

Against the Current
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Love Is Not Sex

We often hear celebrities, “experts”, journalists, and artists talk or depict a “love” which isn’t love at all. How many times do we hear or see the word “love” used, when what’s really being talked about is sex? People say “making love” when they mean “having sexual intercourse”. In any big city you’re bound to find a store called something like “The Love Shop”, where what they sell is not love, but sexual perversion.

Every single one of us is born with a desire and a need to be loved. Love, in one form or another, is the motivation for the vast majority, if not all, of the good things we, as human beings, do, say, and accomplish.

Everybody has an idea of what love is, but when pressed to define it most people have a hard time. What is this most fundamental human reality, and most wonderful Christian virtue, all about?

Many people think that love is an emotion, others think it’s a feeling. Both of these definitions fall far short of the reality of love, and people who reduce love simply to an emotion or feeling can, in fact, behave in ways which are not loving at all.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment of God is, He replied that it was love – love of God, and love of neighbour. Love, according to Jesus Christ, is a commandment.

This makes sense. While we do have emotional feelings towards those we love, we all know that those emotional feelings can’t be artificially maintained or manufactured. Feelings come and go, but love – if it’s true love – always remains. If love really is only an emotion, saying “love your neighbour” would be as silly as commanding someone to “feel angry” or “be hungry”. Emotions are by nature reactive. Love, true love, is by nature proactive.

The best definition of love I’ve ever come across goes like this: “Love is a commitment of the will to the true good of the other”.

“A commitment of the will to the true good of the other”. This is important. Love isn’t primarily a matter of emotion, but a matter of the will. In other words, I choose to love. This means I can choose to be a loving person, to do what love requires, to perform loving acts for my spouse, child, parent, or friend, even when I might not “like” them.

Every single one of us recognizes that there are different types of love. There is the fiery feeling of “falling in love”, when we’re constantly thinking about the person we’re in love with; the committed, cooperative love of a mother and father; the deep, quiet love of a couple who’ve been married for many decades; the love of parents for children and children for parents; the love between and among family members; the love of good friends; Christian love, which encompasses our fellow believers, the poor and needy, and all people; and that most Christian of all loves, love for our enemies. All these different types of love are summed up in Christ’s teaching: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself” (Lk. 10:27).

But love goes even further than this. We love our pets, we love nature, we love sports, we love Church, we love music – there’s nothing good in all of creation that is not worthy of our love. Love is a universal need and a universal reality among human beings. Put another way, no one can live an authentic human life, or be a true human being, without loving and being loved.

There are four different words for love in the Greek language: *στοργη* (*storge*), *φιλια* (*philia*), *ερος* (*eros*), and *αγαπη* (*agape*).

Storge (pronounced stor-GEE) is the love of affection, the love we have for a pet, for example. *Philia* (pronounced fi-LEE-ah) is the love we have for a good friend. *Eros* is often mistakenly understood as sexual love, as, for example, when people use the word “erotic” to refer to sexual acts or words. But this is not the original meaning of the word. *Eros* actually means a fiery, strong, almost jealous love. In the spiritual tradition of our Church we often find mention of “divine eros”, i.e., the total, absolute, jealous, and zealous love that God has for each and every one of us.

Lastly we have the word “*agape*” (pronounced a-GAH-pee). *Agape* means altruistic love, the love that puts the other first, the love which contains no element of ego or self-absorption. The person with *agape* is willing to give their

life for the one who is loved. It is this type of love which Christ talks about when He says "Greater love hath no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13), and it is this love which St. Paul talks about so eloquently in the 13th chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians.

So burn these words into your brain - **sex is not love, and love is not sex**. This isn't to say that sex and love aren't related. Sexual activity should only take place where there is love. And remember - love is a commitment of the will to the true good of the other. Without commitment, without a real desire for the true good of my partner, I should never engage in sexual activity. This is why the teaching of the Church (as well as all human societies and religions until recent times) about marriage is so clear. Sexual activity between people who aren't totally committed to the other is such a monstrosity because it takes something which is made for mutual giving and turns it into something for selfish taking. It takes something which God gave us to make us happy, and turns it into just another selfish, self-centred, and fleeting pleasure.

Sex isn't love, and love isn't sex. Though they are related, sex is actually a very minor aspect of love. Most of us will love hundreds, perhaps thousands of people throughout our lives. But (God willing!) we won't be having sex with all, or most, or even a small minority of them. This is where those Greek words for love are so useful. We all need to have friends - friends of the same sex, friends of the opposite sex, friends who are older, friends who are younger, friends who help us, friends whom we help, etc., etc., and so on. We should have affection for people, pets, even things. Reducing the idea of love to sex on any level (even the marital level) is an absolute atrocity, which always ends badly.

Sometimes movies, TV shows, books, magazines, or web-sites try to sell us the nonsense that lust is the same as love. This is a bald-faced lie. Nothing could be further from the truth. Lust is sexual desire without *agape*. It's the desire to use someone for my own pleasure. It's the objectification of another human being.

Real love is always concerned with the true good of the other, not with what the other, whoever or whatever they might be, can do for me. Is it good, for example, to have sexual intercourse with another person if one or both of us is married? After twenty-five years of pastoral experience I can tell you without exaggeration that committing adultery is one of the worst things a person can do. If they have any conscience at all it's going to torment them, and if their spouse learns of the act it will hurt them more deeply than you can imagine.

The only ones who benefit are the lawyers and the only one who's happy about it is the devil.

The saying goes that "boys give love to get sex, and girls give sex to get love". Don't fall into this trap.

Men - if you want to be a real man you will respect every girl you meet. She's someone's daughter, sister, and friend. She not a plaything for you to use and dispose of. She's a child of God no less deserving of respect, honesty, and commitment than your own mother, sister, or good friend.

Ladies - think of the life you'd like to have. What kind of a husband would you like - the kind who is here today and gone tomorrow? A 30, or 40, or 50 year old adolescent? Or the kind who will stick by your side no matter what, be a good life partner, a good father for your children, a person who will support, protect, and give his life for you?

All of you - both young men and young women - remember that love is love, and sex is sex, and know the difference. If you are not called to be a monk or a nun the best thing you can do for your future happiness is to pray to God every day that He will send you a good, faithful, Christian spouse when the time is right.

It's been said that "pleasure is a good time, happiness is a good life". Sex, like eating, exercising, spending time with friends and listening to music usually (though not always) results in pleasure. Love - true love - results in happiness. If we're only looking for pleasure, we'll never experience true happiness. The funny thing is, though, that when we seek happiness, when we truly love, and love deeply, we get pleasure thrown in - more, and deeper pleasure than we could ever imagine.