

WHY LOVE?

... because you are imperfect
1 Corinthians 13
June 6, 2010 WEFC

Everyone of us is bothered when things don't go well between other people and us. It hurts. We don't sleep well. The tension we sense is not at all good.

Our minds become preoccupied with getting things worked out. We get ulcers ... we feel the tension when we walk into a room and the other person or people are there.

Experiencing that tension is good ... very good. It indicates that things need to be significantly improved.

Our Creator has so designed us that to live well, to get the most out of Him, we need to love one another.

Key Thought:

Love is the prime measurable trait that accurately gauges Christ's importance to us (spirituality).

When it comes to LOVE and following Christ, we know the lingo, can recite the verses; are able to critically analyze the behavior of others ...

The reason everybody makes a fuss about LOVE is because it really is as big as TV makes it, as the Country Western songs twang, and as much as advertising piggy-backs on it.

LOVE is great.

What society explains love to be and what God's Word defines it as, are miles apart.

Background

The Church in Corinth at times forgot about their "spiritual driver's license".

They were tightly holding onto their wrong opinions so that in the process they squeezed love out from between them.

Biblical LOVE is COUNTER-INTUITIVE. It doesn't operate the way we would normally expect LOVE to operate.

Love doesn't park its brains and feed off sentimentalism, but has learned how to process information and respond with encouragement.

In **1 Corinthians 12** we recalled that ... **Our ONE God has a flair for a diversity that knows its "center"**.

But we don't always share God's love for people diversity.

We, last time, noted that we get **Miffed:**

- **People don't appreciate us or care for us.**
- **I don't need any other people; I can handle this myself**

The Church is loaded with spiritual-gifted people, but life in the church was not good.

Talent, wealth and skill were present, but the warmth that one felt was not the right kind. It was the result of friction rather than love.

They were arguing about what does a “spiritual” person look like?

Most often we evaluate people on the basis of their abilities or talents and how hard they work.

That is a part of it.

But we are given a different emphasis in this section of God’s Word.

There is an ingredient, that when it is present ... we all know that we are getting a true reading ... This is genuine spirituality,

Key Thought:

Christ’s importance to us (spirituality) is most accurately measured by the prime trait of love.

If it is present, we feel like we are at home ... welcome. If it is missing, we sense that we are only guests and better not get to comfortable.

A personal, accurate assessment of my love level (real spirituality level); ... if we want the truth of who we are and where we are at, we are going to need to look in the mirror a bit longer at ourselves than just a quick glance.

Dump all the excuses that we always bring up; pack up our hurts and disappointments and for this brief time take an unobstructed, piercing gaze at ourselves.

1. Godly spirituality refuses to “simplify” life with assumptions

Our mindset today is to ...

- “get to the core”
- “boil things down to the essentials”

Getting to the basics is not as easy as we might think.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Godly spirituality refuses to “simplify” life with assumptions

- that are Incorrect

Incorrect Assumptions

One would assume that if you saw a person speaking in a heavenly language ... that they were “spiritual”.

... that if they could preach up a storm, explain difficult truths, be insightful and accomplish what would seem like impossible feats ... that God was most definitely working, blessing and pleased with that person.

... that if generosity was witnessed and if personal sacrifice was made to the point of death, that this person was one who had God’s stamp of approval.

The listed behavior is impressive.

If we were to put this into a mathematical equation, it would look something like this:

Experiences, expertise, excellence, concrete results, generosity, over-the-top sacrifice each = demonstrations of **Godly Spirituality**

In our day we say, "Show me, don't tell me." .

We are smart enough to see that there is a missing factor in the equation.

Country comedian Archie Campbell enjoyed telling about two sweethearts who were sitting on the front porch. The young man noticed the tears were streaming down his girlfriend's face. He said, "What's the matter with my little sweetheart? I'll kiss those tears away."

After she said, "It's hay fever, darling, but keep up the treatment.

Our equation is missing something. As it stands it is incorrect.

Godly spirituality refuses to "simplify" life with incorrect assumptions

- by facing the painful, yet objective truth

Three consecutive times we read one similar thought:

... I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

- We may be making an impression, but it isn't the right one

... I am nothing.

- We are fooling ourselves as to our importance.

... I gain nothing.

- To persist in this direction we will end up bankrupt.

Into the equation of our lives must come the all-important ingredient – **LOVE**.

Experience + LOVE = Godly Spirituality

Over the top sacrifice + LOVE = Godly Spirituality

We know it ... and we wrestle with ... and in our inner and personal rooms of consultation, we understand, that expertise, excellence, generosity, performance are all good ... but what gives them a face and makes them acceptable is LOVE.

Everyone has caught on and watches to see whether they are being given a cheque, a meal, a gift, ... is that all or does it come attached with your heart ... with love.

We can attempt to convince ourselves and others that if we give our time, use our talents, make sacrifices, -- THIS IS LOVE; that we are spiritual.

The problem is this: We know it isn't true.

On that tragic morning of September 11, 2001, The Brooklyn Tabernacle lost four of its members. One victim was a police officer. The officer's funeral was held at the church building, and Rudy Giuliani, then mayor of New York City, had been asked to share a few thoughts. In his book *You Were Made for More*, Jim Cymbala, pastor of The Brooklyn Tabernacle, records what the mayor shared with the audience that morning:

"You know people, I've learned something through all this. Let me see if I can express it to you. When everybody was fleeing that building, and the cops and the firefighters and the EMS people were heading up into it, do you think any of them said,

'I wonder how many blacks are up there for us to save? I wonder what percentage are whites up here? How many Jews are there? Let's see—are these people making \$400,000 a year, or \$24,000, or—?'

"No, when you're saving lives, they're all precious. And that's how we're supposed to live all the time. How would you want the cops to treat you if you were on the seventy-fifth floor that day? Would you want them to say, 'Excuse me, but I've got to get the bosses out first'? Not exactly.

The point:

- It is easier to do acts assumed to be displays of love than give the genuine item.

This option we refuse to entertain.

- An inaccurate assessment of our behavior and character may give us wiggle room to “cope” with ourselves, but it must be dumped if we are looking for reality that allows us to “live with impact”.

Transition:

The obvious question ...

If I can convince myself into thinking that I am loving people through my acts, and I can think that I am spiritual, and yet miss it ...

- What is this love like about which we are talking?

- How can it recognized or positively identified?

In brief, clear phrases LOVE is explained. The words are understandable, comprehend-able, though not as easy to do.

1 Corinthians 13:4ff

Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.

Key Thought:

Christ's importance to us (spirituality) is most accurately gauged by the prime trait of love.

2. **“Spiritual” love is highly challenging for it reverses our natural reactions**

Love, as we commonly experience it, has as the center of attention - ourselves.

We are naturally inclined to care for ourselves to such a degree that everyone else around us comes a distant second.

We are predisposed to think about ourselves first.

Without even giving it a second thought, we just naturally ask:

- How does this affect me?
- What will this require of me?
- What changes will I have to make?

“Spiritual” love reverses our natural inclinations ... it thinks very differently than our brains normally would.

The point of this passage is not in explaining how we “love God”, but how love works within a church family. It is not that God is being ignored; it is rather that the problem in this church family was how to treat each other.

This is not so much a list of “do’s and don’t’s” as it is an anatomy class. If we were to dissect love, here is what it would look like as a healthy, live entity.

- Offers to others: a willingness to love them in their imperfectness

We know we are not perfect, but living as imperfect people is not always our strong suit.

Everyone around us is going to blow it ... not just a bit, and not just once.

They will flop and fail so many times that it is useless to keep a tally.

As we will bump into them, have many conversations ... and they will often say or do the wrong thing.

Before we ever express your disappointment in them, we need to pre-program our heart with PATIENCE and KINDNESS.

PATIENCE

... is a matter of timing.

“We don’t have all day to get things done, so hurry.”

Patience gives people the time to re-do, re-plant, re-word, re-act, re-think ... what they have done and may come to see was not good ... or they may not yet have gotten that far.

The difference between PATIENCE and LETTING THINGS GO is that PATIENCE keeps the goal of a person’s transformation and development always before it.

LETTING THINGS GO is not caring enough because we do not want to invest more time into this particular person.

PATIENCE cares; LETTING THINGS GO doesn’t.

PATIENCE invests; LETTING THINGS GO calculates; it is too cheap to spend itself on someone else.

PATIENCE is consistent engagement, not withdrawal ... for the purpose of seeing things improve, progress and mature.

PATIENCE may not be frantically running around, but patience is not just sitting around. It hangs around in a way that gives the other person the time to re-think what should be done.

While PATIENCE gives time, KINDNESS provides the resources.

KINDNESS

...supplies some of the resources.

KINDNESS makes PATIENCE presentable. It puts into patience a graciousness that moves it from being a duty to becoming an act of LOVE.

KINDNESS offers security without domination.

KINDNESS gives what is needed without shoving it down a person's throat.

Before we go further, on a scale of "1" to "10", with "1" being low and "10" being high, rate yourself on PATIENCE and KINDNESS towards others.

To help us get a more accurate assessment of ourselves, the following may be helpful:

- Do I interrupt people before they are finished talking?
- Do I grumble about this person when they are out of my sight?

- Do I avoid meeting so-and-so?
- Do I give them the silent treatment?

LOVE ... It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

- Love closely monitors personal negative emotions which tend to flood the basements of our heart.

Many of you last Saturday night were dealing with flooded basements ... water that came either through the walls of your house or through drains that were backed up.

That is why our city administration has urged us to put in back-up valves ... devices that shut out the bad water from backing into our basements and making a mess.

LOVE is the best back-up valve against the sewage emotions that tend to push back up in our spiritual drains when life gets flooded.

ENVY – being ticked at their good fortune

BOASTING – calling undeserved attention to one's self

PRIDE – blowing oneself up to appear bigger than we are

RUDENESS – shaming or disgracing others

SELF-SEEKING – self-gain, self-justification, self-gratification, "finding one's self" ... are not running our lives

NOT EASILY ANGERED – restraining the urge to create a blow-up (like we have off the coast of Louisiana) ... knowing that such a blow-out wreaks havoc in a big way

KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS – wiping off the books of our mind legitimate reasons and faults found in the other person saved for opportune moments to hurt and get even.

The words of Scripture:

LOVE ... **“does not ... does not ... is not ... is not ... is not ... is not ... “**

It isn't a suggestion; nor are we encouraged to be more positive than negative. The words indicate either we do or we don't. We pass or we fail.

Again, on a scale of “1” to “10”, “1” being “not good” ... do a quick calculation of the amount of “love” that you are practicing in these specific categories.

LOVE realistically knows that it is constantly opposed from within (right under it's own nose) and therefore is constantly alert to its challenges.

LOVE is not afraid to draw bold lines which it declares are un-crossable, and when crossed, are dealt with as “sinful”, not personal “slip-ups”.

When LOVE wisely implements these negatives (do not envy, do not boast ...), **it results in positive character development.**

To envy, boast, be arrogant, blow our cool ... is disgusting, sinful behavior ... and therefore is confessed, forgiveness requested ... and then we move on.

One of prime problems is that we muck around in the past so much that we make it bigger than it was. We constantly raise the corpse of past failure so that it stinks up the entire relationship.

Just in case we might be getting the wrong picture of what LOVE is like, we are given a “correction” phrase or a “balancing” statement that indicates ...

- In the big picture, love is uncompromising

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Just in case we mis-apply what has just been said, we are given a love-characteristic that keeps things clear.

LOVE never does wrong or evil so that good may come.

LOVE stakes its lines clearly.

It is never right to do wrong.

LOVE is an ally of truth.

In other words, LOVE is uncompromising with evil and always a partner with truth and right.

To neatly wrap all of these details of LOVE in one whole package we read ... LOVE ...

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.

- Love is invincible

“There is nothing that love cannot tackle.”

It wisely and appropriately sticks its nose into everything and brings benefit. Because it is LOVE, it is not seen to be intrusive, insensitive, a bother, someone performing a duty.

Love puts up with everything ... never losing its purity, power or persuasiveness.

Permit once again a bit of a paraphrase of what is the intent of these four concise descriptive phrases.

Love approaches all situations from a perspective of seeing that change, good change, can really take place in imperfect, skeptical, soured and damaged lives.

Love will bring to people its developing characteristics and present them, in flawed ways, without demanding change but giving them space to pursue change; believing that if it is welcomed, real change can happen; refusing to quit by exhausting failure; anticipating God’s breakthrough in people’s lives.

Love is convinced that nothing can outdo what has been fleshed out in Jesus Christ on His Cross.

The spiritual gifts ... ways that we make our special contribution to God’s family ... are important.

The gifts, though, are only temporary helps, tools with which to get the big job done. ... and when God’s Church, His people are one day without spot, stain or wrinkle ... then these spiritual gifts of service will no longer be required and will therefore be retired.

Though the gifts will be retired, LOVE will remain in demand for time and eternity ... and that is why LOVE is so important ... it lasts.

... implementation ...

Key Thought:

Love is the prime measureable trait that accurately gauges Christ’s importance to us.

About at this point we are saying, “I know that what has been said is true, but this isn’t going to happen overnight in any measureable way.”

This is not easy, but it is good. This is really the best that there is.

It is so good that we need to consider doing the following:

1. Stop making excuses for NOT biblically loving others.

None of this, “Well, this happened to me and so I’m still not completely over it.”

Whatever your excuse, do not let it get you off the hook of loving.

Jesus doesn’t make excuses for loving us.

... and we respond, “But I am not Jesus.”

“... correct, but as His follower we should be acting like Him.”

2. We do not stop working with our spiritual gifts until we get our “love” side fixed up. The use of our spiritual gifts is one of God’s prime ways given for us to develop love.

Our spiritual gifts are the tools with which LOVE get’s God’s work done.

Put in another way: If I am not serving using my gift in or with God’s family, I will neither learn nor have the opportunity to grow in love.

3. Love must be expressed.

Love is not a feeling or a positive thought. It is an activity. It is an aliveness that is refreshing and delightful to others.

Love does not develop in a vacuum or a closed closet. It matures through effort.

4. We do not gauge the quality of our love by people’s response, but by whether we match what God’s Word states.

... but neither do we ignore people’s responses.

We must be cautious in how we measure whether our love is being effective.

5. It is very important to see that to LOVE complicates matters. It does not simplify them.

To LOVE means

- that we are going to “put out”, when others are not “putting in”.

- inequality, unfairness, imbalance, ridiculousness are the soil in which it is planted – not particularly good soil. This is where it starts.

As it grows in less than ideal conditions it produces equality, fairness, balance and cooperation.

The wealthy industrialist Charles Schwab declared after going to court and winning a nuisance suit at age 70. Given permission by the judge to speak to the audience, he made the following statement:

"I'd like to say here in a court of law, and speaking as an old man, that nine-tenths of my troubles are traceable to my being kind to others. Look, you young people, if you want to steer away from trouble, be hard-boiled. Be quick with a good loud no to anyone and everyone. If you follow this rule, you will seldom be bothered as you tread life's pathway. Except you'll have no friends, you'll be lonely, and you won't have any fun!"

Most of us expect to start there ... that is more like where we are hit stride ... and is where we anticipate finishing.

6. LOVE means WORK, more than people would reasonably think is required.

That’s why people go around asking, “Do you still love me?”

Because they know that LOVE, the real stuff, is not easy, especially when they are imperfect.

That is why we need a deep well from which to draw – and that is why we read that GOD IS LOVE ... and JESUS IS THE FULLEST EXPRESSION OF HIS LOVE.

He becomes our deep well of LOVE from which we can drink.

Love is what people experience between each other because of Jesus Christ.

There is no other well deep enough to keep us together in one family ... that requires the love of our Savior who died on a cross for us to bring us and keep us together.

[From Sports Illustrated, By Rick Reilly]

... Dick Hoyt ... Eighty-five times he's pushed his disabled son, Rick, 26.2 miles in marathons. Eight times he's not only pushed him 26.2 miles in a wheelchair, but also towed him 2.4 miles in a dinghy while swimming and pedaled him 112 miles in a seat on the handlebars--all in the same day.

Dick's also pulled him cross-country skiing, taken him on his back mountain climbing and once hauled him across the U. S. on a bike.

Makes taking your son bowling look a little lame, right?

This love story began in Winchester, Mass., 43 years ago, when Rick was strangled by the umbilical cord during birth, leaving him brain-damaged and unable to control his limbs.

"He'll be a vegetable the rest of his life," Dick says doctors told him and his wife, Judy, when Rick was nine months old. "Put him in an Institution."

But the Hoyts weren't buying it. They noticed the way Rick's eyes followed them around the room. When Rick was 11 they took him to the Engineering department at Tufts University and asked if there was anything to help the boy communicate. "No way," Dick says he was told. "There's nothing going on in his brain."

"Tell him a joke," Dick countered. They did. Rick laughed.

Turns out a lot was going on in his brain. Rigged up with a computer that allowed him to control the cursor by touching a

switch with the side of his head, Rick was finally able to communicate. First words? "Go Bruins!"

And after a high school classmate was paralyzed in an accident and the school organized a charity run for him, Rick pecked out, "Dad, I want to do that."

Yeah, right. How was Dick, a self-described "porker" who never ran more than a mile at a time, going to push his son five miles?

Still, he tried. "Then it was me who was handicapped," Dick says. "I was sore for two weeks."

That day changed Rick's life. "Dad," he typed, "when we were running, it felt like I wasn't disabled anymore!"

And that sentence changed Dick's life. He became obsessed with giving Rick that feeling as often as he could. He got into such hard-belly shape that he and Rick were ready to try the 1979 Boston Marathon.

"No way," Dick was told by a race official. The Hoyts weren't quite a single runner, and they weren't quite a wheelchair competitor. For a few years Dick and Rick just joined the massive field and ran anyway, then they found a way to get into the race officially: in 1983, they ran another marathon so fast they made the qualifying time for Boston the following year.

Then somebody said, "Hey, Dick, why not a triathlon?"

How's a guy who never learned to swim and hadn't ridden a bike since he was six going to haul his 110-pound kid through a triathlon? Still, Dick tried.

Now they've done 212 triathlons, including four grueling 15-hour Ironmans in Hawaii.

It must be a buzz kill to be a 25-year-old stud getting passed by an old guy towing a grown man in a dinghy, don't you think?

Hey, Dick, why not see how you'd do on your own? ``No way," he says. Dick does it purely for ``the awesome feeling" he gets seeing Rick with a cantaloupe smile as they run, swim and ride together.

This year (of the article), at ages 65 and 43, Dick and Rick finished their 24th Boston Marathon, in 5,083rd place out of more than 20,000 starters.

Their best time?

Two hours, 40 minutes in 1992--only 35 minutes off the world record, which, in case you don't keep track of these things, happens to be held by a guy who was not pushing another man in a wheelchair at the time.

``No question about it," Rick types. ``My dad is the Father of the Century."

Rick, who has his own apartment (he gets home care) and works in Boston, and Dick, retired from the military and living in Holland, Mass., always find ways to be together. They give speeches around the country and compete in some backbreaking race every weekend, including this Father's Day.

``The thing I'd most like," Rick types, ``is that my dad sit in the chair and I push him once."

Why love? ... because a perfect Savior gives us what it takes to love imperfect people like you and me.

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4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8Love never fails.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

My daughter Hannah practiced for two weeks for the high school cheerleader tryouts. She had been a junior varsity cheerleader but wanted to move to the top squad. Only three varsity spots were available in a school of about two thousands students. And Hannah was nervous about competing against the other girls.

"Dad, do you think God wants me to make the varsity squad?" she asked.

"Practice as hard as you can," I answered. "Do your best at the tryouts, and leave the results to God."

Her best friend, Melissa, who was already a varsity cheerleader, practiced with Hannah every day to help her make the varsity squad. They had talked about how fun it would be if they could cheer together. Melissa taught her the proper way to jump and encouraged her to keep a smile on her face. When Hannah became discouraged, Melissa always egged her on with, "You can do it, Hannah! I know you can!"

On the day of the tryouts over a hundred girls showed up to compete for the three spots. That afternoon each girl performed a routine in front of the judges. The results of the competition would be posted at 9:45 p.m. Although each contestant had high hopes of making the squad, all but three would go home heartbroken that evening.

Just before 10:00 p.m., Hannah came bursting in our front door sobbing uncontrollably. Immediately my wife, Cindy, and I jumped out of our chairs and rushed over to comfort her for not making the cheerleading squad. Cindy patted her on the back and said, "It's OK that you didn't make varsity cheerleader. We still love you, and we're glad that you tried." Hannah continued to cry. She finally settled down and explained what happened.

"Mom and Dad, I did make varsity. But Melissa didn't make it! The judges demoted her to the junior varsity squad and gave me her place on the varsity. She's devastated. I hurt so badly for her!"

We were stunned. Melissa had gone the extra mile to help Hannah make the varsity team so they could cheer together. We certainly didn't expect this strange turn of events. With hands covering her face, Hannah continued to weep. "I don't want to be a varsity cheerleader now. I want my junior varsity position back so Melissa can stay on varsity. Do you think the judges will let me swap places with her? I love her so much. Now she says she has nothing to live for."

"Hannah, I don't think the judges would allow that," I said.

She realized what she needed to do. Immediately she got up, walked out the front door, and drove to Melissa's house. She wanted to comfort Melissa that night, so she slept on the floor next to her bed. Hannah knew the best thing she could do was to be near her friend during this difficult time.

The next few days Hannah helped her work through her devastation. Melissa put her disappointment behind her and excelled in other ways during her remaining years in high school.

I watched Hannah lead cheers at varsity football and basketball games for the next two years. But that's not what I remember most about her cheerleading career. My fondest memory was the night she slept on the floor of a hurting friend. When you swap places with others to feel how they hurt, you've taken the first step toward loving your neighbor as yourself. (Kent Crockett, *I Once Was Blind But Now I Squint*, Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2004, 85-86)

In his book *Dad the Family Coach*, Dave Simmons describes the shape love took in the life of his daughter.

I took Helen (8-years-old) and Brandon (5-years-old) to the Cloverleaf Mall in Hattiesburg to do a little shopping. As we drove up, we spotted a Peterbilt 18-wheeler parked with a big sign on it that said "Petting Zoo." The kids jumped up in a rush and asked, "Daddy, can we go? Please. Please. Can we go?" "Sure," I said, flipping them both a quarter before walking into Sears. They bolted away, and I felt free to take my time looking for a scroll saw. A petting zoo consists of a portable fence erected in the mall with about six inches of sawdust and a hundred little furry baby animals of all kinds. Kids pay their money and stay in the enclosure enraptured with the squirmy little critters while their moms and dads shop.

A few minutes later, I turned around and saw Helen walking along behind me. I was shocked to see she preferred the hardware department to the petting zoo. Recognizing my error, I bent down and asked her what was wrong.

She looked up at me with those giant, limpid, brown eyes and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, it cost 50 cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing I ever heard. She repeated the family motto. The family motto is, "Love is action!" She had given Brandon her quarter, and no one loves cuddly furry creatures more than Helen. She had watched Sandy take my steak and say, "Love is action!" She had watched both of us do and say "Love is action!" for years around the house and Kings Arrow Ranch. She had heard and seen "Love is action," and now she had incorporated it into her little lifestyle. It had become part of her.

What do you think I did? Well, not what you might think. As soon as I finished my errands, I took Helen to the petting zoo. We stood by the fence and watched Brandon go crazy petting and feeding the animals. Helen stood with her hands and chin resting on the fence and just watched Brandon. I had 50 cents burning a hole in my pocket; I never offered it to Helen, and she never asked for it.

Because she knew the whole family motto. It's not, "Love is action." It's, "Love is sacrificial action!" Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. When you love, benefits accrue to another's account. Love is for you, not for me.

Love gives; it doesn't grab. Helen gave her quarter to Brandon and wanted to follow through with her lesson. She knew she had to taste the sacrifice. She wanted to experience that total family motto. Love is sacrificial action.

"As for me," said Paulus, "I am a disciple of Christ, who has taught us to love our enemies and to reward evil with good."
Adapted from Richard Wurmbrand, "Love Pardons the Enemy,"
The Voice of the Martyrs (April, 2002); submitted by Clark Cothorn.

The following story (retold in Modern English) was found in the catacombs of Rome:

A rich man named Proculus had hundreds of slaves. The slave named Paulus was so trustworthy that Proculus made him the steward over his whole household. One day Proculus took Paulus with him to the slave market to buy some new workers. Before the bargaining began, they examined the men to see if they were strong and healthy.

Among the slaves stood a weak, old man. Paulus urged his owner to buy this slave. Proculus answered, "But he is good for nothing."

"Go ahead, buy him," Paulus insisted. "He is cheap. And I promise that the work in your household will get done even better than before."

So Proculus agreed and purchased the elderly slave. And Paulus made good on his word. The work went better than ever. But Proculus observed that Paulus now worked for two men. The old slave did no work at all, while Paulus tended to him, gave him the best food, and made him rest.

Proculus was curious, so he confronted Paulus, "Who is this slave? You know I value you. I don't mind your protecting this old man. But tell me who he is. Is he your father who has fallen into slavery?"

Paulus answered, "It is someone to whom I owe more than to my father."

"Your teacher, then?"

"No. Somebody to whom I owe even more."

"Who then?"

"This is my enemy."

"Your enemy!"

"Yes. He is the man who killed my father and sold us, the children, as slaves." Proculus stood speechless.