

1-1-2003

## Love - A Decision and a Verb (The President's Page)

Jiri Moskala

Andrews University, moskala@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>

---

### Recommended Citation

Moskala, Jiri (2003) "Love - A Decision and a Verb (The President's Page)," *Perspective Digest*. Vol. 8 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol8/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).



Jiri Moskala

**T**he Bible plainly and unequivocally declares that God is love (1 John 4:16). This description means that ultimately there is only one, and thus unique, source for love—God himself. Love exists because God exists. It is his nature. It tells us who he is. We can conclude, then, that genuine love comes only from above and is personified and manifested in the life, death, and mission of Jesus Christ, through whom love came down and walked among a very loveless humanity.

I find it significant that the first and last sentences of the five-volume magnum opus of Ellen White, *The Conflict of the Ages*, begins and ends with the words “God is love.” Not “We are love.” Nowhere in Scripture are we told that love is something with which humans are born. We learn to love by the experience of being loved; we are able to love only because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). In loving, we take God’s side.

Jesus speaks of love as a new commandment because he modeled

### Love: A Decision and a Verb

love in the flesh as a sign of true discipleship (John 13:34, 35). However, loving each

other was not a new revelation: The two greatest commandments (Matt. 22:37-40) are rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. The first commandment—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (NIV)—appears in Deuteronomy 6:5; the second—“Love your neighbor as yourself” (NIV)—is found in Leviticus 19:18. No discrepancy or tension in respect to love exists between the Old and the New Covenants. Love was, is, and will always be the foundation, and thus the basic principle, of God’s government, law, and salvation. God does everything out of his incomprehensible, overwhelming, majestic, impartial, unselfish, and unconditional love.

### In the Name of Love

Unfortunately, in our contemporary world, the word *love* is often a twisted, dim, vague, ambiguous, crumpled, self-centered, and some-

times even dirty notion. Almost everything, however evil, is done, excused, and permissible in the name of love. It seems as if the more humans speak of love, the more singers sing about it and poets write poetically of it, the more we distort its essential meaning. As meaning is lost, we are confronted with such counterfeits as hatred, unfaithfulness, betrayal, selfishness, envy, and pride. It appears that the more we articulate love, the less people take this blueprint for happiness seriously. No wonder Jesus warned, "The love of most will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12, NIV).

Nevertheless, we long for true, unselfish love. We want to be loved and we want to love. Victor Hugo rightly stresses: "The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved." With love, we can never go wrong.

I'm glad that we don't need to argue about what constitutes authentic love, because the holy Scriptures offer a profound description in 1 Corinthians 13, the Magna Charta of Paul's writings and, incidentally, a chapter Ellen White suggests we read every day (*Review and Herald*, July 21, 1904). In picturing genuine love as an action, Paul explains what love is and what it is not. In verses 4-6, he describes excellent qualities of love as well as characteristics foreign to its nature. On the positive side, love is patient, kind, does not envy or boast,

is not proud, rude, self-seeking, or easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil, rejoices with truth, always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. To this list, which Paul does not intend to be exhaustive, we could add that love also unselfishly forgives, truly cares, speaks truth in love, and is always willing to help, to visit, to give of finances, time, prestige, influence, position, reputation, affections. Sensitivity is also a crucial attribute of love; lovers' eyes are wide open. Love is also blind to the mistakes of others, but sees their needs; in that sense, love is inclusive. The fragrance of love permeates the Christian's being.

True love leads to activity and knows no hindrances or borders. To love means to be lovable, humble. Without love our life is worthless, poor, cold, destructive, powerless; all our effort, work, and achievements are rendered meaningless (1 Cor.13:1-3).

No wonder Jesus commands: "Love one another." Can love be commanded? Instinctively, we react against the very thought. But Jesus is not saying that we need to feel sympathy for one another. Rather he directs our thinking to whether or not we want to love. It is our choice, one that affects how we relate to each other—in essence, our whole behavior. When we reflect heaven-born love, we seek the best for others. We do this because we have

experienced how God treats us. This thought is developed by Gary Smalley with John Trent, in their book *Love Is a Decision*.

In another insightful book *Leading With Love—And Getting More Results*, Neil Eskelin writes: “Remember, love is like the five loaves and the two fishes Jesus multiplied. It does not start to multiply until you give it away.” Christlike love gives, shares, protects, delivers, sacrifices. Love is an engagement, a doing; it is best described by the verb “to give.” “For God so loved that he gave.” Oscar Wilde exclaims: “Who, being loved, is poor?” Because God loves us, we can love ourselves and our neighbors.

#### Love: A Roof Over a House

Nobody cares how much you love until they experience how much you care. The saying, “They do not love who do not show they love,” is perceptive. True love serves rather than seeking to be served, makes someone happy rather than seeking to be happy. Building a wall instead of a bridge does not make for happiness.

Love, then, is more than feelings; it contains emotion, of course, because love without emotion is icy, gloomy, and abstract. Because love is a principle, it also has intellectual, cognitive, and volitional dimensions. Love is not a sentiment, but a deliberate, consistent, transparent attitude emanating from a sincere heart.

Love is like a roof over a house; as Peter observed, it “covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8, NRSV). Love condones, congratulates, protects, encourages, and does not seek self. Yet, love is also tough: It cannot tolerate sin, hatred, selfishness, and pride; in that sense, it is exclusive. Strong and healthy love understands but does not compromise with injustice and other forms of evil. In fact, love and justice, love and truth, love and faithfulness always go together! One without the other cannot exist in a credible, convincing, and incorruptible life.

Love never fails. It endures and is immortal (1 Cor. 13:8-13). It is love’s permanence that makes heaven a most desirable place to live. Love brings quality and meaning to our existence. That is why it abides into eternity. Without love, heaven would not be heaven.

Love is the first fruit that the Holy Spirit implants in our heart (Gal. 5:22). It is a summary of God’s law, its aim, expression, purpose, and fulfillment (Rom. 13:10). It is an indispensable Christian virtue.

The wise saying of Puritan writer Richard Baxter (1614-1691) speaks wisdom still: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, freedom; in all things, love.” Love is above all other virtues. It is stronger than death! Love is, indeed, the victory! “Do,” therefore, “everything in love” (1 Cor. 16:14, NIV).