



## LOVE: AN UNFULFILLED NEED OR AN UNPAID DEBT? BY: JEREMY LELEK

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### LOVE NEEDS AND LOVE TANKS?

For the past several decades Christians have been bombarded by the “mental health” establishment with the message that in order to love well, one must have his or her “need” for love adequately met. This secular hypothesis was posed by humanistic theorists decades ago, and the Church has often embraced it as if it emerged from the very Word of God. There have even been some within Christendom who have gone so far as to add to the two commands offered by Jesus to “Love God and others” with a third command to love yourself. (Luke 12:31) While the messages of “love tanks” and “love languages” have profoundly shaped the way believers view love within marriages, such messages may have served only to confuse believers as to what godly love actually is.

Where has such teaching gone wrong? The message of “love needs” feels so accurate. Anyone involved relationally with another individual can certainly attest to the fact that it is much easier to love when being loved (or having one’s “love tank” filled or one’s “love language” spoken). Yet, this view of love has led many within the Church far away from the Bible’s conceptualization of what love truly exemplifies. Not to mention, it has created an expectation within marriage that has tragically left many couples discouraged and disillusioned. This being the case, it is noteworthy to briefly examine the Bible’s teachings on the topic.

### LOVE AS A DEBT, NOT A NEED

Rather than framing love among believers as a “need” to be sought, Paul framed it as a “debt” to be paid. In Romans 13:8, Paul says, “Let no outstanding debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another...” (NIV). For the average human being (if not all human beings) this statement runs completely counter to the heart’s natural perception of things. To view love in relationship as something “I owe” versus something “I need” is staggering. Yet, it is precisely how Paul explained it. His exposition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 completely highlights the outward focus of true love in that it is “patient”, “kind”, “rejoices in truth”, “protects”, “trusts”, “hopes”, and “perseveres”.

These characteristics stand in stark contrast to what love is not: pride (I am the center of the universe, and my “needs” must be attended), rude (I will use and manipulate you to get what I want), and self-seeking (I will meet your “needs” so you will meet my “needs” in return). Paul points couples to something much higher than this. He points them to the eternal decrees spoken by Jesus: “Love God” and “love your neighbor”. For Paul, these words were everlasting, and could never be satisfied to the point of no longer owing obedience to the One who spoke them. Every day, husbands and wives awaken as debtors owing their lives and love to the Author of these words, and His call to



### LOVE AS A DEBT, NOT A NEED (cont.)

“Love God and your neighbor”! This is the perpetual debt of the believer. Therefore, reclining back in the easy chair of complacency is not an option for the husband or wife. To do so would be to assume falsely that one’s debt to God’s command has been paid, and that now a surplus exists in which one is owed love by others. Such a mindset is false, and very closely resembles the worldview of the secular modern culture.

If you are married, you owe love to your spouse. Functioning from this frame of reference rearranges the entire premise of relationships, and provides a far superior basis on which you may build a lasting and joyful marriage. In contrast, the idea of “love needs” runs counter to such a paradigm. While this may sound extreme, consider the words of Jesus: “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you...If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that you? Even ‘sinners’ do that” (Luke 6:27-28; 32-33, NIV).

Certainly, your spouse should be offering love to you in meaningful ways. This is the way of relationship. However, you need to consider your primary focus: to give or to receive? Christians should ALWAYS pursue a mindset that giving love, regardless of the situation, is always a more noble and God-ordained call than falling prey to the cultural self-seeking view of “I need” before “I give”. Otherwise

love begins to resemble that of the “sinner” more than the glorious One who selflessly gave his life to redeem the sinner.

### LOVE QUICK LIST

1. **Read the book of Hosea.** *If Hosea adhered to the idea that love is first and foremost a need to be met, could he have honored God’s commands to love Gomer? Seek to imitate Hosea’s love and obedience in your marriage.*
2. **Read Philippians 2:4-8.** *Seek to imitate Christ by making “self” nothing, serving your spouse, walking in humility (versus entitlement), and being obedient even when it is extremely difficult (even unto death of a Cross).*
3. **Perceived needs are simply desires that master the heart.** *Whereas desires for love are not wrong (we SHOULD desire love), to allow them to rule the heart to the point of controlling our lives is dangerous. Read Matthew 6:24 and Romans 8:5-8. How do these passages apply to desires that seek to master the heart?*
4. **Write out FIVE ways you will love your spouse today** (even if they may not deserve it). **Go and love them TODAY.**
5. **Read Luke 6:32-33.** *According to Jesus, pagans and unbelievers “love those who love them”. Recognize your call to something much more glorious..*
6. **Read Luke 27-31.** *Identify desires (perceived needs) in your heart that keep you from living out this passage in your marriage. Replace them with godly desires.*