

32963 Column by Rev. Robert and Rev. Dr. Casey Baggott
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It's All About Love

Almost two thousand years ago, Paul of Tarsus wrote a letter to a squabbling little group of fledgling Christians in ancient Corinth, trying to encourage them and instruct them. Today, many would consider the centerpiece of his first letter to the Corinthians to be the thirteenth chapter, which is read at countless Christian weddings every year. Many of us have memorized its timeless phrases that extol the surpassing gift of love.

Recently we ran across Sharon Jaynes' adaptation of Paul's beautiful tribute to love. Using his poetic meter and some of his phrasing, she shines new light on Paul's encouragement to love. She reminds us that living lovingly is the most excellent way of all to live -- especially for the Christmas season.

For example, Jaynes captures our distractions and anxieties, when all the frantic bustle and all the demanding expectations of Christmas can make what is holy and inspiring seem joyless and flat. She says: "If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but have not love, I'm just another decorator. If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table but do not love, I'm just another cook. If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home, and give all that I have to charity, but do not love, it profits me nothing." Loving simply and graciously is, by contrast to elaborate busyness, a far more excellent way to undertake Christmas celebration.

How have you chosen to celebrate Christmas this season? Do you have a central criterion for determining what gifts to buy, what parties to attend, what services to offer, what people to contact with good cheer? Is there a bedrock principle for you as you make choices at Christmas time?

Paul told struggling people so long ago that love was the bedrock of life. He said that while faith, hope, and love are three lasting and significant gifts in life, the greatest of these is love. As Jaynes modernizes that notion and makes it fitting for this season, she says: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust. But giving the gift of love will endure."

We pray that in this season as you decorate, cook, shop, entertain, wrap, carol, watch, wonder, and pray, you will remember Paul's astonishingly fitting words from so long ago. We hope his encouragement to treasure and to lavish the gift of love will sustain you and enrich your Christmas celebration.