

Can Marital Love Last A Lifetime? (Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

Love is not just a feeling to be experienced but a relationship to be built.

Traditionally, June is a popular month for weddings, and I have officiated at many over the years. When a couple comes to talk over marriage plans, I often ask, "Why do you want to be married? In almost every case the answer is, "We are deeply in love and desire to live together for the rest of our lives."

But what is love? In our English language we have only one word for love, which often leads to confusion. How can one word describe the love I have for my grandmother, my dog, ice cream or my wife? I can love them all but certainly not in the same way. In the Greek language, (in which the New Testament was written), there are at least three words for love, giving us a more accurate meaning of marital romance and faithfulness.

Eros – A taking love. Eros has an important place in marriage as individual needs are met through sexual relationships.

Philia -- A sharing love. Husbands and wives need to be good lovers, but they should also be the best of friends.

Agape – A giving love. There will be times in your marriage when your greatest need will be for agape, when difficult circumstances keep you from feeling very romantic.

Next question, how many of these loves do you want to be prominent in your marriage? The unanimous answer, "a good marriage needs all three."

Without Eros, there would be no procreation.

Without Philia, we would have no friends.

Without Agape, there would be no God and His unconditional love.

Furthermore, it is natural to experience Eros and Philia. They are characteristics of what it means to be human. Agape love is quite different. It is not natural to be always kind, giving and forgiving. Agape is supernatural! Is centered in the will rather than in the emotions. It is not a do-it-yourself product. It can only be bestowed by God as a gift of his Spirit.

One final question, are you confident that your love for one another is strong enough to last until death separates? Once again, the vast majority give a resounding yes! But unfortunately, years later, I have met some of these same people, only to discover that their marriage had fallen apart. The reason given – the love has gone.

But these are some of the very people who said their love would never cease. Were they honest and sincere? Yes, I believe they meant what they said. So,

what went wrong? Could it be, they never learned that for love to sustain the relationship and last continually, there must be constant maintenance and replenishing from God, the true source. And he does not bestow agape love in advance, we need to go to him every day, for a fresh supply.

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1st John 4:8).