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Love is a Decision

As a pastor, I have conducted quite a number of weddings. Before I marry a couple, however, I always give them counseling. As you know, one part of the wedding ceremony involves a vow that the individuals make to each other before God that they will remain married until death. I try to emphasize to them what that really means.

Sadly, a number of those I have married have since divorced – in spite of their vow to each other before God. Why do you suppose that is the case? They all started out so much in love and with every intention of staying together.

I have thought a lot about that and I believe I know the main reason. At the deepest level, their love was about feelings of attraction they had toward one another. Unfortunately, feelings are fickle and often fleeting. So, when the feelings leave and stress gets interjected into the relationship, it falls apart.

For many people, feelings are king when it comes to what they do in life. And this doesn't relate only to marriage or other personal relationships. It applies to virtually everything. The motto of the day seems to be, "If it feels good do it, and when the feelings are gone, it is okay to quit."

But Jesus taught us a foundation for love which goes beyond feelings. And that foundation is based on a decision – a decision to love. That kind of love can endure even when feelings go away. It endures because the individual has determined to stay faithful regardless of the ebb and flow of feelings.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus talked about this kind of love. You need to keep in mind that he said this on the occasion of the Last Supper, just after Judas left to betray him. Jesus told the rest of his disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." NIV

Let's be clear though, this kind of love does not mean that you must like everything others do, or that you approve of all the actions they take. In fact, you can actually despise the actions a person takes but still love the person. It also doesn't mean that you will never confront another person about the bad actions they take. In fact, sometimes it means that you must confront them because the path they are taking is either self-destructive or will result in harm to others.

Love that is based on a decision is a love for the person. And you can love a person even when their words and actions are disappointing, hurtful, or even hateful. And that is the kind of love Jesus promoted. In fact, if you can learn to have that kind of love, you can use this principle in every area of your life.

In the capitol environment, there is a great deal of competition, and feelings can run very deep. And that is okay. There is nothing wrong with vigorous and passionate debate. But in the middle of it all, you can decide that you will love the people you are interacting with – no matter what.

