

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation
TITLE: Let Your Love Be Genuine

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:9-21

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

To my way of thinking, one of the hardest things for people who are seeking to follow Christ to do is to love people who don't believe and live like them. I mean, we believe, *by the grace of God*, we've come to know God and we know, *by what's written in the Bible*, how God wants people to live. We believe that the Bible teaches us the difference between good and evil—right and wrong—wise and unwise. I'm not saying we always live according to what we know is right and wrong—but for the most part, we know right and wrong and we're really good at seeing when others aren't living the way they should. And that's where the rub is because: *When you think you're right about something, it can be very hard to love people you believe are wrong.* But the same Bible that teaches us what's right and wrong also tells us that if we don't genuinely love all people—*those who agree with us and those who disagree with us*—then we are not right with God even though we might be right about what we believe.

Matthew 5:43-48--Jesus is correcting what has been taught by the Pharisees which basically was, "Love the people who believe like us and live like us. Consider everyone else an enemy." But Jesus taught us to love our enemies; love people who believe and live differently from you *because* God loves people who don't live like he tells them to live. That's not to say that they won't face God's judgment at some point in the future. But in the here and now, God shows himself to be good to all people, good or bad. Therefore, so must we.

But we have a hard time loving people we believe are wrong because to act in loving ways toward someone we believe is wrong feels like we're condoning their wrong behavior. But if our Father in Heaven can love people in the wrong without compromising his inherent righteousness and if Jesus can love unholy people without compromising his holiness, then why can't we?

The apostle Paul paraphrases and expands on what Jesus said in Matthew 5 in Romans 12:9-21. This passage contains over 30 *do and don't* commands depending how you parse them out. But, simply reading them doesn't automatically bring the life-change we need? So how can a list of 30 commands make a difference in our lives?

Let's think about the historical context in the Roman church. The Roman church was made of Christians from Jew and Greek backgrounds. And even though these two groups of people came to be God's one new people in Christ, they were still very different people. They believed the same basic Gospel doctrines, but in regards to "secondary" matters, they held very different convictions (see Romans 14:2-6 for specific examples of their differing convictions). Each group thought their way of seeing things was the right way/the only way to see things and that meant everyone else was wrong. The question is: How do you bring these two groups together and get them to live in harmony with each other. Paul's big idea was: God has made you one people in Christ so don't let secondary matters make you two again.

Paul's says, only by learning to genuinely love each other can unity be preserved.

Let your love be genuine, he says. The word "genuine" or "sincere" literally means "unhypocritical/without hypocrisy"--Let your love be without hypocrisy. How is that possible? Let your love be genuine/unhypocritical by hating what's evil and holding fast to what's good (v.1) which would ensure that you are not overcome by evil yourself and that you would overcome evil by doing good (v.21). Unity will only be preserved when believers genuinely love each other despite their differences.

But our love can become hypocritical when: (1) We pretend to love someone on the outside when we have unloving feeling toward them on the inside. Our love must be true to our hearts. We are to love those we don't love. ??? How is that possible? What do you do when you know the Bible tells you to act in loving ways toward someone, but you don't have the loving feelings to back it up? Isn't that hypocritical. Yes it is, but that doesn't let you off the hook. The Gospel teaches us that we are to love others as God loves us. So when we find it hard to love someone, we do loving things while repenting of unloving feelings. If you show love as you repent of unloving feelings, your heart softens and your love becomes more genuine toward hard-to-love people over time. Also, (2) Our love can become hypocritical when we refuse to confront the wrong someone is doing in the name of love. In other words, our love must be true to the will of God. Example: Jesus and the woman caught in adultery in John 8--Jesus stood up for the woman, but he stood against her sin. He hated the evil of her being enslaved to sin, but at the same time he held fast to the good by loving her well.

Who do you have hard feelings toward? Who has hurt you so bad it's hard for you to love them? Who do you believe is wrong about something they're doing and it makes you so mad you can't hardly stand it? Is it someone outside the church? Someone inside the church? Is there anyone you despise? Read back through vv.9-21 and ask the Holy Spirit to apply specific expressions of genuine love to your heart as it relates to that person or group of people.

For Discussion:

Begin by having someone read Romans 12:1-21. Our focus will be on vv. 9-21. Have everyone look at the following paraphrased list and take a personal inventory that will then be discussed in the group. (remember, the Sermon Notes are on the app or you can make copies for everyone in your group.)

Ask: (1) In which 2 of these am I weakest? (2) In which of these do I struggle with the most? (3) What practical steps can I take to strengthen myself in these two areas?

- Love the the people you find hard to love with repentance and sincerity of heart. (v.9)
- Love, by being willing to speak the truth in love. Don't make the person an idol who can lead you to allow him/her to sin ...or... who may lead you into sin. (v.9)
- Love with dogged affection over the long haul, no matter what. Stay loyal. (v.10-12)
- Love by making people feel honored and valuable. Listen and show utmost consideration to those around you. (v.10)
- Love by being generous in a practical way with your home, money, and time. (v.13)
- Love without bitterness. Don't try to get even or hold on to resentment against others. (v.14)
- Love with empathy. Be willing to be emotionally involved with others. (v.15)
- Love with humility, Be willing to associate with people who are very different than you. (v.16)
- Love by not avoiding hostile people, but planning appropriate kind and courteous words and deeds. (v.21)