

Love is patient, love is kind and is not love does not is not arrogant, act unbecomingly not seek its own provoked, does into account a wrong suffered, does not Loving Him



EASTER WEEKEND WE WATCHED THE THEOLOGICALLY CHALLENGED but still intriguing, 1973 “rock opera” movie, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In it Mary Magdalene, portrayed as the traditional yet erroneous role of a prostitute, sings the touching “I Don’t Know How to Love Him.” The song (lyrics by Tim Rice) intentionally intermingles fleshly with spiritual love:

*I don't know how to love him—
What to do, how to move him.
I've been changed, yes really changed.
In these past few days,*

*Reflections
by the Pond*

May 2 2011
No. 497



*When I've seen myself,
I seem like someone else.*

In the song's bridge she puts into words her frustration over just how to express her feelings for Jesus:

*Should I bring him down,
Should I scream and shout,
Should I speak of love,
Let my feelings out?
I never thought I'd come to this—
What's it all about?*

Most of us can identify with Mary's quandary. Human-to-human love can be sufficiently challenging. How, then, are we to love human-to-God? After the love expressed by Jesus at the cross, how do we respond? Certainly not in kind, for man is incapable of the depth of sacrificial love demonstrated by Christ.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:6-8

There is something built into our DNA that we more often than not love conditionally. That is, we like those who like us; we are fond of those who are fond of us; we love those who love us. Therein can lie the beauty of marriage: we reserve our deepest level of earthly love for the one who has done the same for us.

But how are we to respond in kind to the *unconditional* love of God in Christ? God's singular brand of love—a painfully costly, sacrificial love—was expressed not to people who shared similar feelings, but

to people who had *rejected* Him! How can we ever hope to reciprocate to that level of supernatural love?

We can't.

We can spend our lives in the profitable pursuit of understanding Christ's love for us—

...being rooted and grounded in [Christ's] love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:17b-19

—but, as the apostle Paul states, it is a love that “surpasses knowledge.” If we cannot fully understand it, we cannot reciprocate in kind.

And we are not supposed to try.

God does not love us in the hope that He will receive back from us the full measure of what He has already expressed. If so, He would be little more than a shrewd businessman, willing to spend in the hope of gain. But God's love is not so base. His motivation is inexpressible and beyond human conception. It probably cannot even be put into words outside the language of heaven—but we will try:

God loves us because He is God.

God's love is all of grace, and mere flesh has a difficult time understanding the concept.



The Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar* anguished over not knowing how to love Jesus. If she had listened to His own words, however, she would have known the answer.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.”

John 14:15,23-24

A man’s love for his wife may be beautiful, and inexpressible in words. It is, in a sense, holy, ethereal, breathtaking. But a man’s love for his wife is also expressed in his faithfulness and duty—and in the daily keeping of his marriage vows.

So, too, are we to love Christ Jesus. Our words of devotion and heartfelt praise are right and good, but they are just the beginning. Without obedience, they are little better than a philanderer’s vacuous pledge of devotion.

When I was a young lad, my mom would often say to me, “Don’t just tell me you love me. *Show me.*” By which she meant that my *words* of love carried little weight when I failed to take out the trash or shake the rugs when asked.

Our words of love and devotion expressed to Christ carry little weight in the currency of heaven when our actions betray our deeper devotion to the things of this world.

*Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee;
Thou art my God, in Thee I live and move;
Oh, let Thy loving Spirit lead me forth
Into the land of righteousness and love.*

*Thy love the law and impulse of my soul,
Thy righteousness its fitness and its plea,
Thy loving Spirit mercy’s sweet control
To make me liker, draw me nearer Thee.*

*My highest hope to be where, Lord, Thou art,
To lose myself in Thee my richest gain,
To do Thy will the habit of my heart,
To grieve the Spirit my severest pain.*

*Thy smile my sunshine, all my peace from thence,
From self alone what could that peace destroy?
Thy joy my sorrow at the least offence,
My sorrow that I am not more Thy joy.*

John S. B. Monsell