
What Is Love?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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The practical application of love means many things in our day and time. It is a challenge to capture the essence of practical love in one special definition. In fact, it may not be a good idea to try to capture the essence of love in some overall guideline. For our human condition is such that, once we have a definition of love, we think we have mastered it. Our temptation is that, once we know what love, maybe we will not have to worry with it any more!

Despite that danger, it is good to keep trying to answer the question --in bible studies, churches, homes, and families every day. It is our search for the essence of love that keeps us striving for its practical application.

What is love? For one, love is the application of other virtues besides love. I think of that beautiful verse from Paul's Epistle to the Philippians; chapter four, verse eight. "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Change the words "think on" to the words "act on," and we have a decent definition of the loving thing to do on a daily basis. "Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent: do these things and you have done the loving act."

Secondly: Love also means finding someone who shows us love, and then staying as close to that person as you can, for all your life. I am blessed this weekend to be celebrating my wife's birthday. She has certainly shown me love. Love means staying close to people who love.

That's why the essence of Christian love consists in staying close to Jesus Christ - not in memorizing a bunch of rules and ordinances which we rigidly adhere to the rest of our lives. Those codes of conduct can be helpful. But, ultimately, love is not a slogan, or an easy answer. Instead, love is actually a habit.

Yes, love is habit. That is the third aspect of love. Love requires discipline and will power. Too often, we treat love as if it is an accident, something like a stray arrow from Cupid that just happens to pierce us and intoxicate us. On the religious side, we treat love as if it is an easy slogan, repeated so many times that it becomes meaningless. Yeah, yeah, we remember, love your neighbor.

Habits take practice. Love takes practice. Thus, the practice of love happens in all sorts of places. It happens at these bible studies which we have emanating from the Cathedral these days. It happens on mission trips - to Tanzania and to the city homeless shelters. It happens at family dinner tables - but you have to show up. The practice of love even happens at staff meetings of your business. Yes, even there! But you have to be there with a spirit of good will and honor.

When we have made that loving choice, an amazing thing happens. Suddenly, we are no longer concerned about every jot and tittle of the law. We are no longer worried about rigid codes and laws. For, in the moment of true love, in the moment when we have chosen the loving action, we have fulfilled the law of the universe. We have fulfilled God's purpose for all of humankind. We have willed -and chosen-- the good, the beautiful, and the true.

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