

The Church That Loves

Romans 12:9-10

Paul has moved us through Romans 12 by first talking about how we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God, and then by telling us to discover and use our spiritual gifts. Now, Paul moves into the area of RELATIONSHIPS.

Verse 9 begins a section that strings together about 25 exhortations that continue until the end of the chapter. They are, as Douglas Moo writes, “a volley of short, sharp injunctions with little elaboration.”

Now in Romans 12:9-13, Paul frames a thought. It is like a chain with different links all the way down. There are about 10 participles, if I counted correctly, from verse 9-13. The next imperative verb comes as a command in verse 14. Participles are verbs that describe how something is done, they modify the main idea. So the things Paul urges us to do and to be in these verses are not just independent commands that are unrelated to each other. Rather, they are all describing how we are to love without hypocrisy. The whole thought here is relationships in the body of Christ—how we treat one another. We know we are gifted differently and we are going to serve one another through those gifts, but what is it that houses all of that service? What is the house that all those gifts live in? It is this love without hypocrisy.

These verses flesh out what love looks like in the Christian life. The theme of the passage is not hard to find: *Love must govern all our relationships*. John Stott calls this Paul’s “recipe for love.” The theme of love in relationships actually runs all the way through verse 21. But today we are going to focus on verses 9-13:

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Today I want us to see what love should look like in our relationships with one another.

1. Love must be sincere.

“Let love be without hypocrisy.” (v. 9a).

The word here for “love” is the word “agape,” which means unconditional and sacrificial love. It is the kind of love that God shows to us in Christ. We have seen that love described in Romans 1-11. In Romans 5:8 Paul wrote, **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** God does not just love the lovely, He loves sinners. He loves so much that Christ died for us while we were still His enemies. This love of God is so strong and deep that Paul writes in Romans 8 that absolutely nothing **“shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

But God not only demonstrates that permanent, unconditional, sacrificial love for us in Christ, He also produces that love in us through His Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5 says, **“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”** When Paul teaches about the fruit of

the Spirit, or what the Holy Spirit produces in believers he writes in Galatians 5:22, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, ...”**

The word “hypocrisy” originally referred to an actor who played a certain role on stage. In ancient Greece actors wore masks that showed the emotion that they were supposed to be portraying. Some of the masks were happy, others were sad. The actor did not necessarily feel as the mask signaled, but the mask showed the role that he was playing. Paul says that our love for one another is not to be a phony mask or role playing, but rather be the real thing.

Eugene Peterson (The Message) offers this paraphrase of the first part of verse 9: **“Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it.”** John wrote about that love in 1 John 3:16-18

16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Love without hypocrisy is not just saying “I love you,” but it is doing love in action and in truth.

John Piper points out that hypocrisy often shows itself in two ways:

- 1) *Hypocrisy tries to make the outside look better than the inside.* Jesus said to the religious people of His day, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.”** (Matthew 23:27 NKJV)

We put forward what looks like a loving behavior that does not really signify what we feel inside—just as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:3, **“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”** So you can do some remarkable external acts of sacrifice and not have love.

So the first way that hypocrisy shows itself is when we hide internal sin by putting up a moral, external front. Most often people do this to impress others and get the praise of men.

Paul says love is not like that. It is not hypocritical. It does not crave the praise of men. It doesn’t do good for people just to get their applause. Instead we love because Christ has so loved us.

- 2) *Hypocrisy overlooks our own flaws while condemning them in others.* Jesus taught, (Luke 6:42 NKJV) **42 “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.”** But love is not that way. Love doesn’t put up artificial fronts. Love does not dwell on the flaws of others. Love does not act religious to hide sin.

So Paul’s point is that your motive must always be sincere, to seek the other person’s greatest good, which is conformity to the image of Christ. If you’re just looking out for your own interests and trying to manipulate the situation for your own benefit, you’re not

practicing biblical love. If you praise the person to her face and then run her down behind her back, you're not practicing biblical love.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Love must be sincere.

2. Love must be discerning.

"Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good." (v. 9b).

As I said, in the Greek text, "abhor" and "cling" are participles that show how love without hypocrisy operates: "abhorring what is evil; clinging to what is good." In other words, biblical love is discerning. Paul writes to the Philippians, **"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,"** (Phil. 1:9). It never endorses, aligns itself, or encourages in others attitudes or behavior that is evil. Rather, it embraces what is good in God's sight: His good, acceptable, and perfect will (12:2).

The word abhor means to shrink back from horror or to detest. You tremble at the thought of it. Love hates evil! Think about that for a second. Often we think of love as an ooey-goey emotion that causes us to lose our sense of right and wrong, but that's far from true Christian love. We cannot love evil and love God at the same time.

Paul's words obviously imply that there is an objective, knowable standard of what is evil and what is good. This standard does not change with the times or with different cultures. God has revealed His holy standards of right and wrong in His Word.

Love does not mean ignoring right and wrong. Love always makes that distinction. Love may choose to love in the face of wrong, and often does. It does not call wrong, right, and it does not ignore the distinction between wrong and right. Love distinguishes.

Here's another way to put it. *Don't ever get over being shocked by evil.* That's hard to do in a world where almost anything goes.

The opposite of abhorring what is evil is to **"cling to what is good."** The verb, "cling to," literally, is to be "glued to." "The good" is God's good, acceptable, and perfect will (12:2), His moral will, which is revealed in His Word. In Philippians 4:8, Paul instructs, **"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."**

We must hold tightly to that which is good because the enemy is always trying to get us to loosen our grip on the good by being more tolerant of what is evil. Psalm 97:10 commands, "Hate evil, you who love the Lord." Or, Proverbs 8:13, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate." Loving God and fearing Him are the basis for the proper hatred and disgust of all that is evil. It is only to the degree that we love Him for the beauty of His holiness that we will hate evil and cling to what is good.

Please take Paul's words to heart!

Never get over being shocked by evil.

Glue yourself to what is good.

3. Love Must Display Tender Affection.

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love" (v. 10a).

Paul uses two words that speak of the love of family members for each other. One of them is a word you already know—*philadelphia*. It comes from two Greek words that have been joined together: *philos*, which means tender affection, fondness, devotion,” and *adelphos*, usually translated “brother,” but it literally means “one born of the same womb.” So the word *philadelphia* literally means “tender affection owed to those born from the same womb.”

In Christ we are a family. We are brothers and sisters, children of God, born of the same womb. Born again by the Holy Spirit of God through faith in Jesus Christ. So we are to love each other with a devotion that is characteristic of a loving, close-knit, supportive family.

Some of you may think, but I don’t feel love toward that person. How can I change the way I feel? The answer is to go back to verses 1-3. First offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice as a service of worship because of the mercy that God has shown you in Christ Jesus when He saved you. Renew your mind by reading, studying, memorizing and living out God’s word. Let God change the way you think about yourself and others. Act on God’s commands in His word and God will change the way you feel toward others.

Everyone who belongs to Jesus belongs to me. And I owe all of them tender affection and brotherly love. Let us be clear about this. We are to love all true believers everywhere all the time. Brotherly love embraces all true believers no matter who they are or what church they happen to attend.

4. Love Must Honor Others.

“in honor giving preference to one another” or “Outdo one another in showing honor”(v. 10b).

The Greek word actually has a sense of competition about it, so the translation “outdo one another” is very accurate. We are not to seek honor for ourselves, but rather genuinely to rejoice when others receive honor and we don’t. That’s easily said and hard to practice!

So when Paul says, “Give preference to one another in honor,” he doesn’t mean that we should deny our gifts or knowledge. Rather, he means that we should have a true estimate of ourselves. We should not over-estimate ourselves and under-estimate others.

This means that you look for tangible ways that you might honor a brother or sister. You do not let these opportunities come to you; you pursue them. You seek to “outdo one another” in trying to show esteem. This is the practice Paul explained to the Philippian believers in light of the humiliation, death, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. **“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others, Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”** (Php 2:3-5). Is this your practice toward others in the body? If you do not go out of your way to get to know others and to invest yourselves in others, then you are not fulfilling what the Word commands as an outgrowth of genuine love.

Conclusion

How do we grow in this sincere love for one another? Steven Cole gives some practical ways:

1. **Confess your own selfishness and anger as sin and ask God's forgiveness.** Self is the main enemy when we fail to love others. Sincerely ask forgiveness from the one you sinned against (beginning with your mate and kids!).
2. **Remember God's love for you at the cross.** In Ephesians 4:32-5:2, Paul writes, **"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."**
3. **Depend on the Holy Spirit.** When we walk in the Spirit, we will not carry out the deeds of the flesh. Instead, His fruit will grow in us: **"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"** (Gal. 5:22-23).
4. **Evaluate your love.** Memorize 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, so that you can evaluate whether your attitudes, words, and actions are in line with biblical love: **"Love suffers long [and] is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails.."** Read those verses over each morning until they shape the way that you relate to your family and to others.

Show me a church where there is love, and I will show you a church that is a power in the community. In Chicago a few years ago a little boy attended a Sunday school I know of. When his parents moved to another part of the city the little fellow still attended the same Sunday school, although it meant a long, tiresome walk each way. A friend asked him why he went so far, and told him that there were plenty of others just as good nearer his home.

"They may be as good for others, but not for me," was his reply.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because they love a fellow over there," he replied.

If only we would truly love one another could make the world believe that we loved them there would be fewer empty churches, and a smaller proportion of our population who never darken a church door. Let love replace duty in our church relations, and the world will soon be evangelized.