

# FROM LOVE THERAPY TO LOVE ETHICS:

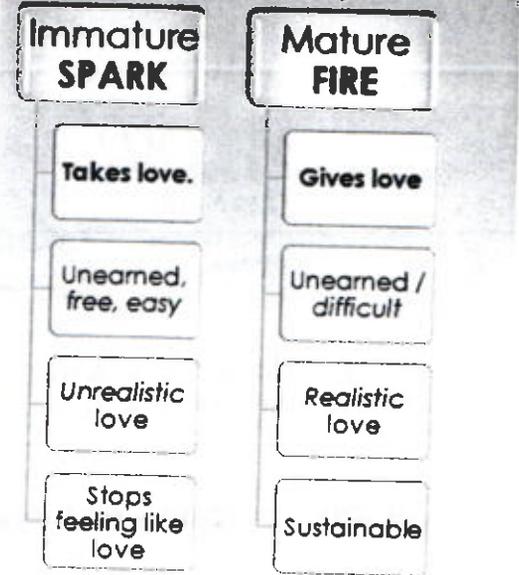
*A Description of Who and How We Love  
Definitions, Strategies, and Illustrations*

*Assignment: Before reading this paper, please think through your definition of love and write it out.*

## Love Therapy Defined

Love Therapy was developed by Dr. Ralph Ankenman in the 1970's. Dr. Ankenman was a medical missionary in the 60's, then did mission work in the United States before returning to his home in Cedarville, Ohio to resume his medical practice. He was burdened because so many of his patients would return with the same complaints. He prayed for wisdom and saw that people who loved others in immature ways developed emotional and physical problems. While attending Ohio State University (1977-79) to complete a Letters in Psychiatry degree, he taught Love Therapy to a group of people from "Layman's Challenge for Today" (an early Xenos group). The group attended his lectures every Wednesday night for three years. This paper is a compilation of his basic premises.

### Love Development



Love Therapy identified strategies people use to fill the deep loneliness in their hearts caused by "Immature Love," as he called it. Dr. Ankenman tried to help people develop "Mature Love," or the ability to give love, by recognizing how Immature Love strategies were causing anxiety, depression and other emotional problems which often triggered physical problems. *The key to solving most emotional problems is victorious love output*, he taught. This begins with developing a grateful and a heartfelt love for God and others. This is certainly a core biblical approach to a healthy lifestyle. As gratitude is developed and Mature Love is practiced, the emotional problems greatly diminish.

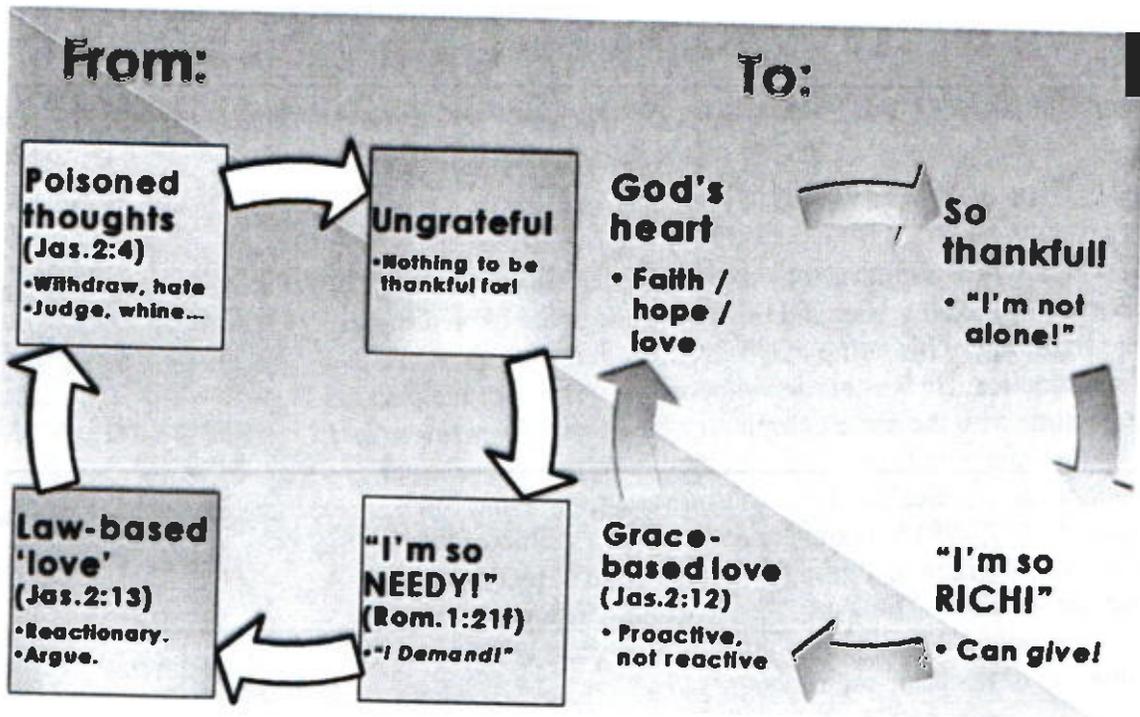
Love therapy identifies five general Realms of Activity in which people develop emotional problems through Immature Love, or gain healing through Mature Love. Although these problems may be associated with the actions or attitudes of other people, it is essential to take personal ownership through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and end this suffering. Inevitably, people suffer from their own failure to practice *Victorious Love Output* through problems such as an inability to forgive or demanding love (rather than building it).

## The Process in Love Therapy

People do not change by themselves. Through the loving support and instruction made possible in the Body of Christ, people grow mature (See Eph. 4:14f). We commonly call this process *the work of ministry*. Love Therapy is a subset of that process, focused on changing destructive behaviors learned in the past, and building a victorious future by learning to love God's way. This process of change involves:

- Identify the Immature Love strategies employed to get love. These are love-taking expectations and activities called *Love Demands* which are the root cause for our emotional problems.
- Building gratitude as an emotional foundation and ultimately a replacement for anger, anxiety, and depression.
- Learn how to practice *Mature Love* by giving love, regardless of the reactions of others. Maturity

means the freedom to choose, by the power of God, to give love according God's definition of love. By faith we know God's approach will *eventually* bring emotional stability and positive love feelings.



This paper will attempt to define biblical love which can then become a basis for identifying various Immature Love strategies employed to get love.

### ***The Incorporation of Love Ethics***

What Dr. Ankenman taught is clearly biblically-based, and not the product of one man's personal observations as a clinician. They represent *ethics* as taught in scriptures: "Let all that you do be done in love." (1 Cor. 16:14) For decades, various attempts have been made to capture Dr. Ankenman's lectures in a more systematic format which identifies the biblical foundations for this body of knowledge. As modern culture continues to grow more confused about the Mature Love, it is becoming increasingly difficult to raise Christian workers and leaders with the background and framework to sustain prolonged ministry efforts. This affects the quality of Body Life itself.

Christian literature which describes the biblical framework for love is woefully scant and often misses the significance of Mature Love. In 2007 Katey Downs, head of Xenos Pastoral Counseling, and Keith McCallum, Xenos Sr. Pastor, collected all the known material from Love Therapy and attempted to distill it into what they termed "Love Ethics", which are the ethical imperatives found in the Bible. Love Ethics provides a biblical framework for teaching and applying Love Therapy in everyday Christian life. The principles in this paper are broadly based on Dr. Ankenman's teachings, considerably augmented with scriptures and explications from the Love Ethics project.

### ***BIBLICAL LOVE DEFINED***

Biblical love is a commitment to give loving concern to others for their good, in every area, without demanding a specific response.

We call this concept *Mature Love*, which is synonymous with the concept of "love-giving" and should be

distinguished from "love-taking," which is the epitome of *Immature Love*. "Maturity" in a practical sense means having the ability to not only take care of oneself, but others as well (see Eph. 4:28, where "stealing" certainly includes love-taking, and "sharing" must include love-giving). Thus we ask if someone has the maturity to become a parent, which means taking care of more than personal needs. "Immaturity" is evident in someone unable to take care of himself, like a child who needs parental care. In the relational realm some people seem to never grow up, even though they become adults physically, because they never seem to cross the line from being love-takers (immature) to love-givers (mature).

## Love Capacity

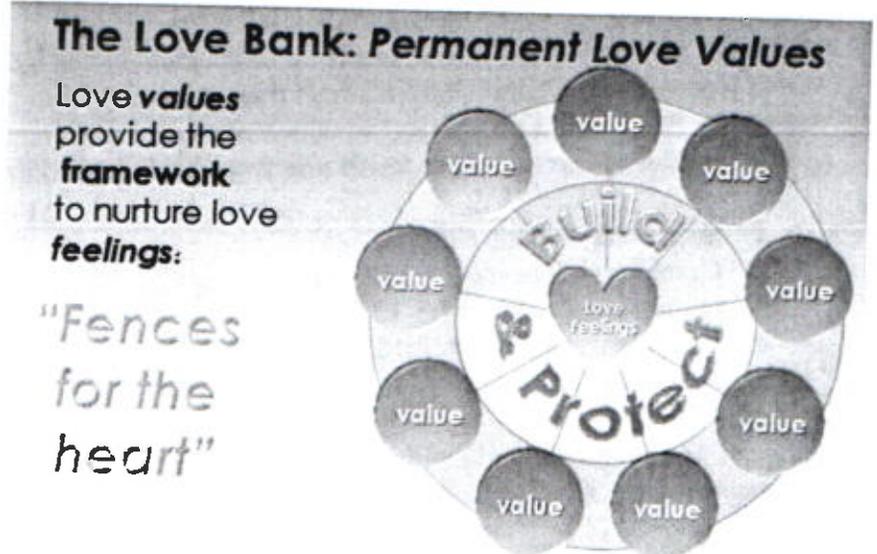
Love Relationships do not appear magically, as in a "Cinderella Love" story. Real-world love requires an *ability* to love. God created humans with two important and complimentary capabilities which make it possible to form the uniquely powerful relationship we call "love." These capacities (abilities) impact each other either negatively or positively, so attention must be given to each.

**Permanent Love Values:** also called "The Love Bank", these are a collection of beliefs and practices people employ in building love relationships. We already mentioned the mythical "Cinderella Love" story which imagines that love occurs spontaneously and lasts forever without any problems. But all relationships--even non-emotional ones like in business--occur because more than one person makes deliberate choices and takes real-world action to make the relationship materialize. These choices and actions are embedded deeply within our experience, character, and beliefs, so they are "Permanent" as opposed to "transient" and temporary. Still, they do change with added understanding and experience, so we must use the word "Permanent" loosely.

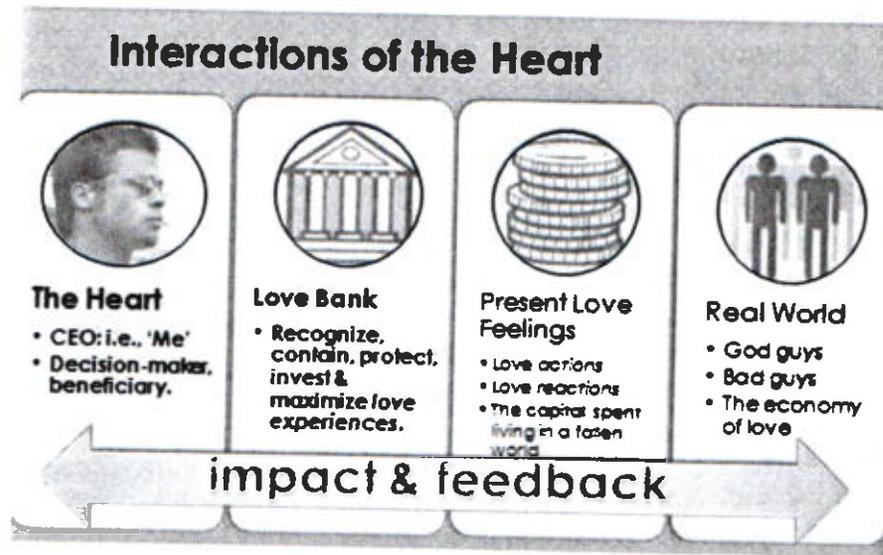
The ability to create love relationships and recognize the difference between loving and unloving arise from our Permanent Love Values (PLVs). This is where PLVs act like a repository, or a Love Bank, able to build and make use of the emotional reserves generated by love relationships. These emotional reserves are a vital source of fuel for all human activity, and those having the ability to create and use these reserves wisely are those having strong PLVs.

**Reinforcing Activities:** The warmth of Thanksgiving or Christmas family gatherings, "Tribe Night", "Family Night", Cell Groups, "daddy-kid night", marriage, discipleship relationships, evangelistic and ministry efforts, personal devotions, prayer, Bible studies, child-raising, ministry houses, and many other activities which habituate long-term PLVs.

**Present Love Feelings:** this is the ability to feel emotions in the here-and-now real world where relationships take place, and thus the emphasis is on *present* as opposed to *past*. In order for any relationship to qualify as a loving relationship which meets our heart-felt needs for love, it requires *present-day* interactions which are *emotional* in nature. This does not mean constant emotional contact, but Present Love Feelings (PLFs) must occur close enough in the present to build emotional reserves in the Love Bank. This is important because suffering, trials, and difficult circumstances make withdrawals from the Love Bank. There are times when we are going through a difficult time, a friend may send a card or say an encouraging word, and those little acts of kindness make deposits in the Love Bank.



To reach the ideal of Mature Love and identify the problems keeping people stuck in Immature Love, Love Therapy focuses on the interactions between these two love capabilities, the effects, and the changes necessary to grow:



### **Realms of Activity in Biblical Love**

Love is far greater than mere emotions: a fact which eludes most people. Love engages other people in a Love Relationship where the miraculous transformation from Depravity to Redemption occurs. The Bible describes five "realms of activity" in which Mature Love is engaged. These activities work together as a whole in Mature Love, and are found missing or imbalanced in Immature Love:

1. Sacrificial – Mark 10:45
2. Gracious – Ephesians 4:32
3. Disciplining - Heb. 12:5-13
4. Emotional – Romans 12:15
5. All – John 3:16

Since all our relational and emotional problems can be traced back to a failure in some way to understand and practice Mature Love, these activities help us identify the practical ways we need to mature.

### **The Sacrificial Activity of Love**

Mature Love is sacrificial as described in passages like Mark 10:45, where Christ explains his own life-sacrifice at the cross. This tremendous act of self-sacrifice was driven by a clear priority which Christ never lost sight of: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve." *Positive servitude* describes the example of Christ (as opposed to the negative criticism employed by Immature Love to initiate change). Sacrificial love means to *give loving concern for the good of another*, and not react or lash back to protect oneself.

In John 15, Jesus says, "Greater love has no man than that he lay down his life for his friends." This is how Christ lived. He also commanded believers to "love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12, 13:34.) His intention was that out of gratitude for his great love for us, we would love others the same way.

Biblical descriptions of sacrificial love include:

*Initiative* is paramount. Although "no one seeks for God" (Rom. 3:) we find that "while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6). Put differently in 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." This means that positive *sacrificial love is an active, rather than a passive concept*. Mature Love does not require that the other person even request help. Initiative is always as an opportunity to love, not a burden. The creativity and work needed to devise ways to initiate love is the most fulfilling and significant way to exercise our gifts and design as humans.

*Love Demands have no place in Sacrificial Love*. Love Demands are love-killers because they place illegitimate and negative expectations on others. Examples include, "No one has called me on the phone," or that, "It's always me who has to do the asking," and any number of similar arbitrary rules. In God's definition of love, there are no demands. By holding expectations over other people, we are creating an arbitrary and ungodly definition of love, which is of course Immature Love.

*Dumb Sacrifice* is not sacrificial love. Dumb Sacrifice is compliance to the illegitimate *Love Demands* of Immature Love. Dumb Sacrifices are selfish in nature caused by either avoidance of conflict or hoping for approval, and merely deepens immaturity and increases Love Demands. Luke 6:27-36 provides good examples of how to sacrificially respond to the illegitimate Love Demands of others: rather than reacting negatively or self-protectively, the Sacrificial Activity of love uses Love Authority (described later) to stop the Love Demands.

*Sacrificial Love has a positive emotional impact on people*. Because we are emotional creatures and because love relationships are emotional, there is an emotional impact for every relational interaction. The impact will either be positive or negative; redemptive or destructive. Victorious Love Output means understanding how we might affect others negatively, for example: Why do I seem so self-protective to others? Why do I seem so defensive to others? Why do I get so angry, or seem to be angry with others? The work of Love Therapy is to understand our negative impact on others, identify the Love Demands underlying this negativity, and understand the sinfulness at work in our Love Demands. This is the "blindness of sin" at work which makes it impossible to understand how God wants to sanctify us. *Sacrificial Love* is redemptive in that the legitimate need of the other person is considered beyond any personal discomfort felt.

*All personal rights are waived in Sacrificial Love*. "Personal rights" are the basis for Love Demands. Christ as Creator more than anyone had rights, yet these were all voluntarily waived when he came to earth (Phil. 2:1ff). He demonstrated it when he bent down and washed the disciples' feet, when he allowed himself to be crucified even though completely innocent. Christ once never complained, "It isn't fair!" Mature Love rejects the right to be treated in a certain way, even if that right is legitimate. Sacrificial love instead understands the basic unfairness of life, and how self-sacrifice rises above life's unfairness. (John 10.18).

*Thankfulness is a prerequisite* for developing the maturity capable of genuine sacrifice. Sometimes sacrifice is tied to hidden Love Demands which eventually surface as complaints and demands for fairness. These would never occur in the presence of a thankful heart. We must choose between either justice or thankfulness as the basis for our love relationships. It is impossible to mix the two. Thankfulness begins with responding thankfully to the initiative God has already taken to change us. Responding to God's initiative with thankfulness is the only possible response, because demanding justice with God means demanding condemnation. From the justice perspective, we deserve only hell. With a thankful perspective it possible to undertake the difficult work of scrutinizing our illegitimate Love Demands and transforming them into Sacrificial Activities.

*Not all relationships are Sacrificial*. Justice and fairness still (supposedly) govern the business world and civil society. Jesus made the distinction, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God that which is God's." Relationships in business, crime and punishment, and a just war are not love relationships. These deal more with social ethics than with individual love ethics.

*Sacrificial Love is not primarily a feeling* of affection for another person – although it certainly includes