

A CENTURY OF
TOUGH LOVE

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“I have this request too : do not be annoyed by what I have written, for I have merely carried out what I was commanded to do. I say this because we who plague people with words are many nowadays, while those who teach by actions are very few.”

-St. Maximos the Confessor
from *Four Hundred Texts on Love*
7th Century AD

Love is the highest ideal. Love is powerful. Love is greatly misunderstood. Love is the reason behind our lives. Love gives us a *reason* to live. Love is also the excuse we use for many varieties of bad behavior. Love is war. Love is impossible. Love is unattainable. Love is amazing. Love is tough.

God is love (1 John 4:8) but is love (that is, our finite conception of it) God?

A CENTURY OF TOUGH LOVE

“But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.”
John 5:42

1. (August 2019) Love has been claimed by some to be the unifier of all humanity. And ostensibly, love *is* a thing in which people can find common ground. All know, however, that the principle of love as a universal unifier remains in the realm of theory and not practice.

The year 2020 is about to descend upon us. Inevitably, the theory will be sorely tested.

To start this discourse, I ask this question: Can love exist without confrontation and conflict?

2. As far as it concerns you, love can only happen in a situation in which you are *involved*. That is, you can't be loving from a remote position. Plus, your judgements about the character of love in any given situation will have no weight from a remote position. Bear this in mind as I begin this exposition.

3. Love has guts. It is dynamic and not sentimental. We rally around the principle of love because we sense that it informs the everyday reality of all people. But we agree that love is

difficult as much as it is beautiful. The times ahead will not invalidate the reality of love, but they will surely force us to go beyond personal sentiment and public sloganeering into the guts of what it is in reality.

4. Love is dynamic and requires self-sacrifice, and we must *grow* in that dynamic and in self-sacrifice. We will not *default* into love, but must choose on a daily basis to enter into the difficult situations that catalyze the creation of a loving disposition within us.

5. Jesus Christ has been the perennial image of self-sacrifice, and all accounts of His life confirm an unselfish disposition being consistent within Him. For this reason, almost all people (exceptions being the most cynical and nihilistic among us) seek to have Jesus “on their side.” People will often go to great lengths to prove that Jesus would support their “cause.” Yet we see in the Gospel narratives that Jesus supported the human race, not the “causes” of the human race. He did not support Jewish causes (aside from the fulfillment of the promises of the prophets) and he certainly did not support Gentile causes, Roman or otherwise.

6. Jesus particularly despised *religious* causes, and clearly saw the hypocrisy that they contained in actual practice. He cried out against the Jewish Pharisees with bold ferocity (cf. *Matthew* 23). He also came against the people’s personal agendas and “causes” by telling them often to *sin no more* (*John* 5:14; *John* 8:11). Whether the behavior seemed religiously righteous or was unabashedly indulgent, Jesus was bold to confront it. This is because He was *secure in His love*...He loved those whom He

confronted, and never conflated behavior with identity.

7. Those who seek to love like Jesus will never conflate behavior with identity. Like Jesus, we see that love starts from God, the Heavenly Father (cf. *1 John 4:10*). In Christ, we love others as God does; we love people because they are His children and we are their brothers and sisters. However, like Jesus, we can always confront behaviors and still be loving, because behavior is not identity.

8. Behaviors are themselves, in effect, responses to confrontation. People are confronted either by nature (the physical world) or super-nature (a human or divine will). People never live in a vacuum that is devoid of confrontation. Love perhaps can be defined as the fruit of a confrontation that leads to a behavior or behaviors becoming of a person's essential identity as a *beloved*. Thus, love can never be neutral, or "non-confrontational."

9. Love must be tough and confrontational. The agent of love, inasmuch as the confrontation is concerned, must be settled in themselves. That is, they must not *seek their own* (*1 Corinthians 13:5*). Because the agent is settled, they can confront directly without distraction or double mindedness (cf. *James 1:8*).

10. (January 2022) The ideal of love is always bastardized by pagan culture and pagan spirituality because these cultures are always oriented toward physical and metaphysical objects that are, essentially, dying.

11. Pagans devote themselves to and obsess themselves with people who will either fail them, betray them in weakness, or (ultimately) die. Pagans call all varieties of sexual behavior “love,” but they are really just devoting themselves to feelings that are fleeting and self-indulgent because they have let their eternal essence be clouded by hurt, bitterness, and fear.

12. The weakest conception of the eternal life of the soul is reincarnation, and it reflects the type of metaphysical escapism that its proponents live in day-to-day. Love is confrontational, and the agent of love must be settled, and thus has no desire to escape.

13. The highest conception of love is the Trinity of the godhead: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is a perfect relationship of three distinct co-eternal persons. The miracle is that we are invited into that perfect relationship by Jesus (the Son) in the Holy Spirit. The entrance was made possible by the Cross and His shed blood on Calvary.

14. When I was young, like many others in the season of adolescence, I desired a perfect relationship. My inner thoughts at the time conceived of a female companion that would be a type of “savior.” My journal writings at the time reflect this. I was not religious, so it was strange that I would use that language. What was I seeking to be saved from?

15. I was lonely. I understood love as a sentiment, and wanted to feel that I could be accepted by someone who I thought was beautiful, because I myself was often made to feel unattractive and rejected. I did not believe in God or divine purposes at the time, so did not see any real providence in my discontent. I

mixed these unprocessed emotions and unhealthy responses to pain with the lure of sexual desire and I thus became, like so many of my peers, addicted to the idea of sex.

16. Sex was largely visual to me and had its most abundant manifestation in my fantasies. I cared very little for people themselves, but cared a lot about doing activities that gave me pleasure and relief. Pornography was the perfect temporary fix for this void. What a perversion! Real human beings trapped in a frozen (and often degrading) image. No possibility of relationship, communication, nor confrontation, thus no possibility for love.

17. While in my addiction, I rarely if ever considered the conditions of the women that I viewed in these pornographic contexts. I am so thankful for the blood of Jesus, which covers every transgression! Because although it was done unwittingly, I inevitably participated in the abuse of thousands of women by engaging in that sinful paradigm.

18. It was not coincidental that, as my pornographic imagination developed, I also developed a disposition that loathed conflict and any sort of relational inconvenience. It deadened my mind. I was never able to fully understand why people in general and women in particular would never develop any real interest in me, in spite of my agreeableness. This “agreeableness” was an agreeableness of indifference and death.

19. Love is not, in its essence, “agreeable.” Love seeks the best of its object, and while it *suffers long* (1 Corinthians 13:4), it will not tolerate the person to be anything less than healthy,

fulfilled, and fully alive. Love, real tough love, would rather hazard sundering conflict than tolerate the slow death of his or her beloved.

20. Love forsakes control of the beloved. Mature love understands that it will never be able to control the person or solicit true love while interfering with his or her agency.

21. This issue of agency begets the classical argument for both the existence and the necessity of and for hell. Hell has been prophetically conveyed as eternal separation and eternal punishment, as an issue from the hand of a loving God. While I do not expect philosophically-minded people to accept this readily at face value (I certainly didn't for a long time), I can guarantee that no logical divine formula (eg. Christian Universalism) can escape this reality without fatal flaws. If control and manipulation of the beloved cancels out true love in the human realm, it will certainly cancel it out in the realm of God as well.

22. Love must learn the difference between influence and manipulation. Influence can affect a free-will agent off of the hell-bound course, but manipulation cannot. In manipulation, once the hand is removed, all will return to how things were before the manipulation began.

23. Loving influence must be established strong and with intention. It is the personal work of the lover, and it must be done in faith, because the result of the influence will not be seen immediately. Not even Jesus had the privilege of seeing immediate results of His loving influence, even if He saw immediate results in His miraculous healing works in the

bodies and souls of people.

24. The love that Jesus expressed did not garner Him immediate approval by His followers. His apostles often thought that they knew better than Him. Few people who read the gospels take note at how many times the apostles contradict Him and throw doubt upon His plans and intentions (eg. *Matthew 14:15-18; Mark 3:21; Luke 5:5; John 4:31-33*). But Jesus's loving influence was established and it never changed course.

25. There is a deep truth that we find in nature...the power of the river. The river carves out the terrain and smoothes rough edges better than any act of blunt force.

26. The Holy Spirit made a very strong point to take coarse and flawed men and put them under Jesus's care for the three-and-a-half-or-so years of His earthly ministry. Eleven of His closest disciples (as well as many others who knew Him personally) went on to lead lives of unflinching devotion to Jesus and His Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit. They were the quintessential fruit of loving influence. Yet, one of Jesus's closest apostles still chose the way of perdition (cf. *John 17:12*).

27. Perhaps the river analogy can go further. Tough loving influence not only smoothes out the rough edges, but also widens the channel. Real love expands, and moves us to widen our heart for the whole world, not just in theory but in actual practice. Jesus taught a love that was not bound by blood or natural affection, but recognized that the providence of the Father could bring Him face-to-face with one who His

love could complete.

28. I know that my conscience is not clear unless the vista is broad. God has put me in many relational situations in which there is no easy answer, yet the hope in my heart rises when I see how Christ's love, after I have done all I can, expands the terrain. Divorced from self-interest, my sphere of relationship expands through influence, and many are affected, at first to their good, but eventually to their perfection in faith.

29. Love must expand, and real love, tough love, must be in fellowship with others who abide in this principle of expansion. One of the gravest trials of my life came in a season when I felt like a "lone ranger" in a battlefield of very broken people. Receiving hurt and broken people is one of the greatest challenges and blessings of commitment to a local church ministry. God brings the broken and the needy to you, and you must be so yielded to Him that your own version and resource of love becomes exhausted, and you are loving in Him, with absolutely no sense of or hope of a return benefit.

30. In 2008, after walking in the light of Jesus Christ for a few years, I remember being especially equipped with some sense of real compassion. My conscience was already incapable of rejecting people who I knew God had brought into my path. At the time, only a few people who I was with had the same radical imperative to accept all who came our way. I knew very well that, alone, I was ineffective, mainly because I was so susceptible to manipulation.

31. One of the reasons why love must be tough is because of the tendency for people to default into manipulation as a

response to a loving advance. If we are in Christ, we are called to love the unloveable. Now this, of course, is a paradox. But even so, the Gospel says, “*For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?*” (Matthew 5:46). Isn’t it also true that it is *not* an act of grace to love someone who is *lovable*, but just a consequence of natural affection?

32. Jesus loved the unloveable. Most of the unloveable people that I met in my critical transitional years in Christianity had experienced decades’ worth of rejection, humiliation, and abuse by the time that my path crossed theirs. These people would be drawn to me and pick up on my newfound compassion, but they would also, without knowing it, take advantage of my naïveté, weakness, and mildness as well.

33. In the early days of my Christian walk, I found myself easily manipulated into giving sympathy and agreement where I should not have given sympathy or agreement. During His lifetime, Jesus was effective in His interaction; I was not. It would take me years upon years to begin to come into an understanding in my heart as to why this was the case.

34. One of the things in life that I am most thankful for is that around the year 2010, I found a group of people who shared the same vision of love. Some of them, like me, were babes in the discipline of tough love, and knew very little of the actual practice of it; others, like Pastors Robyn and Tony Kassas, were veterans having lived out this life of tough love for decades all over the world.

35. My relationship to the Kassas family and the founding members of what would later become Times of Refreshing

Christian Center New York City (TORCC-NY) gave me the two greatest gifts; a living standard and relational accountability. What did I need accountability for the most? I needed accountability for the setting of proper spiritual boundaries in the context of Christ's calling us to do nothing less than give our lives for others. Thus, 2010 ended the fruitless and frustrating "lone ranger" phase of my life.

36. Love is in both giving and receiving a timely rebuke. You don't have to be alive for a very long time to realize that the most acute form of indifference is conflict-avoidance. As my pastor always says, "Peace at all costs' is not a virtue."

37. The weakest forms of Christianity believe that obedience to God is divorced from obedience to other people and ecclesiastical leaders. It is just as weak to believe that obedience is contingent upon agreeing with the thing that you are being asked to obey. Agreements are in constant flux and do not reflect loving reality.

38. One of the most powerful revelations in my life was this: the highest trust in God was trusting that God was working providentially through the people that he brought into my life. That trust is consummated when real love is established between myself and those others, in spite of diverse disagreements and differences.

39. It is possible that the greatest gift that the Kassas family has bestowed upon me through their ministry and care is the sense that living for others is not a special Christian calling, but part of our original design and the only way to live in Christ. It has been a long time in the making, but I noticed

real transformation in the way of love when my cares and distresses had more to do with concerns for loved ones rather than unfulfilled desires of my own.

40. Whether I am in distress about my own unfulfilled desire, or the suffering of another, it is distress nonetheless. But the point of difference between suffering as an evildoer or suffering as a Christian (cf. *1 Peter 4:15-16*) is manifest in the conscience.

41. I have discerned that there is very little instant gratification in a life devoted to truly loving others. This is why Jesus commands that we forgive people *not seven times, but up to seventy times seven* (*Matthew 18:22*). He could have been “more spiritual,” and said “forgive infinitely,” but I believe that He deliberately gave us a number so that when we forgave real and painful offenses, we would do so in a real *hope* that we may never have to forgive that offense again. I think that this is the difference between forgiveness and resignation.

42. The real pain involved in making your life completely open and vulnerable to others in the way that Jesus did comes from the accusations that constantly come your way. These accusations most often do not come from remote enemies, but from those to whom you have poured out for and suffered the most. The devil speaks through these wounded ones: “You never should have gotten involved. I am WORSE now because of you.” And then we go through the cycle: “Have I really done all that I could in the way of unselfish love?” Of course I didn’t.

43. In truth, devoting my life to others has brought me into an even more sober realization that, deep down, all I care about is

my own happiness, comfort, and justification. *Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24)*. God's transforming power within me seems at times too subtle. Why can't I just stop being selfish? These are the mental trips that the accuser has sent me on in my season of living for others and learning how to truly love.

44. It is a season of faith. I would have all people on a program that is a bee-line to permanent and positive change. But that is a very rare thing. Looking at the big picture, nowhere in history have we ever seen even the best of influencers lead people into such a "bee-line to permanent and positive change."

45. We must stay in the fight, be willing to get our hands dirty, be willing to be wrong, and wrong often, and endure the accusations which are often justified, in at least some sense. Spiritually, we are always to live in the state of John the Baptist: *Jesus must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:30)*.

46. Assaults on our pride should be welcome. God calls us not only to love people who are extremely difficult to be with, He also calls us to love people who are ideological enemies of the secular world; hated and unpopular people. When we take up His call to love the deplorables, we become ideological enemies of the world ourselves. If we commit to the supernatural life of Jesus, our trajectory will be naturally toward those who are ideological enemies of the world. This is a good thing. The world is passing away, but His kingdom and His love is forever.

47. Our love must become unmeasured. In my own life, love started out measured because I was somewhat aware of the cost. “I will move in Christ’s love, I will be misunderstood, and this will turn out bad.” My spiritual mother, Robyn Kassas, taught me by her life to launch off of the shore of Christ’s love in spite of the apparent chaos, lack of balance, and feeling of losing control of life. She inspired me, through her obedience and reflection of Christ, to go beyond the sight of shore, without a “plan B,” trusting the love of Jesus all the way. Otherwise, we are not trusting in Him at all.

48. The measuring of our love is an indication that we still want to be in control. I am learning to not measure time, nor potential results. Unmeasured love is the place where the conscience ultimately finds rest and liberty. I can sit in the presence of Jesus for hours, and if the focus is on His unmeasured and eternal paradigm of love, it was time well-spent. God orders the situations of life around this intimacy, and we become surprised at how things move forward.

49. I have to accept that the invention of telecommunication was providentially ordained by God in the same way that the invention of the printing press was providentially used in prior centuries. The printing press was the beginning of mass media, and while it in some ways typified the mythical box of Pandora, God used it during the Reformation to steer the people of the world out of mass theological darkness. But it is easier to see that *now*. How can those who are earnestly seeking after Christ’s love go beyond the anxiety and obligation that telecommunication brings?

50. If telecommunication is over-saturation (and it is) I ask God to keep me saturated with his real, living, tough, challenging, and engaging love. For the real Christian, their conscience is open to assault whenever it is not engaged in the things of Christ's real love, and telecommunication creates a grid that allows for any communication to enter in at any time, and if I am not already saturated by Christ's love, I will not be ready. I will be overwhelmed.

51. I truly believe that spiritual dispositions that were previously associated with mystics must become the disposition of the average Christian now. Christians must be conversant with God's word at all times of the day, from the moment that they wake up, to the moment that they go to sleep, and by God's grace, they will dream in His word as well. Robyn Kassas has taught us that this continual conversation with God is possible! When people speak with her, they are eating the fruit of her conversation with her Heavenly Father. The fruit of our conversation (cf. *2 Corinthians 1:12*, KJV) will be bitter if we are saturated with anything other than Christ's love, as He desires to live in us in both strength and humility.

52. And what is the alternative to Christ's love? We begin to walk on the spectrum of mental illness. Every modern human's mind is being assaulted at all times. There is no vacuum or neutral space. The zombie became a trope in modern literature because that is exactly the type of creature that Satan wants to raise up in these end times. So again, I ask, what is the alternative to saturation in Christ's love?

53. The virtue of productivity is a joke. It is so shallow compared to a true saturation in the love of Christ. Look at

what is going on around us. A whole generation of teenagers and people who have the emotional maturity of teenagers have hijacked the creative canvas of the world, lifting up the basest of emotions, and mocking centuries of worldwide cultural development in creative expression.

54. Whatever your great idea is, it cannot compete with the army of influencers who spent years expending themselves to bring you shallow content and stimulation of your most base emotions. But at any moment in time, Christ's love can strike you, saturate you, and relieve your conscience fully of the darkness of unworthiness and obligation that you have been conditioned to accept.

55. Every moment is an opportunity to exercise Christ's love, if He lives within you. Some people describe Christ's manifest love as "tough," others as "uncomfortable," and still others are bold to call it "suffering" (cf. *Colossians 1:24*). But one thing is for sure, it looks nothing like the self-serving lust that the modern pagan and compromised Christian call "love."

56. When real love is exercised in Christ, God steps in supernaturally to surmount the challenges. A situation involving real love will contain an element of the impossible in it. It will also contain the element of the ineffable and the element of surprise.

57. Miracles are seen by those who are willing to risk all for God. If there is any possibility for a rational or logical resolution of a situation, the divine economy will allow those possibilities to run their course. Generations go by without a miracle because the sensible things are working themselves

out. Then there is a generation that needs to face the impossible, and they are the ones who see true supernatural miracles.

58. Isn't it amazing to know that ultimately, Christ's love will have the victory on earth? Yet we spend our whole lives learning not to *hate* Christ's love even in its most basic forms. A willingness to suffer for those who don't deserve anything but punishment is the very first principle!

59. What has been the fruit of your lifetime of indulgence? *What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death (Romans 6:21).*

60. Many modern advocates of the words "love" and "tolerance" are in reality filled with bitterness and hatred, and this would be shown if they would allow the light of truth to expose their inner thoughts and motivations. For the verb "to tolerate" itself is rife with scorn, condescension, and (ultimately) hatred. We do not value what we tolerate, and we certainly do not really love who we merely tolerate.

61. Moment of reflection: This is a possible juxtaposition between hell and heaven. In my early 20s, I suffered because because I was putting my penis in places where I had no business putting my penis. Decades later, I now suffer willingly for others, out of the abundance of the peace and joy that abides within me on account of no external or visible circumstance. I even choose to live amongst those whose infirmities create environments of instability and strife, so that they may have the opportunity to see the light of a different

way in at least one person.

62. There are some mornings when I wake up feeling like a spiritual slug. It is in this very state that I am aware of the crossroad that I am at. If I recognize my spiritual poverty, and wait diligently for Jesus Christ's love to both come in to, and then be prominent in my spiritual purview, then the day is a tangible victory. But to neglect this spiritual waiting and expectant stillness is to tread a path of mental sludge.

63. Great saints have often stated that the ideal spiritual situation is when we are able to meet with God for a significant period of time each day before we meet with other people. This may not always be possible, but I simply cannot conceive of starting a day scrolling through internet-based content before reading and meditating on the Bible and the testimony of Jesus. This is effective even if I am in a mode of spiritual sluggishness.

64. There are some people who are so completely addicted to ephemera, they will never taste love, ever, in their lives.

65. It is my estimation that, prior to some very powerful and moving conversions that occurred several years into my confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and God, I had absolutely no true knowledge nor active experience of love beyond theory or providential accident.

66. If true love (the Greek ἀγάπη) is the fruit only of *deep* maturity in Christ, which is an ultimate thing, why should I believe that a person who mocks Christ, treads His Person underfoot, or simply gives Him a nominal or culturally

acceptable tip-of-the-hat, knows anything about love?

67. How can I regard cultural uses of the word “love” as anything other than a manifestation of Satan’s deception? A culture to which Christ’s cross and salvation is a foreign thing is antichrist, and has nothing of love in it.

68. The Bible says, *Love never fails* (1 Corinthians 13:8a). This means that if the thing fails, it is/was not love.

69. John Wesley was a preacher, theologian, and the founder of the Methodist movement. He lived a good long life between the years 1703 and 1791. John Wesley regards his conversion to Christianity to have occurred when he was thirty-five years old. His conversion was catalyzed by the reading of a passage, not of Scripture directly, but from Martin Luther’s preface to the biblical book of Romans.

70. The passage from Martin Luther, the one to which John Wesley gives credit for his conversion, reads as follows: “Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God...Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times. This knowledge and confidence in God’s grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performed in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything out of love and praise to God who has shown him grace. Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible to

separate heat and light from fire.”

71. Comb through the words Luther’s comment on the Epistle to the Romans. The conversion of John Wesley involved the realization of the abandon of love, a gladness to suffer all things for anyone that God may be indicating through His Spirit. Wesley had served as a gospel minister, preaching salvation through Jesus for *decades before* this conversion event (known as the “Aldersgate Experience.”). Yet he did not consider his love real until this specific truth found its way in him.

72. How many professing Christians have a conversion like John Wesley’s? This is not a light thing. For Wesley, embracing God’s love directly meant taking on a life of intentional suffering and hardship for the sake of others, even for those who would be his enemies. Apostle Paul accepted the same life, as do all serious Christians over the many centuries of the Church.

73. One of the greatest enemies of real love is obligation. Obligation cuts off both the spontaneity and creativity of real love, and makes the conscience a slave to a false guilt that will renew itself through the whims of man and *not* the truths of God.

74. God esteems family, even blood family, very highly in His spiritual economy. “*Honor your mother and father, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth*” (Deuteronomy 5:16 via Ephesians 6:2-3). But blood family is one of the most common sources of

obligation, and the Christian must take heed of this.

75. The story of Saint Perpetua completely confounds the rational mind's sense of familial obligation. In the city of Carthage, Africa, second century AD, Saint Perpetua willingly gave her life to be a Christian martyr shortly after her conversion from paganism to Christianity...and shortly after giving birth to a baby boy.

76. Saint Perpetua was given several opportunities to renounce her newfound faith in Christ for the sake of her loved ones, in particular her infant son. She turned those opportunities down and faced the wild beasts in the Roman amphitheater, who themselves miraculously spared her life. She was soon after killed by the executioner's sword at the end of the games.

77. Saint Perpetua took the Bible's message seriously. Apostle Paul, who also died by the sword, said, *"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ..." (Philippians 3:8)*. And Jesus Himself famously said, *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37)*.

78. Saint Perpetua is not a fringe figure or a heretic. She is a true early Church saint whose spiritual courage is recognized across denominational lines. Nor is she the only one who made such radical sacrifices. The Christian faith grew in the early centuries on the shoulders of giants like her.

79. Perpetua's love, even for her son, started with God, and recognized that whether she lived or died, or was present in the flesh or absent (cf. *Philippians 1:22-24*), it would be God alone and His good providences that would bring goodness and blessing to the life of her son. She had the faith to entrust her son into God's hands, even when it came to her showdown with the devil. And it is true that at that time, the devil had the seat in that city of Carthage.

80. It is ironic that the martyrdom of Saint Perpetua and her companion Saint Felicitas would happen in Carthage, a city traditionally known for child sacrifice and Molech worship. The religion of the Carthaginian empire would offer the blood of babies to demons for blessings and national favor. Did Saint Perpetua effectively reverse this curse over Carthage, the city which later brought forth the great Tertullian and other powerful saints? How God's love and favor was activated by her Christ-like sacrifice! This baby, now firmly in the arms of the true Church, would never have to live under the shadow of demonic superstition.

81. Conversely, it is a loving thing when a child walks away from his parents' godless traditions. This is somewhat the theme of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It is the hardest thing in the world to come out from under the spirit of obligation and to give what all know is tacit disapproval. Even if the disapproval is not hostile, it is firm. God asks us to pursue His kingdom and righteousness undeterred (cf. *Matthew 6:33*).

82. Evil loves to be approved. Love disapproves of evil. When evil is stirred by disapproval, tacit or explicit, all sorts of

violence also gets stirred up.

83. Christians who avoid the responsibility of disapproving evil are ignorant. The disapproval of evil has been an important characteristic of godliness since the time of Noah, who diligently built an ark and was considered a madman for one hundred and twenty years, as people mocked his warning about world-wide destruction. The New Testament calls Noah a *preacher of righteousness* (2 Peter 2:5).

84. Obligation ultimately begets evil. Tradition ultimately begets evil. Love is vital, bold, courageous, and willing to disapprove of evil, not bending to excuses born by tradition and obligation.

85. John the Baptist publicly disapproved of King Herod's marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias. For this reason, John was imprisoned and later beheaded (cf. *Mark 6:14-29*). We have every reason to believe that John and King Herod had previously enjoyed an amicable or at least cordial relationship. Evil cannot stand disapproval.

86. Expressing disapproval endangers our standing with people as they are. But such an expression can be a loving and self-sacrificial gesture pointing towards what people can become. I have bought in to the lie that people can never change. But I know that I have changed, so that statement is patently untrue.

87. "All that is not eternal is eternally out of date," says C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*. As much as it infuriates those outside of Christ, the Christian must love people with the absolute

knowledge that those that they are to love are eternal creatures, eternal souls, who have a destiny either of eternal beatitude or eternal suffering.

88. *Love suffers long and is kind...* suffers long = the Greek word *makrothymeo*, which means “long in spirit.” Love allows His body to be elongated on the Cross, dragged down by gravity in agony. Yet in that suffering, He is gentle and kind. Christians are often encouraged to not be “doormats” to other people. But the greatest of spiritual writers, Oswald Chambers, said, “[Apostle] Paul said he knew how to be a ‘door-mat’ without resenting it, because the mainspring of his life was devotion to Jesus.” Jesus Himself bids us, “*Take up your cross and follow Me*” (*Matthew 16:24*).

89. *Love does not envy...* Love is satisfied with reality. Reality is the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are in perfect relationship, and they are ever-present in this perfect relationship, which we are invited to live in through Christ at all times. Everything else fails and dies, and in envy we burn for these false realities. They always let us down. But in Christ, we have perfect relationship and reality at all times in Him. The genius of God is that He is a perfect relationship.

90. *Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up...* The more I know Christ’s love, the more unworthy I feel, and the more thankful I am that He is there, in proximity. For me, this is a daily reality. When the tides of pride subside, Jesus remains.

91. *Love does not behave rudely...* Can we get to the place where we understand that every indulgence in crude levity or coarse humor is a slayer of real love? I heard Henry Rollins once say

something to this effect: “Don’t say that you were only joking, because you know that you weren’t.”

92. *Love does not seek its own...* This is why love and lust can never be compatible. No amount of word-games or dismissiveness can overturn this truth.

93. *Love is not provoked...* George MacDonald once described heaven as a place where “all that is not music is silence.” Giving in to provocation leads to the creation of a lot of noise.

94. *Love thinks no evil...* Jesus made it clear that thought and deed cannot be separate (cf. *Matthew 5:21-30*).

95. *Love does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth...* When children encounter evil, it is either a source of horror or shame. A seared conscience is the worst thing a person can acquire in adulthood. A system of relative truth is satanic.

96. *Love bears all things...* Somewhat like Atlas of the myths, all is carried by Him who is love (cf. *1 John 4:16*). The Lord Jesus Christ is preeminent.

97. *Love believes all things...* In spite of our reasonable suspicions, when it comes to the word and testimony of others, we should start by believing them. A cynical disposition towards God and other people is an ungodly mode of self-protection. The most powerful saints often left legacies of naivety, and were known for being easily suckered (John Wesley was one, Apostle Paul another [cf. *2 Corinthians*]). But those saints who are now on the other side of eternity have full wisdom and will never again be naive, so what did they have to

lose in believing while they walked in faith?

98. *Love hopes all things...* Saying “that’s just how that person is, they will never change,” is the cowardly complaint of spiritual defeatism. And it is a lie from Satan, who desires to drag as many into the lake of fire as he possible can on that dreaded Day (cf. *Revelation 21:8*). Love never stops praying and love never stops hoping.

99. *Love endures all things.* Christians will be hated and accused in this world until the fires of the end come. Our whole purpose is to love like Him to the death, because love is stronger than death (cf. *Song of Solomon 8:6; I Corinthians 15:55*). *Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:57).*

100. *Love never fails.*



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