

## Falling in Love

*"Love suffers long and is kind."* 1 Corinthians 13:4

*"Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel. Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.' So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and... they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her."* Genesis 29:18-20

Have you ever been in love with someone? I suspect that when you started talking to this person on your first date or encounter you didn't say to yourself "I'm going to fall in love with this person." Now it sometimes happens that you are aware of the goodness or attractiveness of the other person on a first date. For example, Alice's first date was quite excellent. They talked for hours and of course there was some smooching in there too. And Alice went home and told her family that her guy was the man she was going to marry. But she did not say she had fallen in love with him. That would take a while longer.

Love is not premeditated, calculated or preplanned. It is spontaneous. It bursts forth in extraordinary ways. There are lots of things, besides falling in love, that cannot be premeditated or preplanned. For example, we cannot predetermine our thoughts and actions by simply stating: "Now I will never think any evil thoughts and I will believe everything that Jesus would have me to believe." On Hal's first visit to one of the churches he used to attend years ago he was not sure what he believed. He had just gone to that church because of the urging of a friend of his. One of the ministers told him "We love Jesus here." He was not comfortable with all that Jesus talk and was not thrilled about that statement. But he liked the music and the sermon was pretty good so he kept going to the church. It was three or four years of hearing sermons, singing songs, interacting with guys in a men's group and reading the Bible before he was ready to have a personal relationship with Jesus. But when it happened it seemed to have happened suddenly and without preplanning.

The characteristic of love is spontaneity. For some people who were baptized as an the baptism itself might be the moment of rebirth. Or perhaps an inspirational message by a gifted preacher prompted a feeling of falling in love with God or Jesus. I have heard people tell their stories of being reborn. They speak of getting goosebumps or shedding tears, and I have heard one person say she had the excitement and fervor similar to when she fell in love with her husband. Many people say they will never forget that moment. I think that was because the Holy Spirit was having his way with them. When the Holy Spirit has his way with us we start living according to his standards and his wishes for us without realizing it.

A friend of mine told me recently about a feeling he had about his church and the people there. He said it was as if he was part of an organism, that he felt like he knew with certainty that he was joined and enmeshed with this community. He went on to say he felt connected to other Christians as well, as if he was breathing with them and was part of a body, the church body. He explained that he did not calculate that he would feel this way or that he would come to this realization, he just knew it with certainty all of a sudden. As he related his story, I realized that this was not him. It was the Holy Spirit. For this man this seemed to be a spontaneous moment of love and breathtaking bonding. I thought to myself that the Holy Spirit was having his way with him. He said he was totally unconcerned with his emotions or opinions.

It is this kind of tumbling, this kind of crashing that is the very evidence of real spontaneous love. Oswald Chambers says this: "The nature of everything involved with the life of God in us is only discerned when we have already been through it and it is in our past." Having read stories of people's experiencing so close to another, the realization of the experience came after they had already gone through it. Chambers says that the "fountains from which love flows are in God, not in us. God's love is there only because, quote: "it has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit." as Paul said in Romans 5:5.

If we try to prove to God how much we love him, it is a sure sign that we really don't love him. The evidence of our love for God is the absolute spontaneity of our love, which flows naturally from God's nature within us and not our own nature.

A man ran into a burning building to rescue the people there and he did this without thinking, without calculating the costs and benefits. That is he did it out of spontaneous love. And later when people asked him how or why he did it. He simply said: I don't know.