

Theology of the Body

Love vs. Lust

What is love?

Although most people prefer to start with the negative and then move to the positive, I want to make sure we understand the love before we explore its privation which is lust. So, what is love? Often we equate love with various actions or ideas without exploring the notion of love itself. We may say things like “I love this cake” or “I love my dog” or “I love my mom.” I am sure that we do not feel the same way about all of these statements. I would not eat my mom neither would I desire another piece of my dog. The way I care about and love my mom is different than the way that I care about and love my dog. I would not take my mom on a walk neither would I get by dog a diamond necklace. So, what do we mean by love?

Love is a gift of ourselves: Regardless of what image you want to use to describe love, it will always be of some gift given to the other. If we love our dogs, we buy them food, we take them on walks, we give of ourselves to these things through time, effort, and money. Anything we care about will require something from us.

Love is an emotion: we cannot assume that just giving from ourselves will make us love something. We feel the emotion of love. We only want to give ourselves when we feel something for the person either we like them or we have an infatuation with them. Love is the feeling of liking another person. Love is the feeling of desiring the good of another person. Love is the feeling of willing to give ourselves for the sake of the other person. If we limit love to a feeling, we will never truly love another. Our feelings come and go. Even though we may feel a great sense of love for another person one day, it may be gone the next. True love is not just a feeling but a desire for the other. We feel this desire even when we are angry, sad, happy, joyful, or even hurt by the other. A true sense of love is present regardless of our other emotions.

Love as a sacrifice: much like love being a gift of ourselves, love is also a sacrifice. If we truly love something, we will be hurt by it. This feeling of sacrificing is a necessary part. Love will require us to give up something. It will require us to care enough about it to give from ourselves and be hurt by it. This idea that love is sacrificial comes from almost all media sources and stories. Narcissus from Greek mythology love himself so much that he stared at his reflection in a pool until he died. The avengers sacrificed for the good of the planet because of their love for the people and desire for the good of the Earth. Any good character has a reason they fight, a reason for sacrificing their lives, and a reason for being good.

Love is demanding: often we think of love as a passing emotion: one day we love something and the next day we don't care. This isn't true love. This is a desire or the emotion of love. True love will continually require more of ourselves. The think we love will demand our attention and require us to chose it over other things. To truly love someone or something means that we must devote time and energy to it.

Love deepens over time: since loving something is sacrificial and demands our time and attention, the more we choose to love it and devote our lives to it, the more our love for it grows.

Thus love continues to deepen the more we choose to love. Love continues to grow with time as we give our time, attention, and energy to it. Something worth loving, is also worth devoting time to it.

Love is life-giving: the aspect of love as life-giving comes in two major forms. The first form is that any person who loves another supports them and build them up. Their goal is to make their friend or spouse better or a greater person. Love wants the good for the other. The life-giving aspect of love means that the other person is important, the other person has meaning, the other person's good is your good, the other person is worthy of praise, and the other person's fault are your issue. The second side of love as life-giving is more

Types of Love:

Love of things: we may think that we love things but for the most part we just really like them. Certain foods or hobbies are things we greatly enjoy. To love a thing means that we would devote our lives to that thing. For instance, a hobby. Hobbies that we love would require us to continually do them, to devote time to them, and to sacrifice in order to do them. These types of love are feeling and are expressed in our desire for the pleasure they bring.

Love of friends: friendships are an important part of our lives. Our love for our friends is about our desire for them, their good, and the meaning they bring to our lives. A good friend will sacrifice for his/her friends. She makes a point to spend time with her friends and support them. He makes a point to give up parts of his life for the good of his friends. All of these showcase friendly love: a love that provides mutual support for each other.

Romantic love: romantic love takes on a different aspect from the forms of love. Romantic love is a type of love where the person is devoted to the good of only one other person. A person can be romantic with another person out of a desire for their own good and the joy of romance, but this isn't love, its lust. A true romantic love desires the good of the other person as the only object of their love; a deep desire for the other person. Whereas a person can love many friends, a person cannot be devoted to several people at the same time. Romantic love is limited to one person at a time.

Lust:

All sins and vices are the same: they are deprivations of the good. This means that the good of love is twisted from its original goodness. The goals and aims of love have been twisted away from their goodness of sacrificial, life-giving love into a self-serving desire to possess the other. Here are some ways to think of lust.

Lust is self-serving: the goal and aim of all lustful feelings are to make the other our own. This can come in the form of desiring to be with the other person for our own interests and desires or to make the other person bend to the whim of our desires. Regardless of the aim, the goal is the same: lust seeks to make our interests more important than the good of the other person.

Lust treats the other person as an object: no part of our society better explores the side of lust as treating the other person as an object than advertising. In almost all advertising that tries to make

lust good or sexual love the selling point, the person in the advertisement is meaningless. The goal of the advertising is to make you want the person for our own desires and not the person for their own sake. Or, the advertising seeks to make lust and the desire to be loved more important than the desire to love and appreciate the other person.

Lust seeks to be loved: true love seeks to love the other. The desire of love is to seek the good in the other and orient our lives towards the happiness of that person. Lust seeks to be loved. The other person is only valuable to the extent that we are loved in return. Therefore, all relationships based on lust will fail because no love exists but only the self-centered desires of the person.

Lust desires to possess: On this point we can diverge from sexual imagery and move to any form of desire. The fullest sense of lust is the desire to possess the other. This can take the form of a person or an object. If we lust after an object, for instance a toy, game, sport, or activity, the desire to keep that object, to use that object, or to manipulate it for our pleasure controls our lives. The idea of “lusting after something” means that our attention, desires, and feelings are focused on attaining and possessing that objective. The same idea works for people. Lustful feelings desire to possess the person and use them for our own self-interests, as stated many times above.

How to counter lustful thoughts and grow to love:

1. Recognize our desires: often the hardest part in countering lust is that we have to acknowledge that our desires are lust and not love. Many relationships feel like love but are actually lust because at least one of the people in the relationship don't want to give themselves to the other. They desire something from that person and not the person themselves. What are you desiring? What do you want from that person or thing?
2. Come to know the person: the most common reaction in lustful thoughts is to see the person as an object, as something that we want, and not as person. We need to change our thoughts and come to know the person. What are their thoughts and desires? What is the good they are striving for? How can I come to know the person?
3. Learn to love: love will always demand something from us. Common forms of love include compliments, gift-giving, wanting to spend time with a person, engaging in the interests and life of the other, and many more. The goal of love is to desire the good of the other person and give of ourselves for the sake of the other. This is not easy. It can take a lifetime to do this well. Start with simple acts of love. Focus on people you often ignore who would not return the same type of love. Be willing to reach outside your groups so that your love isn't because they are already your friends who want to love you.