

Love As It Really Is

Almost no one I counsel ever knows what love is. Even though I have described it to hundreds of people, I have never written anything on the subject that was devoted solely to its 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. Because he is, Jesus his son made love his central message. Love God, love your neighbor, 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 did not believe like Mohammed did; instead he said to love them. Except for part of the crusades this is what Christians have done. Unfortunately, today people have 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 him or her, to make physical contact with him or her, and be one with 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. *Agape* was a word they had to make 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 from that of the Greeks.

You may or may not have noticed, but love is a two way street. One cannot love an inanimate object. Real love requires someone to love 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 names 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 another being. We all are body, psyche and spirit, but we are a unity and one cannot divide us. The Jews know this and they do 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 built into our central nervous system. In a recent book entitled *Why God Won't Go Away* two scientist 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.

But God is an abstract concept. Even so we all must have a god. 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 they did not tolerate the imposition of another will above their own they readily bought 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 have to provide the child with love or it will die. Parents must live their lives for the child and nurture him/her until he or she leaves to become a parent themselves. Children must separate and individuate to leave their families, but they never stop loving their parents. 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.

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, their personality, their intellect, their sense of humor, their energy, their 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 do for our children we now live our lives for our potential mate. Wherever we go they go and where they go we go. 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 or 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 with others.

It is noteworthy that our Judeo-Christian heritage is one of love. After the Hebrews escaped from Egypt they sang a song in which they sang of God's unfailing love (Exo. 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 was 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 are: 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 He 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 it says that we have to be transformed by a 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 Bill 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)."

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