

Have You Fallen for These Deceptive, Worldly Versions of Love?

Editor's Note: This is Part 1 of a two-part series.

When it comes to “love”, the world doesn’t have a clue. When I was a teenager, I saw a movie called *Love Story* that trumpeted the line: “Love is never having to say you’re sorry.” Even then, I knew that that was the dumbest thing I’d ever heard. It was a placard for a culture that was starving for, yet bereft of, love.

The story is told of St. Francis of Assisi roaming through a town, pounding on doors, proclaiming, “Love is not loved!” So, who is the love that is not loved?

1 John 4:16b says, “God is love!”

The World’s Version of Love

Jesus warned in Matthew 24:12 that in the last days, the love of most would grow cold because of the increase of wickedness. And in Matthew 7:21-23, He cautioned that many in the church who prophesy, drive out demons and perform miracles in His name will be lost because they never really knew Him—even while professing to know and love Him.

And so, in the absence of taught, communicated, and demonstrated love, we too often settle for false versions. For example:

Love as Romance

Without the real thing, we imagine love to be romantic notions that tap into deep inner desires. See if you can find such notions in some of the most beloved songs from the theater:

“Maria, I just met a girl named Maria/ And suddenly that name, will never be the same to me/ Maria, I just kissed a girl named Maria .../ say it loud and there’s music playing/ say it soft and it’s almost like praying” (*West Side Story*).

“My white knight, not a Lancelot, nor an angel with wings/ Just someone to hold me, who is not ashamed of a few nice things/ (*The Music Man*).

“Some enchanted evening, you may see a stranger/ across a crowded room, and somehow you know/ Some enchanted evening, when you find your true love ...” (*South Pacific*).

“I have often walked down the street before/ but the pavement always stayed beneath my feet before/ All at once am I, several stories high, being just on the street where you live/ And oh, the towering feeling, just to know, somehow you are near/ The overpowering feeling, that any second you may suddenly appear ‘ (*My Fair Lady*).

“Shall we dance?/ On a bright cloud of music, shall we fly?/ Or perchance/ when the last little star has left the sky/ Shall we still be together with our arms around each other, and shall you be my new romance?” (*South Pacific*).

Though nothing is wrong with having romantic feelings and singing romantic songs, if that is our entire definition or experience of love (and it is for many a lonely soul), then it is not love at all. In fact, for some, such songs produce a sorrowful and obsessive dwelling on the love they’ve longed for but never had.

Love as Performance

For those who see love as a performance, it becomes for them an affection that comes and goes depending on whether they’re being given what they want by the other person. This kind of false love is epidemic in our world and needs to be exposed as the deception that it is (see the chapter “Living by Grace

Rather Than Performance Orientation" in my new book, *Sexual Healing Reference Edition*).

Love as Sexual Desire (which is often kept alive by youth or beauty)

For those who stray from God's purpose for sexuality, (see the chapter "The Divine Intent for Sexuality" in *Sexual Healing Reference Edition*), sex-based love is a form of idolatry, as described in Ephesians 5:5: "No sexually immoral or impure person, or one who is greedy, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (See also Col. 3:5 and Ezek. 23:49).

For many, sexual desire for one's spouse fades with age, which can easily lead to divorce, adultery, promiscuity, the use of pornography, sexual abuse and a host of other perverse behaviors.

These false versions of love are also used by activist groups who seek to promote immoral lifestyles. The homosexual proclaims, "Don't tell me who I can love," meaning, who I can have a romantic, performance-based and/or sexual relationship with. The adulterer, fornicator, child abuser, transgender person, porn user and others also use one or more of these to excuse their activities. (For more on these sorts of behaviors and how God can set people free from them, see "Part 2—Specific Dysfunctions" of the *Sexual Healing Reference Edition*).

The Consequence of Living by the World's Standards for Love

As a person lives by such false versions of love (which always come up short), he or she can develop self-hatred, a fear of intimacy or an unspoken bitterness against God and others.

Eventually, when someone genuinely tries to love them, they cannot receive it, because of the embitterment and because of what they have expected love to be. In never having received

real love, they often draw the conclusion that they are somehow unlovable, a belief that creates a wall that prevents people from even trying to love them. They end up living in loneliness and self-pity and go from one unreal, romantic trip to another through books, films, romantic ballads and worldly experiences. Or they settle for the illusion that sex is love and, because it never satisfies their hunger for real love, end up trapped in an increasingly immoral lifestyle.

Such people never ground their definition of love in God but choose instead to define it by the world's standards, even if unwittingly. The truth is, in this fallen world, we will find true love only in relationship with God and only as God expresses His love through us.

Many years ago, I was an executive of a Christian radio network. As I walked through the office one day, a secretary happened by. I didn't know her and didn't really care to know her. Suddenly, an unexpected love for her began pouring out of my heart. It was so intense that if I'd opened my mouth, I would have proclaimed an undying love for her. So I kept my mouth shut and kept walking. You see, I had never known or experienced genuine love for another person, so this supernatural moment was both shockingly foreign and frightening. I knew God was pouring His love for her through my heart, yet I didn't know what to do with it. But the message was clear: Although I was incapable of producing such pure and perfect love, God could. And so I knew that in order to love anyone, I would have to seek and receive that capacity from Him. The difference between the world's version of love and true love was now perfectly clear, and it delighted me to know that God would enable me to love others, if I really wanted Him to.

Questions We Must Ask Ourselves About Our Love for God

Have we taken on the world's definitions of love not only in relation to each other, but in our relationship with God as

well? Have we lost our first love? Have we let it die from malnourishment?

Have we ever had a love for Jesus that elicits an appropriate response to His sacrifice on the cross? Theologian Leon Morris has observed, "It's the cross that gives us a new understanding of what love is." Reference also Christ's admonitions to the churches in the book of Revelation concerning the consequences of failing to truly love Him: 2:4-5, 14-16, 20; 3:1-3, 15-21.

Have we rejected His call to live a life of holiness, and therefore rejected who He is and what a relationship with Him is supposed to look like? Reference Jesus' statements about the connection between loving Him and obeying Him in John 14:15, 21, 23-24 and the apostle John's similar statements in 1 John 2:3-6, 9-11, 15, 28; 3:6-10, 14, 24; 4:19-21; 5:2-5, 18-19.

The Bible's Version of Love

Over and over again, the Scriptures tell us what loving God means. It warns us that unless we surrender our lives to the prince of love, Jesus Christ, those who live by the world's definition of love will be shut out from the kingdom of God.

According to the Bible, professed love is demonstrated and proven genuine thorough actions and deeds, not just words.

Note that in 1 John 3:18, the apostle John says: "let us love not in word and speech, but in action and truth." In other words, true love naturally produces actions that are consistent with its claim and appropriate to the good of its object.

That is why Jesus said three times in John 14, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (vv. 15, 21, 23). In other words, "If your professed love for Me is real, not just some meaningless, romantic, emotional vapor, then it will naturally

demonstrate itself in the trust, respect and sacrificial actions that bless Me.”

Genuine love demonstrates itself actively by the giving of self to the object of love. Parental love, for example, is genuine only as it demonstrates itself through the regular provision, protection, blessing, training and mentoring that parents are responsible for giving their child. They should be imparting to their child, by word and deed, the goodness of who God created them to be. They should be imparting to them the words of life found in the Scriptures and introduce them to the Lord, who is love. They should be sacrificing their own selves for the good of their child, even unto death if necessary. {eoa}

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