

Community Church of Issaquah
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The Do's and Don'ts of Love
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As I was completing my self-service checkout at Safeway a few days ago, I was chatting with the woman who was the employee helper. I made the comment, “I bet you’re glad you in here where it’s warm and not wet.” Her reply made me smile. “Oh, I love the rain. I was born here and have always loved it.” I smiled and didn’t offer my opinion about gray rainy days. Then I walked into the Starbucks to grab my latte and was in line behind an older woman who had just ordered a slice of the lemon loaf. Her comment to the barista was, “I love this more than anything! I could eat it all day every day.” When I got home, my son called to check on me and we ended the call with our usual closing, “I love you.” My mind began to focus on that word – ‘love.’ Without a doubt, it is one of the most frequently used words in our vocabulary. When was the last time you used it in a sentence? See what I mean?

Our Scripture today gives some very clear guidelines about the concept of love. It spells out for us what love does and what love doesn’t do. Before I get too deeply into that, let me give you a bit of a lesson in the Biblical languages. In the New Testament there are several definitions of the types of love. The basic three that are most commonly referred to are these: “eros, philia and agape.” In the Scriptures, one of these three definitions of love is used to specifically

describe what is being intended. The word eros refers to the romantic or sexual description of love. We call those erotic feelings.

The word philia refers to a friendly relationship as we see in John 16:27: “For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father.” This type of love is often called brotherly or sisterly love. It’s the basis for the city of Philadelphia, now called the “City of Brotherly Love.” And the third type of love used in the Bible that Christians prefer is that which is called ‘agape’ which means self-sacrificial or unconditional. John 14:21 says, “He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loved Me; and he who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will disclose myself to him.”

Three very distinct types of emotional connections that are defined as love. In our world today, there seems to be no distinctions since we use that one word to cover a multitude of emotions and feelings, from our affection to things to our intense feelings for a specific person. We love pizza and we love our children. The same word has such different meanings. For our message today, let’s focus on the type of love that is defined in the passages we read from I Corinthians chapter 13 – agape or unconditional love. This is the type of love Jesus taught his followers to practice in so many of his teachings, such as “Love one another as I have loved you” and so many more lessons telling us believers how we must copy his deep and passionate love for all.

The message of today's Scripture is very clear to the reader or hearer – there are specific do's and don'ts in the love we as Christians are to follow. Paul worded it so well for us in his letter to the church at Corinth. It was his instruction for those believers to follow in the way that they exemplified their strong desire to do what Christ has instructed. The passage begins with the distinction between doing acts of kindness because you love others and doing acts that have no basis of love. Doing love is very different than doing acts for humanity without the base of love.

Let me read that for you again:

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have 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 I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

Paul is saying that you can do many things that appear to be based on love for others and yet if love is not the reason for doing it, those acts mean nothing. This clarification of the “do” of love and opposed to the “doing of actions” can help us understand more clearly what Jesus sought for his followers. Do love and let it be the foundation of your life.

With all that said, what exactly does love do when we strive to follow Jesus's teachings? Consider how many times the word 'love' is mentioned in the Bible. Were you to read the King James Version, you would find it 361 times; in the New International Version you would find it 319 times in

the Old Testament and 232 times in the New Testament; and in the new Living Bible you would encounter it 645 times. How then do we define that word by the way we 'do' love?

Paul is very clear about answering that question. In order to very closely follow the guidance Jesus left us, the way we love has some specific instructions. These are the 'do's' of love and the don'ts. Let me read these verses again and you will see the ways we are told what to do with love and what not to do in love.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, 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. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

Let me take the do's of love first. When you and I are told to practice the love of Christ, that comes with some specific direction. We are to be patient with those to whom we give our love. There are times when we love someone and we become frustrated that their character or behavior isn't quite up to our standards. It is difficult to be patient and to wait for that person to come up to our standards. The problem with that is patience does not depend on our standards, but those of our Lord. Each of us experiences the patience of God when we don't measure up to our own potential. I am sure that the Lord has spent many a moment with eyes rolled back thinking, "Vincent, what is taking you so long to get with the program?" But God

waits patiently for us because God loves us. We, likewise, must do the same for others, allowing them time to grow in grace and wisdom.

When we 'do' love, that love must be filled with kindness. Love is kind. It is that kindness that always seeks what is best for someone else. It is always present for the ones we love regardless of our relationship. If we truly love others as Christ told us, we are led to acts of kindness. From experience, I must say that being kind to everyone is not always an easy task, but it is one thing we must work toward if we are to truly do the love of Christ. I've often told my son that if I am to leave a legacy at all, I simply want it said at my parting that I was a kind person. My hope in life is to do the love of Christ through being kind.

Do you want some good news about doing the love of the Lord? It's this: when we do the love that Jesus taught us to do, it never fails. There will always be some positive and compassionate result of the depth and sincerity of your love. Have you ever done some act of kindness out of love for someone and not thought much about it, and at a time much later were told what effect your love had on that person? I think we all have had those moments. It's the evidence that when we do the love of Christ, it never fails, even if we are never aware of the results. I love the verse that says so tenderly, "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." That, to me, is the heart of doing the love of Christ.

Just as there are many do's when we live out the rule to love others, there are some don'ts as well. In the passage

we are studying today, there are several ways we must not follow if we are doing love correctly. These don'ts are strongly worded in the portion of the passages that Paul warned against and are listed here:

Love does not envy

Love does not boast

Love is not proud

Love does not dishonor others

Love is not self-seeking

Love is not easily angered

Love keeps no record of wrongs

Love does not delight in evil

Most of us have been taught that love is an emotion or a feeling, and indeed it is. But love is so much more than that. It's doing or acting or living what we believe to be the core of our Christian faith. The way we express the love we have, even for neighbors we don't know, is how our lives will be measured and will reflect the authenticity of our promise made at our accepting Christ as Savior to follow his teachings. The one commandment that forms the base of our lives as believers is to do love. It may come in the simplest act or in the inclusion of our life in the lives of others, just like your inclusion in this amazing faith family here at our church. Truly, our mission in life is to do love as Jesus taught.