

"Recipe for a Loving Life"  
I Corinthians 13, I John 4  
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September 3, 2017

Today we're going to play a version of "Name that Tune".  
I'll spare you the singing, your job is to help supply the lyrics. See if you can finish each line:

What the world needs now... *is love, sweet love, it's the only thing that there's just too little of...*  
All you need.... is love...  
I just called... to say I love you  
God only knows...just how much I love you (Beach boys)

According to one internet source, the most popular love song which remained Number One longest on the music charts—for nine weeks, in 1981, was a duet by Diana Ross and Lionel Richie titled: "Endless Love".

While love songs proliferate, there are probably an equal amount of songs that mourn the loss of love, like the song made famous by the Righteous Brothers:  
"You've lost that lovin' feelin'...now its gone, gone, gone..."

Paul Simon wrote:  
"There must be 50 ways to leave your lover...  
Just slip out the back, Jack.  
Make a new plan, Stan.  
No need to be coy, Roy.  
Just get yourself free...."

And so far this list does not include any of the multitudes of country western songs about love and the loss of it—"my achy, breaky heart", and so on.

These songs and countless others, glorify or decry the wonders or pitfalls of romantic love.

Without exception, one would be hard pressed to name a religion or philosophy that does not promote love and loving one's neighbor. So what's the big deal? What is different about Christianity? Jesus was all about love, right? Sure.

In fact, the love that Paul describes in I COR 13 is most often read at weddings. So we have come to associate warm fuzzy feelings with it. But it is NOT about romantic love.

In fact, it is part of a letter which Paul wrote to the church in Corinth; a church torn by disagreements and dissention. Paul is urging them to “find a more excellent way” of being, and relating to one another.

John writes in I John 4: “We love because God first loved us. ” God is the source and the model for love.

Love is not a warm fuzzy feeling, it is action oriented.

The quintessential role model for--the recipe for a loving life--is to follow Jesus.

Imitate Him.

Jesus did not look out first for his own interests but for the interests of others. This is most evident in his sacrificial death on the cross which is the highest expression of love.

One day, newlywed Brent decided to do something really special for his wife Carol. Brent was a grad student and Carol was working full time. So one afternoon he took a break from his studies. Brent got out his mother-in-law's German Chocolate Cake recipe and carefully studied it. Then he assembled everything he needed and he began to measure and mix the batter, finally pouring it into the greased and floured cake pans, and placing them in the preheated oven. He set the timer, and went to work washing up the dishes. When the buzzer rang, he was shocked when opened the oven door only to discover that all his efforts had been wasted! The cake was as flat as a pancake! Why? He had omitted an essential ingredient: baking soda.

Paul is saying to the church in Corinth, and to us--that the essential ingredient for fulfilling life together—the life God calls us to-- is agape love! Without it, we will *exist* but we will not *fulfill* God's purpose for us.

In what is known as "the love chapter" Paul begins by making the point that without love, all the other gifts (of the Spirit) are worthless. He says (v.1-3) that no matter what amazing gifts one has—the gift of speaking in tongues, the gift of spiritual insight or a faith that results in miracles, even the ability to abandon oneself in order to save another—***unless these actions are paired with love, they are hollow and ineffective.***

I am told that when a certain wine is paired with a particular food, it brings out the best in both. Love is the essential ingredient with which the exercise of all spiritual gifts must be paired in order to make a difference in the world. In tandem they are dynamic and transformative. Without love, they are worthless.

***In v. 4-7 Paul describes the nature of this love in language which points out how little the Corinthians are measuring up.***

The qualities of love are spelled out as positives--what is desirable and demonstrable--such as kindness, patience or long-suffering. Love finds joy in the truth. It protects or "puts up with annoyances". Love "trusts" or believes...

Paul contrasts these positive aspects of Love with the negative aspects or what is undesirable: bragging about oneself, having an inflated sense of self-importance, and becoming easily angered.

Taken together—when all of these ingredients are combined, this agape love is selfless, Christ-like, putting the needs of the loved one before one's own needs and desires. Rather than a warm, fuzzy feeling, this love is demonstrated not so much in words, as in *action!*

During this last week we have been witnesses to the devastation in south Texas from Hurricane Harvey. A crisis like this brings out both the worst and the best in people: a very small minority of individuals took advantage of the situation by dressing as police, looting stores and businesses. However by far, the majority of people have stepped up, offering a helping hand and more, to victims who have lost everything.

Two friends in the north were so moved by hearing of the immense need, they pooled their funds, purchased a trailer, filled it with basic supplies (food, water, diapers, blankets, etc.), hitched it up to a big truck and drove across several states to the hardest hit area, intent on sharing what they had. At their own expense, these folks put the needs of others first and foremost. When visiting the stricken area, our President said, "There's a lot of love here". Indeed! Love is action!

***In v. 8-13, Paul stresses the lasting nature of love in comparison to all other gifts.*** Spiritual gifts—as wonderful as they are—have a limited shelf life. They are not intended to last forever. *Why will the gifts cease? It is because they are imperfect provisions for an imperfect world, rendered unnecessary when perfection comes (v.9-10).* (p.260 C. Blomberg, I Corinthians)

This is a likely reference to the return of the Risen Christ—when this occurs, the church will—at long last--be mature and complete. However the gifts of faith, hope and love will endure for all time. But the greatest? Love. Love is foundational. Love is essential now in our life together, and always.

Taken together-- when all of these ingredients are combined:

Kindness—Patience—Long-suffering—Joy—Truthfulness-- such love is modeled after Christ's own love--it is demonstrated in self-sacrificing service. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we will take up God's point of view, we will implement God's desires when we treat our neighbor as God has treated us (Romans 15:1-7).

I know of no religion or philosophy that does not promote love. But leave it to Jesus to—as a friend of mine likes to say—“to go from preachin’ to meddlin’ !”

Listen to what Jesus says -- Jesus kicks it up a notch. (Matthew 5:43-48)

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* <sup>45</sup> *so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.* <sup>46</sup> *For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?* <sup>47</sup> *And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,<sup>[o]</sup> what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?* <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Leave it to Jesus to shake things up! Just when we thought we might be doing pretty well, he says that it is easy to love those who love us. Anyone can do that—even an atheist! You don’t need to be a Christian to love those who love you, right?

But Jesus calls believers to a higher standard: We are to love our enemies! (or our frenemies?!)

What?! I don't have any "enemies" do you??

You may recall that some time ago a popular bumper sticker sported the slogan: “Jesus loves you and I do too!” I say one that was more honest. It said: “Jesus loves you, and I’m trying!”

Do you and I have enemies?  
Consider this:

No matter what political party you may belong to—Jesus says we must love those who are on the “other side” of whatever issue one might name. In other words, if you are Republican--you must love Democrats....likewise Democrats must love Republicans... and both, must love Independents.

No matter our nationality or ethnic background, we are to love those of all ethnicities. We are one family, all are part of the human family, all of us made in the image of God.

No matter our income or socio-economic status...we are to love others, rich or poor or in between. As we have seen, Hurricane Harvey was no respecter of socio-economic status, wiping out the homes of people across the board.

I could go on, but you get the idea. Any time we come up with a label that separates “them” from “us”, we have a problem.

Jesus kicks it up a notch when he calls us to love not only those who love us, but yes, those who differ from us and even those who would persecute us!

This is a human impossibility.

Can't be done.

Can't be done...*unless* we are filled with and empowered by God's Holy Spirit! Love is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Tracy, mother to 8-year-old daughter, Brenna, had a very trying week, a series of one minor crisis after another, that resulted in a migraine headache. She nearly lost it when she walked into the living room, and noticed that the window was covered--top to bottom and side to side—with crayon.

At first, it seemed like one more mess for Tracy to clean up.

Then she saw what Brenna had written: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindnece, goodnece, faithfulnece, gentlnece and selfcantrol* (in Brenna's delightful spelling). (I like the spelling of that last one, myself!)

It stopped Tracy in her tracks. It was exactly the reminder she needed: the fruit of the Spirit arises, not from our circumstances, but from Christ's Spirit within us.

Then Tracy noticed one more thing Brenna had written at the edge of the window: *Love one another*.

However, Brenna, in her creative spelling, had written: "*Love won another*." Instead of "o-n-e", Brenna spelled it "w-o-n"!

*Indeed, we were won over by Jesus' selfless love for us. Now Jesus commands us to "love one another". It is our challenge and privilege to love one another—both our friends and our enemies—in hopes that they too will be "won" over to Jesus.*

Mark Buchanan, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Secret of More* (Thomas Nelson, 2007)

The essential ingredient? The Love of God that grows in us as a result of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Let us "Love one/won another"! Let us pray...