

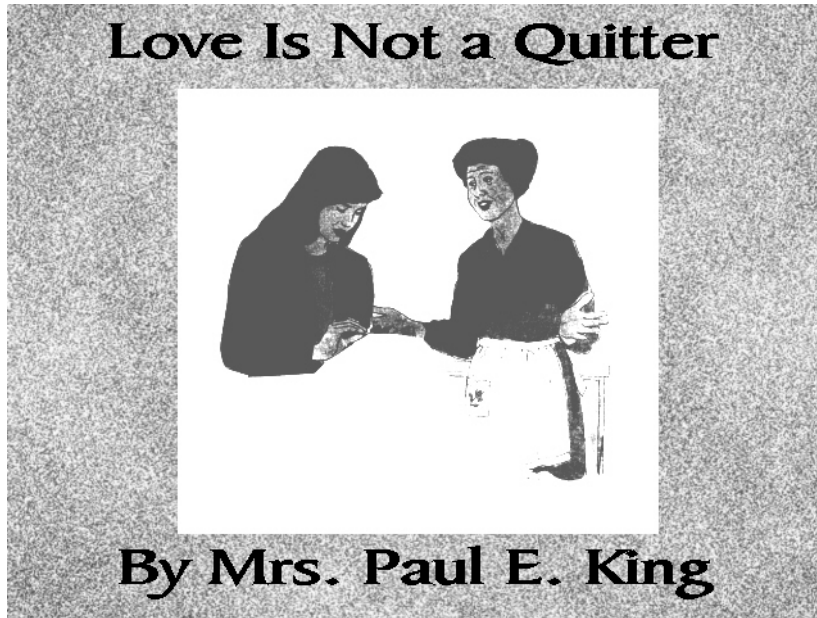
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Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

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The Sunday School Beacon
August 27, 2000



LOVE IS NOT A QUITTER
By Mrs. Paul E. King

I had just taken the last batch of bread out of the oven and set the hot, golden-brown loaves on the counter top to cool when a car door slammed in the driveway.

The next instant a honey-gold head popped around the screen door and a tall, slim figure stood in my kitchen. Her sky blue eyes were red and

swollen from weeping and her ordinarily sunny and pleasant face was shrouded in sorrow and seeming disappointment.

"I . . . I'm home, Mom," she burst out. "I'm home to stay."

My look of utter incredulity, plainly read and precisely discernible to my daughter, prompted her to remark, "It's all over between Mark and me."

"It can't be!" I exclaimed, easing the bread pans gently into the hot sudsy water for washing. "Marriage is for keeps. You made a life contract when you took those vows. . . ."

"But, Mom, you don't understand," my eldest pleaded. "It's impossible to live with a man who gives you only a minimum amount of money to spend . . . for groceries and everything!"

"Is it?" I questioned softly. "'Wilt thou keep him only unto thyself in sickness and in health, in joy and sorrow' and, I might add, in affluent circumstances or direst poverty? Remember, Jennifer? I know you do! It's been two-and-a-half years now. . . ."

"But, Mother, it's simply impossible to manage on what he gives me! Impossible! And I don't have to put up with it."

"Oh, but you do!" I interposed. "Marriage is for keeps. It's meant for mature people. It's not a toy or plaything that can be dissolved or discarded at will."

"But, Mother, don't you see my side of things? Mark's impossible. I'm home to stay. I have all my clothes in the trunk of the car."

"No, you're not 'home to stay,'" I said kindly but firmly. "You're going right back where you belong . . . back to Mark's and your home. When you and Mark took those sacred and holy vows, you became one. On that day a holy institution . . . a God-ordained institution, really . . . was begun. 'Till death do us part' is a binding oath. A serious oath, really. You cannot come home, Jenny, and break this contract. Your father and I shall never be guilty of condoning your actions by allowing you to forsake your husband and giving you shelter beneath our roof. Mark's a wonderful man and an excellent husband."

"Maybe you think so; but I wish you had to live with him. Always, it's 'No honey, we can't get this!' or 'But we just can't afford that!'"

"And Mark's right," I said, washing the bread pans.

"I might have known you'd take sides with him," Jennifer exclaimed.

"Your father and I are on the side of right, Jenny. This is no mere personality thing. You know us well enough to realize this."

Jennifer sat on a kitchen chair and stared blankly at the tile on the floor. At length she broke the silence.

"Then . . . you wont take . . . me back?" she asked in a voice so low that it was barely audible.

"No, dear: you belong to Mark."

"But, Mother," she pleaded.

"Love is a wonderful thing," I said, drying the bread pans. "Though much discussed love is difficult to define. There is a real sense in which only love comprehends love. Furthermore, there is much confusion between 'real' love -- which is a sorry mixture of selfishness and impurity covered over with a thick layer of purple passion -- and real love -- which does not bargain for itself but only begs to bless the other"

"You think my love is the selfish kind then?" Jennifer asked, feeling sorry for herself.

"Can you say it isn't?" I countered. "True love is more a matter of will than of emotion; or, as Moliere put it, 'Love is often the fruit of marriage,' as well as the root of marriage. You're being most unreasonable and selfish."

"Unreasonable! Selfish! Oh, Mother, if you had to put up with what I do. . . ."

Jennifer's statement was cut suddenly short. Undoubtedly, she remembered the hard times Dave and I had weathered and come through

together -- raising seven children and contributing heavily to the church besides doing much to help and assist many families who were in more dire circumstances than ourselves.

"I . . . I'm sorry, Mother," she apologized, suddenly and unexpectedly.

"If your relationship with Christ were what it once was, you wouldn't feel as you do toward your husband," I said, feeling the time had come to make the positive statement. "You need to be saved and sanctified."

Jennifer's head dropped low. I knew she was thinking.

"Love is what you've been through with somebody," I said gently. "Without a doubt, love is best defined by what it does. When you fell in love with Mark there wasn't anything you weren't willing to do for him. Remember how many chocolate cakes you baked for him when you were going together? He still loves chocolate cake, Jenny!"

My daughter swallowed hard. I knew she was remembering. I was glad. Thankful! I cut into one of the loaves of freshly baked bread and set a plate before her.

"Care for a piece?" I teased, pushing the buyer and strawberry jam her way, too.

She smiled a wan smile. "You make me feel awful, Mother! Mean and wicked and so. . . ."

"Things would look different to you if you got back to God," I said tearfully, putting my arms about her.

"There was a time when you were extremely happy with Mark. An unsaved heart is a dissatisfied heart. That is your whole trouble. It's not your wonderful husband."

"I only wish I could have things like other young couples we know."

"Thou shalt not covet."

She gave me a startled look.

"I . . . I didn't mean to be covetous, Mother. I . . . guess I never thought of it like that."

"But isn't it, Jennifer?"

"I . . . yes, it is."

"Certainly it is. And I remember the time when our lovely daughter knew Jesus and loved Him and her husband with all her heart, and was perfectly satisfied with what Mark's income could afford; a time when she knew that love could not be passive: her love was not love until it did something for Mark! And, interestingly enough, the more she did, the more she loved!"

"Mother!"

"That's right, dear. Only too well I remember those days of courtship and marriage. Your love grew in proportion to your action. Remember the year we were extremely pressed and Mark's birthday came around?"

A smile of recollection played across her face. "You mean the year I baked a chocolate cake and gave him the mittens I had knitted? How could I forget! I'm afraid I gave him the impression that all I could bake was chocolate cake. And that for his birthday too!" Jennifer's eyes were aglow now. She was suddenly laughing, remembering.

"And I'll never forget the look on Mark's face when he unwrapped his mittens and blew the candles out on the cake," I said. "One would have thought that he received a small fortune."

"And that year for Christmas!" Jennifer exclaimed.

"Yes," I prodded eagerly "just four months after your wedding"

Jennifer toyed with the knife on the table. Tears stung her eyes. We were so happy, Mother! And -- we didn't have nearly as much -- as we have now --"

"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things he hath," I quoted. "But you didn't mind. You were a Christian and you had Mark."

"And I had everything!" My daughter finished for me. "Let's pray together, Mother. Just like we used to do when I was naughty and wanted God and you to forgive me." She was crying, penitently so. "The Savior can give me the same peace and rest I one time knew. I want to see through the same kind of eyes I saw through then. I was so happy. . . . "

The fragrant odor of the freshly-baked bread hung heavy in the kitchen but it was as nothing compared to the breath of heaven that came through when Jen got back to God.

For a long, long time we both feasted on the Bread of Heaven and Honey in the Rock.

Quite suddenly she arose. Kissing me soundly on the cheek, she said softly, "Thanks, Mom. You're wonderful. Mark and I'll see you later. I've got a chocolate cake to bake before supper."

Laughing lightly, in her old familiar, satisfied way, a loaf of the still-warm bread in her hands, she hurried through the door and was gone.

My heart felt as light and airy as my bread. Love was a wonderful thing . . . a sticker!

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THE END