



What is love?

If you think you know what it is, you'll be surprised. If you think you know what it isn't, you'll be shocked.



Love is not an emotion. The Hallmark company has no idea what love is. Love has nothing to do with strangely-shaped hearts and rhyming sentiments. Love does not necessarily produce “soul mates,” and neither do “soul mates” necessarily produce love. As I just said, love is not an emotion. True love will produce emotion, but love itself is not that. (The emotion follows quickly, which is why love is often mistaken for it.) Love is a decision; it is a decision to benefit another without regard to that other's worthiness. Were worthiness involved, the word would not be “love,” but rather “fondness” or “like,” which qualify as emotions: “I like you because you are a nice person,” or, “I am fond of you because you are good to me.” But, “I love you because I decide to do it and it doesn't matter what you do or who you are”—now *that's* the radical thing.

I think it is refreshing to have a word like love in the vocabulary to describe something so unique as working for the benefit of another despite that other's worthiness. This *thing*, love, existed always because God always existed, but it never had a name. Humans recognized that something different was bubbling within—this strange urge they noticed inside them to do something splendid for jerks. They probably puzzled over it, the early humans. It must have seemed godlike to them. It must have seemed less godlike to be fond of someone as in a “tit for tat” arrangement where if you are nice to me, then I will reciprocate. This deal where I am nice to you even though you are a jerk—this must have shocked the early humans. So they rummaged

through the word bag to describe this strange God-like thing, and the English-speaking peoples came up with “love,” and of course the Beatles wrote a song about it, but the Liverpoolians confused it with “like,” I think, and perhaps even with LSD, although I suppose that LSD might help a person see past the “tit for tat” arrangement into the greater thing. Only guessing here, never tried the stuff.

NIKE LOVE

Love is a decision. The Nike company has coined a phrase: “Just Do It.” The company is referring to athletic events and those contemplating whether or not to partake thereof. I am hijacking this phrase and using it to define love because it perfectly suits. Love is, “Just Do It,” with the key word being *do*. You don’t have to feel love, you just do it. Donna Summer sang, “I Feel Love,” without any Scriptural instincts. (Great, song, Donna, but you should have titled it, “I Feel Lust.”) Love is not a feeling, and neither is it felt, at least not by the giver. It doesn’t matter if you feel like doing something, you

Love
JUST DO IT.

can love without feeling anything except wanting to do it. This is more clearly seen with the completely God-like concept of loving your enemies. You don’t have to feel love for your enemies to love them. You just do it. I used to condemn myself for “not feeling it” when doing something nice for a bad apple. Then I realized that love was neither an emotion nor a feeling. It was an action based on a decision. So I did the loving thing and stopped searching for feelings. Granted, it may have felt good inside my little heart afterward, but feeling had nothing to do with the act itself. I think this is helpful, which is why I keep repeating it.

LOVE AND LUST

Love is many times confused with lust. There is absolutely nothing wrong with lust. Scripture tells us that there are good lusts and bad. Lust simply means “de-

sire.” Is desire a bad thing? Not of itself. So neither is lust. People use the word “love” the most when talking about men and women, as in: “Those two are so in love.” I don’t even know what the phrase “in love” means. It is neither a Scriptural phrase nor concept. I think it means either infatuation or lust. Again, there is nothing wrong with either thing, but neither thing is love. The photos accompanying “love” cards from companies such as Hallmark show couples kissing, or hugging, or looking bug-eyed at one another. When looking at such photos, observers ought to say, “These people are so infatuated with each other,” or, “That couple is in lust.” They should not say, “The are so in love,” or sing the Donna Summer song.

SEETHING LOVE

Love is by far less sensational, less soft, and less photogenic than lust. Love is a man opening the car door for a wife who hates him. Love is a daughter serving a meal to an elderly, disabled parent after that parent has just called her a terrible name. The daughter may be seething, but she serves anyway. The man may be heartbroken, but

he opens the door anyway. You can definitely seethe and love at the same time, because the emotion is separate from the act. You don’t have to love with a smile on your face. You don’t have to feel it. You don’t have to

feel anything. You just do it. We equate spirituality with smiles. I don’t know where this comes from. No, wait. Yes I do. It comes from our confidence in and infatuation with human emotion. We think human emotion is a reliable indicator of how things are. So someone “feels” that they love us, and they tell us, “I love you,” but then we find out it wasn’t love at all; it was lust, or it was novelty, or it was infatuation, or it was a big, fat lie. Human emotion is a liar. It can’t be trusted. True love should be the best friend of someone who struggles expressing emotion. Some people have emotional issues in that they are depressed all the time, or sad, or dark, or just plain crazy. These people think they can’t love. That’s so wrong. Emotional cripples can love. Love is not an emotion, it is an action based on a decision. I love how God created love to be so compartmentalized. Emotions are sold separately from love; emotions are *here*, love is *there*. If you love, then emotions will follow. As I have already said,

love produces emotions, but it doesn't start with them.

The apostle Paul defines love for us in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13. He does it not by giving a dictionary definition, but by telling what love does and what it doesn't do. We will note all the verbs in this passage. You will note that nowhere are emotions or feelings involved. Before we get to this chapter, maybe it would be helpful to tell you what love isn't. I think this is a good plan, as so many of you will take what you think love is into 1 Corinthians 13 and allow your preconceptions to discolor your discoveries there.

LOVE DOESN'T GIVE SOMEONE EVERYTHING HE OR SHE WANTS

This should be self-evident as we consider the love of God, but it isn't. Many people think that love means doing everything for someone. No, that is called "spoiling." It is called, "enabling." Today, parents think they are loving their children by giving them everything they want. No. By doing this, the parents are actually hating the children. Love is not stupid. Love is oftentimes tough. Love is not condescending. Love does not fear. These parents are not loving, they are fearing. They fear that, if they don't give the children everything they want, then the children will not like them. I don't know what you call this ("spoiling," I suppose), but it is not love. It is a personality disorder.

Same with marriages. I know men who are afraid of their wives. They fear that, if they "draw the line," or make a decision that the wife will not like, then the wife will get mad and leave them. And so these men will "love" their wives by catering to them, speaking "hearts and flowers" to them incessantly, avoiding all possibility of offense, and generally dedicating their lives to not rocking the boat. This, they call "love." Again, it is not love. It is fear. (Or a personality disorder.)

LOVE DOESN'T SERVE ITSELF

Self-serving love is called "codependency." A codependent person will love because he or she needs love in return. (The people I described above may be mildly codependent.) A codependent person has no inner reservoir of love or acceptance, and so they must receive it from without. They need love so badly that they will do anything to receive it. To receive it, they are obsessively nice to everyone, a thing they call "love." They are chronic people-pleasers. This will hopefully cause other people to "love them back." Codependents will sweat blood to

avoid upsetting "the object of their love." There is a crazy popular notion belonging only to the psychologically sick that love never upsets, or never hurts, or never causes pain to another. Real love does all these things—on occasion. The codependent, however, cannot let this happen. All apple carts must remain upright. This is why the codependent will "do everything" for another person. To the casual observer this may look like love (because our culture equates love with "doing everything" for a person, and of "being nice," and of giving someone flowers and cards, and singing them songs, and telling them all the time how good they look and how wonderful they are), but it is in fact symptomatic of fear and self-loathing. Codependents suffer in such silence.

A man I know had a wife who did things in bed with him that she really didn't like. He knew she really didn't like these things, and so he asked her why she did them. "Because I love you," she said. He took that statement at face value and enjoyed the time with his wife. Five years later, however, this wife divorced him. "Why are you divorcing me?" he asked. Her answer: "You made me do weird things in bed." Then it wasn't really love in the first place, the so-called sacrifices she made. It was codependency, that is, a self-serving "love." The wife's self-esteem and happiness depended on her husband liking her, so she did things because she thought she had to. Her mistake was calling it "love" when it was, in reality, something she did to earn praise, points, and to make herself feel good. That is was a false love was proven when the very things she claimed to do "for love," later became grounds for divorce.

"By giving them everything they want, parents are actually hating their children."

Codependents will eventually crack because denying one's self will always produce resentment. The resentment may take a long time to build up, but when it finally does, it will erupt like Vesuvius and the victim (in this case, the husband) will experience shock because he naively took at face value what the wife said was love. (A healthy person will, out of a sincere love, do things he or she doesn't like. A wife may not like watching John Wayne movies, but when she says that she does it because she loves her husband and wants to



“If you have to be excruciatingly nice to keep someone in your ‘love circle,’ at least have the decency to not call it love.”

share with him the joy of watching John Wayne shoot native Americans, it’s true. She won’t turn around five years later and divorce her husband because he made her watch John Wayne movies. Healthy people do self-sacrificial things all the time, but with right motives. This truly is love.)

The cure for the false kind of love is to be oneself. Do not be afraid to hurt someone’s feelings by stating your mind. If the object of your affection truly loves you, then he or she will stick with you. If you are keeping someone in your “love circle” only by excruciating niceness (as opposed to truth), then what kind of a relationship is that in the first place? It is a relationship based on lies. If the object of your affection will leave you the moment you decide to be yourself or to say something

unpleasant yet necessary, then it is not your fault. The other person has a problem. The other person is an emotional child. If you have to be irrationally nice to keep this person in your circle, at least have the decency to not call it love. Being irrationally nice is not love, it is fear. It is a borderline personality disorder. So don’t say, “I love my wife,” because you don’t. Rather, say, “I am scared to death of my wife so I constantly indulge her to keep her happy. I am afraid that, if I’m not constantly nice to her and incessantly deferring to her, she’ll leave me.” That, I can accept. But for God’s sake, don’t call it love. Because you are not loving her, you are enabling her. You are allowing her to remain sick. You are keeping her an emotional child.

LOVE HURTS

The apostle Paul loved people. And yet what is his formula for evangelism? 2 Timothy 4:2—“Herald the word. Stand by it, opportunely, inopportunely, expose, rebuke, entreat, with all patience and teaching.” The first two elements of true, loving evangelism are exposure and rebuke. It is unpleasant to be either exposed or rebuked. Two-thirds of a loving evangelism, then, is negative. Yet Paul did it. Was he not loving? Not at all; exposing and rebuking *is* love when you employ these tools to produce a good object, namely, belief in the message.

I disciplined my three boys by spanking them with my hand. These were not token swats, but rather serious, tear-producing deliveries. I never disciplined out of anger, but rather love. It was true love. Today, my three boys are upstanding citizens; wonderful people; great friends. I credit it to my child rearing techniques. I did not spare them instruction. I did not spare them rebuke. I did not spare them pain. I loved them, hugged them, kissed them, and told them all the time how valuable they were to me, but I never compromised rearing them. I never compromised honesty with them. I was real. I didn’t give them candy for breakfast (even though they wanted it) because I was afraid they wouldn’t like me if I didn’t. *I* liked me, and that’s what mattered. This is essential. It is why Jesus said, “Love your associate as yourself.” You have to love yourself first. Self-love is Scriptural. I have always had a great self-esteem, which I realize comes from God. I never needed anyone to love me in order to love myself. I always loved myself because I knew God first loved me. I credit my parents as well, who loved me in the same honest way I loved my kids. Being free, then, of desperately needing love from other humans to feel

whole, I could be honest, both with my kids and my wife. I am in a position to truly love, and to love truly.

TOUGH LOVE

I found the following article on-line. The author is not stated, but the piece shines:

“Tough love” is an expression that is generally thought of as a disciplinary measure where someone is treated rather sternly with the intention of helping them in the long run. For example, tough love may be the refusal to give assistance to a friend asking for help when to do so would simply allow him to continue along a dangerous path. However, with tough love in a biblical sense, the chastening hand is always controlled by a loving heart. As the wise King Solomon said: “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him” (Proverbs 13:24). The Bible has much to say about tough love, particularly in Proverbs and Hebrews.

Unfortunately, however, many people, parents in particular, often equivocate when it comes to meting out tough love. Granted, firm disciplinary measures can be as unpleasant to the parent as they are to the child; that’s why it takes wisdom and courage. However, when we continually shield loved ones from the consequences of their errors we often deprive them of the opportunity for the growth and maturity that could possibly eradicate their problematic behavior altogether. Additionally, we eliminate any incentive someone might have for change when we hesitate to save them from themselves. As the writer of Hebrews aptly informs us, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

In Hebrews we see who God disciplines: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not

lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He disciplines everyone He accepts as a son” (Hebrews 12:5-6. We are to endure hardship as discipline, for God is treating us as sons (v.7). If we are not disciplined, then we are not His “true sons” (v. 8).

Tough love is often necessary because we have a tendency not to respond to gentle taps on the shoulder. Our heavenly Father will do whatever is necessary to conform His children into the likeness of Christ as He predestined us for this very reason (Romans 8:29). Indeed, this is what His discipline is all about. And the better we understand His Word, the easier it will be for us to accept this. God will administer whatever amount of tough love is necessary so that our behavior will line up with our identity in Christ. Likewise, this should be a parent’s motive when correcting the behavior of a wayward child.



GOD’S LOVE

You don’t think God practices tough love? In case you haven’t noticed, God is not incense and peppermints. Speaking for myself, almost everything God does “for my good” seems hard to me. He is not “enabling” me, that’s for sure. He is not codependent; He doesn’t seem to care whether I like Him or not. Many days, I don’t like Him. I still love Him, but I don’t like Him. I think God’s self-image is pretty good. He acts like it is, anyway.

God doesn’t let me get away with my little tantrums.

He is bringing me to maturity by means of discipline. If I am wise, I will accept this. I may complain about it, but I eventually accept it. God is wiser than I am. He doesn’t mess around. His love is not mushy. It is not soft-focused. God does not send me Hallmark cards. He doesn’t tell me how nice I look today. Some days He says, “Zender, you look like shit.” But I know He loves me. I know what love is. It’s an action, not an emotion. It’s a decision, not an emoticon.

This is why I chafe at all the emotional definitions of love. I hate those emoticons that people use on emails.

These things are supposed to show love, but what they really show are emotions. Emotions are fickle. Some people who have sent me emoticons no longer talk to me. So hey, just love me. Keep the emoticons and love me. Decide to love me in spite of me, because then I know it will last. So anyway, for these people who think that love is a mushy emotion, I just point to God and say, “Does God love us?” The answer is always, “Oh, yes, yes. God loves us.” Then I ask, “Does God give you everything you want? Does God coddle you?” I always make my point here, because the people look down at their feet and mumble. No, of course God does not give us everything we want. He kicks our asses. God put His own Son on the cross. How is *that* for the love of God? God crucified His own Son. Talk about tough love. When we look at it this way, it changes our entire conception of love. When God put His Son on the cross, He was looking at the long view, not the short view. And that is the key. Love does what will be better for its object *eventually*.

LOVE IS NOT EXCESSIVE

This statement may surprise you because love seems like an excessive emotion. We have been trained by Hallmark to think of it this way. A stupid phrase is, “I love you SO MUCH!” It’s like saying, “eternity and a day.” Love is very simple. It is not complicated at all, which is another way of saying it is very simple. For instance, Paul writes in Ephesians 5:28-30,

Thus, the husbands also ought to be loving their own wives as their own bodies. He who is loving his own wife is loving himself. For no one at any time hates his own flesh, but is nurturing and cherishing it, according as Christ also the ecclesia, for we are members of His body.

That’s how simple it is. Do you hate your own flesh? Do you destroy it? Paul is not talking about a man’s soul here, but his body. It is easy for husbands to abuse wives, because women are physically weaker than men, and they are much more emotionally volatile than men. Since women sometimes get weird and even crazy because of hormones (they do and say harmful things), some men sometimes get the urge to just hit them and knock them out so that they will finally shut up. Many men of every era have been tempted in this way; the urge is as old as Adam, apparently: too many women are physically abused in this world. It is an epidemic. It is

Paul’s chief concern that believing husbands not do this. Would Christ do this to the ecclesia? The ecclesia is just as “hormonal” to Christ as a wife can be to a husband, and a lot more frequently than one week out of the month. But instead of hitting the wife and knocking her out, Paul recommends *not* doing that. Would you hit and knock out your own body? All right then, don’t hit and knock out your wife.

You may be asking now, “Zender, are you saying that all I have to do to love my wife is to not hit her and knock her out?”

Yes, it’s a hell of a good start because so many other husbands are doing just that.

But then you must nurture and cherish her. How does Paul mean this? Do I buy her flowers every day? Make sure she has a new car? Surrender all my principles because she wants me to? No. Again, the example Paul gives touches the flesh, not the soul. “No one at any time hates his own flesh, but is nurturing and cherishing it.” How do we nurture and cherish our flesh? We feed it, hydrate it, exercise it, warm it, give it rest, groom it, and so forth. These are basic life things. They will produce positive emotions and soulish sensations, yes, but they are aimed at the body. So my advice to you—if I may elaborate upon Paul—is to make sure your wife is fed, clothed, hydrated, groomed, and kept warm. Help her groom. Make sure she has a nice bed to sleep in. Don’t skimp on blankets, or body warmth. Does it mean you have to take her to a fancy restaurant? You can, sure. But it doesn’t mean you have to. Just don’t let her starve. Can you do that? Can you not let your wife starve? Splendid, then. Here is what we have learned so far: 1) Don’t hit your wife in order to knock her out, 2) don’t let her starve, 3) groom her, or make sure she has what she needs (running water is nice) to groom herself, 4) keep her warm.

SPOIL THE KIDDIES

I talk about these things because modern society has put burdens on people that are not meant to be there. Take children, for instance. Back when I was a kid, parents celebrated a child’s birthday by giving the kid a present and baking a cake. Maybe they threw a little party at home. (In the Bible days, I don’t think they did anything. Nobody cared what day you were born back in the Bible days, at least not that I can tell.) Nowadays, this simple stuff is not enough. If you *really* love your child, you must spend hundreds of dollars taking the kid out with a dozen of his or her friends to a Disney-esque restaurant like Chuck E.



Cheese's. God help you if you don't, because other parents are doing it for *their* children, and if you don't do it, then obviously you don't love your children. After the restaurant experience, of course, you have to take the whole brigade to a movie (if you *really* love your kid, you'll rent the entire theater), or to one of those go-cart places, because God knows that, if you don't take your birthday darling to a go-cart track, then they will be scarred for life. You don't want to scar your kids for life, do you? You don't want them to resent you for the rest of their spoiled lives, do you? All right then. Take them to Chuck E. Cheese's, then to the track. If you really want to love them, take them to Chuck E. Cheese's, the movie, *and* to the track.

SPOIL THE WIFE

I knew a husband whose wife told him, "If a man really loves his wife, he will go into debt for her." Oh, really? Where does Scripture say that? Scripture didn't matter to this wife, however. The only thing that mattered to her was that all of her friends had fancy houses and fancy cars, and she didn't. If her husband really loved her, therefore,

he would do whatever it took to get her these things to keep her from feeling inferior to her friends. The husband, caving to this pressure, did it. He thought that if he didn't do it, then he wasn't really loving his wife. If he didn't do it, then she might leave him. The result was disastrous: debt and eventual divorce. This proves that you cannot buy someone's affection; that person will always want more. It also proves that the very thing you think you must do to preserve something may be so wrong that you will eventually destroy the very thing you were trying to preserve. It also proves that you cannot base your definition of love on society's expectations, because these get changed more frequently than socks.

Another wife I know wanted her husband to give up his career for her so that she could go to college and make "all her dreams" come true. A man can do that if he wants, but it might be the most disastrous decision he ever makes. Where does Scripture require a husband to give up a career for his wife? Some think that a man should be willing even to surrender the exercise of his principles if it means pleasing his wife. Where does Scripture encourage a husband to do that? Did Christ



surrender the exercise of His principles for the ecclesia? Did Christ give up His career for the ecclesia? He went to the cross for the ecclesia, but going to the cross was part of His career.

The only safe recourse and guide for how a husband is to love his wife, is Scripture. Clyde Pilkington delivered an extremely helpful talk last year in Treasure Lake, Pennsylvania, on God's definition of what a husband owes to a wife. The answer is: food, clothing, and sex. In this way, a man loves his wife. This answers to Paul's analogy of the husband loving his wife in the manner in which he loves his own flesh. What does the flesh need? Food, clothing and sex. Pretty simple.

Am I saying that there is no more to give? There can be more, yes. There is the emotional involvement, of course. True love ought to produce positive emotions all around. Yet strangely, God does not mention this. He only mentions the love, and He relates the love to actions, not emotions. He then relates the actions to how a man takes care of his own flesh—not his own emotional needs, but his flesh. Today, men are expected to be so “emotionally one” with their wives, and “in touch with their feminine sides,” that one wonders why all men have not by this time been turned into women. So-

ciety—and many women, I think—would make all men into women if it could. I tell women who want all men to act like them, “If you want someone just like you, then marry another woman and be done with it.”

Some have taken me up on it.

Men are famous for not being able to tap into their emotions as easily as women. I don't think it needs to be a problem. Of course wives will feel lonely when a man seems emotionally detached. Yes, there may be underlying problems here that should be addressed. But if a man is honestly supplying the above-mentioned essentials, then he should not condemn himself, thinking he is not loving his wife. Forget society. Forget the latest psychology book. For God's sake, forget Oprah; Oprah has cotton candy for brains. Forget romance novels. Forget popular movies. Forget Hallmark. Did Jesus love His disciples emotionally? I don't really see it. Jesus was not a very mushy guy. He said some very hard things, even to His best friends. He gave them what they needed, but not necessarily what they wanted. He made them want what they eventually wanted. Good enough. It's the love of God. Will we pretend to be more loving than Him?

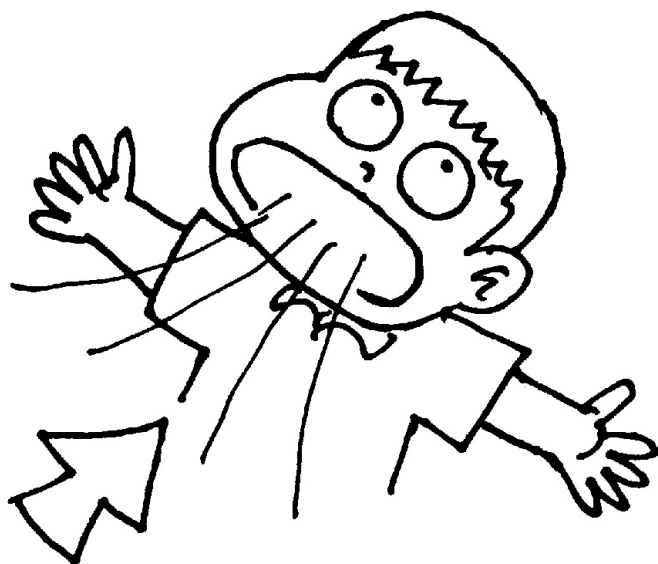
WHAT LOVE IS

The following, of course, is from the famous “Love Chapter,” namely, 1 Corinthians, chapter 13. As this is simply a list of actions and non-actions, I am going to list them, comment upon them, and not bother with the verse references.

“Love is patient.”

Sure it is. Patience can be as simple as waiting for someone to come out of the bathroom without banging on the door and shouting at them. It doesn't mean you're not fuming. I believe one can be patient and fuming simultaneously. Others think this is impossible, insisting that fuming itself is a sign of impatience. I see fuming as a struggle to remain patient. Sure, it would be great to be whistling instead of fuming, but the result is the same: you're not making the person feel rushed and unloved. So do what you have to do. If it takes fuming, then fume. If it takes a cigarette, then smoke one. If you can manage to whistle, congratulations. I don't think God requires us to whistle, however. Nowhere in Scripture are cigarettes condemned. Paul says not to murmur. Is murmuring the same as fuming? I'm not sure about this. I think not. I think that murmuring is external and is aimed at another. It is

my opinion that murmuring ought not be done against God, or against another person. I think, then, that fuming is acceptable. Fuming is not vocalized. The equivalent of the fume in polite society may be the deep breath or heavy sigh. Who does not sigh heavily? Sighing heavily is a publicly acceptable way to fume. If you are waiting for someone who appears to be taking up residence in the bathroom, it is fine to sigh heavily. A heavy sigh is related to the deep breath—in my opinion. A deep breath is something you do to maintain patience if someone asks you, say, a stupid question. A deep breath, therefore, is not a breach of patience. Like the fume, it is actually an exercise in patience, in that it extends the patience. If no one is hurt, then no foul is committed. Groaning is definitely acceptable (Romans 8:22-23).



In the long run (forget the bathroom example, if you can), patience will wait for one's character to develop—either one's own, or the character of another. This may take years. Patience will wait for the transformation of our bodies of humiliation into glorified bodies. Talk about patience. That takes the cake, right there.

In a nutshell, patience is not making another feel rushed. This can apply to ourselves, to another person, or to God. Many of us are impatient with God. He doesn't move very fast; the three-toed sloth, by comparison, moves at a right sprightly clip. God seems to get very distracted. Waiting for God to wind up this eon is harder than waiting for someone in the bathroom. Don't yell at Him to make Him feel rushed. Don't yell at the bathroom person. Don't pound on God's door, and don't do that to the bathroom person, as it will only slow down any processes

occurring there. Fume if you have to. Try to graduate from this to the deep breath. Don't murmur. Feel free to groan.

"Love is kind."

There is a nice way to say something to someone. Here is an example of the bad way: "You are a liar! Get out of my life!" This is unkind, therefore it is not love. Instead of being love, it is an emotion. Such unkindness springs from emotional trauma. Who doesn't have some of that? But even emotionally traumatized people can be kind. Instead of saying to someone, "You're a liar!" it would be far kinder to say, "Even though you quite often tell the truth, it seems to me that, in this case, you are stretching reality."

You may ask, "But Martin, how does someone say, 'Get out of my life!' in a kind way?" Like this: "It would be very much appreciated if you would kindly remove yourself to another part of the planet."

Kindness is simply formatting things so that they sound and feel more pleasant. It is sanding the edges off the base human emotion known as anger. Anger is not necessarily bad, but it becomes that way when expressed unkindly.

"Love is not jealous."

This is not the kind of jealousy God talks about when He desires the affection of His creatures. The human brand of jealousy is killing. It ends lives and relationships. The Greek word here is *parazelo*, and the English elements are "BESIDE-BOIL." Picture a boiling pot; the water is going crazy. Now stand beside it and constantly scrutinize it; everything will boil more, especially you. Jealousy is one of the most furious emotions known to humanity. It leads to anger, hate, even murder. Jealousy is what caused the Pharisees to kill Christ. They scrutinized Him constantly to find fault with him ("BESIDE") and then got so mad at Him they killed Him ("BOIL"). In many ways jealousy seems like a lesser crime, but it fuels larger crimes such as hate, divorce, murder.

Jealousy wants what another person has, whether that other thing is a good or an emotion. Jealousy many times seeks an opening. A man is jealous of his friend's car when his friend's car is better than his. A wife is jealous of her husband when she thinks other people or things capture his emotions instead of her. She will scrutinize him ("BESIDE"), and then fume ("BOIL"). This is

the opposite of love. It is a disease.

I just read a comment on Yahoo news this morning from Jennifer Lopez's ex-husband Casper Smart, who said that being married to J.Lo was very difficult because of the public scrutiny. He was jealous of her time and her fame.

Love does not do this. Love gives relative freedom. Love does not check another person's email account, or even demand access. Love does not hire an investigator to follow another person. It is different, of course, if one believes the other person to be in danger. We are not talking about that. We are talking about wanting what another person has to the point of boiling over it. Love appreciates what another person has, whether it is attention, fame, money, friendships, time, or a new Mustang.

"Love is not bragging."

There is a saying, "If it's true, it ain't bragging." In other words, if you jumped the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle, it's not bragging to say, "I jumped the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle." The Concordant Dictionary defines bragging as, "to seek one's own fame." Going on-line, then, and wanting the world to know that you jumped the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle, would be bragging.

But maybe not even this. If you are on-line to simply make the information known, it would not be bragging. If it is done with the intention of self-glorification ("seeking one's own fame"), then it is bragging.

There is a fine line between wanting the evangel to go as far as possible, and seeking one's own fame. I have been accused of seeking my own fame. This is a joke because—how famous am I? If I'm seeking my own fame, I'm doing a lousy job of it. Nothing I do is consistent with the actions of a person seeking fame. I hate social media. I like writing in my bed in anonymity. Being alive is exhausting. If God decided to end my life, I'd say, "Okay." I'd rather be in a coffin than on "Ellen." How am I seeking my own fame? All my fame comes in the future, not now.

Paul did everything he could to further the gospel, including preaching on Mars' Hill. Today, he would go on some insipid talk show (sorry for the redundancy). Good for Paul. I can't work it up. This does not mean Paul sought his own fame. He was a better evangelist

than I. He sought Christ's fame, and used himself to get it. I like to think that's what I do: I seek Christ's fame, and use myself to get it. I just don't go as far as Paul. I would visit Mars' Hill as a tourist, not an evangelist.

When Paul bragged, it was always about either Christ, or his own weakness. Paul's bragging, therefore, was anti-bragging. He wanted the world to know how inept he was. This could be called seeking one's own infamy, I suppose. I think this is fine. I do this myself.

Love doesn't talk incessantly about how wonderful it is because it needs everyone to know how wonderful it is. It simply is.

"Love is not puffed up."

If you love someone, there is no need to congratulate yourself. God did it. What do you have that you have not



obtained from God? (1 Corinthians 4:7). And if you obtained it, then why are you boasting as though you produced it yourself? Love is one of the fruits of the spirit

(Galatians 5:22). In fact, it is the first fruit mentioned. You cannot self-produce the kind of love I am writing about. Such unselfish love (sorry again for the redundancy) comes from God. He gives it to you by an act of spirit. This is why it is called a fruit of the spirit. If you have it, then thank God for it. If you don't have it, then pray for it. If you pray for it and don't get it, then for some reason God doesn't want you to have it. In this case, it is His fault, not yours. When you get to the dais of Christ, you can then ask God, "How did you expect me to love, when you didn't give me a spirit of love?" God is going to have to shrug in acquiescence to that point and say, "Next!"

**"I would rather
be in a coffin
than on 'Ellen.'"**

“Love is not indecent.”

I’m not sure about this one. The Greek word is *aschemoneo*, and the English elements are, “UN-FIGURED.” I can’t make any certain judgment about it, so I’ll take a guess. Love is civilized. It is mannerly. It does not burp at the table. The opposite of being “un-figured” would be “figured,” which is to say, “in order.” Maybe Paul is suggesting here the indecency commonly associated with lust. This would be another way for him to segregate love from emotions.

“Love is not self-seeking.”

This is an easy one. “Self-seeking” is Paul’s first-century way of saying, “codependent.” Love doesn’t love just to get something for itself, or make itself feel better. Love gives away without expecting anything in return.

“Love is not incensed.”

This is a big one that I fail at all the time. I give other people such benefit of the doubt (I am quite naive), that I am initially shocked when these people fail me. When they fail, I become exasperated. I will not just sigh heavily, or take a deep breath, or groan (all of which would be pure and holy reactions), but I will say something like, “Sheeeeeesh” and follow it with ten exclamation points. If I am truly shocked by the behavior, I will turn around and walk away. Sometimes I will even say, “You have f***ing got to be kidding me.” This is not love. I keep praying that God will remove from me the spirit of being incensed. He doesn’t see the hurry, so I just keep doing it. I feel better when I read in Acts 15:37-39,

Now Barnabas intended to take along with them John also, who is called Mark. Yet Paul counted the man who withdraws from them from Pamphylia and comes not with them to the work—this man not worthy to take along. Now they become so incensed as to recoil from one another. Besides, Barnabas, taking Mark along, sails off to Cyprus.

Paul and Barnabas became incensed with one another. How nice—nice for me, that is. I’m not the only one who fails to love perfectly. Even great men of God like Paul and Barnabas experienced their share of “sheeeeeesh”-es. It’s good to know.

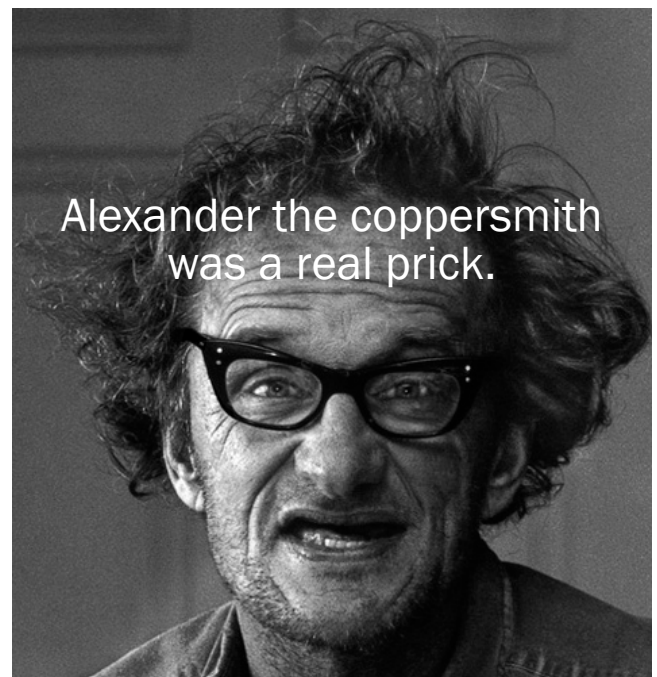
“Love is not taking account of evil.”

I love this one. I can actually do this, sometimes. To be honest with you, it has strangely happened to me many times. Not so strange, I guess, because I realize it is a gift from God and that I am completely incapable of doing something as amazing as this apart from Him. This explains why I am not puffed up about it or feel the need to publish my fame abroad in this department. It is so wonderful when, after great harm has been done to me, I can go to the offending person and hug them warmly. And it isn’t even that I’m forcing myself to be loving. It’s as though the evil never happened. It is so weird. How can evil not be violently reacted to?

You say, “But Martin, you just spoke of being regularly incensed. How does this allow you to also take no account of evil?” Good question. Being incensed is my initial reaction. It’s like stubbing one’s toe—who does not cry out? A couple minutes later you can shrug and forget it, but not while it’s happening. Not taking account of evil is the “ability,” after the initial shock, to forget about it. I compare it to child-bearing. The mother screams like a chimpanzee, but then forgets about it as soon as the baby gets nestled into her arms.

This brings me to Paul again. In 2 Timothy 4:14-15, Paul writes at the end of his life,

Alexander the coppersmith displayed to me much evil: the Lord will be paying him in accord with his acts—whom you also guard against, for very much has he withstood words of ours.



How is Paul not taking account of evil here? Is this another example of Paul failing in the love department? I don't think so. I think there's a difference between speaking about evil and taking account of it. Paul is here warning Timothy about a man who very much harmed Paul and the evangel. Paul has not forgotten the evil. The evil has still apparently scarred him. He is not taking account of it in the sense that it would stand against him and a loving gesture toward Alexander. I think that if Alexander the coppersmith had walked into his prison cell, Paul would have jumped up to embrace him. One can remember evil and let it work its purpose in one's life without harboring an animosity that would prevent reconciliation.

“Love is not rejoicing in injustice, yet is rejoicing together with the truth.”

Love isn't happy when another person gets screwed. This is related to jealousy. If you are jealous of your neighbor's car, you might very well also be happy were his car to be stolen. This isn't love.

Another sense in which to take this is that, since love is rejoicing together with the truth, then the “injustice” of the previous clause must be referring to falsehood. I use this verse to convict people concerning their belief in the false Christian doctrine of eternal torment. That God would eternally torture people He brought into the world, made mortal, and refused to give belief to (belief is a gift of God—Romans 12:3), would be the ultimate injustice. Christians, however, have no problem believing this. In fact, they are happy that some people are (according to them) going to be tortured forever. This is certainly not love. What does love do? It rejoices in the truth. Yet I will bring the truth to these same people (“God is the Savior of all humanity”—1 Timothy 4:10), and they will hate it. Thus, they are not rejoicing with the truth (the eventual salvation of all), but rather rejoicing in injustice (the false doctrine of eternal torment.) What a paradox that the people who think they are the poster-children for love (that is, Christians), are actually some of the most unloving people on Earth.

“Love is forgoing all.”

Does “forgoing all” mean that love gives up everything for the sake of its object? Let's ask the question this way: If your husband told you to stop eating (“Forgo food!”), would you do it? If he said he needed you to cut all your hair off (“Forgo hair!”) and be bald for the rest of your life, would you do it? If he said he really needed you to forgo

covering your face because he just “had” to hit you there, would you comply? If he told you he was uncomfortable with your faith in God and needed you to forgo it, would you do it? Would God expect you to do it? “Forgoing all” does not mean giving up legitimate needs. It means doing the loving thing when someone is religiously “hung up” by your actions. This verse is related to 1 Corinthians chapter 8 and Romans chapter 14, where Paul tells us that love will not cause another person to stumble when we, in our maturity, are able to do what they, in their immaturity, are incapable of.

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul uses the example of meat sacrificed to idols and the gross conduct of “lying down in an idol's shrine” (1 Corinthians 8:10). This corresponds to the truth that love is not indecent. Lying down in an idol's shrine in sight of one who is offended by it is blatantly offensive and the height of indecency. You are free to do it yes, but love will forgo such a slap in the face. At least *stand up* in the idol's shrine, for God's sake.

Take smoking, for instance. Believers are free to smoke. Nowhere does God condemn smoking. Some people, however (Baptists, for instance) believe smoking is a grave offense that will send a person to hell. Does this mean the believers should refrain from smoking because of the Baptist's ridiculous qualm? No. If we refrained from doing whatever people were offended over, we would not do anything. People can be offended over the oddest things. What Paul is saying is that love will not blow smoke (literally) into the Baptist's face. This would be the equivalent of lying down in the idols shrine, that is, making a production of it for the purpose of taunting another person's weakness.

If your husband hates that you smoke, but you have to smoke, then smoke outside. Smoke out of eye-shot and nose-shot of the poor man. You say, “But my husband wants me to stop completely. Should I do that, since Paul is telling me to forgo all?” We are to forgo all blatant displays of offense. This is Paul's teaching elsewhere. Tell your husband, “I can't quit. I need these damn things, sorry. I will honor and love you, however, by smoking away from your presence.” It is not sneaky at all, because you are confessing it. It is loving, because you are forgoing the right to smoke in the comfort of your own home. It's good enough. If you completely quit something that gives you such pleasure and that God Himself smiles at, then you would be disobeying another one of Paul's exhortations in Romans 14:22,

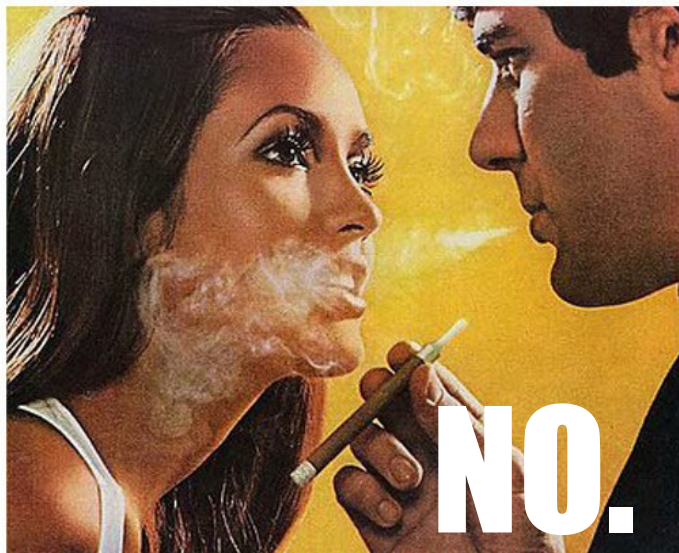
The faith which you have, have for yourself in God's sight. Happy is he who is not judging himself in that which he is attesting.



Have your faith (and your cigarette) in God's sight; lovingly avoid having it in the sight of your husband.

“Love is believing all.”

I'm not sure about this one. I think it applies to loving God. Many of these exhortations can very well apply to loving God. For example, we ought to be patient toward God, kind toward God, and so forth. I do not see how “believing all” can apply to other humans. Does it mean I'm supposed to believe everything everybody says? Surely not. So I'm at a loss here, except to apply it to God. Believe everything God says, yes, that I can do—or at least pray to be able to do.



“Love is expecting all.”

Again, it is easy to apply this to God, more difficult applying it to human beings. Am I to expect everything of everybody? The simple answer is, “yes.” I am to think the best of everyone until proven wrong. This is the equivalent of presuming a person to be innocent until proven guilty. “I am expecting that you will do the right thing.” “I am expecting you to do what you promised to do.” Expectation is often dashed to bits, but at least it had the decency to expect. It gave the other person credit. Sometimes this credit is enough to turn around a bad character. This is why the teachers at my school always gave the rotten kid (not me; I was the class clown) the responsibility of cleaning the chalkboard erasers. (Every kid wanted to do this.) The teachers expected good of him. In the example I'm speaking of, this gracious act shocked the kid so much (I will not use his real name of Danny Santarelli), that he rose to the occasion and became a better person. Love does this. It does it until its expectations are dashed into pieces, but then it refuses to take evil into account (after being temporarily incensed, that is), and comes back for more.

“Love is enduring all.”

The Greek word for “endurance” is *hupomone*, and the English elements are simply, “REMAIN-UNDER.” Endurance isn't pretty. It may not even smile. But what it does is—it never leaves. It stays. It stays no matter what. That is true love. It is God's love for us.

May it also become our love for one another. —MZ

