

Love Is



Love is a subject that humanity has struggled to understand, as long as there have been writers. Love can elicit a profound emotional response from those who experience it, and it can also move people to acts that seem irrational to their self- concept. In the attempt to understand this much explored subject, this essay presents the Christian and Greek/ Roman views of love.

The Christian view of love is presented in "Paul's Teachings on Love, Sex, and Marriage". Paul describes love in almost esoteric terms, referring to love as "patient, kind... never rude or selfish... (And) delights in the truth." This theme of love being equivalent to truth has been repeated again

throughout Paul's reading. Paul considers love to be a high virtue, and encourages people to make it their aim. Through love many "gifts of the spirit" are promised (Pearson Custom, 2002).

Another view of Christian love is presented by C.S. Lewis in "The Four Loves". Lewis, a contemporary Christian writer, begins the introduction to his book by characterizing "Need-love" from "Gift-love". Need-love isn't necessarily bad, according to Lewis, but can lead to an idolization of love. When we worship love we are likely to devastate it because we are actually overestimating love. Gift-love results from under-estimating love (1988, Barfield).

Lewis goes on to describe other types of love including Affection; this can blend with other loves. Affection, Lewis argues, is an animal instinct, and consequently stems in our biological and natural nature. Lewis believes, in essence, that love can show signs of a closeness God. Making less important matters into loves, and therefore Gods, can turn them into evil, which destroy the love and corrupt the person. This can be interpreted as having to do with lust and desire (1988, Barfield).

Lewis goes on to state that, in his opinion, rooted in Christianity, our usual loves have a propensity towards dishonesty. We require a superior love. Not to substitute our loves, but to complete and regulate them, even to provide them a motivation for being (1988, Barfield).

The Greeks also grappled with love and sought to understand and intellectualize their pursuits. In Greek and Roman origins we can find love divided into three categories; Eros, Philia, and Agape.

Our modern word "erotica" comes from the word Eros, which can be described as passionate, intense, and sexual desire. Plato had another way of explaining Eros. He thought of this term to describe an ideal beauty. Plato believed that when we saw someone who was truly

physically beautiful, they were really a representation of the ideal beauty that exists in the world. So when we see someone we consider beautiful, they trigger in us the memory or thought of things, ideas, and art that is beautiful. That desire we feel, that we call Eros, is actually a longing for a higher ideal (2001, Moseley).

Philia, another category of love described by the Greeks and Romans, can be described as friendship. It refers to a partiality and liking that we have with people with whom we have thoughts and ideas in common; with whom we find camaraderie and sharing. Recognizing the differences and levels that "like" entails, Philia was divided into sub-categories in order to gain more clarity into the nature of Philia (1992, Becker).

Aristotle detailed some of these sub-categories, and gave accounts in order to understand Philia. He describes the value that is to be placed on the free and honest exchange of mutual concern and caring. Aristotle recognized that the highest level of care and concern in a friendship was rare and should be valued. Aristotle recognized that some relationships were more equal than others, that there were dynamics in human relations. Philia can be experienced between a parent and child, as well as members of a political community. Aristotle even described Self-love as a praiseworthy and desirable quality, as long as it was dedicated to a higher moral ideal (1992, Becker).

The final category of love described by the Greeks and Romans is Agape. Agape can be summarized as the love for God, and God's love for humanity. This aligns to a great extent with the Christian ideal of loving God with all the fervor and zealously that a person is capable of. Loving God requires an absolute loyalty and single-mindedness. When speaking of Agape one would also have to look to the commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself." This commandment alludes to a

universal love that is covered under the definition of Agape (2001, Moseley).

Today, in our modern world, we see that Love is such a broad word and has so many categories and ways of understanding this concept. Some of the ways we can further define love is by classifying it as Romantic Love, Ethical/ Political Love, and further dimensions of Love in the Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual senses (2001, Moseley).

Romantic love goes beyond just physical desire and sex. It can be equated to the longing on has to complete themselves (certainly a co-dependant explanation!) And connect with a person on a soul level. To find a mate and life partner is the essence of Romantic Love for some (2001, Moseley).

The Ethical and Political realms of Love can be utilized to define love in terms of equality in an increasingly diverse population. The love of ethical and moral philosophies and ideals fall under this realm. Social relations and the equalization of our society, the healthy evolution of humanity, and the desire for a better tomorrow are all forms of love that create a great passion in many (2001, Moseley).

And then there are the modern day realms of love that have to do with the Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual. Defining and determining whether love is a feeling, an expression, a behavior, or an unattainable goal; a perfectionist ideal, are all areas of exploration and questions that arise in our world today (2001, Moseley). As to the future of love, we may find the answers to a broader or more contemporary concept of the term lie in the subtlety of the questions.

References

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