

What is love?

By Edward Kurath

We talk a lot about love, but what exactly is it? We fall in love and out of love. We love our children, we love our car, and we love sports. We love a certain movie, or we love to sleep in on Saturday morning. Alcoholics love alcohol, chocoholics love chocolate.

Our culture is very confused about what love is. As it turns out, the English word "love" is a very fuzzy word. (In my book "I Will Give You Rest," see Endnote #13-2 on fuzzy words). Selfless love brings healing and life, and Hollywood type love means lust and use and abuse.

We sometimes seek for love in all the wrong places. Why do abused women stay with the abuser? They love them. Why do children constantly pursue abusive parents? They need their love.

God is love (1 John 4:8), and yet this attribute of God can't be what is wounding and destroying these people.¹ God only brings life and healing.

God's Love Is Essential

God is love. His kind of love is real love (I will call it "authentic love"), and it is essential to our wellbeing. He wants to pour out His love upon us. In fact, we can only love Him because He first loved us. And yet for some reason God has made us in such a way that we must receive some of His love through another human being. To equip us to transfer God's love to another, there is a part of us that is made in God's image. He also fills parts of our "honeycomb" (see "I Will Give You Rest," Chapter 3) with His love. However, every other part of us is not inherently filled with God's love. To the degree that every other area is not filled with God's love, our fallen nature impacts our brand of "love," and in reality is a counterfeit of the real thing. To keep a supply of God's love in our hearts to bless us and to flow to others to bless them, a one-time infilling is not enough. We need to be continually receiving. God is the only source of authentic love, and we can't produce any of it on our own. If we receive authentic love from another person, they are simply giving us the love that God placed in them.

We need God's love so badly that when our supply of it gets too low, we must try to find other sources, and we may be impelled to accept inappropriate substitutes. God's love is the one essential that keeps us from going down a path of death and destruction. Before we were filled with His Spirit, we were all suffering death and were being destroyed, which is why God sent Jesus to redeem us.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).²

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2, underlining is mine)

¹ One misperception of Love

Some contend that there are two types of love discussed in the New Testament:

1. **Agape** is God's kind of love. It is good, and it is the kind of love we are to pursue.
2. **Phileo** is man's kind of love. It is fallen and fleshly and not important.

Unfortunately it isn't that simple.

1. **1 John 2:15**, says, *If any man loves (agapao) the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* But man can't love the world with a "good" kind of love.
2. **John 5:20** says, *For the Father loves (phileo) the Son.* But God can't love Jesus with a fallen and fleshly love.

Therefore, the Greek words for love are also fuzzy words, and we must look deeper into Scripture to understand what love is.

² "death" and "destruction" are harsh words, but the Bible uses these words regularly to describe our status before we believed in Jesus, and were therefore without the love of God dwelling in us. A few additional scriptures are:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death . . . in this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. . . There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love (1 John 3:14; 4:9; 4:18, underlining is mine).

Without His Love We Become Wounded

As children start out in life they are incredibly vulnerable to wounding if not given real love. There must be a continual infilling of love from both father and mother. The flow of love must be from their parents to them, not the other way around. When children do not receive this love on a continual basis, they desperately seek it. If they are unable to get their parents to give them what they need, they will surely judge themselves as being unlovable. They begin to believe there is something wrong with them, and they begin to build The Wall inside (see Chapter 9 in "I Will Give You Rest").

Whenever we are not filled to the brim with authentic love, we are miserable and desperately seek something to make us feel better.. If we have never received much of it, we don't really know what authentic love is like, and so we latch onto anything that seems to make us feel less miserable. We are willing to accept substitutes. In fact we may think that the substitutes are as good as it gets. A teenage girl who becomes sexually promiscuous is seeking love. The attention of the boys seems to help her emptiness. But it never really works because it isn't really love. The flow is actually in the wrong direction, because the boys are using her to get their own needs met, not giving to her. They are actually draining her further.

You have a gauging system inside that tells you when you need more water. If you have plenty of water in your body, you aren't thirsty. If I would then offer you a dirty glass of water, you would say, "No thank you," because you don't need any water. You know that the dirty water might make you sick, and you are in a position to be particular. However, if you are out in the desert for three days without water, and if you saw that I had a dirty glass of water, you would do anything to get to drink it. You are then so needy you will accept a substitute for good clean water.

We have a similar gauging system that tells when we need more of the God type of love, and a similar dynamic happens. If we are filled with plenty of authentic love, we aren't needy and will be very particular about what we accept. However, if we are empty and desperate for authentic love, we will accept inappropriate substitutes. These substitutes are actually destructive to us, because they drain life from us instead of filling us.

God Is The Only Source of Real Love

God is ultimately the only source of authentic love. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . .* (Gal. 5:22). God gives it to us through His Spirit abiding in us, and this good root produces good fruit - we are truly loving and giving.

If we receive authentic love from another person, it is because that person has a full reservoir of it. Somehow they have received a bountiful supply, and it overflows to us. No person can be a source of authentic love. Anything we crank up out of our own resources is tainted with sin, is not the real thing, and will therefore not bless another person.

For instance, if we find out that the Bible says we are to love others, we may try to do so. But when we are "trying," our motives are impure. We may be doing it because we are afraid God will be unhappy with us if we don't. Or we may try to do it to appear spiritual. Or we may try to do it to be accepted, or to feel important.

The flaw is that in each of these cases we are using the other person to meet our own needs. The counterfeits of God's love all have this fatal flaw: the flow is in the wrong direction. The person we are "trying" to love has a sensor inside them that knows whether they are receiving the authentic love, or if they are being used and sucked dry. The other person would in fact be better off if we weren't there "trying" to love them.

Unfortunately, when we have never received authentic love we don't have access to the information from our own love sensor. When we were a child, since we were always empty, our love sensor was constantly sounding the alarm. This didn't feel good, so we had to find a way to silence this bad feeling; so we built The Wall inside. Now as adults, because we can't hear our love sensor anymore, we don't consciously know when the other person is sucking us dry instead of filling us; so we allow

**Out of my emptiness I
take from others.**

**Out of my fullness I
give to them.**

them to do this to us. And, since we are in fact empty inside, we are subconsciously impelled to go around trying to get our tank filled up from others. We then begin to suck them dry!

Further Wounding Results

When we have lost the ability to tell authentic love from counterfeits, we can make huge mistakes. When we have not received lots of real love, we can be susceptible to becoming enmeshed in destructive relationships and organizations. When this is our history, we are then looking to have our tank filled, and aren't very adept at telling the difference between the authentic and counterfeits.

Gangs are attractive to wounded youths. Gang members typically come from very non-nurturing homes. They are looking for a place to belong, and they find acceptance and affiliation in the gang. But they are actually being used by the leader of the gang to fill his unmet needs for power and control. The members are so powerfully drawn in to get their needs met that they will do anything to retain membership, including committing crimes and exposing themselves to injury or death.

You may recall the tragedy with the Jim Jones commune. To start with Jim Jones was a Bible believing pastor who had a way of drawing people to himself. The members' needs to belong eventually led them to leave all they had to move to the jungles of Ghana with the group, and eventually to suicide. This charismatic leader mutated into an abusive tyrant. Yet, despite his control and harshness, the people stayed with him because of their need for love.

Our need for authentic love is so great that people will suffer abuse rather than do without it. They will even die for a counterfeit, because they are desperate. Tragically, they don't know that what they are receiving isn't authentic love, and won't really fill their emptiness.

If we haven't received a wealth of real love, we are vulnerable to abuse and further wounding.

These are just a couple of examples, but the world is full of abusive organizations. They are abusive because the members and the leaders are all trying to get their own love tanks filled at the expense of the others. It is very possible they don't consciously realize what they are doing, because they are impelled by unconscious forces to do this. The counterfeit love, which is sin, opens the door to evil, and the people get wounded rather than nurtured.

Real Love Is Good Fruit

This can seem very discouraging. If I can't love others by setting my own will to do it, how can I possibly obey God? After all, he tells us over and over to love one another. Therefore the question isn't whether we are to love others, but rather how we can.

We can't love others rightly, but God can do it through us. Remember, the image of God dwells inside each of us, both in our Treasure Inside and those areas of our "Honeycomb" into which we have invited Him. Those areas of our inner being can love the way God loves. We need to let our Treasure Inside out of jail, so that he or she can be free to live, and we need to remove the bitter roots in our "honeycomb." Remember that the reason our "Treasure Inside" is not free is because of our wounding - we built The Wall (see Chapter 9 in "I Will Give You Rest").

We do need to set a goal of being able to love with God's kind of love, but this will only come about as we are changed into the image of Jesus. Trying hard to love will not enable us to give authentic love.

God's love can flow through us as good fruit from a good root.

Our love must be good fruit from a good root. 1 John Chapter 4 makes it clear that we can only love others because of His presence dwelling in us.³

How to Love

Then, in a practical way, how do you truly love others? The answer, as we have seen, is that it must come from Jesus dwelling inside. If you are not feeling love or compassion for another person, there is a bitter root of some kind in the way. So the answer is not to try harder, but to seek the bad root. This will probably entail forgiving that person (or others who have hurt us) and being forgiven by the Lord. With some people you may need to do this over and over again. We will know we have accomplished forgiveness when we find ourselves feeling towards that person the way Jesus feels about them.

Summary

So what is love? Authentic love is an attribute of God. We only have it to give if we have first received it from Him. God's love residing in us gives to others rather than taking from them. Authentic love is the life of God in us, and it gives life to those who receive it through us. 1 John 4:9-19 (see footnote on the prior page) professes that good fruit grows from a good root. Jesus is the good root, so the only way to increase in love is to continue to be changed into the image of Jesus. Then Jesus will love others through us. Anything else is not of God and tears people down instead of bringing life.

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³ This truth is expressed in 1 John, Chapter 4:

9. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit . . . 17. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19. We love Him because He first loved us. (1 John 4:9-13, 17-19).

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Root</u>	<u>Fruit</u>
9.	God sent His Son	We live through Him
10.	God loved us	We love Him
11.	God loved us	We ought to love one another
12.	God abides in us	We love one another
13.	He gave us His Spirit	We abide in Him
17.	His love perfected in us	So are we in this world
19.	He first loved us	We love Him

The message is that the God kind of love comes from God, and there is no other source. We get it from Him and are to pass it on.