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LOVE AS IT REALLY IS
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There is a popular song entitled “My Cup Runneth Over with Love.” The opening verse says that the man wakes up in the morning and looks at his wife sleeping beside him and his love wells up. When this happens he whispers endearing things to her. The real message in the first verse is, though, that his “cup” runs over with love.

In the second verse he says that again in the evening he watches her and studies the little things she does. He memorizes the moments he is fondest of and again his cup runs over with love. It is obvious that he thirsts for love. Interestingly, a Christian song says the same thing. Its title is “Fill my Cup Lord.” In it we tell him that we want our cup to run over with God’s love.

If you have ever felt love you know how it feels to have your cup run over, but how do you put the feeling into words? I have to admit it is almost impossible. Even so, the feeling is unbelievably pleasant and you want more of it. Sadly, some people have almost never experienced love, and they neither know how to give it or receive it.

Very few of the people I treat ever know what love really is. It is even more apparent that most of the general population also do not know what it is. Even though I have described it to hundreds of people, I have never written anything on the subject that was devoted solely to love’s description. I have, therefore, decided to write a short essay on the subject as I have learned about it during the last 35 years.

Christianity is a religion of love. John said that **God is love**. I know he is love because he introduced himself to me by immersing me in his love. Others have had the same experience. Because he is love Jesus, his son, made love his central message. Love God, love your neighbor, love yourself, love one another, do love by feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, taking strangers in your home and visiting the sick and the prisoners were his commandments. He never ordered his followers to kill all who refuse to believe like Mohammed did. Instead he said to love them. Except for an episode in one of the crusades and our internecine wars, this is what real Christians have tried to do. Most nominal and cultural Christians behave like the Muslims. Unfortunately people today have also sexualized love to the point that it has little

meaning. To love someone is to have sex with them. That is not what love really is.

But what is love? Love is an emotion pure and simple. Emotions either inhibit our movement or move us toward or away from a stimulus. The word emotion comes from the Latin word *emovere* --- to move. As we inspect the actions associated with love, we realize that it moves us toward the person we love. It is no wonder then that when we love someone we want to be with them, to talk to them, make physical contact with them and be one with them. We do not want to physically hurt or verbally abuse them. Instead we want to hold them close and caress them and tell them in endearing words with gentle tones that we love them.

There are four loves and although they have the same basic emotional mechanism they are different. To characterize the differences the Greeks had four words for love. **Eros** was the sexual love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man. **Storge** was the love of children for their parents and the parents for a child. **Phileo** was the love of friends for one another. I am told that **Agape** was a word they made up when Christianity came along. They had no word for the love of God for man and man for God. Others have written about love, notably CS Lewis who also described four loves, but his classification differed slightly from that of the Greeks.

You may or may not have realized it, but love is a two way street. One cannot love an inanimate object. Real love requires someone to love it back. With these observations, I would like to now describe the way love develops and what it does to the participants. I will then describe how it gets distorted.

I learned about love from a Spanish philosopher named Julian Marias. Most people in my field have followed the teachings of John Bowlby and his Object Relations Theory. His books entitled *Attachment and Loss* do not supply a simple definition of love. Sadly he minimizes the emotional and spiritual aspects of love. In contrast Marias has a simple theory of how love develops and what the final outcome of love is. What does he say?

Marias begins by saying that love is an installation of the psychospiritual dimension of a person loving into the psychospiritual dimension of a person being loved. We all are body, psyche and spirit; but we are a unity and one cannot divide us. The Jews knew this and they did not divide man into three parts like the Greeks did. One cannot install a love object into our physical body so love has to be psychospiritual.

Having accepted the idea that love is installation, how does it come about? It is an integral part of our life because it is built into our central nervous system. In a recent book entitled *Why God Won't Go Away* two scientists have demonstrated that there are circuits in the brain that light up when we pray or meditate. We are hard wired to relate to God. It makes sense that if he created us to relate to him he certainly would have hard wired us so we would be able to relate to others. Therefore, he gave us radical needs to relate not only to himself, but also to children, to parents, to a mate and to friends.

God is an abstract concept. Even so, we all must have a god if we are hardwired to have one. It may be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; or it may be Allah, or Buddha, or Vishnu, or a living man, or ourselves. We in medicine often make a joke about some physicians (especially surgeons) who think they are God, but in many instances it is not a joke. Prideful people do not think they need a god and so become their own god. Humanism appeals to these people. There is no doubt that humanism teaches that we can be our own god. The writers of *Humanist Manifesto I* called their philosophy **religious** humanism. Since humanists do not tolerate the imposition of another will above their own, they readily buy into the offer that Satan made first in the Garden of Eden, "You can be like gods!" He is still making that offer today. When humanism is accepted its adherents create their own laws and values. They decide what is right and wrong. We see this being taught today in the public schools, colleges, universities, and even in law, medical, divinity and other graduate schools. There is, though, only one true God and an enemy called Satan who can influence men through their human nature, and may even possess them.

Installation in parents is instantaneous when a child is conceived. As soon as a couple finds out that the wife is pregnant, the child is installed in both the mother and the father. They are literally reborn, for the child becomes part of them, and they become new persons. They immediately begin to prepare for the child's coming. They have to provide him or her with love or she/he will die. Parents must live their lives for the child and nurture him/her until he/she leaves to become a parent themselves. Children must separate and individuate to leave their families, but they never stop loving their parents nor parents the child.

The installation that occurs with conception is why women and men have post abortion syndromes. They literally have destroyed part of themselves. Grief occurs with miscarriages, too, since part of the parent has died. Sadly, society does not know or admit this so they are not given the opportunity to grieve.

When we fall in love with our potential spouse, we are first attracted to them because of some aspect of their being. It may be their appearance, personality, intellect, sense of humor, energy, loving nature or any number of other characteristics. When we are attracted, we want to come along side that person

and get to know them. We do that by spending time with them and talking to them. We reveal ourselves to them and they to us. As they do we install their vices and virtues, their perfections and imperfections and their assets and liabilities. We are now a different person. For just as we will do for our children, we now live our lives for our potential mate. Where we go they go, and where they go we go. This love is not purely sexual. It was called by Marias "sexuate" love. We are bonded to them in a covenant when we marry and it is only with great difficulty that the bonds are ever broken. The process of breaking the bond whether by death or divorce is called grieving.

Our love for friends is not the same as our love for our spouse. We install only part of that person in us. Among Christians the thing that attracts us to another is our faith. With faith our ability to love is amplified. And it becomes manifest in our relationship. If we are not Christians, we will still be attracted to people because of our common interests. It may be our profession, occupation, recreational pursuits, love of the out-of-doors, or any other thing that can put people in contact with one another. Although we want to be in the presence of friends, the desire is not as acute as with others we love. Love for friends is ended with less trauma than the others.

It is noteworthy that our Judeo-Christian heritage is one of love. After the Hebrews had escaped from Egypt, they sang a song in which they sang of God's unfailing love (Exodus 15:13). His unfailing love is a subject that the writers of the Bible constantly reiterate. David is especially emphatic about God's love. Among all the other religions of the world, there is none that emphasizes the loving nature of their God like Judaism and Christianity. It is because of his love that our God is a forgiving God. It is because of his loving nature that God attracts us to himself so that we can accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Jesus is love. He condemned our sinfulness, but made it possible for us to confess and be forgiven to restore our relationship with him. He emphasized the necessity for us to be loving in his commandments. They were: Love God with all our being; love our neighbor as ourselves; love one another as He has loved us; and do love by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving water to the thirsty, visiting the sick and prisoners, and taking strangers in our homes.

The most amazing part of his creation was the fact that when God is installed in us we become more loving. We naturally possess the emotion of love and have the capacity to love, but when he installs himself in us we are even more loving. Our love is amplified. Unfortunately, many of us bring all kinds of negative emotions from our childhood into our Christian life, and we still are not able to love unencumbered by our past. It is not until we inspect ourselves and forgive the persons who have traumatized us that we can get rid of our anger. Our shame and guilt can be gotten rid of by confessing our sin and being forgiven. Our emptiness will be dispelled because we now have a purpose for our life and

it provides excitement. Our jealousy will be dispelled because we are now secure in our relationship with God and this gives us security in our relationship with others. Anxiety (fear) is no longer a problem because we trust God to guide and direct our lives. We know he has good for us so we are sure that we have a future and a hope. Perfect love casts out all fear.

It does sound easy and in practice it is not as easy as I have made it sound. It does take work. In Romans 12:2 Paul says that we have to be transformed by a complete change of our mind. This only occurs if we learn the truth. Most of our problems arise from lies that we have learned in the past. These have been called misbeliefs by William Backus. Whatever we call them we have to know the truth for our thoughts (beliefs) determine our emotions and our emotions determine our actions. It behooves us then to live in love. The Apostle Paul summed it all up in these words: "If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever" (1 Cor 13:1-8a NLB).

I reiterate, the most important thing that love does is that it causes the lover to put the best interests and welfare of the loved one above his or her own. They live their lives for the other person. One sees this all around us when we look at the lives of persons who love one another. One of my patients has a mother who is difficult to say the least. She has always, to the patient's best recollection, been critical, carping and demanding. She now is old and getting senile. Her daughter has to care for her. During her last visit she told me of all the financial machinations she has had to carry out to get her mother cared for in a nursing home. Was she complaining? No, she was just telling me about the activities of her life. She has a child's love for her mother and is honoring her by taking care of her now that she has become helpless. She is being faithful in her love in spite of her mother's personality problems.

At the beginning of my career as a parent I learned what love for a child was really like. I read in a popular magazine that one of the fringe benefits of being a parent was to watch my children while they were asleep. I knew this was true

because I had often gone into my infant son's bedroom at night and watched him sleep. My cup would run over with love. I did that with all five of my children as often as I could and it never failed to run over.

Another of my patients told me of the love he had for his wife. She developed Alzheimers Disease and had to be taken care of for seven years. The first years were at home, but the next were spent in an assisted living facility and then in a nursing home. For seven years he sat with her caring for her every need until she died. Love never gives up because our cup runs over.

I can also testify to the pleasure of loving. I was attracted to my wife because she is one of the most loving people I have ever known. This was apparent when I first met her. Her loving nature drew me to her and it did not take long for me to begin installing her in my life. We courted for two years, and it finally became apparent to me that I could not continue my life without her by my side. We have been married 55 years and have never had a major argument. We have been truly one throughout the years we have been married. Living with her is a wonderful experience and the thought of losing her brings tears to my eyes. We are both old and one of us will die first so I hope it is me. I cannot conceive of living alone.

And then there are the parents of mentally defective children. Their children always remain dependent. They never grow up to care for themselves. Yet with patience their parents care for them and love them during their lifetime.

The greatest example of love is Jesus' death on the cross. God knew that mankind or a substitute had to be punished for their sins. God had prescribed death as the punishment for sin. This meant that mankind's lives would be extinguished. But because God loved us as his children, he sent his son to take the punishment for us all and made eternal life possible. Jesus who was righteous died for the unrighteous.

So that is what love is about. It is the source of real happiness, for happiness comes from having a right relationship with God, our mate, our children, our friends, and being creative in our vocation.

Is the infinite love of God available? Yes it is! All one has to do is to ask him to be the Lord and Master of our life, and believe that he was resurrected from the dead, and he joins his Spirit to our spirit to declare that we are his children (Romans 8:16). In that act his love is revealed to us. It can be over and over again in our life if we seek him. To do this we have to cleanse ourselves by first inspecting ourselves, identifying our sins, confessing them, repenting and asking for forgiveness.

Most people do not know what repentance is. It is more than saying I am sorry and vowing to amend my sinful ways. It has to be accompanied by godly sorrow. Godly sorrow is the sorrow that comes when we know we have made Jesus suffer on the cross. He was taking our punishment upon himself there and he suffered for us. I have described this in my previous newsletter. There is also an in depth discussion of the subject on our website in the section labeled essays.

To end this letter I want to relate a story. I was on call one weekend and the nurse on the ward told me that one of my colleagues who I was covering for had a patient being admitted. I had forgotten to examine her and write an admission note. I was leaving the hospital when I remembered my responsibility and went back to my office, put my white coat on and went back to the ward. I had planned to spend only 15 minutes with her. I got her chart, went to her room and began my interview. My fifteen minutes had turned into one and one-half hours when I got through listening. She told me she was born into an Italian nominally Catholic family in New York. She had gone to nursing school where she met a Jewish medical student. After a long courtship she married him and converted to Judaism. By the time he finished his training they had three daughters. He had come to Duke to do a cardiology fellowship and after he finished was made junior faculty member. Then she got pregnant for the fourth time. Her husband did not want any more children so he forced her to have an abortion. She acquiesced and the procedure was done. She immediately got depressed and entered therapy with an analyst. For three years she was seen several times a week, but when she got no better her therapist sent her to work in an abortion clinic to “desensitize her.” This only intensified her feelings of guilt and she became suicidal. Her desire to end her life became so intense she had to be admitted several times. It was the latest of these times that she was admitted when I was on call.

As we finished she asked me, “Dr. Wilson, do you know what is wrong with me?”

“Yes I do.”

“What is it?”

“Your life doesn’t have any meaning.”

“Is there anything to do for that?”

“Yes, but I cannot tell you what it is because your doctor may not like what I will tell you.”

“Tell me! I won’t tell my doctor.”

“The answer is Jesus.”

“I knew that. Why wouldn’t they tell me about him. You can tell me!”

So I did and when she heard she wanted him as her Lord and Savior. Then she was healed and the abortion experiences could be healed. Some months later she went through a requiem healing service and was finally delivered from all the grief, guilt and shame. After we did this I took that opportunity to ask her why she had accepted Christ that night. Her answer was that she had never felt so loved in all her life as I listened to her, and felt that if my compassionate love was what God’s love was like she wanted it. I had no more contact with her since she moved out of town, but later she wrote me that she had led her husband and her children to the Lord and had no more symptoms.

The world does not know that abortions create unresolved grief reactions. And even if it recognizes them, it does not know how to deal with them. Then too if they admit to the traumatic psychological effects of abortion, they have to admit that abortion is wrong and stop doing them. But even if they don’t, we have an obligation to demonstrate his love to the traumatized, hurting people in our midst and heal them. It has been said that the most critical factor in psychotherapy is that the therapist cares for (loves) his or her patient. Who is better empowered to love than a Christian. God has shown me this over and over.