**You Know How To Love? OK, Do It?**

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Do you know how to love? Seriously, do you know how to love? In answer to this question, I can only guess the responses I might receive. But there are some things we do to love others.

Maybe a better lead up question before you figure out how to love is to ask, “***Who*** should we love.”

Should you love your spouse? That’s a given!

Should you love your children? That’s a given!

Should you love your parents? That’s a given!
Should you love your grandparents, your grandchildren? Another given!

Should you love your aunts, uncles, and cousins? Again, a given.

You are probably thinking these are family, they are blood, you love them, it is what you do. So do you truly? If so, how?

Are you always patient and kind to family?

You never envy family members, or boast to them?

With family, you are never arrogant or rude?

You never insist on your own way with family members?

You are never irritable or resentful to anybody in your family?

When it comes to family members, you bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things?

With family members, you never rejoice at wrong-doing, but you always rejoices with the truth.

At a guess, I am thinking that there are a few of you squirming in your pews right now. Those qualifying words; “always,” “never,” and “all,” really convict you of your sins. Even with family members you lose your patience, find yourself being less than kind, may even be envious or boastful, sometimes rude or arrogant, and probably insist on your own way. I personally cannot stand under that judgement, I cringe in fear and terror, I fall repentant to my knees covering my face with my hands and beg, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” I am sure that you also would be able to claim that you have not loved your family as these verses proclaim that you should.

If this is how we are with family members, our closest neighbors, then maybe we ought to inquire of God, “Who else are we supposed to love?” From Leviticus in the Old Testament, from the very lips of God in person of Jesus in the Gospels, and clear through to the book of James we are instructed, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Who is my neighbor?” you ask? Your neighbor is not just that kindly dear lady living next door who brought you home-baked cookies when she found out your dog died. Your neighbor is also that crotchety, old, fart that chased you off his lawn and called you foul names when you went onto his yard to grab the football that got kicked over there. Your neighbor is the millions in China who are terrified of the Coronavirus, the Nigerians who might lose their life to Muslims, verily, all who inhabit this planet – all those who share the same flesh as you do – all those of the human race are you neighbors.

With all your neighbors, are you always patient and kind?

You never envy your neighbors, or boast to them?

You are never arrogant or rude to your neighbors?

You never insist on your own way with your neighbors?

You are never irritable or resentful to your neighbors?

When it comes to your neighbors, you bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things?

You never rejoice at the wrong-doing your neighbors, even when they get what’s coming to them? You always rejoices with the truth in your neighbors?

Hmmm, a bit more squirminess in the pews? Maybe a silent word of repentance? Not me, no silent words! I fail miserably! My sinfulness is rampant! I do not love as instructed! “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”

And you know what else, we are not even near done because God’s word to us declares that we are not only to love our family and our neighbors, but Jesus, true God enfleshed, gets very specific about naming some particular neighbors we are to love. Do you know who they are? Lest you think it is my interpretation, I will simply quote Jesus’ own words.

Matthew records our Lord’s words: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt. 5:43-45)

Luke also records the words of our Lord in another situation. “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27-36)

To put it in the words of our text from Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth:

With your enemies, are you always patient and kind?

You never envy your enemies, or boast to them?

You are never arrogant or rude to your enemies?

You never insist on your own way with your enemies?

You are never irritable or resentful to your enemies?

When it comes to your enemies, you bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things?

You never rejoice at the wrong-doing your enemies, even when they get what’s coming to them? You always rejoice with the truth in your enemies?

Ouch! I would like to know, which of you wants the words of first Corinthian 13 to be the demand of God as to how you are supposed to love ***ALL*** you neighbors?

Is 1st Corinthians 13 prescriptive? Yes, to a point, it is that! This is indeed how we are to love!

But it is so much more.

It is a call to repentance.

But more than anything else, it is descriptive of what true love is.

Love – at least in this text, is the Greek word *agape* – it is a specific kind of love. It is not romantic and physical. It also has nothing to do with emotions – although emotions may sometimes be tugged by it. It is however true love. It is the love which God has for us in Christ Jesus. As I have said before, is an act of the will, to do for another – sometimes involving sacrifice of self.

If I change the word “love” in our text to another word that means the same thing, if I change it to a word that is the fulfillment of self-sacrificial love, maybe it will reveal truth to you. Let me read the text to you after changing just that one little word love.

Christ is patient and kind; Christ does not envy or boast; Christ is not arrogant or rude. Christ does not insist on His own way; Christ not irritable or resentful; Christ does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but Christ rejoices with the truth. Christ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

 Christ never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

 So now faith, hope, and Christ abide, these three; but the greatest of these is Christ.

As much as we are to love as this great love chapter prescribes, it is even more important to know that this chapter is descriptive of the great love God has for us in Christ Jesus.

God, Jesus the Christ, loved you as He laid down His life for us. He gave up His life in His unfathomable love, suffering the anguish of the cross. In His great love, He died to forgive us our failures to love – our failures to love even those closest to us, our family, much less our enemies. While we were yet sinners – while we war against God – Christ died for us.

Christ crucified is God’s proclamation, “AGAPEO – I LOVE YOU!”

If we were to take 1st Corinthians chapter thirteen as prescriptive only, we could only wallow in guilt and depression, we would know that all we deserve is the eternal wrath of the fires of hell for our failures to love.

Instead, out of His love for you, the fire of His wrath against you is extinguished in the waters of baptism.

God does not just say, “I love you!” He loves you to His own death. And, in His word of love, the absolution, He covers your sins, removes them from you and buries them in His tomb

Love is His invitation to a sacred meal where He feeds you most holy food, His body and His blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

The love of God comes to you, fills you, and constrains you so that you may love as He has first loved you.

*By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*  (1 John 4:9-11)

In the name of Jesus. Amen.