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IS LOVE REALLY A BEAUTIFUL 'SONG'?

Thousands of songs deal with the subject of "love". Love is by far the most common subject of novels and short stories. It is an ever-popular topic in stories, songs and movies. There are myriad variations on the story, where the prince falls in love with, and at the end marries, the beautiful princess, and they live happily ever after.

It seems that everyone longs for and yearns for love; and it seems that people are willing to do almost anything to get love. The ultimate representation of love is embodied in the marriage ceremony, where the bride and the groom publicly profess their love for each other with the words "I DO"!

A truly HAPPY marriage must be built on the foundation of love. Without the ingredient of love there is something missing in a marriage. Without love a marriage is nothing more than a business contract, which may provide mutual benefits for both parties ... a far cry from the picture of a beautiful bride prepared for the wedding ceremony.

So let's take a closer look at this subject of love within marriage. Let's ask ourselves some specific questions.

- 1) How can you know for sure that you really love someone, before you make the commitment to marry that person? Can you be sure?
- 2) How or when did you first realize that you love this particular person? Was it when you first met this person?
- 3) Can you help having feelings of love for someone ... or is this something that is beyond your control?
- 4) How can you possibly be sure that you will still love this person 20 years from now? Can you be sure or is there an element of risk involved?
- 5) Once you marry this person you love, will you ever again fall in love with someone else? What is the likelihood of that happening? Or is that totally unlikely to happen?
- 6) What does God have to say about love and marriage? Does the Bible provide answers and understanding on this subject?

Let's see if we can reach some answers to these and similar questions.

THE WORLD HAS BEEN TOTALLY DECEIVED

In the western world we are from early childhood onwards bombarded with the word "love". By the time we finish high school most of us have heard many HUNDREDS of songs that talk about love; and we have probably seen scores of movies that have the theme of love. All of this exposure to this abstract concept of "love" has certainly contributed towards the picture we ourselves have of love.

Just take a moment and think about all the songs that come to YOUR mind, which deal with the topic of love. Depending on your age, this could possibly include any of the following statements, which are

either the titles or key phrases from songs that are or at one time or another were popular:

- Love is a beautiful song;
- Love is a many splendoured thing;
- I can't stop loving you;
- I don't know why I love you, but I do;
- Love me tender;
- All you need is love;
- She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah;
- Lay your head upon my pillow, make-believe you love me;
- Everybody loves somebody some time;
- Heaven is my woman's love;
- All I want to do is make love to you;
- We were lovers but never friends;
- O Carol, I am but a fool; I love you but you ...;
- When I first saw you, with your smile so tender;
- It's now or never, my love won't wait;
- My hands are shaking and my knees are weak ...;
- Some say love is like a river;
- Please release me, let me go; I don't love you any more;
- Please help me, I'm falling in love with you;
- It must have been love, but it's over now;
- I just can't help believing ...;
- You picked a fine time to leave me, Lucille;
- Only you for ever more; you are my theme for a dream;
- I want you, I need you, I love you with all my heart;
- I'll always love you; etc., etc..

The list is seemingly endless. And it seems every week someone has written a new song about love and a new "star" performer is discovered somewhere. We've all heard many, many songs like these at various times.

But which of these songs REALLY talk about love? The answer is: NONE OF THEM!

That answer may not be any great revelation to you. But we still need to understand something, and that is this: don't think that this endless exposure to what the songs we hear, the movies we see and the fiction stories we read tell us is love, has not in some way made an impression on what WE think about the subject of love. It surely HAS influenced our view of "love". The world we are a part of has shaped and moulded our concept of love, probably far more than we realize. There is a good chance that some of our expectations regarding love are not right, if we are an average member of society. In our western world we have been conditioned to have extremely high expectations of what love will do for us, and the happiness it will bring into our lives.

A common idea is that when you meet the right person, you will somehow know that this is the person for you to love. This idea is itself based on the assumption that there is such a thing as "the right person" somewhere ... the difficulty is just finding that right person. Another common idea is that when you do meet the right person, you can't help having feelings of love for that person; you can't deny the love you feel. This last idea is very much a fulfillment of the one song I referred to above, which stated: "I can't stop loving you; so I've made up my mind ... to live my life in dreams of yesterday ..."; the idea being that if you, the ideal person for me, don't want to marry me; then there simply is no other purpose to my life. That's a rather vivid illustration of the extremely high expectations we have for "love".

God created us human beings. He knows how we function and "what makes us tick". So let's try to understand this concept of love from God's point of view.

WHAT GOD TELLS US ABOUT LOVE

Let's start off with a statement Jesus Christ made in John chapter 15.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

This is a well-known statement, right? But have you noticed what this tells us about love? "To love" is something we are COMMANDED to do! This all by itself makes very clear that we certainly DO have control over who we love. Jesus Christ could not command us to do something over which we have no control.

So we ourselves very clearly decide who we will love and who we will not love. Love is not at all something beyond our control. This becomes even clearer when we look at Galatians 5:14.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, [even] in this; THOU SHALT LOVE thy neighbour as thyself. (Galatians 5:14)

Again, "to love" other people is something we are commanded to do. Love is not at all just "a feeling that comes over you". Actually "love" has to do with the whole law of God. It really would not make sense to say we will only love our neighbour as God instructs us to do when the feeling to do so comes over us.

Let's ask the question: which of the ten commandments is conditional on how we feel? Are we to keep

them only when the feeling is right? If we don't really "feel like keeping the Sabbath", is that something we can't help feeling? No, the ten commandments are not at all dependent on how we feel. God requires us to obey Him whether we feel like doing so or not. And such obedience is an expression of LOVE!

Let's now look at the biblical definition for godly love, i.e. for REAL love. It is found in 1 John 5:3.

For this is the love of God, THAT WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:3)

The Greek verb here translated as "keep" is "teromen", the present active subjunctive of "tereo". This verb means: to carefully attend to, to take care of, to guard (Thayer's Lexicon), to preserve (Vine's Expository Dictionary). Used in the present active subjunctive, it really means "that WE KEEP ON KEEPING"! So, in plain language, this verse tells us:

"For this is the love of God, THAT WE KEEP ON KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS ..."

The point to notice here is that love has to do with DOING or NOT DOING something, rather than with what we may or may not "feel". To love is to DO something; to love is not "to feel" something.

The same point is made in 2 John 1:6, which reads:

And this is love, THAT WE WALK AFTER HIS COMMANDMENTS. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. (2 John 1:6 AV)

And the same point is also made in 1 John 2:3.

And hereby we do know that we know him, IF WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. (1 John 2:3)

Again, the claim to "know" God is only true if we "KEEP ON KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS". But now notice another statement made by John.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

What is it that demonstrates God's love to us? God DID something ... He sent His Son. God GAVE His Son for our sins. Real love has to do with GIVING! This is also made clear in the Gospel of John.

For God so loved the world, that HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

"To love" means "TO GIVE" something; it does not refer to "getting" something. This is of the utmost importance to understand!

TO LOVE MEANS "TO GIVE"! IT DOES NOT MEAN "TO GET"!

Now exactly how did God come to love us? Was it on an emotional impulse? No! God actively and consciously set His mind to love us human beings. To love means to deliberately set our minds to do something.

A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

The way we use words reveals the meanings we attach to these words. Now above I have just mentioned that "to love" means "to give" and it does not mean "to get". But let's consider the way many people actually USE the word "love".

People will say things like:

"I LOVE strawberries and cream."

"I would LOVE to own a Ferrari sports car."

"I really LOVE playing basketball."

"I LOVE listening to classical music."

"Now I would LOVE to have a big juicy steak."

"I would really LOVE to have a million dollars."

"I'd LOVE to dance with you." etc.

All of these statements involve a misuse of the word "love". It is really impossible to "love" foods or possessions or activities. And people obviously know this, when they say something like "I love strawberries". But what people easily overlook is this: all these things are based on "get" and not on "give". And what people have done is use the word "love" as a synonym for "I like very much" and "I enjoy very much".

But that is not what the word love means!

"To love" does not mean "to like very much" or "to enjoy very much". The word "love" does not have this meaning as far as GOD is concerned.

However, it should be very obvious that THE PEOPLE who use the word love as in the examples above have clearly attached the meaning of GETTING to this word. To them the word love means TO GET ... the foods they like, the possessions they think very highly of and the activities they really enjoy. Obviously they think of love in terms of GET!

Then, when it comes to thinking about "love" in the context of marriage, what meaning do you think the word love will have in their minds? Do you really think that then all of a sudden this word takes on the meaning of GIVING ... when the rest of the time people very clearly think of it as getting something, as liking something and as enjoying something? Hardly! That would be asking people to suddenly attach the exact opposite meaning to this word "love" which they are used to attaching to this word.

So understand this!

Even if WE attach the correct meaning to the word love, the same meaning God attaches to this word,

that still does not mean that the people we talk to and deal with attach the same meaning to this word as we do. We need to recognize that the word love means different things to different people. And to a very large number of people it has the meaning of "getting something" and "enjoying something".

This perception by a very large number of people, that basically love refers to something that will make them FEEL good, causes a great many problems, misunderstandings and frustrations. Irrespective of what is said or how it is expressed, when everything is said and done, very many people think of love in terms of GET and not in terms of GIVE!

SOME MORE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS

Let's look at an instruction Paul gave in Ephesians.

HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (Ephesians 5:25)

Again, it is quite clear here that the attitude of love is something that husbands are COMMANDED to have. Yes, it does involve an attitude we have control over. In the letter to Titus, Paul made a similar point about wives.

THE AGED WOMEN LIKEWISE ... THAT THEY MAY TEACH THE YOUNG WOMEN to be sober, TO LOVE THEIR HUSBANDS, to love their children, (Titus 2:3-4)

For a woman to really love her husband (and equally, for a husband to really love his wife!), this attitude may have to be TAUGHT! So much for love being "spontaneous" and "beyond our control". The sad fact is that in our western world most people NEVER have been TAUGHT "TO LOVE" other people. Rather, as Paul explained to Timothy in reference to our present age:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. FOR MEN SHALL BE LOVERS OF THEIR OWN SELVES (2 Timothy 3:1-2)

The hallmark of our age is self-centredness and covetousness. There is absolutely no way that anybody, who is motivated by these two attitudes, could possibly have a correct understanding of what true, godly love really is! So it should not be surprising that NONE of our entertainers, whose songs about love we hear from morning till evening, have even the foggiest notion of what it means "to love someone". We may like the mood and the emotions which these songs about love elicit; but the feelings such songs produce in our minds have nothing to do with what the word "love" really means. NOTHING AT ALL!

THE WORD "LOVE" ALWAYS MEANS THE SAME THING

The meaning of the word "love", as far as God is concerned, does not change. It always means exactly the same thing. It means exactly the same thing ... whether we are talking about "loving God" or "loving our children", whether we talk about "loving our wives" or "loving our neighbours", whether we talk about "loving our parents" or "loving our enemies". The meaning of the word "love" is the same in all of these different contexts.

When God commands men to love their wives (and women to love their husbands), God means exactly the same thing as when He instructs us to love our enemies. WE HUMAN BEINGS are the ones who want to modify the meaning of this word "love" for different contexts, but God always means exactly the

same thing when He uses this word. We are all familiar with the words of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said unto him, THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second [is] like unto it, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

We are commanded to love God. We are also commanded to love all human beings. How we may FEEL never changes these two commands. Whether we feel good or whether we feel bad, whether we like someone or whether we dislike someone is totally immaterial! We are commanded, and God requires us to love God ... to love our spouse ... to love all human beings. We have no choice in what God requires of us. Our only choice is whether or not we will actually obey God.

Notice what the Apostle John explained about the subject of love.

IF A MAN SAY, I LOVE GOD, AND HATETH HIS BROTHER, HE IS A LIAR: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. (1 John 4:20-21)

Love really has nothing to do with what we can SEE! If it did depend on seeing, then we would never be able to love God, as Christ commanded us to do. Furthermore, if we don't love our spouses, then we obviously also don't love God. Our love for God can ONLY be expressed by demonstrating our love for other people in a totally impartial and unbiased way. And this must not be based on sight. However, when people talk about love and about "falling in love", they are almost always speaking about what they can see.

We have already looked at a biblical definition of the noun "love". Now let's look at a definition of the verb "to love".

HOW JESUS CHRIST DEFINED "LOVE"

Jesus Christ spelled out very clearly what it means "to love" someone. It is simple and easy to understand. And it is eminently practical. This definition is recorded in Matthew chapter 5.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES, BLESS THEM that curse you, DO GOOD to them that hate you, and PRAY FOR them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; (Matthew 5:43-44)

"Your enemies" are those that "curse you" and "hate you" and "despitefully use you". These three expressions define "enemies". And so in order to "love" those enemies, there are three things we must do. Jesus Christ was here explaining that "to love someone" means that we do THREE THINGS! That is what Jesus Christ spelled out in this verse. He knew people would not understand HOW to love their enemies. Therefore He explained what is involved in loving someone. The whole thing can be expressed as an equation as follows:

"TO LOVE" = "TO BLESS" + "TO DO GOOD" + "TO PRAY FOR"

The verb translated as "bless" is "eulogeite", the present active imperative of the verb "eulogeo". This verb is formed from two words: "eu" (meaning "good") and "logos" (meaning "word"). So this verb translated as "bless" literally means "to say GOOD WORDS". The next thing to notice is that in the Greek text all four of the verbs in this equation are used in the imperative mood, which is the way of expressing A COMMAND. These things are not "requests" from Jesus Christ; they clearly represent commands! And in the very last verse of this Gospel by Matthew, Jesus Christ is recorded as saying:

"Teaching them to observe all things WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU ...". (Matthew 28:20)

So let's look again at the equation Jesus Christ gave.

"TO LOVE" MEANS:

- to SAY GOOD WORDS to people and about people;
- to DO GOOD THINGS to people and for people;
- to PRAY for people.

Those three things (say ... do ... pray ...) cover the three areas of: our speaking, our actions and our attitudes.

Notice that emotions and feelings don't come into this definition at all! Jesus Christ did not say anything about how we are supposed to "feel" about people. That is because love does not necessarily have anything to do with how we feel ... in spite of everything our culture has indoctrinated into our minds since earliest childhood. But love does have a great deal to do with ATTITUDE!

It is the first two things in this definition that are the expression of love ... to say good and do good to people. But those things could also be done from a wrong motivation; and frequently they ARE done from a wrong motivation. When that happens, we call this "flattery". However, in many cases of flattery the wrong motivation is carefully disguised and hidden in order to promote the selfish goals of the flatterer.

But God is never fooled. God always sees through wrong motives and wrong attitudes (Hebrews 4:12). We can't really pray for people unless we have a right attitude towards them. If we have a wrong attitude towards someone, we cannot pray from the heart for that person, and God knows that. So it is to ensure that we say the right things and do the right things from a right motivation, that Jesus Christ included the instruction "to pray for" people in His definition of what it means "to love".

So let's further refine the definition of love.

"TO LOVE" MEANS:

First of all we must have THE RIGHT ATTITUDE towards all people; an attitude that is willing to pray for the needs and the well-being of other people; an attitude of genuine concern for other people; a desire to help and to serve people; a desire to see them reach their full potential before Almighty God. All this is implied in the short phrase "to pray for people". With that attitude as a foundation, we must then strive to only say what is helpful and kind and generous, not only in the presence of those concerned, but also behind their backs. Philippians 4:8 is certainly a guideline in this regard ("... think on these things"). The good words we say must also be backed up by the good deeds we are willing to do to and for people.

THAT IS WHAT GOD MEANS BY "LOVE"!

That is what the whole law of God is all about. And so another way of defining love is to say that we must keep on keeping the ten commandments of God.

We also need to understand that in this regard there is a vast difference between "an attitude" and "feelings". Feelings are an expression of our emotions. We may like or we may dislike something; we may be attracted to some people and not to other people ... these are simply our personal feelings. They are very subjective: we are almost always attracted to those people who show approval for us and for our actions; and we are not attracted to those people who reject us and express disapproval of our actions.

While such feelings are not necessarily wrong, they should not form the main criterion by which we decide who we will love and who we will not love. However, in practice such feelings constitute a major consideration for very many people in deciding how they will treat other people.

"An attitude", by contrast, is (in this context which we are discussing) a conscious mind-set to treat all people a certain way. This decision is reached totally independently of any feelings we may have for the people involved. In practice it will be easier to maintain such an attitude towards the people for whom we have positive feelings. But the test of true love is that we will also maintain this same attitude towards those people for whom we have negative feelings (i.e. "our enemies").

THE MARRIAGE VOWS

Let's consider a wedding ceremony in the Church of God. In the course of the ceremony the minister asks the groom (and a similar question is later put to the bride):

"DO YOU, then, FAITHFULLY PROMISE and covenant with God, in the presence of these witnesses, to take (the bride's name) to be your lawful wedded wife, and to cleave to her unto death -- TO LOVE HER, cherish her, honour her, and provide for her?"

What is this question all about? Is the groom being asked to state how he FEELS about the bride? NO! There is NOTHING in this question that requires an assessment of his "feelings". What the groom is being asked (and the same applies to the bride!) is ...

TO MAKE A DELIBERATE AND CONSCIOUS AND RESOLUTE MENTAL COMMITMENT TO DO SOMETHING FOR THE REMAINDER OF HIS PHYSICAL LIFE! HE IS REQUIRED TO COMMIT HIMSELF TO DOING THESE THINGS, IRRESPECTIVE OF HOW HE MAY "FEEL"!

Do you faithfully promise (i.e. in good faith) that you WILL love this woman you are about to marry? Are you prepared to commit yourself, that you will indeed do this? And if you are not prepared to make such a binding commitment in a covenant before Almighty God, then the minister must surely refuse to perform the wedding ceremony.

Notice what Jesus Christ said in John 15:13.

GREATER LOVE hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

This is the ultimate in "doing good" to someone else ... sacrificing one's own life for the good of other

people. Are we really prepared to lay down our lives for our wives or our husbands? Don't conjure up in your mind pictures of a hero's death. That's not what God really expects from the vast majority of us.

Think about this for a while. Exactly WHAT is your life? Well, as a matter of fact, your life consists of an existence that spans minutes and hours and days and months and years. Your life consists of TIME! So the question: "are you prepared to lay down your life for your wife or your husband?" is then changed to: "are you really prepared to sacrifice YOUR time for your wife or your husband?" If you are NOT prepared to sacrifice YOUR time for your spouse, THEN you also don't really LOVE your spouse!

Love manifests itself in sacrificing, in giving up something. To say good things to your spouse and about your spouse, to do good things to your spouse and for your spouse, and to pray for her or for him ... these things all take TIME! And that is exactly what love requires of us ... it requires our TIME! And in giving our time to do these things, we are sacrificing our lives for the good of the person we are married to.

As the Apostle John explained:

Hereby perceive we THE LOVE [OF GOD], because he laid down his life for us: and WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN [OUR] LIVES for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)

Now consider what the Apostle John had in mind. Did he mean that all Christians should be looking for opportunities to become martyrs? Not at all! John had in mind that we should "lay down our lives" by DOING GOOD to the brethren, which is the key component of real love. As John expounded in the next verse:

BUT WHOSO hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and SHUTTETH UP HIS BOWELS [OF COMPASSION] FROM HIM, how dwelleth THE LOVE OF GOD in him? (1 John 3:17)

Doing good to those in need is what John meant by "laying down our lives". But let's look again at the previous verse, verse 16.

When John said: "hereby perceive we ...", he was saying: "THIS IS WHAT PROVES GOD'S LOVE FOR US"! It is God's willingness to make a sacrifice for our benefit that proves God's love. It is not a matter of God reacting to some emotional feeling for us that came over Him. No, it is a matter of God having made a deliberate decision to follow a specific course of action.

Earlier we looked at the definition for godly love in 1 John 5:3. Let's notice it again.

For THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:3)

Now understand this!

THIS is the way that God can know whether we really love Him or not! THERE IS NO OTHER WAY! God is not looking for some emotional, impulsive response to some emotional "altar call"! God is not impressed by people's emotions! A lack of obedience is irrefutable PROOF of a lack of love for God! Only sincere, whole-hearted and UNCONDITIONAL obedience proves that a person really loves God. All the zealous religious talk in the world and all the emotional fervency of a revival preacher cannot take the

place of obedience to all of God's laws! To put it in the words of the Apostle John:

HE THAT SAITH, I KNOW HIM, AND KEEPETH NOT HIS COMMANDMENTS, IS A LIAR, and the truth is not in him. (1 John 2:4)

It is ONLY heartfelt and sincere obedience, and nothing else, that proves whether someone really loves God!

LOVE IS ...

Let's put all of the points we have covered thus far together to round out the picture. Here are some statements we can consider.

Love is ... a deliberate mental commitment to treat other people a certain way.

Love is NOT ... a feeling or an emotion that comes over us.

Love is ... submitting and serving and sacrificing and GIVING.

Love is NOT ... getting and receiving.

Love is ... thinking of the needs and the welfare of other people.

Love is NOT ... concerned about what others will do for us.

Love is ... a deliberate and premeditated choice we make.

Love is NOT ... an unplanned impulse.

Love is ... to say good, to do good, and to pray for others.

SO WHERE DOES "SEX" FIT INTO THE PICTURE?

Over 30 years ago Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote the book "GOD SPEAKS OUT on 'The New Morality'". This book was later edited and then republished under the title "The Missing Dimension in Sex".

On page 161 of the "New Morality" book Mr. Armstrong started a section entitled "THREE KINDS OF LOVE". He then commented on three different Greek words, two of which are found in the New Testament. Let's look at those three Greek words.

The three Greek words are: AGAPE, PHILIA and EROS.

Let's realize that each of these words has its own meaning. They do not all mean the same thing. To be specific: "philia" does NOT mean the same as "agape"; and likewise "eros" does NOT mean the same as "agape". It should not be too difficult to realize that IF one of these three words means "LOVE", then the other two words do NOT mean "love"! They must mean something else. You don't have three different words in a language with a very limited vocabulary (biblical Greek consists of less than 1000 root words, which by means of 17 different prepositions, which are usually joined to the root words as prefixes, is expanded to about five and a half thousand words, including all personal names) which all mean the

same thing.

These three words are totally different root words and they have different meanings. Earlier I mentioned that our culture has indoctrinated into our minds a certain concept of what love is. The point we today, ten years after Mr. Armstrong's death, need to understand is that Mr. Armstrong was faced with a difficult task. On the one hand, he had to explain things in terms which the average reader would readily understand. On the other hand, he himself was also to some degree influenced by this indoctrination.

Now the truth is that there simply are no "THREE" kinds of "love". There is ONLY ONE kind of love! Other things are not really "love", though they may perhaps have some attributes which overlap with, or are similar to, love.

Understand that there is only one kind of love ... and that's the kind we have been looking at thus far in this article.

What God means by the word "love" is defined for us in 1 John 5:3, namely: obedience to the laws of God. Jesus Christ Himself affirmed this definition in Matthew 5:44, when He explained that, in practical terms, "to love" means "to say good ... do good ... and pray for other people". Now let's look at these three Greek words.

AGAPE: This is the New Testament Greek word which means "love"! It means love as GOD defines love. It is to this word that the things in the previous section entitled "LOVE IS ..." apply. It is "agape" that will "say good ... do good ... and pray for" others. This love is actually the first of the fruits which the Holy Spirit will produce in a person's life (see Galatians 5:22).

PHILIA: THIS WORD DOES NOT MEAN "LOVE"! This word really refers to: tender affection, physical attraction, liking someone very much, etc.. It refers to how we FEEL, to our emotions. There is no question that "philia" is something that is very good ... but it is not "LOVE"! It is not love, unless we reject the definitions for love which God has given us in 1 John 5:3 and in Matthew 5:44.

Now understand this: where "agape" is the product of God's Spirit being used in a person's life, "philia" is the product of our own feelings and emotions. "Philia" is something all human beings are capable of without any additional help from God.

EROS: This word is not used in the New Testament. This word refers to sexual desire, to physical contact with a person of the opposite sex. This word also does NOT mean "love"! Within the context of marriage a sexual relationship is very good ... but that is not really love! However, it is this word that the world thinks of as "love", when the songs talk about "let's make love", etc..

So, to summarize these three words:

AGAPE means love and refers to a deliberate mind-set;

PHILIA refers to positive tender feelings and emotions;

EROS refers to sexual desire and physical contact.

SATAN'S GREAT DECEPTION ABOUT "LOVE"

We are very familiar with the statement that Satan has deceived "the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). Sometimes we have a tendency to think that we ourselves are not included amongst those who are

deceived, because we are in God's Church and our eyes are open to God's truth.

But Satan did not just start deceiving humanity last month or last year. He has been deceiving mankind on virtually every front for the past nearly 6000 years. He has done his utmost to negatively influence human thinking in every area of endeavour. Many of those "deceptions" from Satan are firmly embedded in the customs and traditions and cultures and ways of thinking of all peoples. He has deceived people into wrong ways of thinking. This includes many things most people would never think of even questioning.

Coming to the subject of love:

The word "love" is an expression of God's nature. God has an outgoing concern for the welfare of His entire creation. We enjoy being around people who have this genuine type of love. We like to have people say good and kind things about us and we like to have people do good things to us and for us. And it would make us extremely happy if we had the assurance that people were indeed doing these things with a right and selfless attitude (i.e. pictured by "praying for us"). That is one of the reasons why it is so easy to become very attached to a well-trained dog ... the dog responds to us in a totally selfless way, willingly defending us against any odds, without thoughts for its own safety.

It is a real pleasure to be on the receiving end of genuine godly love. That's what people dream about when they imagine what it would be like to be in love with someone ... being treated the way real godly love treats other people. We easily think in terms of RECEIVING this kind of treatment.

The problem is that without God's Spirit we are really expecting more from people than they are capable of delivering. This Satan knows and so he has presented humanity with a counterfeit for the godly love all of us would REALLY like to receive.

Satan has deceived humanity into believing that love is something we can actually achieve on our own, without God's help. You don't really need God in order to have love in your life. You can find love in the arms of another human being. And so Satan has changed THE FOCUS away from the godly attitude which underlies the good words and deeds that are the manifestation of real love. Instead, Satan has directed our focus at our FEELINGS and our desire for physical and sexual fulfillment.

Put in very simple terms: what God means by the word "love" is expressed in the New Testament by the word "agape". But that is beyond human beings who do not have God's Spirit dwelling within them. And so Satan has persuaded people to believe that they can find love in "philia" and in "eros". But both of these (philia and eros) have their limitations and their short-comings. But "agape" never fails (see 1 Corinthians 13:8).

Think for a moment!

The word "love" describes the way Almighty God Himself INHERENTLY is. That is His nature and His character. Do we really think that we human beings would, totally on our own, actually be capable of being like God in character and in our approach to life? Do we really think that we would actually be capable of expressing this attitude of selfless outgoing concern without any help or input from God? Can we really become like God in our nature without the help of God's Spirit? Do we really believe that we are capable of expressing "love" without God's help?

Certainly not!!

We are to try to express love, but we will always fall short. Likewise we are to try to obey all of God's laws, but we always fall short. Perfect love is the same as perfect obedience to God. Falling short should

never deter us from trying to do the best we can. But it becomes very clear very quickly that we can't do it on our own; we need help from God.

The first of the fruits which the Holy Spirit produces is love (see Galatians 5:22). No human being is capable of producing this fruit on his or her own strength.

So Satan has deceived us. Satan has persuaded us that love is a matter of "the heart", meaning the emotions and the feelings we have. But when God uses the word "heart", God is referring to the mind and not to our emotions and our feelings. Satan has deceived people to believe that ... "the heart refers to our emotions and our feelings, and the head refers to the mind". Really??

How about Jeremiah 17:9?

THE HEART [IS] DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL [THINGS], AND DESPERATELY WICKED: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

Exactly what is it that is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" ... human feelings and emotions? Or is it not the human MIND that is this way?

Yes, it is the human mind that is described here and referred to as "the heart". Yet our society has made the heart A SYMBOL for emotions and deep feelings. But according to God's inspiration here the heart refers to "the mind".

I can list MANY other Scriptures to show that the heart is a symbol for THE MIND and not for our feelings and emotions. For example:

Mark 7:21 = ... out of the heart proceed evil thoughts ...;

Matthew 12:34 = out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks;

Mark 16:14 = ... their unbelief and hardness of heart;

Romans 2:5 = ... your hardness and impenitent heart;

Colossians 3:22 = ... in singleness of heart; etc., etc..

Are we grasping a bit more of the way Satan has deceived all of mankind in so many different ways? I mean, the idea that "the heart" is a symbol for our "FEELINGS of love" is something we wouldn't even think of questioning, right? And in one sense it is not really "a big deal". But the point is that it is just one of the THOUSANDS of nudges that Satan has given mankind over the past 6000 years to get us off the track in the way we think.

I can't list most of them for you, because he has deceived me just as much as he has deceived you. I don't doubt that currently I am still deceived in areas I am not even aware of ... like you perhaps being quite convinced that THE HEART is a good symbol for our EMOTIONAL feelings of "love". It should be very clear from the Scriptures that GOD uses the heart to represent THE MIND! Yet most people will happily use the heart as a symbol for our emotions and our feelings.

Now the reason I have brought up this matter of how we speak about the heart is because the heart is very closely linked, in our thinking, with this subject of love.

The point is this:

IT IS TRUE that love is a matter of the heart! But as far as God is concerned, the heart represents the human mind. And real love is a matter of deliberately setting our minds to think in certain ways, as I have already discussed. But Satan has deceived us into linking the heart to our feelings ... specifically to the FEELING of "love". We have accepted a totally unrealistic symbolical representation for the heart. And this symbolical representation is commonly used as a synonym for the word "love" on T-shirts and on bumper-stickers.

So Satan has deceived the majority of people to think of "love" in terms of "philia" and "eros", spontaneous feelings and desires. We can have those feelings and desires on our own without any help from God, but they will never provide us with lasting satisfaction. There will always still be something that is missing, something we long for without being able to (in most cases) even know exactly what it is. That something which is missing and which we were created to long for and which God intends for us to experience is a relationship that is based on "agape".

That is what the rich, the famous, the wise, the mighty and the noble (see 1 Corinthians 1:26) are constantly searching for and yet never able to find. It cannot be found in "philia" and in "eros". And so they go through their lives searching for something, without even knowing what it is that they are looking for.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SATAN'S DECEPTIONS

Now look at what are the results of accepting Satan's counterfeit of real love.

Once we accept that love is something we can FEEL for a person, THEN true love is potentially within our reach. We know that we are quite capable of expressing feelings. We also know that many of our feelings are more or less spontaneous.

So in our quest for finding true love, we are going to rely on our feelings to tell us who it is that we should love. When a feeling is spontaneous, it is easy to assume that it is beyond our control, that we can't really help having this feeling, etc..

Now it is perfectly natural to be spontaneously attracted to someone of the opposite sex. God designed it this way. Before marriage this attraction is intended by God to help us find out whose company we enjoy. This helps us to narrow down the choice of potential marriage partners. But this attraction is simply "philia" and it is not in itself "love".

Satan has deceived us into thinking that this attraction ITSELF is love. That is not so; it is simply a feeling. But having deceived us into accepting this natural attraction as "love", Satan then tempts us and pressures us to turn this feeling into a sexual relationship. The reasoning he presents to people is: "we already love each other; so what's wrong with then also having sex?"

God, however, expects us TO CONTROL this natural attraction. But exercising such self-control is not really very pleasurable. And self-control is anything but a strong point of our age. Ours is an age marked by licentiousness ... if it feels good then do it.

The Bible is quite clear in this regard.

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and BRINGING INTO CAPTIVITY EVERY THOUGHT TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST;

(2 Corinthians 10:5)

We are to control our minds. That includes controlling our feelings and our desires. The more selfish we are in our disposition, the harder it will be for us to control such feelings of being attracted to someone of the opposite sex. The attitude of not being able to bear the thought of not seeing, or at least talking on the phone to, the person we are attracted to FOR A WHOLE DAY (let alone for a whole week!) is a display of total selfishness! It is a vivid example of 2 Timothy 3:2 ... "lovers of their own selves". Satan has deceived people into viewing such selfish conduct as an expression of love. In that way people will not restrain themselves. But it is assuredly not an expression of "love"! Not at all!

And every man that striveth for the mastery is TEMPERATE IN ALL THINGS. Now they [do it] to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: BUT I KEEP UNDER MY BODY, AND BRING [IT] INTO SUBJECTION: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (1 Corinthians 9:25-27)

God requires us to exercise self-control in all our relationships, including those where we are attracted to other people.

But Satan's deceptions don't stop before marriage. After marriage Satan wants to deceive us to mistake physical attraction towards a third party as "love". And Satan wants us to believe that it is something we can't help feeling, that it is something we can't really control. And since we really don't want to fight against such pleasurable feelings in the first place, that's all the excuse we need to pursue such physical attraction for a third party. And so people then sing: "Please release me and let me go, so that I can love someone else".

I mentioned earlier that flattery imitates the things love does, but flattery does them from a wrong motivation. Flattery is one of the greatest pitfalls in people's search for true love. As Solomon pointed out in the Book of Proverbs:

That they [wisdom and understanding] may keep thee from THE STRANGE WOMAN, from the stranger [WHICH] FLATTERETH WITH HER WORDS. (Proverbs 7:5)

We easily mistake flattery for love. That is a devastating mistake to make! Flattery is always an expression of selfishness. The end result is:

With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, WITH THE FLATTERING OF HER LIPS SHE FORCED HIM. (Proverbs 7:21)

Flattery of some kind (i.e. an imitation of agape) is the most common method used to attract someone for sexual intentions. It is the most common factor in extra-marital affairs. That's been the case since the time of Solomon, approximately 3000 years ago.

Don't ever fall for flattery!

You are never the victim of your own feelings. If you give in to your feelings and if you make judgments based on your feelings, it is because you WANT to do so!

When you, a married person, feel a powerful attraction for someone to whom you are not married, do

you really know what you are feeling? You are feeling Satan's temptation, which Satan wants you to believe is love, that it is natural, inevitable, and that you can't help it. Because if you believe these lies, then Satan knows that you won't fight to resist his temptation; you'll give in and break God's laws. It is up to you to resist and to flee from such sexual temptations.

FLEE FORNICATION. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18)

FLEE ALSO YOUTHFUL LUSTS: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

Love is an attitude of genuine concern for the welfare of all other people. It will manifest itself in obedience to all of the laws of God and a desire to do those things that are pleasing to God. This means that it will manifest itself in "saying good words" and "doing good deeds" to and for people.

The words and actions in themselves are not love; they are merely EXPRESSIONS of love, how love manifests.

To be specific:

"Philia" is not really love. Feelings of tender affection are not in themselves "love"; they are only feelings. Now they CAN BE expressions of the attitude of love ... but that is not necessarily the case. They can also be motivated by a desire TO GET warmth and affection in return for showing it to someone else.

However, FEELINGS of tender affection and concern are probably the closest we human beings can come to having real love without actually having God's Spirit dwelling within us. They are good feelings and they are right feelings and we are encouraged to have those feelings ... but they are not what Almighty God means by "love". When God speaks about "love", He means something that can ONLY be produced as a fruit of His Holy Spirit.

"Eros", even in marriage, also is not really love. Sex within marriage is not love ... it is sex! Now it is true that within marriage, AND WITHIN MARRIAGE ONLY (!), sex CAN BE an expression of the attitude of love, but that is also not necessarily the case. I think we should readily agree, in view of the heavy emphasis on sex in our present age, that in many cases sex has nothing at all in common with true love! In many cases the motivation is TO GET a pleasurable experience ... but true love is GIVE and not get.

All of the love songs we hear over the radio talk about what the singer hopes to GET from the other person ... feelings of happiness, joy, fulfillment, sexual satisfaction, etc.. They have a selfish focus, which we, the listeners, only too easily identify with. The mood and the emotions which the tunes convey to our minds are ones of making us FEEL good. These love songs do NOT sing about unconditionally serving other people, or one other person; they are very much conditional on the other person reciprocating the singer's feelings.

God created us with a desire to really experience what HIS nature is like ... to really experience true godly love. But that experience is only open to those who repent and submit their lives unconditionally to God. As a result many people in this world have a void in their lives, and they just don't know what to do about it. Therefore many just keep on searching.

However, while unconverted human beings are not capable of experiencing "the real thing", God nevertheless provided a way for all people to at least have the opportunity to have their minds work in "EMULATION MODE" to real love. That "emulation mode" God made possible by giving His laws to mankind. Those people who try to live to some degree by God's laws, even if their minds are still carnal and they have not really been called by God and they don't understand the truth of God, will be enabled to achieve a certain measure of "emulation mode" in their lives. And that can be encouraging and exciting.

In the world of computers: many things can be achieved with high quality equipment. And then there are ways of "emulating" these achievements on lower quality equipment. Such emulations can be very exciting for those who are not familiar with the real thing; but those who know the real thing will readily see where such "emulations" have their short-comings. Similarly, with sophisticated computers it is now possible to emulate reality to a very impressive degree ... like piloting a jet plane on a computer screen. But for those who have piloted REAL jet planes, the emulation has distinct differences to the real thing.

Likewise, "the emulation mode" of real love can be very impressive for people who are not familiar with the real thing. Such an emulation mode is not in any way to be disparaged or discouraged. It is a good and desirable thing for those people who do not have God's Spirit. And since the overwhelming majority of people have never seen the real thing, it is understandable why they will be convinced that this emulation mode actually IS the real thing. It is hard for them to picture that something could be still better than this emulation mode. Their minds are not able to perceive underlying attitudes. It is only an underlying attitude of total and unconditional submission to God that can produce the real thing.

Now before you misunderstand: I am NOT saying that we who have God's Spirit AUTOMATICALLY have a better attitude within our marriage than some people who are not in God's Church. What I am saying is that, by giving us His Spirit, God has given us THE MEANS and THE POTENTIAL for building the correct foundation on which to develop love within marriage. However, it is also a fact that there are many marriages out in the world, which only have an experience of love in "the emulation mode" and which are FAR BETTER OFF than some marriages in the Church of God, where people simply do not make use of the means God has made available to them, or where circumstances make it extremely difficult to utilize the means God has made available. Paul acknowledged such difficult situations in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, where the unbeliever may simply make any real relationship based on love impossible.

King David, for example, had God's Holy Spirit and tried to live in obedience to God's laws. But he also had many wives ... and a really happy marriage was not something he ever had. His own father Jesse very likely never had God's Spirit, though he was basically an upright and honest man; but he only had one wife (seems to be the indication). And very likely Jesse had a far happier life in his family context than did his son David.

Romantic attraction is fine, but it is not what God means by love. And our feelings are very much under our own control. We ourselves decide how to respond to any feelings we may experience.

Let's look at the questions we started out with.

How can we be really sure that we love someone before we decide to marry that person? We can know for sure IF we are willing to make a firm commitment in our minds to always say good ... do good ... and pray for that person, in addition to the duties marriage will place on us. Such a commitment should be made to a person for whom we do have positive emotional feelings. But the commitment should never be conditional on such feelings.

How or when did you first realize that you love this particular person? Probably it started off with a

romantic attraction to that person. That's fine, but that wasn't love. In reality that was only THE INCENTIVE to be willing to make a lifelong commitment to love the person.

Can you help having feelings of love towards someone? YES, you can! Never mistake feelings of being attracted to someone for love. You are required by God to control your feelings and to not let them control you. True love is a commitment, and you yourself decide to whom you will make such a commitment.

How can you be sure that you will still love this person 20 years from now? NEVER rely on your feelings. Let your commitment be the engine that drives your feelings and never the other way around (i.e. once you ARE married). Determine in your mind that you will do what Jesus Christ instructed ... to always say good ... do good ... and pray for your spouse.

Once you are married, what is the likelihood of you ever falling in love again with someone else? Very many people will continue to come in contact with some people towards whom they will feel attracted. Don't ever mistake such attraction for "love". Control any feelings of attraction towards another person. There is no reason why such feelings should EVER take on romantic overtones ... unless you yourself allow it or even encourage it.

Never mistake pleasant, emotional feelings for love. If you are already married, realize that they are very likely a temptation. If you give in to this temptation, then God says that you are dealing "TREACHEROUSLY"!

... Therefore TAKE HEED TO YOUR SPIRIT, AND LET NONE DEAL TREACHEROUSLY AGAINST THE WIFE OF HIS YOUTH. (Malachi 2:15)

Take heed to your spirit ... always control your mind. Always think of the consequences your actions will have. And don't ever allow yourself to be trapped by flattery.

And so, love is much more than "a beautiful song". It is a lifelong commitment to strive to become like God in the way we treat our fellow human beings. And this is only possible with the help of God's Holy Spirit.

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