

“Baby Don’t Hurt Me (What is Love? Part 2)” based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Romans 13:8-14  
Delivered on September 6, 2020 at Absecon Presbyterian Church by Drew Mangione, pastor.

The title of today’s sermon may be lost on many of you who are outside the ages of 35 to 55, but seeing as Scott Sabo and I are in that age range together, we had a good laugh about a sermon from February 3, 2019 which was titled, ‘What is Love?’ Scott saw the title in the Presby Post and sent me a text asking if the next week’s sermon would be titled, “Baby Don’t Hurt Me.” This made me laugh out loud. Literally.

To let you in on the inside joke, these are the refrain lyrics of European Dance Club hit from 1993 sung by the artist Haddaway. “*What is love? Baby don’t hurt me. No more...*” The song was an instant hit in night clubs, but it became much more popular thanks to comedians Will Ferrell and Chris Kattan. It was the backdrop to their Saturday Night Live skit called, “The Roxbury Boys,” which had a spin-off movie titled, “A Night at the Roxbury.” In the skit and the movie, the two lovelorn brothers danced to the song, mostly by standing still in one place, and bobbing their heads to it.

Admittedly, this is an inside joke, but I laughed so hard and I loved Scott’s suggestion. However, calling the next sermon, ‘*Baby Don’t Hurt Me,*’ would have been forced back then. Still, I promised Scott that at some point, I would find a way to use that sermon title. And today, is that day, thanks to this suggested text from Romans 13, which I’ve paired linked to our scripture passage from last year to bring you a much-anticipated sequel by request.

Now in that sermon from more than 18 months ago, which truly seems like ages ago, I talked about the Apostle Paul’s views on ‘love,’ in the well-known passage 1 Corinthians 13. We talk a lot about ‘love’ in church and we assume we know what it is, what it means. But the word most often translated in our bibles as ‘love’ – ‘*agape*’ in Greek – was hardly even used back when the New Testament was written. It is barely found in ancient Greek writings and when it was used, it generally meant a preference or priority.

*Agape* only became a common word because of Christians who sought to be known by it. It’s the word Jesus uses in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, including in His command to love God and neighbor. *Agape* is the word used in the New Testament letters by Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude and the writer of Hebrews. Each one uses it to describe the unconditional love of God, and our love for one another.

Now, to the Corinthian church, Paul’s letter goes into great detail to define that word – *agape*. For the Christian church, it was not a mere preference or priority, but much more. The word needed a clear-cut definition, an answer to the question – What is *Agape*? What is Love?

If you’ve been in church long enough, or you’ve been to enough Christian weddings, you can recite with me at least part, if not all of Paul’s definition. ‘*Agape,*’ or Love, is patient, kind. Love is not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. Love is not irritable

or resentful. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but love rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things. Love believes all things. Love hopes all things. Love endures all things.

So, if you want to know what it means to love, just look to this passage right here. But maybe it's just me, and maybe I am truly the worst of all sinners, which I may well be, but this kind of love seems out of reach for most of us, right from the first word – patience.

Just think of the person you think that you love the most, or who loves you the most. Maybe it's a spouse or a child, another family member or friend. How often have you lost your patience with them, even been unkind? I don't even want to get into how I fail on the rest of the list. Now, I don't think our failures mean we don't actually love them if we fall short. However, it does show the high bar that Christian love sets, and how remarkable it would be if we practiced it, not just with those closest to us, but with everyone we meet. Love at that level, would change the world, and it has.

You see, *agape*, is not just the word for the love that we are called to have toward one another, this is also the love that God has for us. Nothing has had a greater impact on the world than God entering into our humanity, to live as we live, obedient to a mortal body, only to die on the cross, and rise again for us, so that we might receive God's eternal life. By this, Paul says earlier in Romans 5, God's Spirit is in us, filling us with *agape*.

Now, there is a depth to the first line in today's passage from Romans that is easy to miss. It reads, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." Indeed, our only debt in life is to love, to show *agape* toward one another, and the second half could be translated, *the one loving the other, has fulfilled the law*.

Jesus who is One with God, is the one who has already fulfilled the law for us by love for *the other*, meaning humanity, through love on that cross. Our active love for others, is but a reflection of Jesus's love for us and our faith in who He is and what He has done. This is not our own doing, but the Holy Spirit pouring love in our hearts.

So then, how do we fulfill the law through love, or *agape*, toward others in our life? Is it by obeying commandments? These are important, but they are not exactly the answer. You see, we humans are really good at complying with the letter of the law, without ever really being concerned about keeping the meaning of law. The ways of the world are very goal or accomplishment driven. We like to check off boxes and feel proud of our accomplishments, far more than we like to be changed and or as Paul suggested in the previous chapter in Romans, 'transformed by the renewing of our minds.'

The good news of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus isn't supposed to help us earn credit for not committing adultery, not murdering, not stealing, and not coveting, when these are things that we already should be expected to not do. In fact, Paul says this is part of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. You would not want to be cheated on, killed, robbed, or envied and hated for what you have, so it seems obvious to say don't do this to others.

But what's more, and where Paul raises the bar to the meaning behind these laws, he says that to merely 'not do' these things is still not enough. 'Love' means to do no wrong, no evil to your neighbor. It's like the doctor's oath to 'do no harm.' Yes, this is where the lyrics of the song illustrate the point of Paul's words. When we wonder, 'What is love?' do we hear the cries of others: 'Don't hurt me. No more'

You see Jesus said in John's gospel there is no greater love, than to lay down your 'life' for a friend, and like the reading from last week, the word here is 'psyche' which is bigger – it's our identity, our life and soul, the essence of who we are. Too often, we make excuses for the ways in which we hurt the people we say we love. We can't even own up to our responsibility to love, to show *agape* to those closest to us. We dismiss their feelings of hurt to accommodate how we want to see ourselves, namely our own goodness, righteousness and anything that upholds this. We see hurting and we think we have to change or convert them, we think we have to be tough, show them how we are right. We insist on our way, get irritable and resentful toward them. Often, in the name of love, we engage in wrongdoing, even just insults or fear mongering, and do so in the name of truth, ignoring the real truth of God's love.

We do this with those whom we call our friends, and often in public for the whole world to see on social media, where we are unwilling to lay down our identities – our political, national, social, even religious identities – because we long to revel in our being right, drunk on our own righteousness, seeking this conquest for our own gratification, with license to sin. But this only divides us, and creates strife and disorder, jealousy. God's Kingdom is about bringing all of us together in Christ, steeped in this love, this *agape*, to seek more than ourselves, which starts by listening to the hurt of others.

I say this, knowing that I too have a long way to go with this. This is a serious problem in our world today and we need to be reminded of what love is. Our communication should not be an effort to defeat those we are talking to, but instead, it should be a testimony to the power of God's love in our lives. To communicate with love is to reflect God's love in the way we talk to and listen to others. If we are hurting, this does not mean to be stoic and accept abuse, but to reflect these qualities in how we ask for God's love from others in our vulnerability by our willingness to admit where we have been hurt, the ways in which we are afraid, or worried. Anger most often comes from our fears, fears we are afraid to admit.

Friends, *agape*, love, is a strange and powerful force that can transform the world. God is reconciling all things through Christ, and we're called to be a part of that reconciliation. Paul tells us in this text that because Jesus came into this world, died and was raised, we know what time it is – the Greek word for time here is a moment in time – this is our moment, salvation is nearer, closer to us now, it is upon us. The night, yes, this points to the sin that blocked our ability to see God's light, is far away now, and the fullness of day is approaching. As Christians, we must not take up works of darkness, and repay this world's evil with evil of our own, but put on the armor of light, and live honorably by love.

What we have is greater than anything the world has to offer – we are clothed in Jesus, who is the anointed King, our Messiah, the Lord of our lives, who has fulfilled the law, and has shown us the depth of love He has for us, which we should show others. This *agape* love does not hurt others but reflects God's *agape* in this world.

Friends, I do not expect that any of us can do this perfectly, but we can choose to not make excuses for when we fail, and repent both to God and to those we may hurt. But doing this, starts with remembering what love is.

What is love? Well, it is patient and kind. It is not envious or boastful. Love isn't arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. It isn't irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing. Love rejoices in truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

What is love? It is the only thing that we owe to anyone, and we owe it to everyone. Love is what we are to be known for if we are to follow the One who loves us first. What is love? Love does no wrong, no evil, no harm, to a neighbor.

What is love? Love says, 'Don't hurt me.' Love listens and responds, 'No more.'

By this *agape* love, we lay down who the world tells us we should be, and become the person God wants us to be, clothed in Christ, to love others as citizens of God's Kingdom now and forever. Amen.

# Word Search Puzzle

from WhenWeWordSearch.com (use for free distribution only)  
words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

(Romans 13:8-14 NRSV) Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has ***fulfilled*** the law. The commandments, "You shall not ***commit adultery***; You shall not ***murder***; You shall not ***steal***; You shall not ***covet***"; and any other ***commandment***, are ***summed*** up in this ***word***, "***Love*** your neighbor as yourself." Love does no ***wrong*** to a ***neighbor***; therefore, love is the ***fulfilling*** of the ***law***. Besides this, you know what ***time*** it is, how it is now the ***moment*** for you to ***wake*** from ***sleep***. For ***salvation*** is ***nearer*** to us now than when we became believers; the ***night*** is far gone, the day is near. Let us then ***lay*** aside the works of ***darkness*** and put on the ***armor of light***; let us ***live honorably*** as in the ***day***, not in ***reveling*** and ***drunkenness***, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in ***quarreling*** and ***jealousy***. Instead, ***put*** on the ***Lord Jesus Christ***, and ***make*** no ***provision*** for the ***flesh***, to ***gratify*** its desires.