

***“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. For each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” (Romans 15:1-2 NIV)***

***“Each of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, “How can I help.”” (Romans 15:1-2 The Message)***

Reading Scripture can be dangerous. It challenges us in ways that we do not want to be challenged - especially the New Testament. We may celebrate when we read the Old Testament and the words of condemnation and destruction for our enemies. We like Jonah, want to sit back and wait for the judgment to come (Jonah 4:5). We may get angry when God does not come with fire from heaven and wipe out those who are not like us. That is what we are supposed to do, right? After all they are not like us. They are different. They even don't know you God. So...our answer is “shoot first, ask questions later.”

But, we are Christ's and in Christ everything has changed. Love has sprung forth in a way that surprised the world. Love has come to overcome hate. Love has come to change the world. Love has come to build up one another. Love has come through the very child of God. Love has come to those the world did not and does not love. Love has come to you and to me. And because of that love we have been called to love and to build one another up. Love has us looking at the needs of others before our own needs. Christ introduces us to a new way - actually an old way that just wasn't observed much! For example, ***“When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God”*** (Lev. 19:33-34).

We celebrate love in February - Valentine's Day. But mostly, it is a love for those who love us back. We look for the right card that says the right words. We think of romantic surprises for the one we hold dear. We spent mega dollars on flowers, candy, jewelry - looking for the right way to say “I love you.” And, we hope that in some way that love is returned. How many of us send Valentine greetings to those who don't like us? To those who are our enemies? How many times have we sought to love those who will probably not love us back? We want something in return for our love.

But, Christ and Paul challenge us to love in a way that goes counter to all that the world tells us. Paul asks that we bear up one another, especially those who are weak. We should build up our neighbor. Feed our enemies. Love the stranger and alien in our land - make them feel welcome. Seek ways in which we can help and build up one another. The Today Show had a segment this past week where one of the reporters drove with a local snow plower and they stopped at random houses and plowed the driveways - in a random act of kindness. The people were surprised, some where shocked that someone would care enough to do such a random act of kindness. Is that not what Paul calls us to do - random acts of kindness that build up our neighbor (Jesus does answer the question of who is my neighbor in case you have forgotten in Luke 10:25-37 - The Parable of the Good Samaritan).

I wonder, just wonder - what would happen if Christians acted like Christ? If we began to really understand the true meaning of Christ's love for the whole world. I think Paul did. How else would he write as he did in Romans and in I Corinthians 13? We are called to build up one another through love. We are called to change the world through love. We are called to love and build up one another. I guess, a simple question that Jesus would ask, “Why aren't you loving as I have loved you?” And, I don't have an answer. Do you?

***“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love”***  
*- I Corinthians 13:13 NIV*