

Community Church of Issaquah
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God IS Love? Really?

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Not long ago I delivered a message here about my idea concerning the meaning of love. If you recall, I made the observation that love is more than a feeling or emotion, it must also be an action. We simply do not only say “I love you” or “I love chocolate” or repeat loving things we think are romantic, we also do love or do loving things. I love my son, and with each conversation we have, we always end it by telling each other the words, “I love you.” I don’t simply say that because I’m a minister or a Christian but because I’m his father and it’s how I feel. But putting feelings aside, I also love doing things to show him how deeply I feel for him, how much I love him. He would tell you that I flood him with cards in the mail, such that he calls me his Hallmark Freak. I’m proud of that. I do try to do more than send cards though, and I do think he appreciates it and often returns the acts of loving kindness. That’s what I mean by the complexity of feeling love and doing love.

As Christians, we most often connect the word ‘love’ to Jesus. It’s what we’ve been taught and encouraged to practice for our lives as followers of Christ. Wherever we turn in the Scriptures we find the words of Jesus instructing us to ‘do love.’ Let me give you just a few familiar reminders:

- *Matthew 5: 43 – You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemies, but I tell you, love your enemies.*
- *Mark 12:31 – Love your neighbor as yourself.*
- *Luke 10:27 – Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.*
- *John 15:12 and 13 – Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that you would lay down your life for another.*
- *Ephesians 6:23 – Love with faith from God the Father.*
- *I Thessalonians 4: 9 – Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.*
- *I Peter 1: 22 – Love one another deeply.*

I could go on and on with examples of verses in our Bible that give us guidance about doing what Christ did in his earthly life and ministry. Within the Bible itself, there are almost one thousand references to the word ‘love’ and each one refers to moving a feeling into action. The special passages that I have selected for today’s sermon are some of the best examples of that lesson – putting love into action. Let me share again a portion of that passage from First John chapter 4:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not

that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

I have read those verses a multitude of times as I try to know and understand the message of Christ and God. But I completely missed something in those verses until I was reading some words written by a friend. Let me share with you what he wrote:

When the Bible identifies God by saying "God is love", it is conveying that God's disposition toward humankind is perpetual goodness, solidarity, empowerment, and empathy. It's not that God DOES loving things – God IS love. Love is the underlying, unchanging, primordial, and fundamental essence of all things. The Bible says God IS love as a way of expressing that love is the highest truth and ultimate reality. This love does not fluctuate. It cannot be earned or lost. It is never threatened. This love is available to all people, all the time, everywhere.

Those three words in these verses written in the first book of John suddenly jumped out to me. God IS love. I had not thought of the message God wished to convey in such a real way. Like you, I focused on the things God had done such as the words from John 3:16 – *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son...”* This is the most beautiful example of doing love that we as Christians can

rest in believing. But it's an example of God 'doing' love. If we were to search the Scriptures for every verse that contains the word or phrase of love, we would find only these verses from I John and one from I Corinthians that contains the words, "God is love."

I had never thought of it in those terms before, and now the words are being repeated over and over in my mind. God IS love. The clarity of meaning in those three words is that God and love are one and the same. God is not just the source of love nor the creator of love, but God and love are one and the same. That concept had not registered with me until I experienced this awakening.

In my days as a minister, I've officiated at many weddings—somewhere near 300. I cannot tell you how many times I have used the passage of scripture from I Corinthians 13 about love in those services. As I began to think more and more about this concept of God being love, I went back to those verses and saw them in a new light. For the first time I saw the mentioning of love not as words or actions, but as a description of God. Let me share a portion of that chapter.

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not

boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

It puzzles me that I could have repeated those verses over and over and yet missed the core of their meaning. These aren't verses that focus only on our behavior once we come to know Christ and follow his teachings. These verses are descriptions of who God IS. Of course, it is our desire to exemplify what we know to be how a believer should act, how we should show love, and how we should harbor the Christ-like feelings in our hearts. That's easy to grasp. To move into an entirely different understanding of these descriptions about who God is, now that's a new road for me to travel.

God is love. They are one and the same. Had you given thought to that concept when you heard or read the words of the Scripture today? I had not. But now that I have been confronted with someone's definition of love as being identical to the personhood of God, it all makes more sense to me. When Jesus was telling his followers and even us that we should practice love, he was telling us to understand that it is not doing godly things, but instead, letting God work through us. It isn't just love, it's God. When Jesus says to love one another, we can translate that as an instruction to **be** God to one another. Lest we allow that to inflate our egos, we are not being a god ourselves, but rather recognizing God at work in us.

I totally understand that this is a lot to wrap your head around. Trust me, I'm there with you. But the take-away for me in this new revelation is to understand the simple truth that love, and God are one. It matters not if we are Christian, Jewish, Muslim or whatever. God is at work in every faith who sees God even in different ways. But one thing is constant for all of us no matter what our belief, and it is that God and love are one. As John wrote in his letter to the early church, "*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*" God. Love. One and the same. Because, God IS love. And that's the truth.