



The Truth About Love

There's so much false information being circulated in our culture that we need to know the truth about love. There is no word in the English language that has been more tortured, twisted, or perverted. On a daily basis, I see the truth about love being buried deeper and deeper in an avalanche of selfishness and confusion.

The problem is that we see false love around us, but the danger is that we are getting used to it. A friend of mine was watching *The Bachelor* and he said, "The man had a bunch of women to date but he had to eliminate them as he went along. The first one was eliminated she was sobbing. The host asked her, 'Why are you crying so much?' She said, 'I just love him so very much.' She had just met him four minutes ago!

I am not only concerned about this generation, but I'm concerned about the next generation. How is it going to affect them as they steadily feed upon this diet of confusion and distortion?

Believers are not immune to this confusion and distortion. If we keep feeding on this stuff, sooner or later, we are going to begin to view love with the same distorted lens that they do. Sooner or later we are going to believe that those who really love us, including God, will do what we want them to do.

Today there are very few people who really understand what biblical love is all about. Many people today think that love is a warm affection or desire. In fact, I remember many years ago when a young woman came to me and said, "I have been dating a man and he told me last week that if I do not marry him he will kill himself." She was carrying around a huge amount of pressure and guilt. Well I'm going to let you *guess* at what I said to her, because I'm not going to tell you. A couple of years later I saw her and I said, "You obviously did not marry him. Did he kill himself?" She said, "No, he is married to someone else now and has a kid."

That type of threat is not love—it is pure selfishness. Let me tell you about biblical self-giving love. Self-giving love demands something of us, not the other person. Self-giving love is more concerned about giving than about receiving. Self-giving love is about sacrificing of self for others. Self-giving love is more about the will than feelings. Self-giving love puts the welfare of others ahead of our own welfare. Self-giving love has no room for pride and self-conceit.

Beware. As you hear me talking about self-giving love you will be tempted to think, "I am going to try to love that way." Let me be upfront and tell you that if you try it naturally, you are going to fail because it is impossible for you to sustain this type of love in the long-run. The best of our natural efforts to love selflessly will only go so far. Self-sacrificing love is supernatural.

You may be asking, "How do I love supernaturally?" Let me tell you. The Apostle Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:4 that everyone who is in Christ Jesus *are* partakers of the divine nature. The very Jesus whom we claim to know as the Savior and the Lord of our lives has already promised to pour His love into our hearts.

The Truth About Love

It is my testimony—and I am sure that it is probably the testimony of so many of you—that I have tried to love with Christ’s type of love in my own strength. I have grit my teeth and said, “I’ve got to do it because I’m a preacher. I have to love just like Jesus.” I blow it every time in my own strength but I succeed every time I love in the power of Jesus.

The Bible says in John 13:1 that Jesus, when he loved His own, He loved them to perfection. What does that mean? That He loved them to the fullest degree and measure—that he loved them without limits. If there is one thing that should distinguish those who know Jesus Christ from those who do not, it should be that selfless, God given love.

In John 13:34-35 (NIV), Jesus says, “A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” What is the distinguishing mark that sets us apart? It is if we love one another. Jesus is saying that self-sacrificing love will be the supreme trademark of His disciples.

I want you to hear me right: You know of the extreme importance that I place on biblical theology and on biblical truth. But right biblical doctrine is no substitute for love. Did you get that? Right theology—so important that I would die for it—is no substitute for love. Church activities are no substitute for love. Church membership is no substitute for love. A believer has absolutely no excuse for not loving like Jesus. The love we share is not ours, it is His.

In Romans 5:5, Paul writes, “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given to us.” You see, we don’t manufacture love—we only share what we have been given. You cannot manufacture self-giving love. You cannot produce it no matter how hard you might try. You can only share that which God has already poured into your heart.

So many books talk about how much hard work marriage is but I don’t read those books. For 33 years I haven’t been working hard at all—maybe my wife has been doing most of the hard work, but I don’t think she has either. All we have been doing is giving to each other what God has already put in our hearts. We are sharing the love of Christ that He put in our hearts.

Marriage is hard work when you are trying to do it in your own strength because you’re trying to follow someone else’s program. Love is not, cannot, will not, be manufactured. Love can only be shared, because Christ has already poured it into our hearts.

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:9, we are taught this love by God Himself; according to 1 Corinthians. 14:1, we are to pursue love; according to Colossians 3:14, we are to put on love; according to 1 Thessalonians. 3:12, we are to increase and abound daily more and more in love; according to 2 Corinthians 8:8, we are to be sincere in love; according to Philippians 2:2, we are to be unified in love; according to 1 Peter 4:8, we are to be fervent in love; and according to Hebrews 10:24, we are to encourage one another to love. That is why when you come to the great love manifesto, 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul actually does what Hebrew scholars would say is an exaggeration. In the Hebrew language known as hyperbole, he goes to an extreme just to make a point.

The Truth About Love

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor, and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing” (NIV)

There are three things in those three verses that the Apostle Paul wants every believer to understand and to take to heart and to practice. First he’s saying that eloquence is no substitute for love. Second, he is saying that expertise is no substitute for love. And third, he is saying that extravagance is no substitute for love.

Eloquence is no substitute for love. The Corinthians at the time when Paul was writing to them, were bragging about how they could speak in tongues—that they could speak in different languages, but they had loveless hearts and that’s why Paul addressed this problem and wrote, “If I speak in every known language in the world and if I speak like the angels speak.” When the angels appeared to people they were awestruck. That is why the angel said to Mary, “Fear not.” They are awesome creatures when they come in the flesh. And then when they spoke to Joseph they said the same thing, “Fear not.” When angels speak, you literally want to say, “Wow, what is this?” And Paul said if I had this kind of power when I spoke, people would say, “Wow! Listen to this guy—he is incredible!” And they would be awe struck with the eloquence of his words but without love, it would all be annoying noise.

Beloved I want you to hear me right. The best of our witnessing, the best of our evangelistic techniques, the best of our teaching and preaching, the best of our programs, the best of our abilities—if they are not motivated by love, according to the Word of God, they are nothing.

During the time of the Apostle Paul the people in the town of Corinth celebrated pagan festivals to pagan gods and the goddesses, particularly Cybil and Bakkos and Dionesses. When they celebrated those three gods, the people always kind of spoke with ecstatic noise and they had smashing gongs and they had clanging cymbals. Paul was not making this up. He is saying to the Corinthians, you are familiar with all of this—you are familiar with this language; therefore, speaking eloquently, speaking in another language, even speaking with angelic language—all that can only be a bunch of noise like you hear at your pagan festivals if they are not done in love. Eloquence is no substitute for love.

Second, expertise is no substitute for love. We often ask the question, “What makes a person tick?” What we’re really saying is, “What is their motivation?” Several years ago the Lord taught me not to ask that question of others, but to ask it of myself, “What’s my motive?” I often agonize in my spirit for a long time— and probably go overboard when I’m facing a major decision—searching my motives. If I get some convoluted motives, as most of us probably do, I go back to the Lord and agonize some more and I wait until the Lord clarifies my motive.

Why do I do this? Because I honestly believe deep in my heart, that if my motive is self-interest or if my motive is to take advantage of any kind—in the long run I will not be effective for the Lord. You see, anybody can start out right and keep it going for a while. But I am more concerned with finishing right than starting right. Just because I’m

The Truth About Love

gifted in some area does not mean that I can exercise that gift in an unloving way and expect things to happen.

Whatever area of giftedness you have— and we all have at least one area of giftedness—unless it is done and executed in love, it will not produce fruit over the long run. Paul said that even if I have faith that can move mountains—even if I have faith that can perform miracles—without love, all of that will amount to nothing.

Let me point you to one person in the scripture who had faith. He trusted in the word of God, but because of his loveless heart he ran away. Jonah believed God, he really did. He believed in the word of God and he trusted in the Word of God. When God told him to go to Ninevah and preach, the people would repent and He would forgive them. Jonah replied that he trusted God's word, but he wasn't going to go. He believed God. He had faith in God. But he had a loveless heart and that is why he tried to run from God. Eloquence is no substitute for love. Expertise is no substitute for love.

Third, extravagance is no substitute for love. It can probably be no more extravagant than emptying your bank account, your home, your car, your stocks, and all your net worth to give it all away. He said give *everything*. I mean basically this is it. Jonah gave everything away. If I give it all away, He said that is not even enough—it's not a good enough substitute for love.

You know what the problem is? The problem is there are some people who confuse sacrificing things with sacrificial love. Why do I say that? Because giving things can be a way to ease one's guilt—whether it is good guilt or bad guilt it doesn't matter. Beloved I want to tell you something and it took me a long time to really understand this—the greatest gift that you can give someone is yourself.

Men, there are many of us that find it a lot easier to just pay for things. We buy things for our kids and our wives. We just buy *things*. But what they want is *you*.

Throughout history there have been so many people who have tried to practice self-denial. They have tried to practice self-humiliation. They have tried to practice self-affliction—still today. But without love all of these things are anything but selflessness. Why? Because the real focus of these— what I consider to be pagan practices—is not God and the focus is not others, the focus is self. Giving that is not done out of love for God and for others is of little value as far as God is concerned. Paul said, “If I surrender my body to be burned, but do not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3, NASB).

You people say, “Well, I'd die for you.” You know what's harder than dying for someone—it is living for someone. It is dying to self. It's much harder to live for Jesus than to die. It's much harder to live for somebody else than to die. It's much harder to die to your ideas, to your opinions, and to your way.

I wonder in my spirit if there may be some people who would say, “Michael, you are right. I've really tried to practice sacrificial love on my own. I've tried to practice it on my own strength, but I'm finding myself failing all the time.” Today, very simply say, “Lord Jesus Christ, You promised that when I invite You to love others through me, You will. Will You do that?” And then ask Him again tomorrow morning and every day after that, and you will see it, I'm testifying to it. He will make you love the unlovable because

The Truth About Love

that's His promise—if you will take this simple step of faith and say, “Lord Jesus, love through me.”