

"PRIDE AND FEAR: HINDRANCES TO LOVE"

(Romans 12:9-21)

(Chuck Swindoll)

It's fair to say that most people aspire to the kind of love described by Paul. I don't know of anyone who wouldn't want to create an enduring legacy of loving memories for family and friends. So why is Christian love so rare? Why do people hide behind masks or become so undiscerning? Two reasons: pride and fear.

Pride poisons love. Some men and women possess incredible talent and impressive intellect but fail to love because they are too proud to stoop, too proud to reach out, too proud to ask for help, too proud to be vulnerable. So they cover their faces with something pretty, put on a good show, pretend to care, and keep all of their relationships superficial. That way there's no risk of being truly known . . . or hurt.

Fear is no less deadly to love. Some people fear giving genuine love because it comes with the terrifying risk of loss, or perhaps rejection. So they settle for pleasing people, no matter what the cost to their personal integrity. Too timid to confront and too fragile to seek good, they accept whatever comes their way and comfort themselves with the words "I love unconditionally." But really, their love is a cheap trinket.

The irony is that people know when love is hypocritical or undiscerning. Sooner or later, they know when pride is putting on a show or when fear is bargaining for security. Love motivated by pride or fear is self-centered, and nothing substitutes for real love, which is above all selfless. Love, in its simplest terms, is seeking the highest good of the other person.

Sometimes, love is tough, stern, strong hearted, unwilling to look the other way when evil is present. It's not making someone comfortable by telling them what they want to hear. Sadly, love occasionally has to be tough, firm, and unbending. More often, however, love must be tender, marked by compassion, understanding, tolerance, grace, and forgiveness. In every case, whether tough or tender, authentic love seeks the highest, greatest good of the other.

