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What is Love? - Part 3
"Whoops, I've Fallen in Love! Or have I?"
By Tal Davis

No use pretending things can still be right
There's really nothing more to say
I'll get along without your kiss tonight
Just close the door and walk away

At first we thought that love was here to stay
The summer made it seem so right
But like the sun we watched it fade away
From morning into lonely night

Never gonna fall in love again
I don't wanna start with someone new
'Cause I couldn't bear to see it end
Just like me and you

No, I never wanna feel the pain
Of remembering how it used to be
Never gonna fall in love again
Just like you and me

Never Gonna Fall in Love Again, by Eric Carmen (1976)
Songwriters: Sergei Rachmaninoff / Eric Carmen
Remember that song by Eric Carmen? It was a big hit in 1976. Carmen borrowed the tune from the third movement of Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff's [1873-1943] Second Symphony. (Hear it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jewWk8k4V5k>)

That song is the sad lament of a young man swearing off love forever because it hurt so much when he broke up with his girlfriend – who is the one being addressed by the lyrics. This song, and

thousands of others, force us to consider two ancient questions, "Just what does falling in love really mean?" and "How do I know if I am really in love at all?" In this third installment of this three part series titled "What is Love?", we will attempt to explore these questions from a Biblical perspective. To read Parts 1 and 2 go here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2021/12/what-is-love-part-1-defining-the-word-from-the-bible-tal-davis/> and here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2021/12/what-is-love-part-2-who-do-we-love-tal-davis.>

Many years ago I took graduate courses in Marriage and Family Relations at a state University. I recall listening to one particular lecture by a prominent scholar in that field. As he spoke, he kept mentioning something called "undifferentiated ego mass." He said matter-of-factly that this strange stuff is actually what motivates people to be around one another, get married, and have children. He declared that this was the "psychological phenomenon" that attracted people to one another and held families together. At first I was not sure what he was talking about, but the more I listened it occurred to me what he was referring to. In rather sterile scientific terms, he was talking about what people usually call "love," especially romantic love.

In this installment we will analyze "undifferentiated ego mass," but will call it by its more traditional and meaningful term "love."

If a survey were taken of adults, it is likely that nearly everyone twenty years old or older has been "in love" at least once. Some statistics published years ago showed

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that former college students, on the average, had been "In love" 2.5 times before they graduated.

Surely being in love is a wonderful experience, if it is requited (returned in kind). It can be quite sad if it is unrequited. English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson made this audacious statement, "It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." Whether that proverb is true is questionable. The broken-hearted young man in the song above might not have agreed.

But let's get back to our essential issue: just what does it mean to "fall in love"? Is it like falling from some height where the law of gravity inevitably causes one to go down? Is it some deep emotional experience that is overwhelming and irresistible? Do we have any choice in the matter, or does love grab us like a spider's web that we cannot escape? If we follow some popular notions, then it must be like that. After all, Elvis Presley sang, "I can't help falling in love with you."

There is a story told by a pastor who had a couple who was considering marriage come to his office. But they were a bit bewildered and were not really sure they were in love. They had experienced no dizzy spells in each other's presence, nor felt in a daze. They said their attraction was manageable and they did not have been hugging or kissing all the time. To them, it just did not seem to square with what they had heard in love songs, movies, and novels.

So how do we know if we are in love and not just infatuated? That is a good question. We will consider several simple guidelines to help us determine if our love for someone is real.

(Note: In this article we are only dealing with couples consisting of a man and woman. Since same-sex

relationships are expressly forbidden in Scripture we do not regard them as morally valid. For a thorough Biblical exegesis on this topic, and a definitive refutation of pro-homosexual revisionist interpretations, see: *God, Marriage, and Family - Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* by Andreas J. Kostenberger with David W. Jones. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010. Pages 199-222)

First, falling in love should include an abiding sense of friendship between a couple.

Genuine sweethearts are real pals and best friends. They enjoy being together and doing things together. They should be happy doing things that do not require much money. Most young couples do not have a lot of spending cash. But there are many things they can do together that are cheap and fun. For example, going for drives in the country, picnics in the park, playing Goofy Golf, having get-togethers with friends, etc. Overall, couples in love should feel that their lives have been lifted to higher levels by the other. They should bring out the best in each other, inspire one another, and encourage one another.

Christian couples should look for activities that enhance their relationship, and avoid those places and things that may lead to temptations. This also involves an overarching sense of confidence and trust in the other person. No believer should ever pressure another to do something he or she knows is wrong. That is why one should not have to think twice about dating anyone who is not trustworthy.

This naturally leads to the second principle: falling in love involves physical attraction and emotional feelings.

Physical attraction and emotions are natural, but they should be kept in the right perspective. They were put there by God. But they can be deceptive and even dangerous. Remember what we

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said about the difference between *eros* and *agape* (see Part One). That's why the Apostle Paul warned his readers in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18 NASB)

In this passage, Paul establishes a couple of key principles for understanding sexual ethics from a Christian perspective. He says first that when one commits sexual sin, he or she is sinning against their own body. He tells them emphatically to flee immorality. One might ask, "What difference does that make? It is my body and I can do with it as I want." Paul shoots that rationalization down by reminding his Christian readers that their bodies do not belong to them. He asks them rhetorically,

Or do you not know that your body is a temple (or sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19 NASB)

He had earlier made this same point.

16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 NASB)

He stresses the fact that the Holy Spirit of God Himself dwells in their bodies. Therefore, they are living temples of God. What they do to themselves they also do to God. If they desecrate their bodies by sexual immorality, they desecrate the house of God. That is why Paul had condemned what some in Corinth were doing by having illicit relations with

prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:15-17). Also, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to resist temptation. Nonetheless, it is better to stay away from it.

Paul then makes this principle even more powerful by reminding them of what it cost for their salvation so the Holy Spirit could enter their lives.

For you have been bought for a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20 NASB)

Our salvation was bought with the price of Jesus' death on the cross. Thus, to desecrate our bodies in sinful activities is to show contempt for what Jesus had done for us.

The key moral principle here is to remember God the Holy Spirit lives inside you! God is not in the back seat of the car looking over your shoulder, He actually dwells in your very heart. What a motivation for good behavior.

Yes, physical attraction is normal and good. But like a fire in the fireplace, it needs to be kept under control. God intends for the proper avenue for engaging in sex to be in the sacred bonds of holy matrimony:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24 NASB; see also Matt. 19:5,6; Mark 10:8; 1 Cor. 6:16)

It may be hard to wait, but it is worth it. It shows respect for God's will, and genuine love for one's sweetheart.

One other point here needs to be made. Sex is not the unforgivable sin. If someone has already violated God's sexual standard, He will forgive him or her and restore his or her purity in His eyes as white as snow. As Paul told the same Corinthians in his second letter:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB)

Now we go to the third, and perhaps most important principle of falling love.

A compatibility and similarity of personal ideals and beliefs is essential for a successful love relationship.

A young couple were dating. The boy was an evangelical Christian and the girl was a Christian Scientist. At first, the boy thought that their beliefs would be similar since they both professed to be Christians. However, as their relationship grew the girl made the statement that she would not allow her children to have medical treatment if they were ill. This alarming declaration led the boy to investigate his girlfriend's religious beliefs more thoroughly. He quickly determined that their beliefs were essentially incompatible, so he wisely broke up with the girl.

The issue of faith is absolutely crucial in any love relationship, especially when contemplating marriage. It is also one that is often ignored when looking for a marriage partner. But Paul made clear how important this principle is:

14 Do not be mismatched with unbelievers; for what do righteousness and lawlessness share together, or what does light have in common with darkness? 15 Or what harmony does Christ have with Belial (Satan), or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. (2 Corinthians 6:14-16 NASB)

The phrase translated in verse 14 as "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers" is literally, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Like oxen joined together as a team, if they are not going together in the same direction and at the same speed, it won't work. They will inevitably be working at cross purposes.

So here is the simple principle, a Christian should never marry an unbeliever! It is never God's will for a believer to be joined in matrimony to an unbeliever. This has a wider implication: people marry who they date. So it is wise for a Christian to date only other Christians. No, this is not always easy. It may mean turning down some invitations to go out. But it may help you not having to go places that you would rather avoid and will prevent hurt feelings later on.

This principle may also apply somewhat to other situations. For instance, a person needs to consider a potential mate's political and social views before getting serious. Those can be sore spots if not the same. But the main point is that born-again Christians should marry only born-again Christians. And remember, just because someone says they are a Christian, or even goes to church, does not guarantee their faith is authentic. Talking about it right up front, and extensively, is wise to discern a person's true convictions.

Yes, it is true, being in love is wonderful. There is probably only one experience more meaningful and

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joyful: knowing the forgiveness of our sins by receiving Christ as Savior and Lord. But we need to understand one other key point. Falling in love is not a matter of finding the right person, but being the right person. The foundation for any Christian relationship is Christ, and putting Him first. When, and if (not everyone should be married), the time is right, He will bring the right person into your life. Jesus made this promise and it applies to marriage as to anything else:

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you." (Matthew 6:33 NASB)