

## Love

### Rising Above

Hearing or reading about Jesus will cause one of several emotions within a person. Some will reject Him. Some will say He was a gentleman that always did good. Some will want to learn more about Him (Acts 17:32-34). Those in the first century that learned more about Jesus found their lives changed by the knowledge they gained. They found they were becoming more like Jesus with each lesson they learned and applied. They discovered that Jesus is the exact image of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3). By learning more about Jesus, we know more about God and find that God is Love (1 John 4:7-8).

There are 96 lessons and sermons on love in the Monte Vista lesson archives, including an entire class devoted to the topic and a series of sermons presented by Ryan Goodwin. One might ask why so many? The answer may be in Paul's comments to the church at Philippi. *"And this I pray, **that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment**, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, **in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ**; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God"* (Philippians 1:9-11). Paul is referring to the application of knowledge when blended with love. Love causes us to do things for others. Knowledge of Jesus shows us what to do. Practice in righteousness brings wisdom, increasing one's ability to distinguish between good, evil and the best way to help the brethren.

Romans 12:9-10 provides us with the primary words for love in the Greek scriptures. They are translated as Love, devoted or kindly affectionate, and brotherly love. The first, or the highest order of love, is **agape**, then **phileo-storgos**, and finally **phileo-delphia**. Agape is the noun form of the verb agapao and is used in (John 3:16) and (John 14:15). The first reference is the reason God gave His Son to die on the cross. The second reference is the love returned to God when we obey His Son and serve His children. Philio is a family member's love for other family members. Another word usually modifies it to show the direction of the devotion. Storgos is used with Philio to indicate a natural affection, inherent in people, for all of God's creation. It also is used to show love and care for newborn animals and all nature. Delphia indicates friends and associates and is used with Philio to express the love for the brethren or brotherly love.

Before one knows of God's existence, natural affection produces ties to those that offer protection, food, comfort, and general care within the family. With growth and changing needs, that circle of affection grows to include extended family and friends. With the knowledge of God, and understanding of Him and His Son, the circle of affection grows to include His children. At some point, an understanding of Jesus' love for the world, and His desire to save the world, causes us to take His message of salvation to the world. By learning more about Him, we can rise above each level of love to eventually reach the agape love like God's love.

Many view love as an emotion that comes and goes with time and people. And our likes and dislikes indeed do change as we age. The foods loved by a child are exchanged for other foods as the child grows into adulthood. However, love is a constant with God that causes Him to shed His grace upon everyone equally. His grace sends rain to shower the Earth, expecting the Earth to respond with vegetation and animal life. In like manner, He expects His love to grow within individuals and be

returned with respect and honor. Paul writes of faith, hope, and love this way *"But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love"* (1 Corinthians 13:13). Faith will vanish when we see Jesus face to face. Hope will be realized in the reality of heaven. But love will prevail through eternity just as God's love has endured since before creation.

New Testament writers use several different ways to persuade all Christians that they need to increase in all aspects of love. Peter lists the attributes of the divine maturity we must embrace in our lives. Peter says we should apply all *"diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love"* (2 Peter 1:4-8). It appears that the Holy Spirit, through Peter's pen, is telling us that brotherly love and then the complete, agape, love are the hardest to achieve.

Although we develop a comfort level with love, we need to rise above and increase in kind affection, brotherly love, and the love that God demonstrates.