

## Being in Love

Philip was madly in love with Paula the young lady he eventually married. Nothing was too good for Paula and the presents for Christmas and Birthdays were the best that he could afford, especially chosen and specially wrapped. One expression of his love for Paula was to be found in the gifts he gave her. That expression of love was brought to mind when I was thinking about Christian giving and how we should respond to God.

I think that you will agree that Christians would claim to love God. We proclaim that love in many ways, for example in our hymns: *"I love you, Lord, and lift my voice to worship you."* Sometimes we are bold enough to confess how much that love should cost us: *"Were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."* We also proclaim in song just how much God loves us. *"Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love Thou art; visit us with Thy salvation, enter every trembling heart."* You will have favourite hymns to replace the hymns which I have selected and which will have a deep meaning for you and express the same responses to God. But I have a question to ask you as you read this. What is the tangible evidence of your love for God and does it match that evidence shown by Philip?

If we are Christians then we have to live up to the promises we make and God's plans for us. The Bible makes it abundantly clear what God expects. *We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves* (Matt 22:37-40). Now this is not a soppy, sentimental type of love, being off your food, butterflies in the stomach and living in a world of your own, but I would guess that some of you have experienced these emotions. The love of which the Bible speaks is tangible and pragmatic. It finds expression in ways that reflect God's love towards us. It is sacrificial, it is generous, it is time consuming, it is joyous – it is Christ-like.

Philip confessed that he loved Paula but we might have thought this profession a bit thin if there was no tangible evidence to back up his claim. He expressed that love in practical ways that the rest of the world could see. Ultimately he bought Paula an engagement ring which signified, to all who saw it, their love for each other. There was positive proof of their love for each other.

Now we all know that human relations are not perfect. Everyone experiences ups and downs in their relationships with all the people they love but love can and does cope with life as it is with its inevitable changes and its good times and bad times. Another quality of love is that it endures.

I would guess that we are most generous to the people we love and who we care for. At Christmas many parents spend large amounts on the presents for their children, sometimes more than they can afford because they love them and want them to have the best. I wonder if this is the kind of love that you have for your Father in heaven. Is there actual tangible proof of your love and is it generous, joyous, sacrificial and enduring? And if not why not?

Ah! I hear some cry but giving money in whichever way is not the only means of expressing my love for God. And you would be right of course. You can and should do many good deeds of kindness. But if someone said that they loved you and wanted to spend all their time with you but would not share their income with you what would you think? I guess that you and your closest friends might be somewhat sceptical? So it is with our relationship with God. We cannot claim to love God and not share our income with Him in a generous, joyous, sacrificial and enduring way.

Philip and Paula now have two children and their expression of love for one another has had to change as their situation has changed. Life and love do not stand still. This has also to be true of how we express our love for God. We need to continue to grow in our faith, and that growth should be reflected in how we share what we have been blessed with- it needs review from time to time.

Giving in Grace gives us a chance and the challenge to return to, or perhaps for the first time to develop that first flush of enthusiastic, uninhibited, contagious love and practically and privately respond to God's love with our money.