

THE PROBLEM WITH CHEESEBURGERS

Even though we desire and are created for a love with these four qualities, there remains one problem. Through Original Sin we are fallen people so we easily get convinced that we could never find such an ideal love or that we are not even worthy of such love. This is the message that we receive every day from modern society which 'approves' certain behaviours and actions and wrongly labels them as aspects of love. Comparing these false loves to authentic love is a bit like comparing a cheeseburger to a six course banquet.



A cheeseburger is fun and easy - you can even buy them in an aptly named "happy meal" - but at the end of the day you eat it out of a paper bag, sitting alone in front of the TV and there isn't much that is 'happy' about that. A six course banquet on the other hand is more effort and takes longer to prepare but it is enjoyed with family and friends over a long evening with laughter and good conversation, and at the end you take away good memories and real joy in the heart; it is the true "happy meal". Eating a cheeseburger does not make someone a 'bad' person but it is always a bit sad to encounter someone who believes for whatever reason they cannot get to the banquet. We really need to identify where we have allowed cheeseburgers to fill the gap in our lives and admit that we desire the banquet and seek it out!

And these cheeseburgers are easily identifiable because they are missing all or one of the elements of love. In some way they do not allow for freedom, totality, faithfulness or fruitfulness. So while our hearts desire to make vows 'in sickness and in health until death do us part', we are so often led into situations where we make much lesser vows.

Today the vast majority of couples live together before they marry; there are various reasons for this but the essential 'vow' of cohabitation is directly against a total and faithful love; it is something like, 'I will share my life with you today but if I meet someone better tomorrow I will leave you'.

Contraception is treated as completely normal; consequently to have more than one or two children is considered at best strange and at worst socially irresponsible. However the 'vow' of contraception says, 'I give you my body but I do not want your fertility and I do not want to give you mine, I prefer a sterile love'.

Take any moral question you wish: adultery, homosexuality, masturbation, divorce, and simply ask if it is free, total, faithful and fruitful. If you cannot tick all four boxes on a particular moral action then quite simply, that action is not worthy of a human person, it will not satisfy your heart and, to the contrary, it will lead to unhappiness and regret. The truth is we cannot rewrite who we are. We are created in the image of a God who is love and so love has a meaning. Often the slogan is thrown around 'love is equal' (usually as a justification for same-sex marriage) but actually, love is not equal; there is a hierarchy of love with God at the top! Our pursuit of love must always be faithful to God's love. God is not about rules, God is about love, but we need to understand that the 'rules' of the Christian life are simply there to remind us of who we are. St Leo the Great in the 5th century said these beautiful words:

"Christian, recognise your dignity and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning.

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Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God."⁴

The pursuit of love, our desire for love, is nothing other than an inbuilt mechanism calling us to remember who we are, calling us home to the God who loves us, to the God who desires that we live with every happiness in this life so that we may share every joy with him in the life to come.

¹John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

²Genesis 1:26-31.

³John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11 (emphasis added).

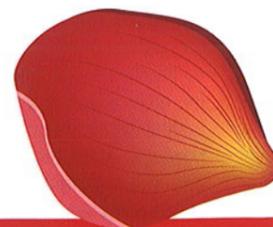
⁴Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1691.

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QUESTIONS

1. What do individuals in modern Western Society say that love is? Why might they say this?
2. In what way are the 4 properties of love described in the article found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?
3. In what way does genuine love echo or reflect the inner life of God himself?
4. What are some ways in which you can convey to others the glorious nature of God's love for humanity and his design for authentic human love?



INFORM

Faith & Life Matters



WHAT IS LOVE?

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This was the most Googled question in 2011. In this article, **Bernard Toutounji** explains that genuine love is what we were made for and is ultimately a reflection of the inner life of the Trinity itself.



WHAT IS LOVE?

It seems we all want to know. The most searched for 'L' term on Google is 'love' and the question 'What is love?' continuously ranks at the top of internet search engine requests. Before the internet, the Beatles proclaimed with great certainty that 'All you need is love'. Even back at

the dawn of civilisation, Egyptian Pharaohs were talking about it; love songs have been discovered that are over 3500 years old.

In 1979 in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, Karol Wojtyla, now Blessed Pope John Paul II had something to say on the topic,

"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."

No one, Christian, Muslim or Atheist is going to disagree with that. Love is one of those realities with which most of us have some experience. If someone is eating and you ask them why they are eating, they will respond 'I am hungry' and there is no further question we can ask, because we all know the hunger for food. Similarly, we all know the hunger for love. People are not usually asked for a more in depth response as to why they go on dates, get engaged or get married. We all desire love and even someone else falling in love brings us joy.

Although it has become perhaps the most clichéd word on the planet, there remains something within the human person that sets them on a lifetime quest in the pursuit of this thing called love. We all identify that love brings a measure of happiness that we need. However, just because we desire love does not mean that we know what it is. Perhaps more than ever before, society conditions us to believe that happiness is to be found in possessions and pleasure, so when we feel the basic human desire for love many people are going to look for it in...possessions and pleasure.

We should therefore take some time to consider what love is, why we actually want it and how we can identify it.

CREATED LIKE GOD?

Before we get to love, first consider this: the religious icon. Within Christianity the most ancient form of visual art is the sacred icon. When a person sets his or her gaze upon an icon they are meant to see beyond the image into the Divine. The icon is deemed sacred, because it points to the sacred.

At the beginning of creation, God made icons, icons of himself. Yet these icons were not carved in wood or stone, embroidered on cloth, or created as a fresco or mosaic:

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in the image of ourselves.'

So God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good."²

The original icons of God are us! Man and Woman. In our sexual complementarity, we image God who is pure spirit. We are visible pictures of the invisible God! Like no other creature or part of creation, man and woman, together, echo the Creator.

A GOD OF LOVE

Now if an icon is meant to reveal the divine, and if we are the ultimate icons, it is necessary to ask, who is this God whom we image?

In his first letter Saint John gives the answer when he states, 'God is Love'. Reflecting on these words, John Paul wrote,

"God is Love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. *Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.*"³

What the Pope is saying is that God is a family. God is not a solitude, a loner or an individual. The Triune God spends all its time loving...loving, loving, loving. God loves and everything else happens.

Traditionally theologians have said it is our ability to reason and to choose which makes us God's images; but John Paul desired to expand this understanding. He said that it is our capacity to love that truly makes us images of God. Whether you are married, single, priest or religious; whether you are a teacher, plumber or astronaut - all of us are called to love. To be fully human is to love.

WHAT MAKES LOVE, LOVE?

It is very easy to say that we are called to love but what does that mean in reality? We hear the word love so often. We can say we love chocolate, we love our family and we love God, but these are (hopefully) not all the same types of love. What we need to ask is how does God love? When we know that, we should be able to further understand what love is.

We can picture God, by way of a faint analogy, as a triangle, with the three points representing the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God in three persons. Each person completely distinct yet each completely united.



The Father loves the Son from all eternity with a love that is free, total and faithful. The Son as a Divine Person receives this love perfectly. The correct response to love is to love in return; so the Son upon receiving that love, loves the Father in return with a love that is equally free, total and faithful. It is because God's love is free, total and faithful, that we as his images desire a love that has those same qualities.

What if a man was having trouble meeting 'Miss Right' so he decided to take matters into his own hands and placed an ad in the newspaper to the effect that he wanted a woman to love and he was willing to pay this person to love him. Well, of course, that could not be love because love is not something we can buy, love must be free or, as we sense in ourselves, it is just not love.

What if you met someone and they said to you, 'I love you so much that I want to be in a relationship with you for 5 years', or maybe 20 years? Would we feel deep down that it was a genuine love? No. Because the big selling point about love is that it has to last a lifetime, it's the Disney fairytale ending; only a love that lasts forever, a love that is total, is going to satisfy the human heart.

Or, what if you were in a relationship with someone and they came to you and said, 'I love you very much but I have met someone else whom I also love, I would like to love both of you'. How would you tolerate that? Not very well most likely, in fact we dislike unfaithful love so much we have invented a word to describe it, infidelity, an act of disloyalty, especially in love.

Imagine though if free, total and faithful love was all there was. What if the Trinity was actually a 'Duinity' with only the Father and the Son. What might be the problem with this?

Imagine you were in love with someone and someone was in love with you. You shared a love that was free, total and faithful. You both chose to freely love the other, for all time, to the exclusion of all others. However, if left at that, what would happen to your love?

Sadly, it would die. Why? Because all we have is a framework, we need more, we need walls and a roof; love needs a sign! If I am in love I need to express my love, I need to say 'I love you', I may decide to bring a rose to the woman I love; she may write me a poem. Basically we need to tell people. Our love needs to bear fruit. In fact changing your relationship status on Facebook may well be the social network equivalency of fruitfulness, 'I am in a relationship and I want everyone to know!' And not only is the fruitfulness of love an essential element of love, it is the best part of love! It is the tangible 'stuff' that makes love so wonderful. No one wants to live in a house that only has a nice timber frame; in fact it is not even a house. What we really desire are walls, a ceiling and light fittings. We desire a place where we can walk around in our tracksuit pants all day without being judged! Couples in love don't share out legal affection contracts on Valentine's Day, they give roses and chocolates, they offer the other a sign of their love! We need love to come with free, total and faithful intentions but what we really want is romance, we want to hear how special we are, how loved we are, how handsome or beautiful we are, that is fruitfulness! Of course, the most wonderful sign of love is children that are literally the fruit of the love of their parents.

The truth is we desire a love that bears a sign because God's love bears a sign and that sign is the Holy Spirit! The love between the Father and the Son is so alive and perfect and dynamic that it is fruitful in the person of God the Holy Spirit. This is why the Holy Spirit was the final gift of Christ to the world. God has given us everything he can possibly give in sending his Son and then the Holy Spirit.

So we can say that God's love has four qualities. **God's love is ever free, total, faithful and fruitful** and being created in God's image we desire a love that is equally free, total, faithful and fruitful.

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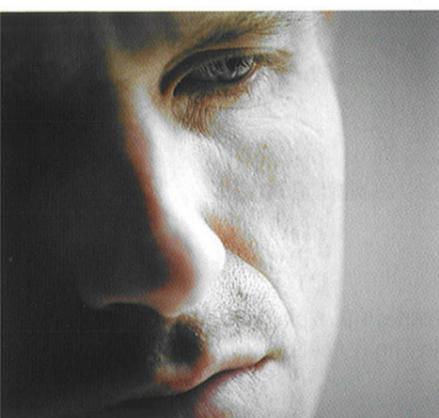
John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11.

So we can say that God's love has four qualities. God's love is ever free, total, faithful and fruitful and being created in God's image we desire a love that is equally free, total, faithful and fruitful. That is the simple truth about it; you desire love because that is what God is, and at the end of the day we remember those ancient words of Saint Augustine, 'You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you'. When we rest in love, genuine love, we rest in God. That is why we do not want to err in our understanding of love because God is love! Just as no one wants to go to the movies with a ticket for yesterday's show, we do not want to get to the heavenly gates with a voucher for 'love' that we picked up from a lifetime of reading Cleo magazine or watching popular soap operas!

In summary, genuine love is free, total, faithful and fruitful. This is what every heart really desires whether they realise it or not.



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