

April 15, 2018

What kind of people ought we to be?

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35

"And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not 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 if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, 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, it always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...And now these three remain: Faith hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

I Corinthians 13:1-13

It is clear from Scripture that among all of the commandments that God gives us, loving others is one of the most important. It is repeated over and over again throughout Scripture and Jesus closes his earthly ministry with his ***"...new commandment..."*** that requires that we love one another as he has loved us. He adds, ***"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."***

So, when we think in terms of "What kind of people we ought to be?", showing our love for others has to be a key behavior. Of course, in trying to live this way, we come up against our cultural problem with defining just what we mean by love. It is, after all, a term we use in so many different ways.

The Apostle Paul clears up any possible misunderstanding of this term Scripturally for us in his first letter to Corinth. In considering this working definition it is, I think, essential that the Apostle is talking about our chosen behaviors and not our emotional responses.

In being the kind of people that God calls us to become we must first and foremost understand that we have, and must exercise, the power of choice when it comes to the way we treat other people. So, while we might want to be rude, or self-serving, or angry, we must choose, if we would become the people we ought to be, to act differently.

Love chooses patience when it wants to be impatient. Love chooses kindness when it wants to be harsh and critical. Love chooses sacrifice when it wants to be grasping and self-serving. Love chooses not to be boastful and proud. Love chooses not to be angry, and perhaps hardest of all, love chooses not to keep a record of wrongs.

For the true believer, the need to make these behavioral choices is essential. We cannot claim to be followers of Jesus and act just like everyone else. As true disciples we must stand out, not because of what we preach, but because of what we do.

Paul would have us understand that love, that is Godly love, ***"...always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."*** As a true follower I am charged with living to protect the feelings and wellbeing of others. I am charged with giving the gift of trust over and over again. I am charged with hoping that others will change and then hoping some more. And, I am charged with persevering even when I want to, even long to, give up.

Walking in the way of the faithful is not easy. For us, as followers of Jesus, following our feelings is not a choice we can make. Our feelings too often lie to us and too often lead us toward self-serving behaviors and those behaviors will condemn us. God, our Father, has given us the power to choose our behaviors and he wants us to learn to exercise that power before the world. Only when we do so, can we truly become the light shining in this dark place.

