

LOVE, MARRIAGE AND SEX!

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The three most important ingredients to successful marriage have been terribly abused.

Some fall in love and never marry. Others marry but are not in love. Millions of people experiment with sex without even being in love.

Still others are in love and are married but fail to understand the importance of a wholesome and proper sexual relationship. Not many seem to be putting all three—love, marriage and sex— together in the right order.

Love to Build a Relationship

Almost everyone has experienced what he or she thought was love, only to find out it really wasn't. Perhaps your case was typical. It probably first happened early in the teen years when you were first attracted to a member of the opposite sex.

There was the strange, tingling, excited feeling that would just not go away. You thought you saw shooting stars. Felt like you were walking on air. And you could have danced all night. Later, you probably came to realize that was not love at all. Your parents tried to tell you it was "puppy love." It was just infatuation.

Maybe you even experienced these feelings of "love" three or four or more times—each time thinking this new feeling was the really one true forever and ever love.

Unfortunately thousands of people make terrible mistakes because of not knowing how to handle adolescent emotions. It often leads to premarital sexual experience, which in turn often leads to premarital pregnancy—and millions of babies born out of wedlock every single year.

Others, misinterpreting their feelings of "love," leap into premature marriages. A large percentage of those who marry and don't divorce are not really happy. They stay married for the sake of the children, or for religious or financial reasons. They find they are not really in love at all. How sad.

And of course where and when to fit the sexual relationship into this picture is often confusing. The signals of our liberated society tell us to practice sex whenever, however, whyever and in whatever manner we want to. "Consenting adults" is the catch phrase.

The God-given formula for happiness and success in marriage is usually totally ignored. That formula is the title of this article: Be in love, marry and have a healthy sexual relationship. You can't build a marriage without love. And sex should NEVER be practiced outside the confines of marriage.

But What Is Love?

If you had to choose just one word to describe God, LOVE would be the best word. The apostle John simply stated it: "God is love" (I John 4:8). From what God is and what God does we can understand the deep and significant emotion called love.

God's love was most manifest by the ultimate gift he gave mankind: "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).

Love, you see, is not a feeling of selfish tingling emotions, like the flaming sunset in an orange colored sky. It's not that feeling of desire and passion so often mistaken as love. Real love is the ability to put one's selfish interests and feelings aside and GIVE to the other person.

Outside of marriage, the passions that lead to sexual experimentation are nothing more than lust. Can you imagine a teenage couple necking in the backseat of a car whispering to each other, "Oh, how I lust after you"? No, they say, "Oh, how I love you, I love you, I'll always love you." But what they really mean is, "I am lusting after you." The chances are that affair will last only a short time, and they will each be whispering the same thing to other persons later on.

Love—real love—is not even possible without a degree of maturity. Mature love that prepares a couple for a lifetime of marriage and commitment begins slowly and grows. Love never stands still.

Of course love has to start somewhere. Romantic love begins with an attraction to a member of the opposite sex. There will probably be a beginning feeling of infatuation. But love that leads to marriage must grow beyond that and not be based on attraction alone.

Understanding Love from the Greek Language

In the English language there is the one word love. Because of that, few are aware that there are different meanings to the words in the Bible translated into English as love. In the Greek language, the language of the New Testament, three different words translate into the English word love. By understanding them, one can better grasp what kind of love to strive for in marriage.

The first word is eros. It forms the root of our English word erotic. It is the kind of love discussed in this article up to now. Of course eros is an important kind of love. Author H. Norman Wright defines eros in his book *Pillars of Marriage*, as love that seeks sensual expression. It is desire. It is romantic, sexual love. It is inspired by the biological structure of human nature—placed in mankind at creation.

Of itself, eros is not wrong. But it is a kind of love that should never act alone. Unfortunately it is the only love many people ever experience. But romantic, sensual love is only part of the God-given concept of TOTAL love.

The second kind of love comes from the Greek word philia. Again you may recognize the meaning—for example, the name of the city of Philadelphia means the city of "brotherly love." Philia is friendship, companionship, the physical as well as emotional sharing of time and interests. It shows a desire to cooperate.

Mr. Wright suggests the difference between eros and philia is that eros is a face-to-face relationship while philia is a shoulder-to-shoulder relationship. When applied to marriage it depicts a husband and wife working together. And parents and children and brothers and sisters working together. A friend is someone whose company you prefer. Someone you want to be with. Every good marriage has philia love—husbands and wives who want to be with each other. But these two words do not tell the whole story of love.

The Greatest Love of All

There is yet another Greek word that explains the deep and spiritual meaning of love. The word is agape.

Eros produces romance—makes your mate your lover. Philia makes your mate your friend. But agape goes far beyond. Agape is a love of total commitment. Agape means "selflessness." Agape is total GIVING love.

This is the love God expressed when he gave his only begotten Son. He had no self-interest. He was giving the one gift that would make possible the forgiveness of sin and would save mankind.

In the human sphere, agape love is thoughtfulness, concern, sensitivity to the needs of others. But agape is not a natural love. We were not born with it. It is not the love of adolescence. Eros is essentially in mankind by creation. Philia comes naturally—we all want friends. But agape is acquired by maturity.

And the highest form of love we can attain is a gift that God can give us. The very giving and loving nature of God can be put within human beings by a supernatural miracle. Paul wrote, "...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit] which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). That is agape love.

One has not truly loved until that selfless love has been experienced. It is when every desire is for the other person. Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15 13). If and when, in marriage, you come to the point you would give your life for your mate, then and only then, have you experienced the penetrating meaning of love.

Relevant to agape love in marriage Paul further said in Ephesians 5:28-29(NIV): "In this same way, husbands ought to love[agape] their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church" (verse 25).

It is natural to love the self. It is not so natural to love someone else that much. Thus God says that we ought to grow in love toward our mates equal to the love we have for ourselves. No one can expect more. But so few ever come close. Most are simply so selfish they do not achieve the real depth of love.

Too many marriages are based on only one kind of love—ergs. That love usually will not hold up under pressure. And sadly, too many marriages don't even have philia love. Some husbands and wives are not even good friends.

Love Leads to Marriage

The teen years should be spent developing a wide variety of friends from both sexes. At a proper age young people can begin to date— but not just one person.

That way, a person can experience being with a variety of members of the opposite sex. You can know much better the type of person with whom you could spend the rest of your life.

Don't even consider marriage unless it is built on a relationship of growing love. Don't marry for convenience, desire, security, money or any other single reason. Marry because you have grown to love the person with whom you want to share the remainder of this physical life. And never live together outside the sacred bonds of marriage.

From the beginning the Almighty God instituted the marriage covenant as the most sacred of all ceremonies. It is the start of a new life together—the beginning of a new family unit. On the day God created Adam and Eve, he said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen.2:24, NIV). God presented Eve to Adam in the first marriage ceremony.

Marriage should be the most wonderful part of life. And the wedding one of the most joyous days to remember. As a minister, when I begin a marriage ceremony I usually start by saying, "There is no more joyous ceremony than this we now enter! Marriage is a natural union, but a divine institution ordained by the Creator God."

A beautiful bride dressed in white, a handsome groom in a tuxedo or suit, and an event shared by family and friends should be a happy occasion well worth remembering. How sad that too many marriages are not based on true love and don't last long. Joy turns quickly to sadness. Happiness turns to tragedy.

If only everyone would put these things in the proper order. First, learn to love—really and truly love. Then before beginning the sexual experience, plan a wonderful wedding.

Sex—Only After Marriage

God designed the human sexual experience to begin only one time in life—AFTER the marriage ceremony. I know that doesn't sound modern and up-to-date. But it is the truth!

And the truth about why God created sex is vitally important. Sex is part of the eros love God designed. It is part of our nature, our makeup. Sex, when practiced in love and in the confines of marriage, is holy and pure. The apostle Paul said, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed [sex in marriage] kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb. 13:4, NIV).

Only two generations ago sex was a taboo subject. It was often wrongly regarded as dirty. It was seldom, if ever, discussed. Most were ignorant of the true meaning of the human sexual experience. Sex life within marriage was often tragically unfulfilling.

Then following two world wars the world burst into sexual experimentation and promiscuity. In the 1950s Dr. Alfred Charles Kinsey conducted his research on human sexuality. More and more people became educated about sexual functions. Now there are literally hundreds of books and pamphlets on the subject. At the same time moral standards declined. Organized religion exerted less influence. Liberality became the pacesetter. The result is a modern society gone rampant with sexual experimentation.

Virginity is an almost obsolescent word. Peer pressure and false or unbridled emotions have led to a great deal of premarital sex experimentation. The modern argument is, "Those who have experienced intimate sexual relationships before marriage will be better sex partners in marriage." How sadly wrong that argument is.

The Almighty God who created us male and female designed sex to be practiced ONLY in the confines of marriage. Any other practice of sex is sin! Premarital sex is called fornication. Extramarital sex is adultery. Both are capital offences against the holy law of God! But sex within marriage—practiced in love—is clean, holy, pure.

The most obvious reason for sex is the reproduction of mankind. God has designed the marvelous human reproductive system to function in the confines of love and marriage. Husbands and wives produce, through sexual contact, miniature reproductions of themselves—new life. One of life's truly great experiences is the birth of a child. But this, again, was designed by God to be part of the marriage union—never to be experienced outside of marriage.

But there is even a greater and far-reaching purpose for human sexuality. Sex can be the embodiment of all three of the Greek words for love—eros, philia and agape. Sex has been designed by God to be the guiding force in preserving and perpetuating love between a husband and wife.

The modern argument that pre-marital sexual experimentation can lead to greater joys in marital sex is one of the greatest lies ever perpetrated by Satan the devil. Such experimentation before marriage or in extramarital affairs can only destroy the purity of what God designed.

The honeymoon is not meant to be a time for experienced sexual professionals to practice. The honeymoon should be that joyful, timid, beautiful, shy, exciting period of time when two people who have begun to love one another begin their new life together—and should be their first joyful expression of sexual intimacy.

Sexual experience should be learned together—after the marriage ceremony. Why should anyone go out and learn it all in advance with a whole army of other people? Why create the possibility for sexual comparisons and vivid memories of unpleasant experiences?

The honeymoon should be the beginning of a new life together when a totally inexperienced couple begin to learn from experience through the human sexual relationship. In each other's arms, they will then spend the rest of their lives growing in philia, eros and most of all agape love.

One of life's greatest accomplishments is getting love, marriage and sex in the right order with the right person at the right time.