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Guided by His Word,  
Serving in His Love

## Love Defined

*<sup>16</sup>This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. - 1 John 3:16*

The cross is more than just one among many pictures of love. We cannot know what love (as *John* speaks of it) is apart from the cross of Christ. That supreme love by which God so loved the world and into which He calls His children was exemplified to a point of perfection when "*Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.*" The cross of Jesus is the only way we can remotely understand unqualified love.

Such a premise would probably annoy the unbeliever. One may ask, "Is it not true that non-Christians love their children as wholeheartedly as do Christians? Is not the love of a young man for a young woman, or between close friends, or among members of a family equally beautiful and genuine whether the parties involved are Christians or not?" "I could only answer, "Maybe – Probably – Often - Sure, I guess so."

None of us should question or undermine the love professions of anyone else. It does not really matter anyway how one imperfect love measures up to another imperfect love. Neither measure up to perfect love; a love only possible when a perfect God empties Himself in behalf of sinful mankind.

Love is poured out from God into human hearts, like sunshine and rain, upon sinner and saint alike. "*God is love*" according to John, and man was created in the likeness of God. So, it follows that love is an intricate dimension of man's nature. But, as was the case with every other attribute of the divine nature within man, something happened to the love within man when sin entered the world, and man fell from God's perfect image.

Love as God intended it became self-centered. In some way, without divine grace to spur us on toward something higher, even the most tender love we can render is inwardly distorted in that it is at least partly a love of ourselves. We love our children because they are extensions of us. We love our parents because our life is related to theirs. We love our friends, but we tend to choose as friends only those who bring us mutual

pleasure, mutual enjoyment or mutual benefit. Ultimately, all human love wrestles with a dimension of self-centeredness within.

"*Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer had a very shiny nose.*" Do you recall the net result of this nasal oddity? Rudolph was ostracized from the herd at large and restricted from participating "*in any reindeer games.*" He only receives love from his reindeer peers after he pulls their cookies out of the fire on a particularly foggy Christmas Eve.

We accept this account of reindeer sociology without batting an eye. That's the way of the world, after all. Reindeer love is no different than fallen human love. Rudolph is not loved unconditionally. It is incumbent upon him to rise above his handicap and establish his worth in the eyes of the community. They loved him because he served them. Jesus asked:

... <sup>46</sup>*If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?* <sup>47</sup>*And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?* <sup>48</sup>*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

- Matthew 5:46-48

There is a kind of love innately present in man, but it is self-centered in that it is fallen. In Christ, something happens. There is born a new kind of love. When a person is born again he passes, as John says, "from death to life," and he begins to love those he never loved before, and to love those he has loved before in a different way. This is love, the perfect love, the love never made evident before the cross of Jesus, which is featured in the writings of John.

There was nothing of self in the cross of Jesus. When Jesus calls us to take up our own crosses, there can be nothing of self in that.



## Karl's Korner