

# What is Love?

(Part 2 of a 5-part series)

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Special to ChristianWeek*

As you read this, the “Season of Love” is over.

“Season” of love?

This nickname for the celebration of Christ’s birth demonstrates a misunderstanding of love. “What is love?” is probably the most-asked question of poetry, song, books and movies. Some conclude that there’s no answer. Others only express frustration with lovelessness. Google the question, and you’ll find a catchy song by popular musician Haddaway whose lyrics follow “What is love?” with “Baby don’t hurt me, don’t hurt me no more!”

And like this song, most of the world’s answers to “What is love?” equate *love* with *romance*.

*Romance* is a feeling of attraction based on *lust*. It’s the confusion of *love* with *lust* that has people “falling in love” and then “falling out of love” – one of the most common reasons for married couples to become unhappy, separate, and divorce. They lose the feeling (lust), get bored, and stop putting energy into their relationship. It’s the “love” that has a season.

In Christian circles, many sermons and commentaries expound the three Greek words translated as love – *epithumia*, *phileo*, and *agape* – in the New Testament. But let’s get simpler. True love can’t have “seasons” because it’s not a feeling. *True love is a choice to value others and be valued by them.*

Paul clearly defined love in his letter to the Corinthians:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Cor 13:6, 7 ESV)

Think about a relationship where you feel unloved, and read Paul’s words again. Notice that everything that he uses to define love is the *choice to do the exact opposite* of how you would sinfully react to how you feel.

Does love give up on or berate a spouse? Does it belittle a classmate or ignore a coworker? Is it selfish about parents' time, or short-tempered with children? Does it enjoy someone's suffering, or seek their disgrace? Is it too tired, uncertain, pessimistic, fading?

These mark the end of the "season" of misguided love.

Yet the world keeps asking the question, because it doesn't like the answer! We are created with an inherent need to give of ourselves, and to belong with others. If I love my spouse or family or congregation or Lord, it means that I belong – not *to* them – but *with* them. I have to put energy *into* the relationship to receive energy *from* the relationship. And while self-care is a necessary part of life, a love relationship requires self-*lessness* and often self-*sacrifice*.

In choosing to truly love you commit to a lifetime responsibility because *love never ends*. (1 Cor 13:8a) God chose to love you forever, through thick and thin. He expects you to do the same in all the relationships He gives you.

Don't choose your feelings. Choose to love.

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