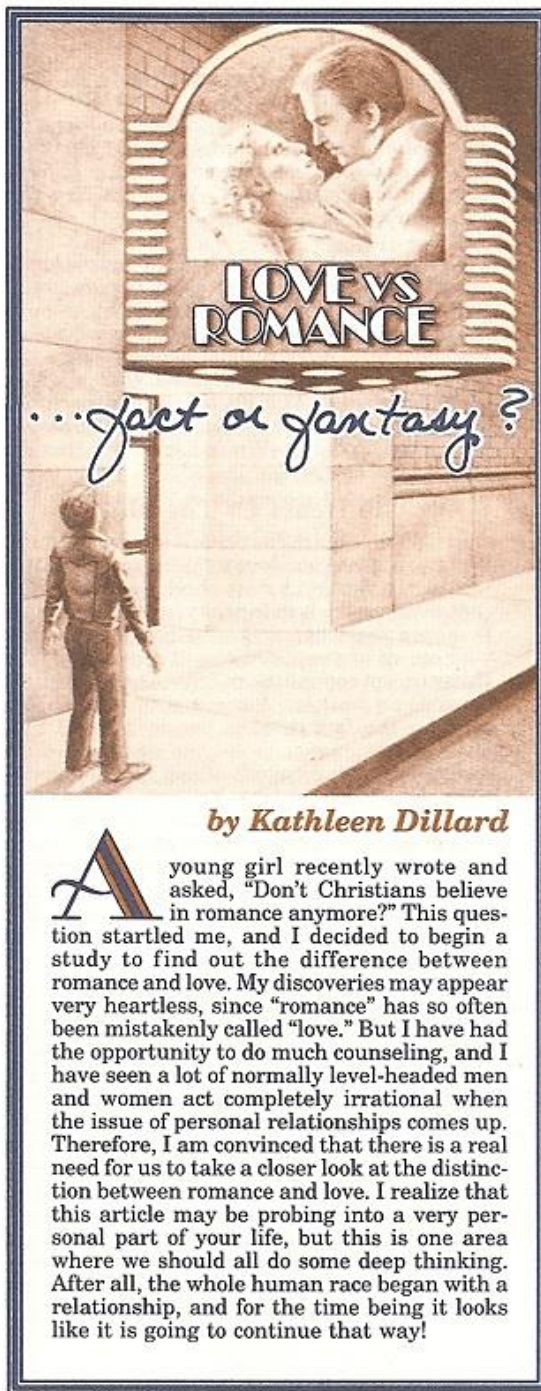




by Kathleen Dillard

A young girl recently wrote and asked, "Don't Christians believe in romance anymore?" This question startled me, and I decided to begin a study to find out the difference between romance and love. My discoveries may appear very heartless, since "romance" has so often been mistakenly called "love." But I have had the opportunity to do much counseling, and I have seen a lot of normally level-headed men and women act completely irrational when the issue of personal relationships comes up. Therefore, I am convinced that there is a real need for us to take a closer look at the distinction between romance and love. I realize that this article may be probing into a very personal part of your life, but this is one area where we should all do some deep thinking. After all, the whole human race began with a relationship, and for the time being it looks like it is going to continue that way!

Love vs. Romance

Fact Or Fantasy?

by
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Some Definitions

ROMANCE: "A fictitious tale of wonderful and extraordinary events, characterized by much imagination and idealization; without basis in fact; an exaggeration or falsehood." - Webster's New World Dictionary.

LOVE: Love, whether exercised toward the brethren or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity (or closeness) is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all (Rom. 15:2), and works no ill to any (Rom. 13:8-10), love seeks opportunity to do good to "all men..." (Gal. 6:10). (Also see I Cor. 13 and Col. 3:12-14) - Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.

The Heart Of The Matter

In light of these definitions, it is a drastic mistake to view romance and love as being interchangeable words. My first and most shocking discovery was that romance deals in **fantasy** rather than **reality**. Romance depends on the "setting," the weather, your moods and expectations - it depends on **everything** except commitment. Love, on

the other hand, depends on **nothing** but commitment! When you consider the fact that we live in a world that is always changing, it is easy to see how romance cannot meet the demands of real life. Romance is a weak substitute for love. You can see this by the countless number of broken and bitter hearts - not to mention the soaring divorce rate. It is embarrassing to admit that in the Church as well as the world, romance is being called "love." This has only added to the world's low opinion of Christians, as divorce runs rampant through the Church, and so many Christian homes are destroyed.

Cinderella Syndrome The Effects Of The Media

The media - which includes radio, TV, magazines, billboards, etc. - is really the main stage upon which romance parades itself as "love." Even though I am not saying that these things are evil in themselves, I do want to remind you that fantasy and ungodly values are the pillars of almost all media entertainment and advertising. And it seems like romantic notions and dreams, in the guise of "I love you's," are constantly bombarding us from every direction. Although glass slippers may work on the movie set, they're not very practical in real life. We can get so caught up in looking for our Prince Charming or our Cinderella, that we begin to weigh each other down with unrealistic expectations. (This holds true even for those who

are already married.) If someone doesn't MEASURE UP to the media image of what a "**real** man" or a "**real** woman" is then we have a tendency to be disappointed or frustrated with them. This way of thinking and relating to each other is something that is encouraged from early childhood.

Here you have this tall, bronze, square-chinned figure of a man named Ken, along with his equally flawless and faithful companion Barbie. Both of them are perfect... **perfectly plastic that is!** Already the children have begun to place a special value on certain "measurements and features." And when they grow up, they will encounter endless problems if they still find themselves trying to play Barbie and Ken, only this time it's with **real people!**

As I once heard a wise teacher simply say, "Do you want to know what a 'real' man is? A real man is a male one! And do you want to know what a 'real' woman is? A real woman is a female one." Placing unrealistic demands on one another is not only unfair, but also unloving. We must pull the plug on our media images and begin allowing each other to be who we are.

Do You Play Cupid?

If your answer is "yes," then I'm sure that you would also add that "it is all in fun." Though your intentions may be harmless, I find myself increasingly uneasy about the outcome of these actions. As I discovered in a mythology book:

*"Cupid is a Roman god derived from the Greek god known as Eros. Both in worship and in popular mind Eros (or Cupid) was the god of sexual love. He was attributed especially in the later period with the power of firing men with the passion of love by means of his sharp shafts (arrows) and stinging tongues of flame."**

It grieves my heart when I consider all of the adults who encourage "romance" among the young people in their churches. With comments like, "You two would make such a nice couple!" and the constant flood of pressuring questions that are asked of dating and non-dating Christians alike - "When are you getting married?" or "You're getting pretty old to still be single, aren't you?" These questions are not only embarrassing, but unnecessary.

Yes, marriage can be a great joy, and I suppose that these adults only want to see these young people experience the same happiness and fulfillment they have found from the marriage relationship. But this continual pushing forward of single people into premature or unblessed relationships is very harmful. For this puts a rush on all aspects of a young relationship - a relationship which they should be entering into slowly, with their eyes open, **and with much prayer.** There's not only match-making to cope with, but "Christian dating services" (yes, they do exist!) and the countless number of activities arranged by the church for the purpose of "bringing single Christians together." It should be alarming to consider that our "good intentions" in match-making just might be making a potential disaster. Match-making is God's business, not ours! As Jesus said, "What therefore **God** has joined together..." (*Matt. 19:6*)

Romantic Roulette

If you are unmarried and have been facing the possibility of choosing a life-long mate, then let me caution you: **Walk with your feet on the ground and your eyes on the Lord.** Next to making a commitment to follow Jesus, the marriage commitment is without a doubt **the most important decision you will ever make!**

Our attitude toward marriage today seems to be much too casual. "Love at first sight" or "falling in love" is all that is needed to throw out common sense and godly counsel - leaving us at the mercy of our unfaithful emotions to decide for us a lifelong commitment. I call this playing "Romantic Roulette." And I can tell you from my experience as a counselor that many people have had to learn this **the hard way.** Sure it sometimes works out... there isn't always a bullet with every pull of the trigger... but more times than not, this selfish and cruel game produces broken homes and bitter, broken-hearted people.

What To Do

Love is a commitment, and no one can make a faithful and unwavering commitment to someone they don't know. Many attractions are completely foolish. Often people find themselves day-dreaming about someone they've seen once or twice at school or work. The day-dreamer begins carrying on an imaginary relationship in his head with this person. The entire basis of his affections are founded on what he **IMAGINES** that person to be like, instead of what they really are.

But other times attractions can be more serious. Occasionally these desires toward the opposite sex can seem overpowering, but the only way to control these feelings is by making the right choices and drawing closer to God. Though it is not a sin to be attracted to someone, what you decide to do with that attraction can be. Since our romantic desires are often stronger than we are, the first thing you should do if you like someone is talk to your Father about it. No, I didn't say,

"Talk to your best friend about it ... " I said, **talk to your Father in heaven** about it. Ask **His** permission. Oftentimes we run to our friends because we want their approval; we long to hear them say, "Oh, the two of you would go so good together!" But what we should really be seeking is God's opinion - **His** counsel. But all too often we are afraid He'll just say "Wait..." or worse, "This person is not the right one for you." Yet if we are not interested in obeying God, all the counsel in heaven will do us no good!

If you really want to do what's right, then don't feed your desire, **yield it to God**. I recently heard somebody say, "The quickest way to let something die is to quit feeding it." You should also go and get counsel from a pastor, or an older brother or sister in the Lord, for *"through presumption comes nothing but strife, but with those who receive counsel is wisdom."* (Proverbs 13:10) Before closing this section of the article, I would like to share the words of a man who has pastored a congregation and counseled many couples: **"Love can wait, lust can't."**

Fickle Not Faithful

No one wants to enter into a relationship with someone who is fickle. Webster tells us that a person who is fickle is **"changeable or unstable in affection and interest."** Yet, at the core of every "true romantic" is fickleness. Of course, romance will say a lot of the same things that real love might say - "I love you only," "I'll love you always," etc. - but since it is led around by whim rather than commitment, there is really not too much that one can depend on in all this "sweet talk." When romance is the basis of any relationship, all that it takes is a good dose of reality to wreck the whole thing.

Take, for instance, a young, vibrant, and beautiful cheerleader-a girl who has always had everything going for her. She meets #22, a strong, handsome, and "hard to get" football player. He is a real challenge for her, and she invests every feminine wile she can to get his attention. Of course he falls for it, and they eventually get married. Both are starry-eyed for the time being... thinking that they have gotten all that they have ever wanted in a partner. Then the true test begins. The football player receives a serious knee injury and he can no longer play. They already have two kids, with another one on the way. He cannot seem to find a job and the pressure increases. The dishes are piling up, the kids are screaming, and the house is filled with smoke as our ex-football player nervously finishes his second pack of cigarettes for the day. Then BOOM! "The honeymoon is over," and so is the marriage. Romance can't stand the same tests that love can.

No one can be fickle and faithful at the same time. The Scripture says that love *"bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* (I Cor. 13:7) On the other hand, I would venture to say that "fickleness bears nothing, is suspicious of everything, is always doubting, and can never endure for long!"

Conclusion

After all that I've said, I do not want you to get the idea that a marriage relationship should be a "dry contract," entered into with no loving "feelings" at all. Sure there's a place for "romance" within a true, godly commitment, but this romance **cannot** be the foundation of the relationship itself. You must look at romance within a relationship like the icing on a cake - just try to imagine a cake that was **all** icing! You can understand why Jesus said so much about building on the rock instead of the sand.

I realize a lot more can be said about the differences between romance and love, but I do hope you have seen the importance of why the two should not be confused. God has made available to us a love that "never fails," but many of us have mixed it with our foolish romantic notions and desires. If while reading this article you have found yourself guilty of any of the mistakes mentioned, then ask God to forgive you, and change your ways - and for God's sake, become part of the solution! By becoming *"...imitators of God, as beloved children... walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."* (Eph. 5:1-2)

AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY FOREVER AFTER!

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