heart attitude of love and kindness towards all creation (Edwards 2020, 3–4). Similarly, contemporary theologian Miroslav Volf explains that everything in the world, according to him, cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as part of relationships colored by love as its main character (Volf 2016, 204–5). However, these various approaches generally emphasize systematic or ethical aspects alone, often failing to fully capture the living and continuously expressed flow of God's love throughout the history of human redemption. However, God's love is not merely a theological concept that can be formulated into a system,

but rather a reality that pulses through every story from creation, fall, to restoration, showing how God continually seeks and restores His people with unwavering faithfulness. On the other hand, the biblical-narrative approach developed by theologians such as Graeme Goldsworthy and Christopher Wright has opened new horizons for reading the theme of Christ's love comprehensively within the biblical narrative, from Genesis to Revelation. This approach helps us see how God's love is not just a fragment in doctrine, but rather the thread that weaves through the entire story of redemption. Nevertheless, there is still ample room to reaffirm and delve deeper into how humans respond to that love not merely as passive recipients, but as individuals invited to live in that love, making it the foundation of relationships, mission, and discipleship. This article aims to fill that gap by presenting a biblical theological study that narratively traces the manifestations of Christ's love from the Book of Genesis to Revelation. In the context of the modern world, which is filled with fragmented relationships, social conflicts, and spiritual identity crises, a renewed appreciation of God's consistent and saving love becomes increasingly relevant. The phenomenon of increasing violence, intolerance, and individualism within society, even among Christian communities, underscores the importance of returning to the foundation of faith: the love of Christ as a transformative power.

This article aims to trace how Christ's love is progressively revealed throughout the entire narrative of Scripture, a grand story about God who relentlessly pursues His people with unconditional love. More than just a theological study, this writing also invites us to reflect on how believers should respond to that love: by loving God with all their heart, loving others within the community, loving Christ as the living Savior, and even loving enemies as a reflection of radical divine love. Through a biblical theological approach, this article aims to present a narrative synthesis that not only deepens the understanding of the Christian faith but also inspires readers to make love the primary identity in both personal life and church fellowship.

With a biblical theological approach and tracing the development of the theme of God's love as well as Christ's love in the Scriptures narratively and thematically. The excavation of verses from the Old Testament and the New Testament is carried out to demonstrate the continuity and progressiveness of God's love in relation to humanity. The main objective of this method is to demonstrate that the love of Christ is the common thread that unites the entire biblical narrative and that Christian discipleship should be seen as a response to that love.

Method

The approach used in this article is a biblical theology approach, by tracing the development of the themes of God's love and Christ's love in the Scriptures narratively and thematically. The excavation of verses from the Old Testament and the New Testament is carried out to demonstrate the continuity and progressiveness of God's love in relation to humanity. The main objective of this method is to demonstrate that the love of Christ is the common thread that unites the entire biblical narrative and that Christian discipleship should be seen as a response to that love.

Result

This study finds that God's love is first demonstrated in the acts of creation, provision, and fellowship with humanity (Gen. 1–2). When humanity fell into sin, God's love remained present in the form of mercy and preservation (Gen. 3, 6). That love developed through the promise to Abraham, the people of Israel, and the prophecy about the Messiah. In the New Testament, God's love reaches its peak in the sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Humanity's response to this love includes love for God (Matt. 22:37), for others (1 John 3:16), for Christ (Luke 9:23), and even for enemies (Luke 6:27). All of this shows that love is the main characteristic of the life of a disciple of Christ. This study shows that God's love was first manifested in creation, preservation, and His relationship with humanity. Even after humanity fell into sin, God's love remained in the form of mercy and preservation. This love continues to develop through the promise to Abraham, the people of Israel, and the prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. In the New Testament, God's love reaches its peak through the sacrifice of Christ. As a response, humans are expected to love God, others, Christ, and even enemies. All of this emphasizes that love is the main characteristic of the life of Christ's followers.

Discussion

The Love of God in the Early Narrative of the Bible

The love of God is the main theme that flows throughout the Bible. In the book of Genesis, this love is evident in the creation of man in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26–27), which shows that from the very beginning, humans were endowed with dignity and high value as a reflection of God's own Person. This love continues to be manifested throughout the history of salvation, revealing God's character of compassion, generosity, mercy, and an everlasting faithfulness that continually supports His people in every age. In line with that, Sauc

emphasizes that the experience of God as just, merciful, and compassionate is a tangible form of the love we experience in our faith life (Sauca 2021, 349–63). This love is not only evident in the act of creation but also in the trust that God gives to humans to manage the Garden of Eden, a responsibility that reflects His closeness and love. However, when humans fell into sin, God's love did not cease. On the contrary, He demonstrated His mercy not by immediately imposing a sentence of destruction, but by giving a promise of redemption as the beginning of a restoration plan that flows throughout the narrative of the Scriptures. In the book of Genesis 3:15, known as the protoevangelium, the first promise about the coming of the Redeemer who will defeat the power of sin. The important theme in Genesis 3:15 explains the first Gospel or the seed of the Gospel to fulfill the work of world salvation (Ashford 2019).

The Love of God in the History of Redemption

Throughout the history of the people of Israel, God's love has been actively and continuously manifested through various forms of covenants and acts of salvation. This is particularly evident in the narrative of Noah, when God did not destroy all of humanity, but instead chose and saved one righteous family as a manifestation of His love and care for creation. In this context, the flood is not merely an act of punishment, but rather a means for God to reconstruct the earth and the life within it without recreating it anew. This action simultaneously affirms God's commitment to the continuity and future of humanity (Pane et al. 2022, 126–38). In Abraham's calling, God's love is evident through the divine initiative to reach out to an individual from a nation of idol worshippers. God not only called Abraham out of his homeland but also made a covenant with him and promised that through his descendants, all nations on earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3), a statement of love that is universal and includes an eschatological dimension. As stated by J. Richard Middleton, the main purpose of God calling the ancestor of Israel was for him to become an intermediary of salvation blessings for all nations (Middleton 2020).

In the figure of David, God's love is expressed through an eternal covenant that promises his descendants will occupy the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16), a messianic prophecy that finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. As highlighted in the article *The Eternal Davidic Covenant in II Samuel 7 and its Later Manifestation in the Bible*, this covenant not only affirms the continuity of the Davidic dynasty but also points to the eschatological fulfillment in Christ as the Messiah, the promised descendant of David (Angel 2016, 83–90). In the Psalms, God's love is sung as *hesed*, an unconditional and unwavering faithful love that

does not depend on the people's response, but is rooted in God's faithfulness to His own promise. Of the 245 occurrences of the word *hesed* in the Hebrew Bible, three-quarters refer to God's *hesed*. This steadfast love is unchanging and eternal; God does not uphold the covenant because His people are obedient, but because of His unconditional steadfast love (Silverman 2021). Likewise, in the prophecies of the prophets, God's love often appears alongside a call to repentance, showing that divine love is not a love that condones sin, but a love that pursues, restores, and renews. This is clearly evident in the book of Joel, where the prophet delivers a prophetic message aimed at stirring repentance among his contemporaries (Joel 2:12–17), with the hope of restoring their fellowship with the LORD, the true God of Israel (Joel 2:18–3:21) (Udoekpo 2023). From all these events, it is clear that God's love is the foundation of the entire covenant relationship between God and His people a love that guides, disciplines with the intent to educate, and ultimately saves. The death of Jesus on the cross as the sin-atonement sacrifice is the core of the biblical narrative, inviting us to a loving reconciliation. Jesus, as the Redeemer through His bloodshed and the Passover Lamb, sacrificed His life so that believers could be reconciled with God. The cross shows the union of God's justice and love, where believers witness the Gospel of Redemption (Wulandari et al. 2023).

The Pinnacle of God's Love in Christ

The love of God reaches its peak in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect manifestation of active and saving divine love. In His incarnation, the Word became man (John 1:14), showing that God does not remain distant and untouchable, but is willing to humble Himself to be present amidst human suffering. In His life, Jesus demonstrated concrete love, reaching out to the marginalized, teaching with compassion, and living in complete obedience to the Father. However, the pinnacle of that love was manifested in His death on the cross, where He took humanity's place in bearing the punishment for sin (Isa. 53:5; 2 Cor. 5:21). The cross becomes proof that God's love is not sentimental love, but love that demands true sacrifice for the salvation of sinners. The cross teaches that true love does not remain silent in the face of human destruction and sin, but instead enters into suffering itself to redeem and restore it. In the cross of Christ, we see love that dares to confront evil, bear wrath, and give itself entirely to liberate its people (Mawson 2022, 115–30).

The victory over death in Christ's resurrection reveals that God's love not only redeems but also renews and gives eternal life (Rom. 6:9–10). This resurrection signifies that divine love does not end at the cross, but continues in the power of renewal that gives hope to all creation.

The love of God in Christ is a love that enters into human history, touches the wounded, and brings them into eternal fellowship with the Father. Therefore, this love demands a response: a faith that believes, a heart that loves God and others, and a life shaped by the sacrifice of Christ. Divine love is not only the foundation of salvation but also the basis for the transformation of life and the calling of the faithful. Wulandari et al., say that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is a tangible manifestation of God's love for sinners. Redemption that reveals God's justice and love (Deut 19:21). The cross as the perfect form of God's love (Wulandari et al. 2023).

Love as the Core of Faith in the New Testament

In Jesus' teaching, love becomes the highest law. When asked which commandment is the greatest, He answered that loving God and one's neighbor is the essence of the entire Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:37-40). The apostles also lived out this love. The Apostle John specifically emphasizes that "God is love" and that love is proof that someone lives in fellowship with God (1 John 4:7-16). Love is not just an idea, but must be manifested in real actions. "My children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Love becomes the true measure of faith maturity and a sign of God's presence in the lives of believers. Stott and Wright emphasize that Jesus sent believers into the world, just as the Father sent Him. The Church carries the message of God's love to the world so that they may become aware, repent, and receive Jesus as Lord, so that God's love may become evident in their lives (Stott and Wright 2015).

Four main responses to love

Love for God as a reaction to the gift of salvation

Love for God is the first and most fundamental response of a believer. In the Old Testament, this love is manifested in the command known as the *Shema*: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5). This command demands total and undivided love for God, which becomes the foundation of the entire life of His people. I. J. Cairns interprets that this command teaches love for God holistically, encompassing thoughts, feelings, will, vitality, and all personal energy, as a comprehensive response to God's love and command (Hotmarlina and Sondjaja 2022, 171–72). This was reaffirmed by Jesus as the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:37). Love for God is not merely a sentimental feeling, but an active response born from the awareness of who God is and what He has done. Believers love God because God first loved them (1 John 4:19). In the light of

the grace of salvation given in Christ, love for God becomes a form of true gratitude and worship, reflected in obedience, worship, and lifelong devotion.

Love for one another as a form of community life

Love for one another is the second commandment that is similar to the first (Matt. 22:39). In the community of God's people, love becomes the foundation of healthy and holy relationships. The Apostle Paul emphasizes that love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10), and in 1 Corinthians 13, love is described as the highest quality that must accompany every spiritual gift. Love for others means being patient, kind, not seeking one's own advantage, not keeping a record of wrongs, and rejoicing in the truth. In the early church, love became the most prominent mark of Christian identity. The expression attributed to non-Christians at that time, "Look, how they love one another," became a testimony to the world about the life of the community of Christ's followers. This love is not only spiritual or internal but is also concretely manifested through social concern, solidarity with the weak, and selfless service—active and transformative love that reaches out to the needs of others in a world full of suffering (Aquilina 2021).

Love for Christ that encourages discipleship and sacrifice

Love for Christ is a profound personal expression of faith. In John 21, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" as the basis for His call to shepherd His sheep. Loving Christ means being willing to deny oneself, take up the cross, and follow Him every day (Luke 9:23). This love is not just a spiritual affection, but is manifested in obedience to His commands (John 14:15). True discipleship is born from love for Christ: a love that moves the heart to present life as a living, holy, and pleasing sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). In the history of the church, many martyrs and servants of God willingly gave their lives because of their deep love for Christ, surpassing their love for their own lives. Ignatius of Antioch expressed this spirit by saying, "I love death... so that I may obtain Christ Jesus." (Antioch 2022). A similar statement is also found in modern studies: "My love has been crucified... When I suffer, I will be freed in Christ Jesus, and with Him, I will rise in freedom." (Anonymous 2023). Moreover, contemporary research concludes that the sacrifices of martyrs, both from the early church and modern times, "demonstrate the same relationship between suffering due to persecution and living as a disciple of Christ." (Mrdjenovic 2022).

Love for enemies as the highest form of love that reflects God's love

Loving your enemies is a radical teaching of Jesus and a hallmark of divine love. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This teaching is not just about being passive towards the wicked, but actively seeking the good of those who oppose us. This is unconditional love, a love that transcends human justice, and a love that does not repay evil with evil. The Apostle Paul reinforces this teaching in Romans 12:20-21, where he commands to feed and give drink to enemies as an act of "heaping burning coals" on their heads, that is, shaming evil with love. Love for enemies is a direct reflection of God's own love, which "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45), and which gave His Son for a world that was still His enemy (Rom. 5:8,10).

From that discussion, God is truly present and faithful. God's goodness for each person He loves. This is shown in His care and kindness towards believers. Cacho sees that God's love also enables Christians to overcome life's challenges, such as the pandemic that occurred during COVID-19. Furthermore, God is the main source of hope for believers. This hope is firmly anchored in Jesus Christ (Cacho and Del Castillo 2022). This reminds believers to place their hope in the merciful God. He continues to bless and grant grace to humanity despite their sins. The contemporary conceptualization of God's love becomes a mainstay for believers wherever they are in overcoming every problem they face.

Implications in Discipleship

The love of Christ is the common thread that binds the entire narrative of the Bible, from creation in Genesis to the fulfillment of all things in Revelation. This love is not merely a divine attribute, but the deepest reflection of God's own character—"God is love" (1 John 4:8). In the act of creation, God did it not out of necessity, but out of love. He created man in His image and likeness, to live in an intimate relationship with Him. When man fell into sin, that love did not cease. It is precisely in the fall that God's love is manifested in the form of mercy and the promise of restoration, which is then progressively realized through His covenants with His people and reaches its climax in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Christ is the tangible manifestation of God's love in history. The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ are not just theological events, but manifestations of saving and renewing love. Therefore, the love of Christ becomes the center of the identity and mission of believers. Christian discipleship is not merely a series of moral obligations or a good ethical lifestyle. It is born from a personal experience of God's love that touches the heart, transforms

life, and evokes a sincere response to follow, love, and obey Christ. True discipleship is a heartfelt response of gratitude to the love that has been given first unconditional, sacrificial, and limitless love.

In the life of the church, love is not just one of many values; love is the primary identity. Without love, all spiritual activities, service, and mission lose their meaning (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3). The church is called to be a community of love that reflects God's love to the world. This is reflected in the vertical relationship with God (worship and adoration), the horizontal relationship with others (fellowship and service), and the outward relationship with the world (mission and testimony). When the church lives in love, it becomes a sign of the Kingdom of God that brings hope, comfort, and restoration to a wounded and divided world.

Looking ahead, the understanding of Christ's love opens up vast spaces for further exploration, especially in the context of contemporary church ministry and mission. In the midst of an increasingly pluralistic, individualistic, and polarized world, God's love becomes both a prophetic message and a pastoral practice. The Church is challenged to actualize Christ's love in various forms: service to the marginalized, forgiveness towards those who hurt, cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue, and the willingness to embrace the marginalized. Thus, love is not just a doctrine, but a living reality that touches the world through the genuine testimony of God's people.

Conclusion

The love of Christ is the main foundation of the Bible, showing that God is true love who creates and sustains humanity. Even after the fall into sin, His love remains evident through the promise of restoration and reaches its peak in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This love shapes the identity and mission of believers. True discipleship is not merely an obligation, but a sincere response to God's life-changing love. In the church, love is the primary identity, reflecting God's love for the world through worship, fellowship, service, and mission. Thus, the understanding of Christ's love challenges the church to actualize it through service to the marginalized, forgiveness, and cross-cultural dialogue. Thus, love becomes a living reality that touches the world.

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