

The Love Dolt

(Think of the song for the "Love Boat")

What I'm talking about today... Well, before I start I think we need to lock the door so that none of the men run out, because I'd like to talk about love. The reason I say that is because, in my former life, talking about love was comparable to talking about oral surgery and I think that I'd rather have a dental procedure than talk about love!

I attribute this amoraphobia (you like that - just coined it) to several factors. First I'm a guy - what can I say. Secondly; my rural Midwest upbringing. Growing up in a farming community in Iowa, people just didn't talk about love. Even girls didn't talk about it in mixed company. But if you were a guy, it just wasn't done - it was taboo - unless you wanted to get beat up or worse yet, get called names (you fill in the blank). Men in Iowa lived by the creed that you don't have to tell someone you love them, they should just know it. The only time it was acceptable to utter the 'I love you' words was if there was something to be gained, like... well, use your imagination. Here, I'll help you: like the Budweiser commercial where the guy says to his brother "I love ya, man" so he could get the last beer. (Now, that's what you all were thinking, wasn't it?)

Ok, let's get to the last reason. I was ignorant of what love truly was. I was a love dolt! I don't think I fully understood it until I became a Christian and that is really what this talk is about. What is love or better yet, what is true, biblical love? Now I don't have all the answers to that question but I certainly have far better understanding than I did.

Before, if someone asked what love was, I would answer like nine out of ten guys would...you'd know it when you see it or better yet, when you felt it. You see, for me, and most of the western world, love is this nebulous thing that is hard to define. It's an emotional feeling that comes over you. A feeling of euphoria or a feeling of despair or a feeling of deep longing, depending on the situation, but a feeling nonetheless. So you can see why I always had trouble with the biblical concept of love your neighbor. So here's how it worked...you can't love someone unless you're in love (or have feelings for them) so when the bible says to love your neighbor, how is that possible? How can you have feelings for someone you don't know or don't like? It was a conundrum for me. It seemed to me that this bible stuff is just not possible so how could I possibly just believe? That's why it took facts and evidence for me to first believe and why I always encourage all of you to study the evidence for God and the Bible, and to put things in their proper context because that definition of love I just gave is not the biblical definition of love but a more modern or western definition, which is commonly referred to as 'romantic' love.

But what is biblical love?

As we know, the Bible was written in three different languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and

Greek. The word for love was not used in the Aramaic text, so we'll look at just the Hebrew and Greek words for love. In Hebrew, there is one primary word for love, "ahava". Now before I go any further with that, I think it would be helpful to compare and contrast Hebrew and Greek. In the Semitic Hebrew language there are no words for abstract thought whereas in Greek or other western languages there are. For example, let's look at Psalm 103:8, "the Lord is compassionate and gracious and slow to anger..." Now, compassionate, gracious and anger are all abstract thoughts so we know that the original Hebrew was translated into these abstract words. Let's look at "anger". The Hebrew is "awph" which is nose or more precisely "the flaring of your nose". So what do you do when you get angry? You guessed it; you flare your nose. So in Hebrew, if you want to express an abstract thought you had to use an analogy like in the example I just gave and everything depended on the context. That's why in Hebrew subtleties in their story telling were very important and that most of these subtleties were and are lost on the western (Greek) minds because we have words to convey these thoughts. That's also a reason that Jesus spoke in parables. In the Jewish culture, stories were an important part of conveying ideas and are much more memorable.

So let's get back to "ahava", the root word for Ahava is "give", and it is modified by the letter "aleph" and changed from give to "I give" or also "love". So love is a verb, a verb of action. It something you do, not feel. By giving of yourself to another person, whatever form that giving takes; physical, emotional, intellectual, you are creating a connection, and only by continuing to give do you create a lasting connection.

Now the Greek language is a whole other story. In the Greek language, the language of the New Testament, there are 4 words for "love" yet only two are used in the New Testament: agape and phileo. Phileo is commonly referred to as brotherly love, not family love but more like kinsmen love, while agape is the highest form of love. Some call it divine love but it is also unconditional love for others despite their human frailties. This is by far the most commonly used word for love in the New Testament. It's interesting that the other two words, storge (love between a parent and a child) and eros (romantic/sexual love) are not found in the Bible, and these two words are most commonly associated with the English word "love".

Let's look at our modern usage of the word love. Let's take Romeo and Juliet for an example. They are idealized as poster children for romantic love. But.... did they love each other or did they covet what they knew they couldn't have? And think about it...it didn't turn out real well, did it? What did they "give" each other? Let's see what did they give...a sentimental poem and brief romantic interlude. They didn't even give their lives for one another - they took their own lives - how tragic! The real tragedy is that this little story is used as a great example of "true love". Haven't you ever wondered what would have happened if they hadn't died? Maybe they would have lived happily ever after but more than likely they would gotten bored with one another after the thrill of "love at first sight" had passed and moved on to a new thrill because they hadn't laid the foundation for true love. I don't know, maybe I'm just an old

cynic (but I like think that I've been blessed with the gift of cynicism.)

But, this does beg the question; is emotion (or feelings) love? I think biblically the answer is a resounding "No"! Now, don't get me wrong, emotions can be a wonderful thing. The feeling you get when you meet someone you think you love. The feeling of longing...all the emotions, good and bad, that happen around love are great but they are the result of love not love itself. Is it any wonder that in America and most western cultures that the divorce rate is out of sight? Because we think love is an emotion. "I just don't love her anymore". "I don't have any feelings for him". "The Love is gone"... all these clichés that people use to falsely describe love or the lack of love in a relationship.

But what does the Bible say about love. The quintessential passage on love is in 1 Corinthians 13: **"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..."**

What's missing from that passage? That's right, it says nothing about emotion. I don't see anything there that says, "love is tingly, love is sweaty palms, or love is an emotional high".

This week BreAnn (our worship leader) emailed asking what the topic was for today's talk. I was in a hurry so I replied, "biblical love". This was totally unsatisfying to her so she wrote back and ask, "Can you give me a bone, is it love relating to husband/wife, friend, neighbors, God loving us...it's a pretty broad defined word in the English language". My initial smart-alecky response when I read the email was, "Yes". But as I explained to her biblical love makes no differentiation. The passage above in 1 Corinthians is used for weddings but the context of the passage is not about marriage, its simply about "love" and what love is!

I remember when I first read "A Case for Faith"; there was a chapter in which the author interviewed a theologian named Lynn Anderson. This guy I could really relate to as he had struggled much of his life with doubt. There always seem to be an aspect about Christianity the troubled him and he was constantly asking why and working through these doubts. In the book, he relayed this one story in particular that really stuck out to me and initially started me thinking about true love. In this story, he was counseling a husband who said he didn't "love" his wife anymore. And Anderson's response was, "go home and love your wife". And the husband's response was, "but I don't have feelings for her anymore". Anderson's respond was, "I wasn't talking about how you feel, go home and love her". The husband came back with, "But it would be emotionally dishonest to treat her that way when I don't feel it". So Anderson asked, "Does your mother love you?" He said, "Of course she does". Then Anderson went on, "About three weeks after your mother took you home from the hospital and you were screaming with dirty diapers and she had to get up dog tired

and put her feet on cold floor, clean up your miserable diapers, and feed you - do you think she got a bang out of it?" He answered, "No". Anderson responded by saying, "Well, then, I think your mother was being emotionally dishonest".

The point he was making was that love, like faith, is not about emotion. That like faith, people have the misconception that love is about feelings. That peoples' love ebbs and flows based on their feelings. That once their emotion high has faded, just like faith, so does their love. As Anderson said, "Faith, (like love), is not always having a positive emotional outlook toward God and life." I like what Darren says, "If you have faith in God, you need to be prepared for disappointment". The same thing is true for love. As all of us married people know, you will be disappointed and be a disappointment but true love endures all these ups and downs.

Paul stated this same concept in Romans 13 when he said, "...whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbors as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." As always, Jesus said all that really needed to be said about love. What did Jesus say as they greatest commandment? To love the Lord God with your heart, soul and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Now He also said in the Sermon on the Mount, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets". So, Paul and Jesus are saying that the "Golden Rule" is what love is. Jesus has cut through all the confusion for us westerners, and made it very simple for us. Even I can get that.

From this, I hope you can see where I arrived at the conclusion that love is not an emotion, emotion is the result of love.

Let me tell you a little story that I think illustrates the concept of Biblical love. Three weeks ago we had a family reunion at the lake. It was an unusual event. Kathy's Aunt Dee, who died of cancer about 7 years ago, had a child out of wedlock back in 1957. Those were the days when young women went away to have their babies. None of her brothers even knew she was pregnant and didn't even know this baby existed. Before Dee died, she told here daughter Teri about the baby and how she had gone to Washington State, had the baby and had given him up for adoption. About a year and a half ago, Teri received a call from an investigator from Washington State. Teri asked the lady, "You're calling about my brother, aren't you?" The lady was surprised and asked her if she'd like to meet James. So for the next year they talked and met, and decided that the families needed to meet.

So three weeks ago, the meeting took place. Kathy's family came, the aunts and uncles came with their families, Teri and her brother came and brought their families. James brought his adoptive mother and adoptive sisters along with their families. What a great crowd!

It was interesting for me, since I'm not a blood relative; because I was able to just

hang back and watch it all unfold. Everyone was instantly accepted and made to feel as though there wasn't this 50-year divide. Sure, there was some apprehension at first, but that soon faded. Soon everyone was telling stories about their families and there were a lot of Dee stories – what a great lady she was!

James, at some point in his earlier life was a professional saxophone player. It was his anniversary, so when the whole group was together, he surprised his wife and played her a Kenny G love song. All the women teared-up (all the men were thinking, "Great, I guess a vacuum cleaner is out for an anniversary gift this year"). But then he dedicated a song to his adoptive Mother, Vicky, and to Dee, his birth Mother. He played Amazing Grace! There wasn't a dry eye in the house. I tear-up now thinking about it. But what an appropriate song. Not only did Dee do a very loving and grace filled thing by giving up her baby to someone who could better love and care for him at the time, but it was his adoptive Mother, Vicky, who encouraged James to seek out his birth family and not to give up when obstacles occurred.

When I was leaving (I had to leave early), Vicky came to me and gave me a hug and a kiss and said, "Thank you for the love you and your family has shown us!". The *love* your family has *shown* us! She obviously gets and lives biblical love. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, loves is not proud..." I can't think of a better example of biblical love.

So, whether its your neighbor, your wife or a long lost relative, love is what you do and how you treat people not how you feel at the moment and if you follow this, emotion will follow also.

So now I've come full circle. I'm back to what most Iowans know; you'll know love when you see it.

Now, there is one last question we need to ponder; how do we know God loves us? I really struggled with that. For most of my life I didn't recognize God's love. I didn't even believe there was a God! I actually thought when I heard people say "God loves you" that they were silly and slightly deluded. How could they possibly know that? It wasn't until I realized that creation was true and that the bible was true, that I realized that God does indeed love us. Creation by itself shows us His love. He gave us this world and everything in it. He gave us life. He designed a world where the sun rises every morning to sustain us. He gave us an earth that provides for all of our needs. He gave us free will so that we are able to love each other and to love Him. But most importantly, as John said in his gospel, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus' resurrection is all the proof we need to know that God loves us!