**Living Out Radical Love:** Romans 13:8-14

What does Paul mean by love? He is talking about love in action. **As 1 John 3:18 reminds us: “Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”**

Love is not a passive feeling; it’s an active commitment. In Hebrew, the word for love, ahavah, means “to act lovingly toward.” The Greek word is about goodwill, compassion, and putting others first. So, here’s the first takeaway: **Love is an active commitment to others**. It requires effort, even when it’s not convenient or easy.

However, loving one another does not mean putting yourself in danger to say “yes” in every situation. **Love includes boundaries**. Setting healthy boundaries is loving, too. When Paul says, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” he is also reminding us to love ourselves. Self-care isn’t selfish; that’s healthy.

**Who Is My Neighbor?** Jesus already answered this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Your neighbor is not just the person who looks, thinks, or votes like you. It’s not just for the easy-to-love; it’s for the hard-to-love, too. It’s everyone. **Loving your neighbor means loving those who seem completely different from you and even those who are hard to love.** So, love one another is the greatest commandment at the same time the hardest one to practice.

**Historical Context: Roman Society**

When Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, the city of Rome itself was a melting pot of various cultures, ethnicities, and religious beliefs. The early Christian community in Rome consisted of both Jewish and Gentile believers, and they faced unique challenges in navigating their faith within the diverse and morally complex society. Back then, Jews and Gentiles didn’t always get along. But Paul showed them that through Jesus, they were all part of one big family. In this context, for Paul, loving one another doesn't mean "let us love with people who are like us” but rather **embracing differences with mutual respect and promoting unity in diversity in Christ**

Another notable aspect of Roman society is that it was marked by moral problems, strict social classes, and idol worship. They valued power, honor, and personal gain over sacrificial love. The idea of unconditional love (*agape*) was revolutionary. When Paul says **“put on the armor of light”** was a direct challenge to these cultural norms. Paul reminded them that living in the “light of Christ” meant **choosing goodness, honesty, and kindness**—even when the world around them didn’t. When we choose to love—even when it’s hard—it doesn’t just help others. It transforms us, too

**Illustration: The Bridge Builder**

In a small village, there was a deep and treacherous river that separated two communities. The river was too wide and dangerous for people to cross, making it nearly impossible for townspeople to interact or help one another. As a result, bitterness and division grew between the two sides.

One day, a wise and compassionate stranger arrived in the village. He could not bear to see the division and suffering caused by the impassable river. He decided to make a difference; he came up with a special plan. The stranger approached the people and said, "I will build a bridge that connects both sides of this river. With this bridge, you will be able to freely interact, support one another, and experience unity and love." They were astonished. They had never dreamed of such a possibility. However, they soon realized that building a bridge would require an immense amount of effort, resources, and cooperation from both communities.

Despite the challenges, the stranger's vision of a united village inspired the people. They decided to set aside their differences and work together. Each person contributed their skills, time, and resources, demonstrating a radical. When the bridge appeared, a beautiful thing happened. They not only built a physical bridge but also bridged the gaps between their hearts. They discovered that they had more in common than they thought, and their shared humanity was more important than their differences. Once the bridge was completed, they rejoiced. They were now able to cross the river, offering support, friendship freely, and love to one another. The bridge became a symbol of their radical love, reminding them of the power of unity and the transformative impact it could have on their lives.

Like the stranger, Jesus came into this world to build a bridge between God and humanity. He demonstrated radical love by sacrificing Himself on the cross, reconciling us to God and to one another. As followers of Christ, we are called to imitate His example and extend that radical love to those around us. **Our commitment is not just to live morally but to live counterculturally, challenging dominant social behavior and making a positive impact on society in a corrupt and divided world.**

Rodney Stark, a sociologist, once wrote about how the early church grew so rapidly. He said it wasn’t because of flashy sermons or big buildings. It was because Christians showed radical love. They cared for the sick, welcomed strangers, and treated everyone with dignity. That’s the kind of love that changes the world.

As we close, let’s ask ourselves: Where can we build bridges? Who needs our love today? Let’s go back to the source of all love—God—and ask Him to fill us with His Spirit so we can love radically and fearlessly.

**Prayer**

**We long to be more restful and less resentful, more merciful and less greedy, quicker to listen than to speak, quicker to be flexible than rigid, and more likely to be consoling than controlling. God grants us your forgiving spirit and we do not want to avoid the pain of conflict. We want to feel joy and hope every time, live every day as loving people. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.**