

Authentic Love

Romans 12:9-13

Intro

Some kids were asked to write letters to God. Here's what some of them had to say:

- “Dear God, it rained for our whole vacation and is my father mad! He said some things about you that people are not supposed to say, but I hope you will not hurt him anyway. Your friend (but I am not going to tell you who I am).”
- “Dear God, maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works for me and my brother.”
- “Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it.”

How true it is, to get along with people and to love those who give you a hard time is sometimes difficult.

In this passage of Romans 12:9-21 the Apostle Paul deals with biblical principles on how to live in a humble loving attitude toward others.

Paul sets out before us 25 exhortations on how to live out the Christian life in practical ways. In essence he is describing to us how love is worked out in our everyday life. He starts this passage in verse 9 with, “*Love must be sincere*” and he continues to unravel how that sincere love is to be put into action right through to the end of verse 21.

A. L. Huxley, the English novelist and philosopher, said, "It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian – it just takes all of him."

Sometime ago someone asked me, “How can you know if you are truly a Christian? How can you know if your decision for Christ wasn't just an emotional experience?”

Well, the only way to know is by looking at our heart and lives. If Christ is our Saviour and Lord, the deepest desire of our hearts will be to serve him and please him. That desire will be expressed in a longing to live a life of love. Love for God and one another.

It is not that our lives will have become perfect or that we will never waver in our commitment and obedience, but that the direction of our lives will be to become more like Christ in demonstrating His love.

I would like to unpack for you how this authentic love looks like in our practical walk. It is, if I can say, the evidence of a true born again believer. The first fruit of the Spirit is Love (Gal. 5:22) and that love/agape is the essence of all our motives, attitudes, behaviour and how we treat others.

Romans 12:9a “Love must be sincere” or “let love be without hypocrisy”

D. L. Moody used to say, "*There are a lot of people who talk cream, but live skim milk.*"

What Paul is talking about in Romans 12:9 is not that skim-milk kind of love; he is referring to love that is cleansed of self-fulfillment and a big ego. You see selfishness reigns in our society. People today look out for themselves to the neglect and hurt of those around them. The Bible is very clear that in the last days people will be “*lovers of themselves*” (2 Tim. 3:2).

We are to love in a pure way for the sake of Christ. Christ Himself put love for God and love for others at the heart of his teaching. In Mark 12:28-31 we read, “*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”*”²⁹ “*The most important one,*” answered

Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Love is the central focus

Through the years of my Christian life I can remember hearing people say, "We love so-and-so in the Lord." That used to mean, "I personally can't stand them, but I'm under spiritual obligation to love them." That's not what Paul is talking about. Christian love reaches out and meets needs. In John 13:34 Jesus said, "*love one another; as I have loved you...*" He had just demonstrated His love by washing His disciples' filthy feet. They had a need and He met that need. That kind of love humbly comes down to the level of someone's need.

1 Peter 1:22 also says, "*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.*"

Agape love centers on the needs and welfare of the person and will pay whatever price or act that is necessary to meet those needs and foster that welfare. Love has to be real, sincere and without hypocrisy.

There's probably no sin worse than hypocrisy. Judas was one of the greatest sinners who ever lived because of the profound depth of his hypocrisy. He kissed Jesus with a kiss of betrayal. That sin is the ugliest sin of all, because it fabricates affection when it is actually filled with self and selfish gain (30 pieces of silver). No vice is more destructive than hypocrisy. On the other hand, no virtue is more wonderful than authentic love – love without hypocrisy.

Now, the following verses in Romans 12:9-21, Paul describes the many facets of sincere love. One of his purposes is to specify some types of behaviour that manifest "sincere love."

Romans 12:9b "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good"

That command logically follows the first one: If you love God with all your heart and love your neighbour or fellow believer you're going to hate what is evil because evil stains the fellowship.

How can I say I love you and tolerate the sin that destroys our relationship? Sin is a disastrous invasion into a love relationship. So anyone who truly loves God and others has to hate evil. Psalm 97:10 says, "*You who love the LORD, hate evil...*" Loving God and participating in evil are absolutely opposed to each other because God is holy and therefore cannot tolerate sin (Hab. 1:13).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "*When Jesus calls a man he bids him come and die. Come and reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to love.*"

The verb "*hate*" is a present tense imperative verb. Therefore verse 9 can be paraphrased: "*Be constantly hating that which is evil.*" Evil isn't something we can tolerate at any level. We must hate it with a passion. There can be no truce made with evil. We must constantly hate everything that is evil.

Shocked by Sin

One writer said, "Our only security against sin is to be shocked by it." When we stop being shocked by sin, we are no longer secure against its invasion into our consciousness. In the society we live in, it's hard to be shocked by any sin because we've become so accustomed to it. But we are to hate sin.

As followers of Christ, we are to hold on to what is good, that which is inherently right and pure.

In Philippians 4:8 Paul says, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*” Or cling to such things.

Romans 12:10a “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”

Paul says to Timothy that people will be "without natural affection" in the last days (2 Tim. 3:3). There will be a breakdown in normal love relationships within families and communities. Paul says that the Christian family ought to have an affectionate kind of love. Christians ought to be marked by a natural love that is shared with all believers.

I think you've experienced that kind of love when you've met other Christians. I can go where I don't know anyone, but if they love the Lord Jesus Christ, it doesn't take very long for us to experience a bond of love that is unique to Christians. There is a common bond that stretches beyond culture, time, place, and circumstances.

Even though we may not have much in common, there is an immediate sense of affection with one who belongs to the family of God. That kind of love is given to anyone who belongs to the same Lord and Father. That's why our Lord says in Matthew 18:10 that you are never to despise "look down upon" anyone who's in the family of God. On the contrary, we should have a natural love for fellow Christians. In our homes, as a family, we protect and care for each other. That's how it ought to be in God's family.

Jesus said that "*whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receives me*" (Matt. 18:5). That's the kind of love our Lord calls for.

This means that we are to fully and consistently apply ourselves to furthering the best interests of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We do this not when it is just convenient but on a regular bases.

Romans 12:10b “Honour one another above yourselves.”

This means we are to regard others more highly than ourselves. The virtue here is humility, not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3).

Philippians 2:3-4 say, “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*”

Romans 12:11 “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

Zealousness and fervency of spirit should characterize our lives as we serve the Lord. We are not to be lazy, but fervent in spirit as we serve the Lord. People can get excited about many things: houses, cars, wardrobes; football, baseball, soccer and games. But our excitement is the Lord and serving Him with enthusiasm.

C. T. Studd possessed much of the world's goods, but gave it all away and became a missionary. He wrote, "*Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.*" I like that spirit!

Paul loved serving the Lord. I do, too. The sense of satisfaction in serving Christ outweighs any other satisfaction the world has to offer. We are called to serve the Lord with a fervent, enthusiastic spirit. If you can't serve Him that way, then the problem is not where you're serving, but what you have in your heart and attitude.

Romans 12:12 “Be joyful in hope. Patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Anyone who fully serves the Lord with their whole heart is constantly aware of the Christian's hope for the future. When you serve the Lord, you automatically have a heavenly focus. It's that hope for the future that keeps us going. In spite of the opposition and indifference we run in to and the failures we experience, our service to the Lord results in our hope for the day when we will rest from our labours and be rewarded. The hope of better things brings joy to the obedient Christian. I serve because someday I want to go to the Lord and hear, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*"

The word "*patient*" means "to stay under." We can stay under pressure because we know what's coming. We can endure the trouble or "*affliction*". We can serve the Lord, reaching out in hope because we see the reward that's coming in the future. We endure pain, rejection, animosity, the struggle with Satan and his demons, and everything else that defies what we are trying to accomplish for God's glory. But that's not the end. Someday there will be eternal victory. That gives us joy and allows us to endure the pressure. Furthermore, as we bring our afflictions to the Lord in prayer, He will sustain us.

Romans 12:13 “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

The world is bent on getting, but Christians are committed to giving. The flow of our life is not in, but out. The Greek word for "*share*" comes from *koinonia*, which means "communion, sharing, partnership, fellowship." It indicates that I'm a partner with other brothers and sisters, and that if they have a need, I should share my resources with them. What I have, I manage for the Lord. Where there are people with needs, my resources are equally theirs because we share as the family of God.

Who should I share and give? The answer is very simple. Jesus answered the question, "Who is my neighbour?" with the story about a man lying on a road on the way to Jericho after having been beaten and robbed (Luke 10:30-37). The point of the story is that your "neighbour" is whoever is in your path with a need.

That is a strong statement encouraging Christians to love people. Hospitality is not to be done reluctantly, saying, "Oh brother, we've got someone else coming over! Do we have to share our resources with them? We can't keep this up!" We are to pursue hospitality, which is an expression of love towards others.

Conclusion

At a certain time in his ministry D. L. Moody was deeply touched and moved by love. He said, "*I took up that word Love, and I do not know how many weeks I spent in studying the passages in which it occurs, till at last I could not help loving people. I had been feeding on love so long that I was anxious to do everybody good I came in contact with. I got full of it. It ran out my fingers. You take up the subject of love in the Bible! You will get so full of it that all you have to do is open your lips, and a flood of Love of God flows out.*"

Jesus said: "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" (John 13:34-35).

The Holy Spirit wants to produce in us that kind of love. Authentic love that oozes and flows out of us to others!