# LOVE

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I admit it! Every time I see a Scripture dealing with love I want a recipe that will guarantee "me" living it out. I have come up with a lot of recipes in my faith walk over time…some have been dropped, others modified, and others refined. Focusing on and loving concepts won't bear deep and abiding love. But when we care enough for people we will find a way to love them; no obstacle will defeat us; no lie will keep us; but grace will seal us.

I still remember my early struggles or attempts to consciously love the people in my life after starting to read, "The Greatest Thing in The World" by Henry Drummond. The book starts out by quoting in King James English First Corinthians 13, the chapter on love in the Bible.

The language used for this text was difficult to understand, but it seemed better to me than the modern versions I read during that time.

The old English version seemed to make love loftier, more exciting, and worth aiming for. But it did not instruct me on how I was to go about loving because I didn't understand many of the words. About the only thing I got out of the text was that I was supposed to with pure motives give good things to those I met with God's help.

The modern versions that I read of this text seemed dull to me at the time, even though I grasped more of the English words used in them. Understanding the words that make up sentences will not guarantee understanding what the sentences say.

It did not matter which version I used, I understood very little of what was said by any of them because my foundational beliefs were incorrectly laid. I told myself that I did not know what love is. This was more true than false at that time. The quality of our love determines our knowledge of love whether we can express it in words or not.

Love seemed to me at the time as something that only God could properly do this side of Heaven. And because I thought only in "all" or "nothing" terms at the time, it provided me with very little incentive to continue along Love's path. I also wrongly put the same pressure I used to accomplish tasks in the past to love in the present. We have to co-operate with God in order to love. Love does not come from putting pressure on oneself, and I unfortunately put pressure on myself.

My standards for achievement were set so high that I set myself up for continual failure. Because of this, I had very little ability to see my growth in the way of love. Who is going to attempt something that she or he believes is impossible to accomplish? Perfectionism

kills love. Perfectionism cause guilt; a better way to love is to do just what is needed to get the job done.[1]

C.S. Lewis made the distinction between natural and supernatural loves and how they complement each other. If only I had of known the thinking behind his observation my confusion, judgmental-ism, and legalism would have been replaced by real wholesome growth in supernatural love with God's help along with embracing the natural loves wholeheartedly. My theology was poor, and it prevented me from seeing the good in others (especially non-Christians) I am sad to say. Mine was a black and white; an all or nothing worldview based on in-correct interpretations of certain sayings found in the Christian Bible.

There are natural loves (eros (romantic love), Philia (enjoyment, fondness, and friendship), storge (family loyalty), and charity (helping the less fortunate)) and then there is supernatural love. The natural loves which all humans possess as gifts from God from the moments of their conceptions in their mothers' wombs are good as far as they go (but they are lacking in some important ways). Supernatural loves complete or extend the natural loves, and lifts them up to where they ought to be. Robbers, rapists, extortionists, politicians, lawyers, Democrats, addicts, Republicans, homosexuals, Liberals, pot smokers, Tax-cheaters, Tax-payers, the working, the unemployed, pedophiles, Conservatives, murderers, Socialists, Communists, Hindus, Protestants, Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, leaders, followers, slaves, free people, Moslems, the greedy, the poor, the rich, the proud, the humble, and all the ordinary people everywhere all possess the natural loves from one degree to another. Perhaps falling short here or there and excelling elsewhere. But that is not what God wants most. God wants us to love supernaturally extending, lifting-up, and completing the natural loves to where they are destined to reach only with His help.

Many people are very compassionate, loving, tolerant, and peaceable but have yet to realize that it was God who gave them that goodness when He created them in their mothers' wombs.[2]

We love because God first loves us! When we experience God's love, some of us can go far and deep along the path of love. Others go much shallower. We all want to grow in love, be kinder, more caring, more compassionate, and more patient. But how do we move passed those things that blocks us from growing in the freedom to love supernaturally? Those interior things that lash out, and cause us to compromise what we know is love.

For those who don't have a relationship with God the first step is getting in touch with their God-shaped-vacuum and drinking and eating the grace that God pours out through Jesus Christ.

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[1] Insight from my friend Anita

[2] I am in debt to my wife Sophie for this insight.

The second step is to forgive those who have hurt us in some way along with asking Jesus to forgive us for the hurts we have caused others. And receiving God's forgiveness and healing emotionally not just intellectually. See the Essay called: "The Twelve [Plus Four] Steps" in this Website with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/TwelveStepsPlusFourSteps.pdf

For good advice on how to work through forgiving people.

The third step is to pray for humility, and to kill the prideful attitudes that we have. See the Essay called: "Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds" in this Website with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf

on how to do just that.

Lastly we live in the moment aiming to love out of "caring" for others by receiving, and giving grace the way Jesus directs with the "golden rule". This Essay can give us focus on what love looks like and how to be able to recognize when we are loving.

This is no easy process, and only those who search out the details with wisdom, the roots with Light, and remain committed will receive the promise of God to love more deeply will grow in love.

What Is Love?

Ultimately God is Love, but to different people, love can mean entirely different or opposite things. To clarify what Christian love is, consider the New American Bible's most modern translation of First Corinthians 13:

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. If there are prophecies they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially, and we prophecy partially, but when the perfect comes the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

An Interpretation:

First, a very wise person told me many years ago, that whenever we try to take

something a part to understand it then we kill it. Since God is living, Love is living. We cannot dissect God, so we cannot dissect Love. And that's not what I want to do here. What I do want to do is to explain how I have come to interpret this marvelous passage. My interpretation here is not the definitive interpretation. Anyone who is further along in the way of Love can easily show me up in both words and deeds.

I will re-state each verse from above and then give brief explanations beneath each of them. Here goes:

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.

This verse doesn't outright say what love is, but it does say that any talk or prayer that is not done with love is meaningless. Love always comes through a pure or clean energy from the heart and mind. Speaking kindly, gently, patiently, humbly, and carefully are a part of loving others and self: "delivery is just as important as the content of what is said."[3] If we are not in the habit of healthily processing our emotions, then clean energy will be hard to come by. Yes, we need to love ourselves in healthy ways and not selfish and jaded ways …and this starts with the way we talk to ourselves and God. The simplest ways we can love others and ourselves are through what we say or pray or declare: truthfully, creatively, imaginatively, humorously, warmly, kindly, and not judgmentally. Admitting negative feelings to ourselves is far better than burying them and not processing them. But we need healthy ways to process them. We can love or not love depending on how we speak to others and ourselves. Are we demanding, mean, complaining, critical, judgmental (in the name of truth), bitter, angry, or abrasive towards others? If so we need a way to clean ourselves up from the inside. See the Essay called, "Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds" for a way.

Are we attempting to be infallibly right, or appear intelligent more to feel good or be right than to bless when blessing is needed? Or, are we gentle, affectionate, gracious, and meek towards others? Treating other people, the way we want to be treated isn't just about doing good deeds but also about how we talk with them. Love can also mean practicing silence. What we say can also become meaningless if our words don't match our deeds. When we don't back up our good promises to others with loving deeds then we aren't being loving. In this case, we become a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. The choice is ours.

We may think we are funny, or have authority to say stuff to people but land up hurting/ humiliating/ violating/ and wounding them even though we never intended to do hurt them. We can't walk away and say that we never intended to hurt them so we aren't responsible. This is being insensitive, cold, proud and callous in our relational styles. When we cause a car accident unintentionally we still should make amends, help those we hurt (even unintentionally) and we apologize and admit we did wrong without excuses all to go the extra mile for restorative justice to be fulfilled. The same is true with

[3] Thank you Sophie

personal relationships. When we hurt somebody by what we said, and they say so, we need to apologize and repent, we have change the way we talk with them, and respect their boundaries and wishes, otherwise the relationship is not healthy.

A very important aspect of communication is in how we ask people to do things. Coming from a "mean, whip driven, hard, abrasive, judgmental, forceful, manipulative, you owe me honor or respect, or dark energy, "do as I say…" moralizing "…if you don't you are evil" in the popular sense" is not loving and will make us enemies; also, if we treat ourselves this way we are not loving ourselves either. If we talk to our pets this way it is also considered unhealthy. This kind of speech comes from fear. Fears of not getting our way; our pride having to get our way; using pressure and using force to get it; meanness because pressure and force are never kind.

Moreover, we can still have these negative attitudes or energies in our hearts and speak sweetly to others…and so have the outside of the cup seemingly clean but the inside all putrid. We know this when people don't see our conversations the same way we do because they react to our energy not our presentations.

Another important aspect of communication is what we do when we get angry for what another person did. A bad approach is when we judge in anger the person in question. Either we judge the person before confronting her or him and hearing them out or we can also judge him or her with full knowledge regarding what they did wrong. Judging is always wrong per Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Truth telling is the correct way to process our emotions and talk to people who may have disappointed us. But how do we know the difference? Judging is giving one's opinion on another person; whereas truth telling is giving one's opinion on oneself using "I"-statements. The former labels, measures, accuses, and tries to use guilt to get one's way. The latter appeals to the nobility of the one who may have done us wrong, and frees them to help in ways we often don't expect.

How we speak with others in conflicts does send messages to them about what kind of attitudes we have. Love is kind and non-judgmental in speech and expression especially when it comes to disagreements or conflicts. When we are kind in potential conflicts, then we will help the situations steer clear from disrespect or from escalating from harsh words to violence.

When we see that our approach to disagreements or conflicts breeds more coldness as opposed to warmth, or goes to hostility, friction, and robs us of peace then our default settings when it comes to how we approach conflicts needs to be replaced with Jesus' way of love. We should renew our minds (attitudes, beliefs, thinking, understanding) with a healthier energy. We have choices when it comes to our attitudes or approaches in our relationships and Jesus is with us to help re-program our thoughts and therefore our feelings and attitudes.

For a long time, I did not know what Saint Paul meant when he said: "Take every thought captive" that is until later. Many times, we will have very uncharitable thoughts in our heads towards others, and if we aren't careful if we don't take those thoughts captive they will take us captive and we will speak those thoughts and hurt those we should want

to love. We might also want to boast about our achievements or almsgiving. If we are careful then we will examine our thoughts, and only say that which will build others up. Words which de-escalate tricky situations ought to be spoken. I think that the kind of speech that does de-escalates volatile situations is what Jesus meant by turning the other cheek. By that I mean He wants us to carry, put up with, and let slide the negative, mean, abrasive, antagonistic, accusatorial, judgmental, and manipulative words others may use to intimidate us or get their way with us.

Lies, half-truths, accusations, insults; words that rob hope, sow discouragement, steal self-esteem, grow hatred and bitterness, place burdens on us that were never meant for us to carry, and replacing faith with un-belief all come into our lives through our minds. Once these spiritual viruses enter our lives unheeded they are used by Satan's servants to poison our lives, remove our joys, limit or destroy our flexibility to learn and love, and help us to infect and harm those we meet the same way we were attacked: "eye for eye and tooth for tooth."

Words can be like stones or rocks that we land up throwing. All human hearts can be compared to soils and rocks; some hearts are all soil with no rocks; some have a few rocks with plenty of soil, and others have plenty of rocks and a little soil. Those with only soil are the healthiest and only need water and good seed to bear good fruit like love, patience, peace, joy, self-control…etc. Those with rocks in their hearts may mean that they have hardened their hearts in some ways with anger turning into resentments, resentments turning into hostility, or hostility turning into hatred. People with plenty of rocks are often proud, bitter, judgmental, and intolerant. It can also be that people vow to not feel anyone else's feelings or humanity because they don't want to feel their own feelings of hurt or rejection. So, they are wounded and often wound others; so, they throw stones too. The darkest and hardest hearts still and always will have some soil. Each person has some good soil within his or her heart…known as a safe place. No heart is wholly evil…if one did have a wholly evil heart they would cease to live…because evil requires life to exist…sort of like rust on paint, rotten-ness on a fruit, or a malignant growth in the flesh. Once the good is totally consumed the good identity no longer remains and all life-giving qualities cease to exist hence there is spiritual death.

Those with good soil are more interested in gardening than throwing soil at others. Those with stones in their hearts are in certain situations going to throw those stones at others. The hurting will hurt others; the sick can infect others.

Truth is: we reap what we sow: we need to say no to the negative, and yes to the positive… this will keep us cheerful and steer away the gloom of depressions that can be nursed by addictions.

When we embark on cleaning up our mouths, after dealing with the past i.e. our old negative sinister strongholds of speech, then practicing the "golden rule" when it comes to how we speak is the healthiest way for the grace of God to flow through us.

<u>Coveting Love or Power:</u>

And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I

have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.

Often it is thought that God would not bestow on anyone the gifts of prophecy, understanding of mysteries, or knowledge if they did not have a great degree of humility. Saint Paul seems to be saying that we might have these wonderful gifts, but still be without love. If we are without love in an area, then we are without humility in that area. We can covet power over others and knowledge in certain fields of discipline instead of pursuing love. The decision is up to us, are we going to love if we have such gifts? Or, are we going to love even when we don't have the fullness of these gifts? What we do with our lives will eventually give God and us the answers to these questions.

Love does not grow by seeking knowledge, understanding, or truth. Love only grows when we care enough for a person and find ways to love them. In the "finding" we will find truth, understanding, and knowledge but they aren't the focus, they aren't the goal; connection, touch, caring, kindness, and love are.

We can also be blessed with incredible faith. But what are we going to do with it? Faith without love is dead. We may be able to believe in the deep mysteries of our Christian faith. But the Bible also says that the demons believe in God, and that there was a time when the demons also experienced those same deep mysteries, although they won't admit it to us now. Yet, they are in rebellion now and oppose God and His elect at every turn. Is there supposed to be a difference between them and us? Love.

Love as Giving:

If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Most people see almsgiving as noble. Few question the motives of those who give money. What Saint Paul is saying here is that motives need to be pure for the giving to be recognized as genuine love. The only motives we can judge are our own. We need to believe the best about others… and like Jesus taught us not judge or condemn anyone.

If we give merely to be able to boast about it to others, then we are proud, and our actions are not love.

If we are giving to receive more money, then our motives are impure. Some companies advertise to the public that they give to certain charities all to increase sales and profits. It may not be a bad thing, but it is not charity.

If we are giving alms to appease a bad conscience over totally unrelated deeds done in the past, then we aren't loving those who receive our money. When we do this, it is like walking on a treadmill: we won't make further progress in our spiritual journey. In fact, we may be trying to pay a debt-bill that only Jesus can pay off.

Giving money is one of the easiest ways to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are righteous. When we are giving, it is easier to point to someone else's faults than to our own. We cannot love God and money at the same time.

We all give ourselves in love in many ways. According to Dr. Gary Chapman there are five

love languages: quality time, works of service, gift giving, touch, and words.[4] Everyone has at least one of these love languages as their primary love language, and if we learn to speak a person's love language she or he will feel loved, and likely respond to us in pleasant ways. It is easier to love those who are kind to us than those who are hostile. I believe that it is impossible to love someone who is hostile to us without God somehow granting us the grace to do so. Most people can love those they are at peace with, but loving someone we have somehow grown to dislike takes supernatural love: it takes a change of mind and heart.

Jesus is the one who introduced the idea of loving our enemies and He himself became our example for doing so. So long as we count someone to be our enemy we won't be able to love them. I have found that when I stop demonizing a person (i.e. stop counting her or him as my enemy), and view them with Jesus' eyes I am more able love them. If I have demonized them, it is because I have judged them. Love does not demand from, measure, put into boxes, or hate people. Love sets free. Someone said that the line between good and evil does not divide religions, cultures, language groups, races, male-female, or political parties…but goes into each of our hearts. Reminding ourselves of this truth kills pride and encourages supernatural enemy love.

If we are insensitive it is because we have hatred, pride, and fear deep in our hearts (I know that this was the case in my life for some time (being aware of our bad fruit of insensitivity, and unaware of its roots)).

Anger is not a primary emotion, but a secondary emotion. Anger comes from being made to feel guilty, or inferior; or rises when encountering fear; or anger comes from trauma that stems from torture; or anger stems from injustices; or anger stems from (moral or immoral) expectations when not met. Anger therefore is an alarm. Nothing more. It tells us when something is wrong or doesn't quite fit right, or when something needs to be attended to in our interior lives or environments. There is no such thing as immoral anger, but immoral stuff can motivate anger. Giving anger an immoral label only leads to getting angry with our anger which gets us stuck, confused, powerless, and a reputation of having an anger problem. When we get angry, then our focus must be on how to deal with (in healthy ways) what is wrong or amiss interiorly or exteriorly. If the anger becomes the focus or we nurse it, then it can turn into resentment, bitterness, hostility and hatred all of which are unhealthy. This ought to be avoided and not encouraged.

We need healthy ways to process our anger. We do so by prayer by feeling our emotions, and telling God about them using "I"-statements not judging, and listening for spontaneous thoughts from the Holy Spirit as we reason with Him about our emotions and situations. We will be surprised at gentle and kind wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives to us to navigate our relationships.

When we treat anger as an alarm then the anger will lose its focus and intensity as we deal healthily with what triggered it. Feelings are determined by what we think, believe,

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[4] Dr. Gary Chapman, The Five Love Languages, Northfield Publishing © 2004.

and expect. If we change what we think, believe, or expect then we change what we feel. Just because we have anger does not mean our fears are justified, or that we are in the right. We can be wrong and angry at the same time.

If we are proud, then our pride will unhealthily motivated anger at times when people don't always listen to us. If we are jealous, or envious then we will have unhealthily motivated anger when others have what we want and won't give it to us. If we are slothful and someone ask us to do work, then we will have unhealthily motivated anger. If we have greed, we will have unhealthily motivated anger when someone has more than us. If we have gluttony, we will have unhealthily motivated anger when we are in line ups for food and the line-ups are not moving fast enough. These are motivated by fear. And fear is motivated by a broken relationship with God. See the essay entitled, "Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds" with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf

on how to tackle these. In tackling these we will win through to love.

The only way to put an end to hatred is to repent in prayer with God's help. Brad Jersak's book called, "Can You Hear Me?" is a powerful invitation to relationship with God that equips us with truth that can be used to deal with all hatred and all seas of pride. What is the opposite of hate and pride? Caring. We deal with our strongholds of hatred and pride by getting in touch with that part in us (that God put there) that cares for people and we will begin to love people in warm ways with God's supernatural grace that comes from the Holy Spirit as we make progress. Note: pride needs to be fought daily.

Let me summarize what has been said thus far. Saint Paul is telling us that our motives play a large part in determining whether our acts are done in love. Are we going to act out of the good motives in our hearts while at the same time saying no to the bad ones as best we can? Love is our decision (it counts the cost and then gives), but we need to co-operate with God if we are to love supernaturally, because supernatural love comes from God. Supernatural love completes the natural loves.

Further Aspects of Love:

Love is patient, love is kind [i.e. warm hearted/non-judgmental/non-critical/gentle]. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests...

What does it mean to practice patience? When we are patient we can wait for what we want with a good kindly attitude. We practice waiting when perhaps certain forces inside of us say don't wait (or don't remain committed). Waiting is not necessarily the same as being patient. The forces inside us that say don't wait might be desires to gratify our cravings, the understanding that it might be easier to not wait (laziness), it might be our, pride, selfishness, sense of entitlements or un-balanced sense of fairness, or it might be anger that is not healthily processed. A root of all these can be pride and contempt: When we are more important, or think we are better than others. Patient-love is not easy and that is why it is looked up to and exalted so much. Patient-love is humility, people-

truth driven along with heartfelt caring. We care most deeply when all fear is gone with a completely sane mind. "The anger, hatred, pride, contempt, self-pity and grumbling we may have should be dealt with if we want our waiting to be patient."[5] These are dealt with by changing how one thinks and believes in the mind and heart through confessing/repenting-prayer in the context of a relationship with Jesus when the Holy Spirit points it out leading us to newness of life.

We might want to conquer (all at once) the interior struggles of not wanting to "be patient" because we see that our conforming to certain moral-standards as the pathway to Sainthood. If our strategies to attain these moral standards of perfectionism are off base and unrealistic we will not attain these moral standards. If our moral standards are not wise, are too idealistic, or are foolish we will land up losing our native intuitions and start wearing masks out of shame, or pride and become legalistic. We will invite falseness into our lives. Overnight changes are not desirable because they rarely last. Slow progressive truth/ relationship based change is the path that promises real wholesome and lasting change. This is the path that Jesus offers: gradually, gradually, gradually then "suddenly".

Repressing our emotions will invite all sorts of troubles in most cases but as my friend Alex Pruss writes: "Some feelings might be good to repress, because they are dangerous to self and others. That may not be the ideal solution, but maybe sometimes that is the right one." Putting pressure on one self is just as destructive. Rejection by others or traumatic events can or do start us off in the troubled direction of turning anger into hatred and hatred into insensitivity, and insensitivity into contempt and therefore making us impatient towards others. If we do try to repress our emotions or urges or put pressure on ourselves we must realize that the insight (that we do repress or put pressure on ourselves) alone won't get us off the treadmill. We must see the lies that we are living in the face of relevant and liberating Truth. But believing real truths is not enough (like Joyce Meyer likes to say) we need to invite correct/positive/truthful thinking about all matters into our lives. The Bible says: God's thoughts are not like our thoughts… for as high as the heavens are above the earth so are His thoughts compared to ours.

If we are aiming to become an unreal saint (like I did for a very long time), then that needs to be abandoned in a careful and wise way (don't gloss over issues) and to pursue being the healthiest oneself one can be with God's help. This is an insight (along with God's grace) that will start to help take the pressure off, and help stop us from repressing our humanity. If we are aiming to be the perfect parent when the perfect parent we have in mind is not based in reality, then we need to abandon that too but slowly, thoughtfully, wisely, and prayerfully. If a spaceship's aim is one degree off its course it will never get to its destination if the target is far enough away.

Practicing: "Love is kind" can be life changing. The Bible says that in part that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance. How much more ought we to have the same

[5] Joyce Meyer, "The Battlefield of the Mind" ebook.

attitude when we desire change in our children, spouses, friends, customers, co-workers, leaders, followers, and enemies. The way to work this is to remember that when God's kindness is directed to us that it has had good consequence in our lives, so how can that be a bad thing when it comes to us wanting change in other peoples' behaviors? We love because God first loves us! I have found that when I change my attitudes for good, then people recognize my energy change and treat me differently. If we don't practice "love is kind" we will attempt to use anger, meanness, manipulation, and abrasiveness to get our way. We will also judge out of pride, blindness and insensitivity those we are trying to correct only to land up hurting them. Controlling people is not the same as these same people responding in devotion, loyalty, gratitude, love, or obedience to the powers that be or possibly us. Control is an illusion.

If we are hard on ourselves then we will be hard on others. Being hard on our selves is a result of pride and wounded-ness. If we are not gentle with ourselves then we won't be gentle with others. If we are gentle with ourselves, we will be gentle with others. Putting pressure on oneself to love will always backfire. If you put pressure on yourself, you will see your patience (for yourself and others) dry up; and your joy will dry up too.

We can be hard on ourselves because of shame (that says there is something wrong with our identity, not like guilt that says there is something wrong with our actions). If so, we will most likely attempt to "do more and try harder" to overcome what we see to be the source of our shame (otherwise we will "give up"; or see-saw between "trying harder" and "giving up"). The only way out is to recognize the lies that foster the "doing more; trying harder" cycles perpetuated by our shame and brokenness. Then to renew our minds and to fight the fight of faith by finding, celebrating, and embracing the grace whose source is Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And living out of what God says is the truth about our behaviors, our value and identities, and our acceptance by Him.[6]

Grace comes from God. But we can be graceful to ourselves and other people too. Grace is unconditional love. This means that we love people "whether or not" they do good, bad, or have apathy. This means that they don't have to do good to be loved, and they are not penalized for doing bad either. This is most freeing.

If we have joy then we won't necessarily be seeking gratification (for ourselves) in other things and that means we will be less greedy, more patient and more giving and kind to others. Joy is one building block to practicing patience. Joy is God's gift to us. Ask and you will receive. Lack of joy is a result of not having been forgiven (and felt it), and restored by grace. We must deal with past baggage/burdens that drag us down through confession for joy to grow. Fear of not being accepted can fuel pride where pride tries to earn it. Forgiveness is a gift just like grace.

If we want to practice patience we need to get in touch with that part that cares for others (which God put in all of our hearts). Caring for others is another building block to

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[6] Cf. Jeff VanVonderen, Tired Of Trying To Measure Up, Bethany House Publishers © 1989

practicing patience. If we care for ourselves in a healthy way, not a selfish way, then we will care for others if we practice the "golden rule". Us caring only for ourselves will not overcome a sense of injustice that leads to anger, or desires for revenge. We need grace. When we struggle with un-grace… we need to say "no" to it by saying "no" to us solving the situation by ourselves through self-analysis… and ask Jesus what the blocks are and to listen for His answer and then to obey Him…the truth will set us free to love (most of the time many truths are needed to set us free to love more freely). We are the branches He is the Vine. Let's take the pressure off us internally by letting God's love flow through us.

If we want to practice patience and love, then we must start where we are at (this is also a building block to practicing love and patience). We find out where we are when we have conversations with God. Jesus said His sheep know His voice. Knowing where we are, requires spiritual eyesight and Light. Jesus is the Light of the world. We can't know where we are at unless we have the Light (aka Jesus)!

If we want to practice patience with others and ourselves, then we need to stop judging harshly our and other people's behaviors or motives. Renewing our commitment (over, and over again) to not judge people is another building block to practicing patience and love until the stronghold of judging is dismantled. Judgmental-ism is rooted in envy that is rooted in pride and contempt; and are rooted in fear, and are blocks to practicing love [we are the branches; Jesus is the Vine: when we fully abide in Him we will not be judgmental]. Judgmental-ism is also rooted in wrong perceptions of who God is. This might show itself in attributing a hard/ mean/ angry/ impatient voice to God when we ask God for advice. God does not drive His children with a whip!

We will not be patient if our foremost focus is <u>us</u> keeping the OT Law (Torah or Moral Law or even misguided ideals or principles). Faith in the OT Law will not help us keep the OT Law. Trusting the law to help us keep the law will not help us keep the law. Our foremost focus needs to be Jesus/God's wisdom/love flowing through us instead of keeping score on who annoys us or who breaks the Moral Law. The Torah or OT Law was the minimum standard that God required from the Jewish people long ago. Jesus' teachings and commands are so much higher, that when we keep them through faith and grace, the Torah or OT Law is fulfilled. The OT Law is about fairness, about people having rights. If we focus on only protecting our rights we will never love, no matter how right our rights may be.

If we think that God does not love sinners until they repent, with us doing the same in this instance as God, then we have not taken seriously the example of Jesus in the Gospels who was a friend of tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. God unconditionally loves us: that means He loves us without conditions. We need to be gentle and see that Jesus is our breathing room from the Law. All that Laws can do are to point out sin, and don't make anything perfect. Love is not legislated, but inspired. Even if we keep some of the commandments from the Law through our own strength, it always asks for more, and so we won't have any rest. We need to be at rest. Rest gives us perspective. Rest and peace are building blocks to patience and love. Rest only happens when we are standing on a sturdy foundation: Jesus; and when we believe in God's love shown through His

forgieness. Jesus is the rock of our salvation. He is the divine Principle: believing, trusting, and resting in His love and power and voice is the key to us loving. He will help us keep His principles and maxims and commands… without Him principles and maxims turn into cold dead law stones and weigh us down. Again, aiming at keeping rules only by focusing on the rules is a sure path to failure.

Repenting in faith with Jesus help in prayer from being committed to revenge with the motto: "An eye for an eye; and a tooth for a tooth" is very important. This motto was meant to limit punishments for wrongs which acted as a sort of deterrent to doing wrong in the OT. If we are committed to the philosophy of: "an eye for an eye…" we basically believe that a person either deserves grace if he or she is good; or deserve judgment if he or she does bad things. This should not be so. Jesus commands us to use non-violence (which does not mean doing nothing) as a pathway to healthy relationships and peace and patience. Kindness goes further than being anally "tit-for-tat".

Patience can't be practiced if we believe the lie that: "we never/hardly ever get our way." We will always resent giving our time/talent/or treasure if we believe that we don't get our way. Fact is if we have little or no faith that things will work out, or that others won't comply with our requests we will not practice patience in a loving way. Fact is my wife often gives me what I want, and when I believe the best about others they sense that energy too, and don't feel forced or manipulated into doing things for me.

Joy in a person is attractive and draws others closer. We need joy (which resides in the heart; unlike happiness that resides in the mind and pleasure that resides in the body). Joy comes from our gratitude, and for Christians that gratitude comes in part because we are celebrating Jesus having forgiven our past sins out of love, and our adoption into God's family out of love as sisters and brothers of Christ. In many places in this world about the only thing we can carry with us that brings joy is knowing we are loved and forgiven. God does not demand thankfulness from us. Indeed, He gives us His love and that naturally produces in us thankfulness and joy. When we have joy, we don't have any guilt. Forgiveness is a building block to patience and love.

No sane person can express joy and anger towards someone else at the same time when an injustice has occurred. We might seesaw back and forth from laughter to anger under circumstances of comedy but that is about it. If we don't know how to express or handle our anger then we will not be able to express patience with others in an easy, warm and charitable fashion. Handling anger in healthy ways is a building block to patience and love.

How does one be non-judgmental, joyful, caring, full of gratitude, gentle, and at peace; and therefore, practicing patience and love? Becoming kind, being gracious (i.e. caring), having gentleness, and being peaceful can't be done by one self if it is to be genuine; not sour nor defective! It starts with putting one's faith in the love of the Creator/Jesus/God, following Him, and abiding in Him (believing in His love, and having a correct image of God the Father, and believing He will help us love and stay away from bitter sin) from moment to moment [we are the branches and He is the Vine; branches bear good fruit; and don't produce good fruit all by themselves]. Not rushing forward quickly to some

poor ideal, concept or seeking to feel good alone. When we abide in Jesus/God (through faith in Him) we will eventually learn from Him directly or indirectly to rest in His peace (Jesus speaks to us through a variety of ways (for our own good: more sources allows us to have less pride and more dependence)), and He will eventually point out lies if any that we believe that keep us from love, caring, forgiveness, peace, and patience. When one seeks to learn from and follow Jesus, one will learn how to deal with one's anger in constructive and healthy ways (this is a gradual process).[7] I have found that the more I learn to deal with unresolved anger, and how to deal with anger in the present my ability to be patient has improved dramatically. Gary Chapman's book on anger gives some steps on how to process anger in healthy ways… these steps work… but they take God's grace to work as designed. Often things that annoy us, or anger us or need to be dealt with or that need to be forgiven can only be possibly done with God through His grace, power, love, and authority in prayer.

Abiding in Jesus has to do with trust, and resting in God's love, forgiveness and His full acceptance helps to kill the stronghold of pride. It also means being truthful with our self about our feelings…and fully and deeply accepting ourselves in the light of our feelings/ judgments no matter how negative. It also means accepting that God the Father wants us to not be independent from Him unlike our earthly fathers who taught us to be independent from them. How it works is through pursuing relationship with God by faith. Each relationship has mysteries about it. As for me, I ask Jesus to help me abide in Him regularly because it is His idea and not mine. If all we follow are principles and neglect relationship with God our love will never be supernatural.

God never stops loving us because of our sins. If we do choose sin over following God, then God still loves us, but His love can't get through because we have set up walls of pride and contempt that keep His love out of reach. When we open ourselves up to God's love, we will want the same for everyone else. And so, we will begin to love others with God's grace and guidance through the person of the Holy Spirit.

When we are impatient (i.e. give up being patient no matter how hard it is), we are not kind (warm-hearted), we are jealous (thinking about ourselves alone), we are pompous and have an inflated sense of our own worth (have unhealthy pride); we are rude (and contemptuous) and selfish (not caring about others). If we have any one of these behaviors, we usually have them all. The root of impatience is self-seeking-selfishness that comes from pride that comes from fear that comes from a broken relationship with God. The root of impatience is fear and thinking that we are more deserving than others. The root of impatience is pride. The root of impatience is "I" not Christ! It is self-pity. It's thinking that we deserve what others have. Perhaps we covet being first in the line-ups at the supermarket. If we do, then we are more than likely going to have unkind feelings (such as anger/hatred/intolerance/ hostility/contempt) towards those ahead of us in the line-ups. Yet love is kind.

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[7] Cf. Gary Chapman, "Anger: Handling A Powerful Emotion In Healthy Ways"

But how does one tackle such negative emotions and attitudes? See my Essay called, “Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds” from the “Insights” page from this Website. Basically, having dealt with the negative past we forge ahead with obeying the higher positive commands from Jesus summed up in the “golden rule” in the context of grace through God’s grace.

Jesus said it is better to give than to receive. If we love humanity, we will love our neighbor, and that means relinquishing our hold on being number one wherever we go. If we are following Jesus, then His will is first in our lives. When Jesus’ will is not first in our lives, then we are not following him; we are trying to do it by our own [apart from Him we can do nothing; He is the Vine we are the branches]. Jesus is only number one in our lives when we are patient out of love. We are patient with others when we do actively love others. Getting here takes dealing with our unhealthy attitudes such as self-pity, pride, envy…etc. We deal with impatience by confessing with genuine honesty to God how wrong we are to have it (along with our self-pity, poor me mentality, envy, resentment, selfishness, contempt, demands for loyalty, hostility, immaturity…etc.), that we are sorry for these attitudes and our histories with them, and then ask His forgiveness and cleansing and receive (emotionally and intellectually) them in faith. Then we honestly pray: “Jesus I repent in faith from all these sins (list…) and sinful attitudes (list…) with your help, and I choose to have a positive attitude in this area from now on with your help” to commit to God’s ways and start to search for ways to love. Shallow prayer does not bring changes; only intensely proportional prayer to the intensity of the sins and unhealthy attitudes we have in our lives brings change through God’s power. Then we commit to living by truth not seeking to only feel good. I outline this more detailed in the Essay called: “Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds” with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf

If we are patient, we are kind (warmhearted). If we are kind, we are not jealous. If we are not jealous, we are not pompous. If we are not pompous, we are not inflated. If we are not inflated, we are not rude. If we are not rude, we are not going to seek our own interests (all of) the time. If we are not going to seek our own interests (all of) the time, we are not going to be selfish. If we are not going to be selfish, we are going to be patient.

All the above positive-behaviors are linked together.

Judging is a root of "Jealousy" and “self-pity” because it assumes one won't get one's way based on past misfortunes. Jealousy is fear driven. It robs us of hope and good will, makes us sad, and leads to anger that can form resentments if not dealt with healthily. Also, we can be full of self-pity when we feel people don’t give us what we want. All of this is rooted in pride, fear, and a broken relationship with God. This also needs to be dealt with in prayer through honest confession and repentance in prayer. We determine our attitudes, countenance, self-esteem, and we ought not give others power over us through self-pity, fear, and wounded pride, or seek honor for ourselves because of our thinking or accomplishments. Judge not and condemn not. We live by truth not feelings.

Pope Francis said to give thanks to God for giving others the gifts He has given so generously. Moreover, this truth dealing with jealousy and pride is more than a principle to be admired and fitted into our theological system of thought. We need to practice it too, when we get jealous or envious...because that is where the rubber meets the road to victory over judging and superiority.

When I used to read the verse that says, "[Love]…does not seek its own interests" I got confused. Part of me would say to myself, that this must be a poor Bible translation. I couldn't help but think that it was contradictory. Obviously, I need to seek my own interests at least some of the time. And if so, then am I being un-loving when I do seek my own interest in those instances? Looking back my intuition told me that I wasn't necessarily violating the command to love in those instances, but this verse seemed to be saying that I was violating God's command to love in those instances.

Obviously, I can't be pursuing my own gratification all the time. If I did, then I would never love anyone else; moreover, I would not be loving myself either: Love is not selfish/pleasure focused. Love often requires that I do things that will cost me something, and often this can feel very uncomfortable and must not be suppressed. Hence the words, "Love is not selfish". I now believe that I understand the meaning of the above words a little bit better. When we love others, we can't be setting our hearts on what we will selfishly get, or are going to get selfishly for ourselves out of the act. If we are doing an action to or for someone else, but the only reason we are performing the act is because of what we will personally get out of it, then we are scheming and we aren't really concerned with loving or pleasing that someone else. In this case, we are only concerned about what we will get. Love does not seek its own interests when loving others; love seeks the highest good of those in our power to love. Love's foremost concern when directed at others is with blessing others with life and the joy thereof. It does not scheme, manipulate, use guilt or shame on others in order to get a desired selfish end or even some sort of justice. "Love does not seek its own interest," means that when we are loving a person we are seeking their best (healthiest) interest not necessarily ours.

Love is not selfish! And Saint Paul is still not finished. He goes on...

<u>Love and Forgiveness:</u>

[Love]...is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

What does it mean to be quick-tempered? It means to quickly make up one's mind to be angry and to stay angry. It is natural to have certain emotions like anger or frustration at times but that doesn't mean that we have sinned. Anger often comes from hurt inflicted on us. It is only done away with through processing it and that may mean forgiveness. We need to process and work through and accept our emotions, reactions, anger, and frustrations. Every healthy saint did/does the same: they work through their emotions no matter how uncomfortable, and working through the process we love and forgive those who trouble us. The process takes time. I have found that I often don't want to embrace

my emotions because I think they will take me places I don't want to go, but when I do process my emotions in prayer using "I"-statements and dialogue with God I find situations are resolved with wisdom and kindnesses I could not come up with all by myself.

It is true that quick-tempered people are impatient. We are impatient when we say "the hell" with someone because that someone is not living up to our expectations. If someone is not living up to our expectations, then hardness may creep into our hearts. By this I mean resentments may form, or un-forgiveness may materialize (i.e. we don't want to give up our anger). When this happens we think that we are better than those who have disappointed us. When we brood over injuries done to us, we are not treating the agents of our hurts like we want to be treated.

We are forgetting that we too are agents of hurt, and also require patience and forgiveness from others. We too require mercy from others. We too desire mercy from others. If we refuse to be merciful to others, we are burning the bridge that would have mercy travel to us. Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.[8] If we aren't merciful or patient with ourselves… and aren't waiting on God to slowly mature our love, devotion, purity, and commitments then we will be whip driven and not love motivated. God does not expect instant compliance with His commands. He knows that real change is a process… one that He is happy to help us with as we renew our minds with His input and wisdom. If we don't sense this as genuinely true and see Jesus true image (unknowingly) replaced with a counterfeit based in lies from the devil while reading the Gospels… we have a case of mistaken identity of what Jesus' voice sounds like… and will be law focused until we reject the counterfeit and our minds are renewed.

The first part of the next sentence under scrutiny, "Love does not rejoice over wrongdoing" is easier to understand than the second part that says, "but rejoices with the truth." Taken together or in context, what does this mean? What is Saint Paul trying to get at here?

In order for "love to rejoice in the truth", one has to find it in others. If we are negative or critical towards others, we will always be skeptical about their goodness or motives. Fact is, we all have some goodness and beauty in us… if we didn't we'd cease to exist because God does not create junk. All truth and beauty is a preparation for the Good News of Jesus Christ. This truth and beauty are not only a "preparation for the future" but the steel that helps to build bridges to accepting Jesus as Leader and Savior. Negative people see the cup as half empty; whereas lovers rejoice in all beauty and truth found in others. The one who looks for the beauty in others, encourages it, waters it, prays for it, and blesses it is a lover.

People who are negative are closed-minded, they are putting people into boxes, and they are judgmental. They have a lot of self-pity and pride. The first Psalm says: "Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked/ or stands in the path of sinners/

[8] Cf. Matthew 5:7

or sits in the seat of mockers." Negative people have a tendency to make good things die: first in themselves then in others. God is positive. So what flows through Him is positive energy that flows into us and out of us in the lives of others when we embrace humble motives. We are the branches; He is the vine. His fruit is sweet not bitter! We bear good fruit; we don't produce it all by ourselves!

I also believe that Paul is contrasting two ways of relating. The reckless, the heartless, the uncaring, and the unloving rejoice over wrongdoing that gets them a desired treasure in the end, whereas lovers of God rejoice over a certain kind of truth. This truth has nothing to do with the abstract or practical theorems found in mathematics, but has to do with a kind of life. This kind of truth has to do with not practicing hypocrisy. When we are true to God, we won't be hypocritical. When we are false, we are hypocritical. Truth and hypocrisy don't mix. They are opposites. Hypocrisy happens when we judge and condemn other people for the very things we still do. Hypocrisy happens when we also expect from others what we would not do for them.

When we relate in truth and not out of hypocrisy, we are behaving more like God; and we will love God and others with our whole being. When we truly love others, they become more important and have value in our eyes, and we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for them. We can't do this by ourselves… only by submitting to the Vine: Jesus in gentleness!

Love As Sacrifice:

This is seen best in the way God loves us.

[Love]...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, [and] endures all things.

Love is willing to believe that all the hardship, all the suffering, and all the evil in this world, is tolerated by a kind God out of love; namely He being patient with us so that He can save us to the uttermost. Love believes that God became man so that He could take on our hardships, and our sufferings to be close to us and become our friend. Love believes that the Almighty became human so that He could reverse Adam's spineless response to not love to the point of death his wife in the Garden of Eden so many years ago. Love believes that Jesus came to reconcile us to Himself. Love believes that Jesus entered death so that He could reclaim the dead and give us all life. God does not condemn anyone…people can and do condemn themselves though.

Love believes that out of the foolish proclamation of this supposed salvation story, people will believe in God's love and receive Him into their hearts.

Love is willing to hope in God's promises until they are fulfilled. Love is willing to endure all things until we finally see God. We won't be disappointed because of who He is. Many get disappointed when they only see the supposed weakness of God hanging on the cross. They may think: "What a pathetic God." Many don't see His strength in being able to endure that suffering and love us even when we ridiculed, mocked, hated, spat, and laughed at Him during His Passion. He became weak so that He could show His strength.

Sin is mutilation, and Righteousness is healing. This is the meaning of: "He became sin so

that we could become the righteousness of God." Jesus was mutilated during His Passion so that we could be made spiritually whole or healthy. This is the Good News.

The Significance Of Love:

Love never fails. If there are prophecies they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing.

Love never fails to be important. When love is important, love never fails to be the goal, it never fails to be the aim. Prophecies will cease to be important after they have been fulfilled. Speaking will cease to be important as far as making promises to love is concerned. Talking about love will cease to be important, loving will become the challenge and reality in word and deed. Even the knowledge that we now have will pale in significance to the reality of God and His Love yet to be revealed to those with patience.

Anticipation Of Love:

For we know partially, and we prophecy partially, but when the perfect comes the partial will pass away.

The first part of this sentence speaks to the sad reality of life on this side of Heaven. We only know partially and should not think that absolute truth is attainable (we don't see all beginnings and all ends; absolute truth is God's domain. Nothing is perfect or fully mature in this life. Prophecy is meant to point to knowing God. The prophecy in the Bible as it now stands is partially fulfilled. And those who know God, or have experienced Him, do so partially. But there is hope, because the perfect is promised by God to come someday to those who are patient with God. History and time are racing towards that climax when God will be revealed in all His glory.

As we grow up in the faith, old doubts will be consumed by new faith, and new doubts will emerge until Christ is formed completely within us:

Growing Up Spiritually In Love:

When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man I put aside childish things.

Many people here in the West have had a childhood that is good. I remember the joys and pleasant emotions associated with that time of life.

It may be a (short or prolonged) time of innocence. It may be a (short or prolonged) time when we get along with our parents. It is a time when our imaginations run wild about life and what the future might bring if we are blessed. But many of us leave that world behind as we develop and grow into adults.

The in-between stage from childhood to adulthood is one of the most difficult to navigate. It is often marked by growing pains as life turns out to be far from what we imagined as children. For many it is marked by feeling distance between our parents and us. But if we mature, we put behind us the hurt and discipline measured out to us when we were young and naive. We then begin to see our parents for who they are, and

sometimes begin again to enjoy their company all over again, (if not then we need to learn how to forgive them, and honor them anew). The few, who make it this far, get to enjoy the fellowship that results from caring and forgiveness. But this time they are more deeply involved with loving their parents back. They also recognize their parents' love for what it is: partial.

What is said above about human relationships can also be said about those who are in relationship with God. Not everyone will work on his or her relationship with God through the difficult times. Those that do persevere discover new depth, insights, connections, and fellowship with God that are all gifts of God's grace that are unwrapped through pain.

Making Maps Of Love:

We are all given road maps or world-views when we first start out. They are usually impressed onto our minds by our parents, teachers, friends and even enemies whether they are well meaning or not.

Some of us burn the road maps that we inherit and pursue something else entirely different. This can be either good or bad depending on whether we do so with wisdom or not.

All of us covet different things as we grow and change. All of us want to avoid different things as we grow and change. Many covet pleasure as the supreme good. Many see pain as the greatest evil. Seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake is a poor path to guide our lives by. And avoiding pain is not a good thing if we want our relationships to grow. No wonder we all despise discipline and crave ice cream. Many mistake pleasure alone for love. Many mistake pain for something intrinsically evil, and something that should be avoided altogether.

Because we all use these indicators at least partially on the maps we are making or following, we don't always recognize love for what it truly is. Some more than others. Saint Paul says about those who pursue Love:

At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.

I heard a story once of a man who spent a considerable time trying to understand one of the more difficult sayings from Saint Paul found in the New Testament. He spent days looking for the meaning of the saying, but could not penetrate its mystery. He finally gave up, thinking that Paul did not want to be understood.

I don't fault the man for giving up, but I do disagree with him that Paul did not want to be understood by others. Paul said that he himself would much rather say a few words in an intelligible tongue, than many in a foreign tongue. The key to understanding Paul is in walking the path that he did. He pursued a relationship with God through much hardship, suffering and action.

Few have exceeded Paul's determination and passion. Some understanding comes easy and naturally, some understanding comes through great study, some understanding

comes from suffering for noble causes. The understanding that comes out of the effort to love is by far the most difficult and rewarding to get.

I'm not saying that we should seek out the exact same suffering and danger that Paul went through for the express purpose of understanding him more completely. That would be mad. Life is far too difficult as it is. And love doesn't seek knowledge or understanding only to have them. Everything Love seeks has to do with giving life. Yes, in seeking to love we come to many truths; but seeking truth does not usually lead to love or life. There is natural life, and then there is super-natural life. Which will we pursue at the expense of the other?

The Means and The Ends Of Love:

So faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Faith and hope are the means to finding love and giving supernatural love. Because only with God's help can we love in a supernatural way; faith and hope put us in relationship with Him so that He can transform our hearts from being hard to being soft and docile to His Spirit. Faith and hope are only important to the degree that they enable us to love.

Love? Why do it? It costs us. It's up to us if we want to patiently pursue its conception, birth, and consummation with God's help.

How to Motivate Love:

So, how does one cultivate doing acts of love? Some people think that in order to love one has to feel like doing it. Others think that no emotion is needed, and that love is only a decision, or a duty.

How one views what love is can enrich our actions or make them very stale or make them non-existent. It can either increase our out pouring of love or diminishes it.

If love is only a feeling then we will emphasis those feelings more than doing something real and substantial for others. After all, love does involve actions.

On the other hand, if love is only a decision then we will only do rigid actions. We will lack warmth and affection towards those we think we are loving. And so those receiving our version of love may not accept our actions as being real love.

If we have no emotions or feelings for those we claim to love, then we will in all likelihood never have heartfelt love for them. But having affection for others does not guarantee that we will love them either. The ideal is to be able to have warm emotions that motivate us to love, but this is not often the case.

Just because I don't feel warm deep passionate emotions for people all the time does not mean I don't love them! If I conclude I don't love them because I lack the right emotions yet I really want to love them then I can wrongly create a box... One that I'll never punch my way out of and be free from... unless I can jettison the box by realizing what's happening... I don't have to feel anything in order to love. Learning to think Jesus' way will free me from much frustration and bondage. But having unloving feelings for people is a sign that we have unwanted negative baggage (pride/ envy/ self-pity/ un-

forgiveness/...) that keeps us from genuine love. Processing all negativity attitudes/ energy/ beliefs/ emotions/ and thinking in healthy ways is to make progress in loving people genuinely.

To have compassion means to both share in another's sufferings and to work towards relieving it in ethical ways. People, who don't feel compassion for those suffering, when they should, actually have insensitive or hard hearts. It is true that we don't need to have feelings to love others a lot of the time, but if we lack compassion (which involves feelings) then we are missing out. There is two exception. Namely, when health-care professionals have to see people with injuries, diseases, or illnesses all of the time, then it can be difficult for them to feel compassion all the time: they too need a way of processing negativity. Those who partake in war can see so much destruction that they get used to it. Mankind was not designed to be absorbed with suffering all our days long. We were designed to feel joy and happiness day in and day out. Insensitivity is rooted in pride. Pride needs to be dealt with. See the Essay called, "Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds" from this Website for ideas on how to do this.

In the past I have found that I have procrastinated when it comes to doing acts of love. I have often preferred pleasure and self-gratification to sacrificing part of my life so that others can receive life from me. Also, while procrastinating, there were often struggles going on inside of me. Like wanting to suppress the cost of love to love. Or suppressing the guilt of not having loved. So what is the remedy, if any?

We will love others the way we perceive God has loved others and us; and how we love ourselves. If we have felt God's love, then we will want to love others in the same way. But getting there can be elusive if we lack wisdom. We get wisdom through reasoning with God in our thoughts (known as two-way prayer). How we speak to ourselves is often the way we believe God speaks to us too. The devil is harsh, mean, tries to force things, puts pressure on us, threatens, and uses false guilt, shame, and fear to get us to do stuff. If we see God like this, then we are confused and won't have much love in our lives. God is gentle, real, kind, sober, caring, and appeals to our nobleness, desires to love, and our caring. God's voice is authoritative and rings like truth, so it sets us free; but the devil's voice is deceptive and leads away from Relationship with Jesus.

We won't always feel God's love… so we will need to believe in it the rest of the time if we want to love. We need to thirst for love to love; thirst is a foundation stone to love. Thirst is like commitment. It helps us love when things get difficult. We have a supernatural love tank… when it is empty we can't supernaturally love; only God can fill it if we allow Him to when we continue to practice humility, and He wants to fill it. When we aren't feeling God's love we believe in it anyways. Believing in God's love is foundational to loving others supernaturally. His love should lead to humility in us. Humility brings grace and freedom. Real humility brings caring; and caring brings compassion.

But it is unhealthy to be dry "like forever." If we are wounded, we will wound others. If we love ourselves healthily we will love others in healthy ways too. We have feelings and beliefs. When they contradict each other then we know we have business to attend to.

We got to process those feelings in healthy ways through honest, deep, connecting prayer where we reason with God about what is happening inside of us without pushing the negative down.

How we think also determines the quality of our love for others. Often old lie-based-codes written on our minds/hearts take time to remove. The reason those codes are there are because we trusted their sources, or there was just enough truth in them to win us over, or our anger and search for revenge kept us from restorative justice.

Getting in touch with that part in our hearts that cares for people, in touch with our gratitude; and practicing mindful genuine thanksgiving for the forgiveness of our sins brings peace and level-headedness that enables God to cleanse us and renew us. Giving God His judgment seat back is also important, and not being hard on ourselves are key. Understanding the differences between judging and truth telling will clear up a lot of confusion. When we have gratitude, we will be less greedy or envious or selfish and so we will want to share with others what we have been given: mercy and grace and love. A constructive way to start abiding in Jesus and kill our judgmental selfish ways is to pray regularly:

> The Serenity Prayer[9]
>
> God grant me the serenity
> to accept the things I cannot change,
> the courage to change the things I can,
> and the wisdom to know the difference,
> living one day at a time,
> enjoying one moment at a time;
> accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
> taking as Jesus did,
> this sinful world as it is,
> not as I would have it;
> trusting that You will make all things right
> if I surrender to your will;
> so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
> and supremely happy with you forever in the next.
> Amen!

And to regularly pray The Abiding Prayer:

> "God please let me abide in Jesus because it is your idea and not mine"

and believing that God grants this privilege each time we ask Him..

I know that in the past when I thought about praying to God, "Please tell me whatever

[9] By Reinhold Niebuhr, (emphasis mine)

you want me to do, and I will do it." I would feel fear and get scared of what God might actually ask me to do. My thinking was if God wants me to do something I don't want to do, and He asks me to do it, then I will have plenty of guilt to deal with. I know that there are things that I definitely would not want to do. So, I have learned to not ask the above when not fully committed. God has no joy in making us feel guilty. I also learned that it was easier to just pray to God saying, "Please make me an instrument of your peace 'today' O God." That way I was more likely to do God's will without worrying about the prospects of feeling guilt and failure knowing I did not want to do something He asked me to do. I realized that I would most likely do God's will (by praying as suggested) even when I was oblivious to the fact that I'm actually doing God's will. That's why I pray The Lords Prayer when it says to God: "your will be done."

On the other extreme, when I was a babe in Christ I used to pray: "God please tell me what to do" believing I would do it without doubt or hesitation. But now that this pride and confidence has been challenged enough for me to know I'm not always up to it, I'm not so naïve anymore. If I go to God half committed to doing His will on an issue I will have a 50% chance of coming away with guilt. Thankfully there is forgiveness… but why waste God's time? Don't ask God if you are not committed to full obedience in the area you are focused on..

Seeing the cost of each act of love should not necessarily make us shrink back. We don't have to dread counting the cost. We don't have to suppress the cost to conquer the cost of loving others. What makes love so special is that it overcomes obstacles. Including those barriers in our minds and hearts. Love focuses on the pros not the negative in each situation that it encounters. Love doesn't set its heart on each thing going its way. Whether it is the flesh or just human nature that opposes doing unselfish acts, the only way to overcome them for a Christian is to abide in Jesus the True Vine through faith in humility and let Him abide in us. By flesh I mean stubborn independence from God.

Genetically we aren't evil. Yet each of our hearts is spiritually sick in some way. We can do good because God has put goodness in our hearts and we do evil because there is evil stored in our hearts too. What does this evil look like? It is darkness, a lack of light, or it is a selfish vacuum...whatever form it takes in our hearts it is in the form of commitments/ codes/ beliefs/ thoughts that go against God's will. And although this darkness promises happiness (through getting things or avoiding them) its promises are empty. It is a trigger for unhealthy motivated anger; but there is healthy anger too. If evil partly takes the form of a dark vacuum within us then it cries out for God, but foolishness tries to fill it with idols that give no life. .

To love we have to accept people for where they are at and not where we expect or want them to be. We do this by prayer and abiding in Jesus the true Vine. To abide in Jesus means that we are connected to Him. Resting in Him. Choosing humble attitudes. Believing in His love and correct attributes. Trusting in Him not laws to help us do right and not sin. But it also means knowing we haven't arrived, that we don't have it all together, that we are dependent on the Spirit for everything. When we care for others, and when we accept where they are at, that is when we can become gracious towards

them. Love does not measure others (i.e. judge) and despise them as a result. Love doesn't manipulate, put pressure on, twist, control, and demand that others change. Love does not force or threaten change. When we start to accept others where they are at we will get in touch with where we are. That is where and when we can start to repent (renew our minds) with God's help and so advance in love with God's help. When we accept others where they are at we will get in touch with what is in our hearts. We will also begin to see and accept what is in our hearts and minds. Love does not push down and try to keep the bad from coming out of our hearts. Love healthily processes the bad energy /emotions/ and attitudes until they vanish. We don't have to be afraid of the bad within us, just respect its presence until it is killed.

Principles and theories and rules are all fine and well… but they are not enough all by themselves. Truths that remove lies that block love are needed, but so is the Holy Spirit.

Saint Augustine taught that the love between God the Father and God the Son was so rich, powerful, pure and righteous that it was the third person of the Holy Trinity: God the Holy Spirit. So if the love between the trinity is the Holy Spirit… ought it not be the same between and for us mere human beings?

Anyone who wants to supernaturally love must not neglect the Holy Spirit: the third person of the Holy Trinity if we know about Him. He who welcomes the Holy Spirit welcomes supernatural love. Jesus is the True Vine, and what flows through His branches to those persons who abide in Him is not just only life giving power. Rather it is a person, namely the Holy Spirit; that inexhaustible source of power and insight to love, ever gentle, at peace, full of good counsel, and generous in grace; who is also an approachable person, ever near and present, and joyfully alive; a loving person who guides us into bearing the good fruit promised to those who follow Jesus. The good fruit being love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control.

There is no formula or recipe or rules that we can use to entice the Holy Spirit to make us supernatural lovers. He comes and goes where He pleases. He wants into our lives though, and the following prayer is a beginning each and every day:

> O Holy Spirit, beloved of my soul, I adore You.
> Enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me, console me.
> Tell me what I should do; give me Your orders.
> I promise to submit myself to all that You desire of me
> and to accept all that You permit to happen to me.
> Let me only know Your Will.

Praying it in faith He will answer it. By faith I mean not only believing that it is possible, but that you will love, and grow in love towards others in the present. Why? Because Jesus said that, "Everything is possible for those who have faith" and Saint Paul said that, "We can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens us." Believing that God will help us to love and grow in love by virtue of our faith in Him is a reality to all who embrace this truth. Our faith turns: "I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me" into: "I can love all who come my way through Christ Jesus who

strengthens me." As our faiths grow in these truths so will our dependence on Jesus grow, along with the love that comes from Him into us and out into the lives of those we meet. Jesus will slowly remove one at a time those obstacles that have kept our loves shallow or weak. Listening to Jesus' voice and not jumping ahead of Him thinking we know where He is going is key to growth. We repent in response to Jesus' call; we don't repent so that we can hear Jesus' voice. Jesus' voice is not only heard when we sin, but in a multitude of other positive ways too. It is God's kindness that leads us to repentance.

Negative talk or ideas; those that lead to us experiencing low self-esteem are planted by the devil's workers. He might do this through loved ones, friends, peers, co-workers, sub-cultures, abusive experiences, or our pride. If we don't take such negative thoughts or lies captive we will by believing them have our holy strengths [granted by God] devoured, limited, and un-invested. Negative thoughts will make us sad, depressed, judgmental, demanding, angry, envious, and hateful and our pride will make us an agent of hurt in the same way towards others. Such needs to be genuinely confessed and repented from in prayer, along with renewing the mind and submitting to God's will.

Truth that comes from God is intended to make us strong in our identity, self-esteem, sense of worth, hope, faith, and love. God's truth is to be used to fight off the lies from the world and the devil. Satan means to use his lies to destroy God's image in us and any truthful images of God in our minds.

Nothing is impossible for her or him who has faith.

It is our faith that overcomes the world. Faith in a good and loving God!

Where is the power to love supernaturally going to come from? By embracing the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ through faith and jettisoning one's trust in the law to bring about good works, right behavior, and salvation. Jesus wants to lead us, he wants to teach us, He wants us to bear much good fruit, and He wants to save us. The law makes nothing perfect[10], it only points out sin[11]. Grace is not a license to sin. The power of sin is in the law.[12] Either embrace Jesus or embrace the law. The former will lead to love, good works and good fruit, whereas the latter will lead to judging, bitterness, depression, legalism, condemnation, judging, anxiety, hatred, malice, and criticism. The New Testament is about bearing good fruit. The Old Testament LAW-mentality is about rule keeping. There is power in the Good News of Jesus Christ. Being rule based leads to negativity and unhealthy relationships because the rules become more important than people.

The Law when we put our hope/expectation in it to get us to obey it in genders: I got to, I have to, I must, and I need to or else I'll go to Hell. It dries up love, gentleness, peace, hope, and makes us miserable; whereas grace through faith in Jesus as the source to love brings peace, desires to love, and good fruits. It also puts within us a desire to not sin. As

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[10] Hebrews 7:19
[11] Romans 3:20
[12] 1 Corinthians 15:56

a person thinks or believes in her or his heart so they will be. So if we want to change our behaviors then we need to change how we think in our hearts. Trying to change our behaviors alone will amount to nothing fast. The goal is to love others not only to look good.

Those who are caught between the law and grace will do well to rest in the Good News writings from Saint Paul found in the New Testament… and also to peer into the person known as Jesus Christ through the Gospels. God's word is utterly trustworthy: Like Saint Augustine said: The New Testament is revealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is explained in the New. Embrace God's word in the New Testament and a rich harvest will come to you. Ignore it and your barns will be empty. Don't put your trust in rules, put it in the person of Jesus Christ. He will guide you into love, commitment, hope, and peace.

The Old Testament Law was about creating a fair, and respectful society, but all too often the people who try to adhere to it land up caring more about what is fair for themselves and not for others. Instead of protecting the rights of others, Law observers too often seek to protect their own rights. Now the fairness aimed at in the OT Law was with good motive, but it was a minimum standard, that by itself gave no one power to keep it. The NT Teachings and commands aim higher than the minimal standard given in the OT Law. In aiming for the higher commandments given by Jesus, the minimum standard is fulfilled. This is only done through grace and connection with Jesus.

God is love. That means that He loves absolutely everyone unconditionally (without conditions). We don't have to change for Him to love us. He loves us so that we can change. His love is new every morning. We don't have to be good or perfect for God to love us. When we sin no matter how grievously God does not love us any less. We are all stamped with God's image. We are all made for Him. He has not destined anyone to Hell. He does not threaten anyone. Hell is where we miss out on bearing the full image of God as far as love is concerned within us. God loves us because He is love. What we believe about the image of God's character in our minds and hearts will determine how we love if that at all. If our feelings run against our intellectual beliefs, then we have work to do in prayer.

There is nothing more powerful that motivates love than God's love. His wrath is giving us what we want. If we try to use fear to grow our love, we will be disappointed. If we try to use "I have to" in order to love, we will be disappointed.

Love meets people where they are at. But that is not enough. Once we meet people where they are at we need to accept them where they are at. That will steer us clear of judging them. Once we accept them for where they are at then we can love them with God's love flowing through us. It only flows through us to the degree that we love ourselves.

Finally, while all the foul rubbish is being washed out of our hearts, and our minds are being renewed we need to believe God's message about what He has done for us on the cross and by His resurrection. We need to know our identity in Christ to get totally free to love fully. The trust in the law to make us perfect [mentality] needs to be jettisoned for it

leads to quarrels, hatred, judging, anger, bitterness, pride, fighting, and moves us away from love. The Law mentality puts the fear of Hell within us. But perfect love casts out fear. Even when we embrace God for who He is we can be robbed of our ability to love because of old attitudes/beliefs/codes/or ideas that have not been challenged and that need to be challenged. For instance: we might interpret certain passages of Scripture with a Law mentality unknowingly and these need to be challenged and seen through the eyes of grace. I know that I saw Jesus in the Sermons of the Mount/Plane as law focused until the Holy Spirit showed me I was wrong and that Saint Paul's writings were consistent with Jesus' message and life. Once this was in place I could move on in my journey to learn how to love.

I know that Pastor Hugh Walker often said that we bear fruit; we do not produce it. If we hold onto the idea of producing fruit, it means we have not died to self. The idea of bearing fruit means that we allow God to live His life through us. What an opportunity! I just listened to Mark Virkler through his Website… and it was very encouraging. Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him. He did not always look into the present. As if He only had one pawn on the chessboard. He saw the past when it was necessary too, and He did what was practical in the present informed from both past and future. He had at least three pawns, along with many other pieces. I know that for a long time my little insights have brought dryness and become unbearable burdens of cold law stones with no life because they became the focus and detracted from focusing on people and on Jesus both of whom I'm called to love.

When we seek for truth we won't necessarily find love, we often fine pride. If we care enough for people, we will find ways (wisdom and truths) that help us to love people. Like pope a Francis said, we must love people more than concepts.

Once we start loving people in supernatural ways we will want to worship God by giving Him the glory so our pride does not make the love rot, decay, and waste away. God does not need our worship; we need to worship Him for our own good. He is the only being that deserves our worship. And our worship of Him won't go to His head. We don't worship God out of fear like those who worship Idols. We worship God out of thankfulness, joy, and peace. Love is not that we have loved but that God has first loved us.

<u>Summing Up Abiding In Jesus:</u>

One of my most favorite passages in Scripture is John 15 where Jesus calls Himself the true Vine. Initially I found it compelling, and beautiful; but there were parts that confused me, and I really did not have a good grasp on how to abide in Jesus. I knew that faith was necessary. But I was confused about how works figured into the equation. Then when I first started working again (not volunteering) my back was injured and I had spasms of pain shoot down one of my legs. Thanks to my friend Anita I saw a Massage-Therapist and he not only healed my injury but he said something that cleared up my confusion. He said, "We abide in the Vine to bear good fruit; we don't bear fruit in order to abide in the Vine." That hit my truth center with real forceful conviction.

I have known that we walk by faith not sight especially in the darkness. That means our circumstances can be rough but it is our faith that gets us through. It also means that interiorly when we don't sense the Lord's presence we walk by faith because He promises to never leave nor forsake us. Let's not live for feelings: more pointedly let's not live for pleasure alone.

When we don't feel God's presence we need to pursue Him. So an undying loyalty and commitment to humility and Jesus keep us abiding in the true Vine. When the enemy pursues us, borages us with fiery darts, lies to us, slimes us with temptations, and tries to shame us with disappointments then commitment is very important. The devil tries to condemn us when we sin seriously; therefore, knowing that God forgives us is crucial to abiding in the vine. Commitment gets us to stand up each time we fall down.

Some people think that turning away from sin comes before forgiveness. This is not true. Often we are caught in sins that we have no idea on how to get out of. We don't pull up our socks to get Jesus to love us. When we confess our sins, we should be aware that we may fall into them again very soon. In fact we might not even have a proven strategy to prevent us from sinning again. We might not know how to stop the sins we do in this life. But if we are sorry for them, God would like to hear it from us in prayer, and He not only knows how to save us from our sins but He also has the power to save us from our sins. Confession let's God's forgiveness into our lives, and the peace we receive from the Holy Spirit within through forgiveness, gives us hope, and bolsters our trust that all things are possible with God including being washed clean.

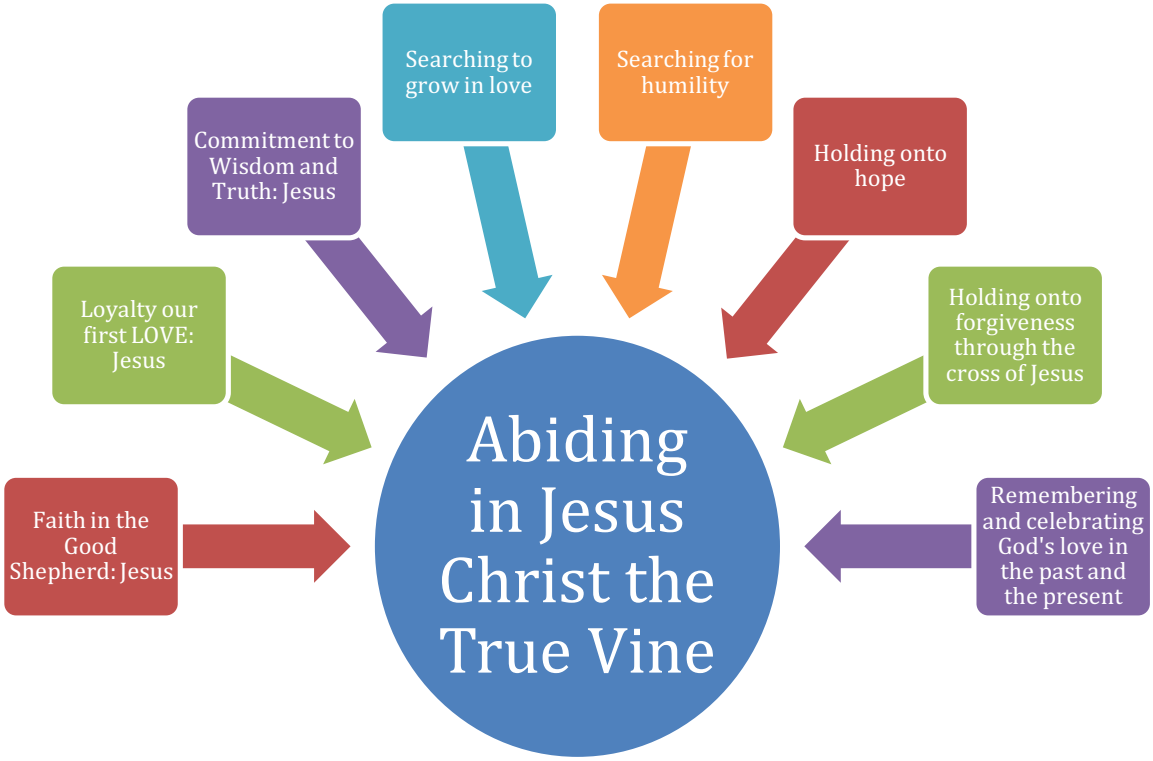
But how does abiding get us to bear good fruit? I have searched for years for the how to overcome my barriers to love. Each person must search for love herself or himself. I have had a lot of people give me good advice but if I had no humility I would have tossed their words behind me and been poorer for it in the worst sense of the word.

Humility is a gift from God for those who ask for it and don't let time, hardship, seeming unfairness, self-pity, pride, injustices, and lack of progress separate them from this quest. Searching for true humility centers us in Jesus. Humility isn't a goal in itself, but it is a means to love. Humility is not the focus, love is.

Persevering in Jesus is only continued because of the hope that we have in Him. Without it we would have nothing. Hope is not found in our circumstances but in being touched by God and the tenacity of holding onto His promises. God is our hope.

God's love and forgiveness are what attracts us to Him. That connection whether we have it, or whether we are searching for it again through confusion, doubt, or fog compels us forward and steadies us in our walk with Jesus: Him abiding in us and us in Him.

This is summarized in the diagram below:




Waiting to Grow in Love:

In order to love if this is what one decides one wants to do. One needs to not put pressure on oneself. God does not lead or drive us via a whip. Neither should we drive ourselves with whips (which is very easy to do…and to be blind to doing). If we want to love then we need to abide in the true vine – Jesus, and at the same time search for ways to overcome our barriers to love (this is true waiting).[13] One needs patience and humility to accept where we are and not to get proud because of what we have done, and not to get discouraged about what still needs to grow or be achieved. If one wants to love one will forever consider oneself to be a student of LOVE… to not have mastered love and moved onto other so called more important things. Therefore, killing strongholds of Pride and replacing it with humility is so important. The Essay from this Website: "Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds" is so useful to get a handle on how Pride corrupts us and how to kill it:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf.

Also, a second Essay on what humility and pride look like, is found in this Website too at:

[13] Cf. John 15

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/humility.pdf .

Prayer too is important to grow in love. The books by Brad Jersak: "Can You Hear Me?" and Mark Virkler on journaling prayer give good foundations on two-way prayer and when we can be certain about whose thoughts are who's in our heads when in conversation with God.

One needs gentleness and the realization that God is the reason for love in our lives and not so much a bunch of principles. If God is the reason for the supernatural love in our hearts then praising, giving glory to, and worshiping Him without end will keep the love we act out from spoiling through pride. A shallow prayer life will not sustain a strong love life. Love is humble: it is always learning, it is always a student, it is always a servant/leader, and it has never arrived. Just like U2's 2009 CD title says: "No Line On The Horizon." There is no finish line in this life until we die. Love does not look down on others who are only now asking the questions we used to ask.

For some time during my Dark Journey I tried to get God involved in my day by saying and trying to impress God with what I thought were really humble prayers.

Showing what one perceives to be one's riches in order to entice God to use one never works. Showing God, one's poverty does get Him to show His compassion, (restorative) justice, grace, and mercy. Prayers like this one:

> "Lord I am unworthy to have you under my roof… but only say the word and I shall be healed, healthy, and love because it is your idea…"

Gets us moving in God's direction. Real prayer does not try to impress God. God is no respecter of persons. Love flows from God… love is God's idea… we don't impress Him so He will include us… all we can do is respond to His call with willing hearts…birthing love is painful… requires faith… and endurance. Even though love is God's idea, He has put that desire to love in our hearts at the moment of conception in our mothers' wombs. This doesn't force us to desire what we hate…rather God gives this desire to us because its end is to bring us true fulfillment. It is an act of kindness on God's part. This all means that even before we met, meet or get to know Jesus we have the desire to love in our hearts and this is a preparation for the Good News of Jesus Christ. So we don't have to feel like we are pompous if we came to know Jesus after we had the desire to love others as a prominent fixture in our lives.

Many times in the courses of relationships…people might reveal stuff to us that we have judged in the past up to the present as unacceptable to such a degree that we would be tempted and motivated to push them away from us and never have anything to do with them again. It is OK to feel this way because that means we are at a crossroads… and if we choose to love them despite the revelations we will grow in love… and that is a good thing.

Being Good Towards Others, Or Loving Others?

Being outwardly good towards others is not necessarily the same as loving others in each case. It is true that when one loves, one is being inwardly and outwardly good. But being

outwardly good alone to someone doesn't always mean that we have loved that someone too. If we think that the good that we do somehow earns us a place in Heaven, then we have not loved those we did good towards. And in this case we are actually on the path to Hell. Heaven is granted through the forgiveness of one's sins.[14] Love does not ask for wages in return, because it seeks to give sacrificially, without any strings attached to it, and it is also motivated out of thankfulness for what God has given. Love is God's idea, not ours!

If love could earn us a place in Heaven, then we would have something to boast about. But love doesn't boast about one's self, rather it gives glory to God, the true and only source of life and authentic love. Every time we boast about a good act in an effort to seek glory for ourselves, the act can't be regarded as love anymore. Love always brings God glory.

God does not need our worship. We need to worship Him. Why? Because when we don't worship God, then we get proud and arrogant. And that pride leads away from authentic natural and supernatural loves and leads to judging, hatred, hurt, and death. I need to and want to worship God more and more because I got lots of pride in the worst sense of the word. This leads to the topics: humility and pride. What do these look like? Why are they important?

Love Is Not Motivated By Fear Of Punishment:[15]

When one is trying to avoid sin because one fears being punished by God if one were to sin, then this obedience has nothing to do with love. Fact is: "Sin kills us; not God" When we sin we push God away a little or a lot, God does not withdraw from us when we sin; we push Him away when we sin. God is life…so when we push Him away it brings death to us in little or big ways. But faith and acceptance of God and His ways can bring His grace into our lives and counter our sin, heal us, give us life, hope and a future.

God did not punish Jesus on the cross for our sins; and neither will He punish us for our sins; sin is its own punishment; our sins kill us; not God. Sin kills us, sin's nature is to hurt, destroy, bring death and to remove the image of God from us. The devil comes to kill, steal and destroy; not God. God is not in co-hoots with the devil. By co-hoots I mean that the devil would do his best to deceive and kill people and hands them over to God for Him to punish and hand over to death. God does not come to condemn but to save, heal, and give life to all. Jesus came to undo the works of the devil. Fear of punishment as an attempt to motivate love won't work because fear and punishment would be the focus not love. Moving from fear/punishment to caring, compassion, and concern for others is what motivates love. Seeing sin as hurtful is more powerful at stopping it than fear of hell or punishments.

Trying to motivate love by fear of punishment is Law focused and it just can't work. The

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[14] Cf. Luke 1:77

[15] I am in debt to Derek Flood and Brad Jersak for the content for this section.

Law makes nothing perfect. Perfect love casts out all fear. Perfect love is not motivating us by fear. God does not come by and say: "I see you have sinned… so as your punishment I am going to kill you"; neither does He say, "if you sin I am going to punish you with death". The sting of death is sin not God:

> "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55-57 NIV)

There is something in sin that kills us. If we believe that we ought to be punished on top of the consequences of our sins after we die...then as we live now we will wish punishment on those who piss us off straight away because that is what we expect for ourselves and who ought be any different from us? What is good for us is good for everyone else we may very well think.

> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23 NIV)

Jesus came to save us from sin and death not to reward us with death as punishment for sin. Jesus does not pay out the wages of sin...He hates sin and death...He came to conquer sin and death...they are His enemy! God is not in co-hoots or partnership with the devil.

God does not condemn anyone, or try to manipulate or coerce us (force or threaten us) to love Him or to choose the life He offers. Those who reject God condemn themselves because they cut themselves off from Life; this Life is God. God has set boundaries and warns us to choose life not death. Death is losing the image of God that we are created in. His image is a precious gift, that the devils try to steal. God does not participate in the devil's schemes, or tries to finish them.

If we do use fear to do what is right, then we will always be hostile towards those who piss us off or break the rules. We will be quick to anger, quick to judge, and quick to being cold towards others.

I have learned that it is better to have the "expectations of people rooted in desire" as opposed to "expectations of people rooted in rule keeping" when it comes to our relationships. By this I mean that if we see actions in terms of rules we will be quick to judge and get angry with others. Whereas if we have desires for other people's actions to be a certain way the most we can have are disappointments. The rule focusing is law focused, whereas the desire focusing is grace focused. The rule keeping is going to require us to forgive all the time because we can't control other people's actions that involve us; whereas, desire's disappointment will lead to compassion for people and not judgmental-ism and anger. We are either rule focused (and become angry often) or people focused.[16]

Fear is what happens when we have a broken relationship with God. It leads to blind

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[16] In debt to Rev. T. G. Morrow for this insight comparing rules vs. desires.

comparisons. Love is people focused…it doesn't measure how well we are doing…this only leads to pride or envy.

We need to abide in the True Vine: Jesus when we incorporate the above understanding into our attitudes and motivations.

I now know that sin kills us, not God. God does not punish us with death when we sin. When we sin we pull away from life either a bit or a lot: that life is God. Knowing that Jesus did not save us from His Father's wrath, but that the trinity comes to find who is lost, heal who is sick, and bring life where there is death; gives me a new focus away from compulsively judging others. Abiding in Jesus the True Vine does help me to stay away from sinning. This insight that "sin kills us; not God…" thanks to Brad Jersak's book helps me view God more realistically…and I no longer fear God's wrath…it also helps me to abide in the True Vine: Jesus and to fellowship with God. I also have a new appreciation of wanting to stay away from sin because of its consequences. Now that I see God in this new light I also want to imitate Him…and I don't feel the compulsion to be overly angry and abrasive with others as much like before.

Moreover, I no longer focus on the possibility of punishment as the only deterrent to not sinning. Seeing sin and its awful consequences is more of a deterrent than fear of the popular understanding of Hell. The former appeals to caring for humanity; the latter is purely self-preservation. When one starts to care about others more instead of whether one is going to hell or not, then a healthy love is forged. With this paradigm: (Sin kills us; not God) one has all fear cast out of oneself because God no longer appears to be the enforcer, policeman, jailor, and torturer; but He is LOVE itself. The devil is the one that comes to steal, kill, and destroy…God gives life: Jesus came to give life. People who are condemned condemn themselves…God only reaches out to them in kindness; God does not condemn.

If we think that somebody owes us for a noble deed we did for them, then they will feel like they have to work off a debt and won't feel loved by us. They will feel trapped, despise us, and feel tempted to abandon us when and where possible. Thinking somebody owes us is a sure way to make enemies and terminate relationships. Love does not demand friendship. Love cares for people, it always sets people free, and does not blackmail anyone.

It is interesting that God said, "He was digging tunnels of love in me" ...not, "building muscles of love in me" so long ago...the former gives God the glory the later would have birthed pride in me because I would have focused on how many love muscles I have. I'm like a glove and God is the hand; or God is the Vine and I'm a branch.

On Judging:

Not long ago I was near a conversation that went like this:

Someone told a friend about a guy who had tattoos all over his body. And the friend became very opinionated saying, "that people with tattoos must have low self-esteem, and that they must have low self-worth because they have to decorate their bodies with

other people's art work. That the artists should get the glory. He said that it was more important to have a mind and heart that was healthy." Just then he put on a T-shirt with art work on it, and his friend launched in on him saying: "Any person with a T-shirt on him that has somebody else's art work on it, must not have much of a mind or heart because they are wearing artwork. They too must have low self-esteem and low self-worth". He laughed and said the sword one uses can be used on oneself."

Yes, when we judge we are easily judged. I needed to hear this. Trying to control others, argue them into submission is very unhealthy. I have been guilty of this so very often. When we feel we see things, and have wonderful insights it too easy to get preachy. I know that God has spoken to me many times through people indirectly, but it did not clue into my mind immediately that what was spoken to me applied to me. The Holy Spirit is a far better convincer than we are. He does not do so to make us feel guilty and condemned, but to have a change of heart, and to joyously go our way thereafter. Correcting people when we got wood in our eyes (think our consciences) is hypocritical, un loving, and should be abandoned. Thankfully God loves us so much that He does all in His power to convince us otherwise.

When we pray, "God please help 'so and so' be more like me in this area of love or humility" we are being proud and judgmental. We ought not compare and put others down and attempt to raise ourselves up in prayer or out of it. When we do grow in love and humility we give glory to God. Let's not pretend that we are paragons of virtue. We all have gaps in our thinking, reasoning, understanding, philosophies, and we all fall short in our actions to love and be completely humble…all of us to some degree major on minor issues, and we all minor on many major issues. We skip over stuff that ought to be done when people are not looking because we think we can get away with it. So many of us have higher opinions of ourselves than are warranted **especially me**. We cannot judge or condemn other people like the Sermon on the Mount teaches not to.