

What Are You Committed To?
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Steven M Conger

(1 Corinthians 13 NRSV) If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. {2} And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. {3} If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. {4} Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant {5} or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; {6} it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. {7} It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. {8} Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. {9} For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; {10} but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. {11} When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. {12} For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. {13} And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Valentine's day is an interesting day.

While the history of it goes way back to early Christian history → the reality of the day is that it was created by companies like Hallmark in the 1800's.

Valentine's Day is a day full of symbols of love. The usual ones, of course, include hearts and flowers, little cupids and those flirty candy hearts with sayings such as "U R Hot" on them.

But if you were in Rome today, you'd be doing your Valentine's Day shopping at the hardware store, not the Hallmark store.

In recent years, it's been fashionable for young lovers in the Eternal City to take a romantic walk on the Ponte Milvio bridge, where they profess their love by wrapping a chain around one of the lampposts, securing it with a lock and then throwing the key into the Tiber River.

It symbolizes their eternal, undying, locked-together love, perhaps portending the day when both will adorn their lives with a marital "ball and chain," as the unfortunate expression goes.

But on this Valentine's Day, is a chain and lock really the best symbol for a love relationship?

Sure, there's the whole idea of being permanently bonded, which is a good thing when it comes to marriage.

But the image of a chain also implies some kind of slavery or prison from which you can't escape.

Pop music seems to see the chain as being more painful than romantic. In the 1988 hit "Chains of Love," Erasure sang, in an upbeat, '80s sort of way, about breaking the chains of love as a good thing. Pat Boone's 1962 ode to "Chains of Love" begins: "Chains of love have tied my heart to you. Chains of love have made me feel so blue."

Not exactly what you want on a Valentine's Day card ... or chain.

As a teenager and young adult, I found Valentine's day very difficult, whether I had a girlfriend or not.

- Obviously if I was without a girl friend, I felt left out.
- But even if I had one, I was often perplexed by the expectations that this "made for TV" holiday created.

And I am sure for many people here today, this is not a day of joy and celebration, but a day of sadness and loneliness.

Have you ever really paid attention to 1 Corinthians 13

It is probably the most often read scripture at a wedding, but I am not sure that anybody has ever really paid attention to it.

I mean, it talks about LOVE, so it must be appropriate → Right?

"How do you spell *love*?" → Is the question that Paul asks?

The apostle Paul gives several rules for spelling it:

- Love is patient.
- Love is kind.
- Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.
- Love does not insist on its own way.
- Love is not irritable or resentful.
- Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.
- Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

According to Paul → You don't spell love with an "I" – you spell it with a "U"

Most of us wouldn't disagree with that.

But saying that Love is spelled with a U instead of an I is easy. Living that way is, however, a different matter.

One reason is that putting U before I doesn't come naturally.

Several years ago, the TV series *Nova* advertised that it was going to air an intimate portrait of two groups whose members labor exclusively for the good of the community. In other words, no individual in either group put himself or herself first.

And who were these remarkable groups marked by such selflessness?

- Some previously undiscovered tribe in the African jungle?
- Some isolated clan living in the interior of South America?
- Some unique cohort in the far, frozen North?

No. It was ants and cockroaches.

To find individuals that are *by nature* selfless, *Nova* had to look outside our own species.

In years gone by, most commentators on 1 Corinthians 13 took pains to point out that the Greek word Paul used for love in this passage is *agape*, which was not the common Greek word for love.

In fact, the KJV translators of 1611 rendered it as "charity," which, in that day, had a somewhat different meaning than it does today.

But the reason for noting that Paul used *agape* instead of a more common Greek word for love is to point out that it refers more to an act of the *will* than a feeling of the *heart*.

In other words, whether or not it's possible to put U before I in the deepest places in our hearts or to feel lovingly in our emotions, it is possible to behave so that *in practice* we put U before I.

That means that even if our inward response is "What's in it for me?" our outward response needs to be "What's best for you?"

And we can ask that question and act on its answer regardless of what our self-interest is saying to us.

That's all fine, and it does credit us with acting lovingly, but it can also be kind of grim: "Let's do what is best for you. I don't really want to, and I won't enjoy it. But at least I will be loving my neighbor."

Instead of seeing loving others as acting against what we naturally want to do, however, it may be better to realize that acting lovingly is a learning opportunity and that learning can be enjoyable and a source of personal satisfaction.

To say that a different way, accepting Christ brings instant forgiveness of sin and immediately makes us righteous before God, but it also signs us up for a lifelong character-formation course.

Paul gave his “rules” for how to spell love not because he was looking for a subject for a poetic essay; he gave them because people who had accepted Jesus still needed some help spelling love in their daily actions and attitudes.

Paul’s spelling out of love gives us a description of what it looks like from the outside, and as we make our behavior match that description, we learn patterns and responses that can override our tendency to put I before U.

But can we really learn to behave differently, in a way that goes against our nature?

Paul’s rules for spelling love tell us that love is found through actions and attitudes.

While marriages are founded and built upon love, emotions are often fickle. Poet Carl Sandburg captured the essence of a love which can stand the test of time when he wrote:

"I love you. I love you for what you are, but I love you yet more for what you are going to be. I love you not so much for your realities as for your ideals. I pray for your desires, that they may be great, rather than for your satisfactions, which may be so hazardously little.

"A satisfied flower is one whose petals are about to fall. But the most beautiful rose is one, hardly more than a bud, wherein the pangs and ecstasies of desire are working for larger and finer growth. Not always shall you be what you are now. You are going forward toward something great. I am on the way with you and . . . I love you."

Renewal

Have you thought about why you wanted to get married? Take a moment, and gaze into each others eyes. What is it that you first saw there that captured your soul? What spark, what love, what beauty have you found in those eyes that has made you into a better person?

Do you remember when you first met? When you first kissed? Can you recall the moment when your lover turned your life and your heart upside down . . . ?

Now, today, you have come through many struggles and personal victories over the years and you bring all of these emotions today as you repeat your vow of love for each other. Today it is your desire to re-ignite the flames of your commitment, emphasizing again that you have not forgotten what it was that first brought you together. Today, you move further down that road which you want to last a lifetime. That's your hope, your desire and your commitment today.

Let me remind you that love is a verb. It's not just a state of being but an ACTION verb. It's not just how you feel about each other, but what you DO for each other that will keep your relationship growing and alive.

Stand or sit and take each other's hands --- look at each other, and I invite you to repeat after me.

Husbands to your wives

In the name of God,
and with a thankful heart,
I once again declare that
I, (name), take you, (name), to be
my wife,
To have and to hold
From this day forward,
For better, for worse
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish,
Until we are parted by death.
This is my solemn vow.

Wives to husbands

In the name of God,
and with a thankful heart,
I once again declare that
I, (name), take you, (name), to be
my husband,
To have and to hold
From this day forward,
For better, for worse
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish,
Until we are parted by death.
This is my solemn vow.