

To Live Is To Love

To be a follower of Jesus Christ is to love! To love our families, love our friends, even love our enemies. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples," said the Master, "if you love one another" (John 13:35). There aren't many rules to the Christian faith, not really, but this rule is iron clad. We are to love. Of course, this was not the first time that the Master lifted up love as the great commandment. In Matthew's Gospel an expert in the law tested Jesus with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments,*" (Matthew 22:34-40).

A young boy in elementary school was given a test in English grammar. He was being tested on the perfect tense of verbs. One question had a column of verbs in the present tense, and he had to put the perfect form of each of these verbs in the opposite column. He came to the verb live, and in the opposite column for the perfect tense of the word live he wrote the word love. Grammatically he was wrong, but from a Christian standpoint he was right on target. The perfect form of "to live" is to love.

A man who had a tough life, with virtually no father growing up and his mother was a difficult person. She married five times, none of the relationships lasting long. She had little time for her children and gave them little encouragement. This adult man still carries many wounds from her inattention. However, late in life his mother developed a degenerative muscular disease and gradually lost almost every physical capacity. You can imagine how difficult she was to care for. None of her other children would have anything to do with her. Neither would any of the men she had married no one except this son. Instead of being bitter he made the choice to love unconditionally. He took her into his home and cared for her, feeding her by hand, combing her hair, and cleaning up after her messes. All she could do was cry and moan incessantly.

When his mother died sixteen people came to the funeral. None of her other kids came. The son who cared for her had a little toy tape recorder his mother had gotten him one Christmas and he played a tape of he and his mom singing a Christmas carol. He talked about how she loved Christmas and how that when he was a kid he would play the guitar and she would sing with him. He chose to remember the good and to love her even when she had failed to show the love a mother should show. He didn't love her perfectly, not by a long shot. But he loved her when loving was hardest. He loved her when no one else would love her, and he remembered her with kind words.

That must have been difficult loving her when she showed him so little love. But that's what Christian love is. That's the kind of love Christ gave us when we were undeserving. For many of us love is a squishy emotion without any real content. "I love you for what you can do for me," is the basic rule of such love. "You meet my needs and so I have a warm feeling for you." We sing about such love, but in our hearts we know such love is horribly superficial. True love is sacrificial. The perfect tense of to live is to love, love as Christ loved us – unconditionally and sacrificially!