

What the World Needs Now
Romans 13:8-14

Though the list of things there are too much of could stretch from here to the moon and back, it does seem that love is not one of them. As songwriter Hal David once wrote, love is the only thing in this world there is just too little of. He may be right, or at least partially right. He wrote the song I borrowed for my sermon title at the height of the Vietnam War, and at first glance his words are almost like a prayer.

Lord we don't need another mountain,
There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb,
There are oceans and rivers enough to cross
Enough to last until the end of time

What the world needs now is love sweet love,
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.
What the world needs now is love sweet love,
no not just for some but for everyone.

Lord, we don't need another meadow,
there are corn fields and wheat fields enough to grow,
there are sunbeams and moonbeams enough to shine,
oh listen Lord, if you want to know

What the world needs now is love sweet love,
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.
What the world needs now is love sweet love,
no not just for some but for everyone.

So, the question begs to be asked- why is love in such short supply in our world? Some would answer by saying there is no shortage of love, it is just misplaced. Judging by the affection people have for things, that may be true. There are those who love things so much they will do anything, including taking unfair advantage of or even taking the life of another person, to get what they want. It happens on Wall Street and on Main Street. Greed and its close cousin envy hinder us from loving God and loving each other the way God desires us to. Some people love their stuff more than they love God and other people. We need less, not more of that kind of love.

Then there are those who would say the reason there is not enough love in the world is that some people do not have enough things because others have too many. Although there is some truth to that it is more of a symptom of a love starved world than a cause. Love is not a commodity like food or water that may be easily distributed among people. Only God loves people unconditionally and universally. God loves us so much that we are all created equally in His image. That does not mean we look like God, but that we all share some godly attributes, which includes the ability to love. Even though our human nature typically moves us to love those who have much less than we do rather than those with much more, the needs of those who are genuinely poor still go largely unmet.

So why is there such a shortage of genuine love? The writer of that popular song seems to place the blame squarely at God's feet, as if God does not already know that the world needs more love. "Listen Lord if you want to know, what the world needs now is love sweet love". God knows that better than any of us, and that was the whole reason He sent His Son Jesus Christ to the world in the first place. Not only does God know something about love, God is love. 1 John 4:7-9. **It is not that God does not know what people need, but that people are unwilling to do what God is asking of them.** God has given us everything we need to make love abound. His name is Jesus. If there is not enough love in the world, the fault is not with God, but with our selves.

Because we are created in God's image, we are all born with the ability and capacity to love. As we grow and mature, we also gain the knowledge that we were made to love each other. One of the foundational characteristics of a just and loving God is that He does not ask or require something from us without the means to accomplish it. Everyone, even those who claim no knowledge of God, has an innate ability of knowing that it is wrong not to love one another. If we do something that hurts another person, even unintentionally, we instinctively know it is wrong, even if our heart is so hard it is just for a fleeting moment. Paul puts it this way in Romans 2:15- "our conscience bears witness to the law". Those feelings of guilt we experience when we sin are there not just to make us feel bad but to have us recognize that what we have done grieves our Creator and that One greater than ourselves is calling us to repentance.

Love is abiding by the Scriptures, or as Paul says in verse 8 fulfilling God's law. A simple working definition of **love is doing what God has asked us to do and not doing what He has said we are not to do**. That is probably not what Hal David had in mind when he wrote the lyrics, but yes, the world does need that kind of love. The Scriptures define it and the church is the vessel God uses to pour it out into the world. God has entrusted the church, folks like you and I, us to show and share that love with others.

The apostle Paul reminds us how to do that in today's Scripture passage. He begins by listing the don'ts. Do not owe anyone anything other than your love. Be prepared to pay your bills when they come due. Don't cheat on your spouse. Have respect for human life. Have respect for the property of others. Don't take what doesn't belong to you. Don't say things that aren't true. Don't be angry or jealous if your neighbor has a bigger goat or a prettier wife than you do. How different our world would be if more people loved like that! Those things are nothing new. They are so important God had Moses write them down 3000 years ago and has preserved them throughout the age. People have been ignoring them ever since, which explains the sad condition of the world we live in. Yet even if we somehow managed to avoid breaking all those laws, the world would still need love because there is nothing proactive about them. In theory, it is possible to do each of those things and still not love our neighbor.

If the world is to have more love, we will need to do something in addition to not doing some things. The do is simple yet so hard. Love your neighbor as yourself. Meet a need somewhere, forgive someone who has wronged you, or ask forgiveness from someone you have hurt. Our challenge this week is to recognize the opportunities God will give us to do love, and then respond accordingly. Time is running short. What the world needs now is love, and His name is Jesus. What the world needs now is for us to be His love. I pray that will forever remain our song. Amen