

Genuine Love: Romans 12:9-13

Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church

Sunday, March 30th, 2014

We're studying the book of Romans in the New Testament, and we're now in the last major section of this letter. In chapters 1-8 Paul has taught us many foundational truths of the Gospel. In chapters 9-11 he taught us about God's sovereign plans to save Gentiles and Jews. Now, beginning in chapter 12 we're learning how Christians are to live in light of all these Gospel truths.

Romans is a great book to study to understand the essentials of the Christian faith. We learn here the most basic truths that Christians believe. And we also learn how Christians are to live. These two things are not separated in Christianity. Faith and practice go together. What we believe and how we live are integrally linked. Christianity is not just a set of beliefs. It's not merely a list of theological affirmations. Nor is Christianity just a list of morals. It's not merely a strategy for living. No, Christianity is faith in the Person of Jesus Christ, who died in the place of sinners such that those who repent of their sins and rest in Jesus . . . they will be saved from eternal punishment in hell. And those who repent and believe in that way, in a saving way, their lives will change dramatically as they are conformed to the image of Christ. You see, we become like our Savior. Slowly, gradually, imperfectly . . . we become like Him.

Romans 12 gives us many concrete instructions that spur us on toward conformity to Christ. The passage we're going to look at this week and next week, just these 5 verses, gives 13 separate commands. They are all very short. Paul doesn't elaborate on them in much detail at all. But he's painting a picture here for us of the things that should characterize our lives as followers of Jesus Christ, as those who are living in the mercies of God. You remember verse 1 of chapter 12 began with the words, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God . . ." All of this instruction is based on the mercies of God, which is what we learned so much about in the earlier chapters of Romans. So none of these commands are without a basis. They don't come to us in a vacuum. They come to us as a structure that is built on a foundation. The foundation is the Gospel truth of Christ's sacrificial death for hell-deserving sinners such as ourselves. The structure Paul is now constructing for us is what a person's life looks like who is standing on that rock.

I hope that each of you is a true believer. I hope that you are repenting of your sins and that your hope is in Jesus Christ, who is the only Person who can wipe away your guilt. And I pray that all of us who are believers will grow in our Christlikeness as we meditate on these specific, tangible instructions for our lives.

This is an interesting paragraph, because each statement is so short, so specific, and many of them seem somewhat unrelated. It's hard to discern a clear logical flow from one to the next, and I don't think we need to. This is the style of teaching Paul is using now in this section. He's giving lots of instruction. In the big picture they're all related, because they are all part of what it means to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. These are all examples of God's will for our lives. But these instructions speak to many different facets of our lives. So there's endless application from these verses. These are verses that we should each consider carefully and thoughtfully.

Let's look at four aspects of this paragraph this morning, focusing on verses 9-10 and 13, and then we'll look at this same paragraph next Sunday, focusing on verses 11-12. And then my plan for Palm Sunday and Good Friday and Easter is to teach from Isaiah 53 – just so you know where we're heading.

For this morning, we'll focus on verses 9-10 and 13. The four headings are these: Love without hypocrisy, love for what is good, love for one another, and love in action.

Last week we learned about the diversity of spiritual gifts which God gives to His people. Each of us should be humble, and the church should be unified, as we celebrate the complementary gifts given to each of us. That was verses 3-8. In these next verses Paul speaks of love. It's important for us to always remember that our particular gifts are to be exercised in humility and for building up the unity of the church, and they should be exercised in love for our brothers and sisters. The flow of thought in 1 Corinthians 12-13 is strikingly similar. 1 Corinthians 12 is all about spiritual gifts and also uses the metaphor the body—one body with many members. That's followed by the great love chapter of the Bible – 1 Corinthians 13. The point of that chapter is that without love all those spiritual gifts are worthless.

We may have tremendous spiritual gifts, tremendous abilities and resources and strategies. But if there is not love, it's all meaningless. So we need to understand love. We need to understand genuine love, and we need to be continually renewed so that we grow in this love.

Love without Hypocrisy

The first exhortation is for love to be genuine. The word translated “genuine” is *anyocritos*—without hypocrisy. So in order to understand genuine love we have to understand its opposite—hypocritical love.

The word hypocrite comes from the theater, where the actors would wear various masks as they played different parts. It means pretender. So when it is used outside of the theater context, it refers to a duplicitous, insincere person.

We find a good definition and illustration of hypocrisy in Mark 7 where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for being hypocritical. They come as religious overachievers, looking down their noses at Jesus and His disciples, and Jesus tells them that they’re just a bunch of poseurs. They posture themselves as the super spiritual heroes of society. Puffed up with pride, they think that they are setting the pace for true religion. They think that their lives serve as the very definition of true love for God. And Jesus tells them, your so-called love for God is just a façade. It’s empty. It’s vain. You’re just pretenders.

In verses 6-7 Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13, and these words provide a definition of hypocrisy. We shouldn’t be surprised that in Isaiah’s day, as in Jesus’ day, as in our day, there has been hypocrisy. So Jesus chooses to quote some words that the Pharisees and scribes would have been familiar with from the great prophet Isaiah, and Jesus applies it to them. “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” That’s a definition of hypocrisy. That’s a definition of hypocritical love as opposed to genuine love.

Hypocritical love involves giving lip-service to God. It involves external things. There is an outward form of worship. But it is only pretending. It is merely external, because the heart remains far from God. That’s the key to the definition of hypocrisy here. There is lip-service, but no genuine love. It is empty and vain, because the heart is not in it.

Now look at this illustration of hypocritical love in verses 9-13 of Mark 7. Jesus has given them a definition of hypocrisy from Isaiah, and now He’s going to quote from Moses, from the Ten Commandments, and then contrast that with the practice of Corban.

First Jesus quotes from the Ten Commandments, from Exodus 20:12: “Honor your father and your mother.” Then, to emphasize the weight of that command, Jesus also includes this other quote from the Pentateuch, which can be found in Exodus 21:17 and Leviticus 20:9. Not only is there the positive command to honor your father and your mother, there is also the negative command that those who curse father or mother must surely die. And then here’s what Jesus says in verses 11-12, “But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, ‘Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother.’”

Here’s the situation. The custom of Corban goes back to Leviticus 27:28, which says, “But no devoted thing that a man devotes to the Lord . . . shall be sold or redeemed, it shall be sold at the valuation.” People could devote things to the Lord. They could give gifts to God. They could even devote *all of their possessions* to the Lord. But here’s the loophole. That didn’t necessarily mean that you gave up those possessions immediately. It was more like writing it into your will—“when I die, all of my possessions will be turned over to the temple.” That’s the vow a person would be making when they declared their possessions to be Corban. It may have seemed very spiritual, but it was actually used as a way to dishonor one’s parents. It was understood that part of honoring one’s parents was to support them financially in their old age. But the Pharisees and scribes had found a way to relieve people of that obligation. If they devoted their possessions to the temple, then they wouldn’t be obligated (indeed, they could not) use any of their possessions to support their parents. The individual could still enjoy all the benefits of his possessions for the duration of his life, but he could not give any of it to his parents.

Do you see how sneaky this is? To give the appearance of being super spiritual, when in reality the action is motivated by greed and selfishness?! To give the appearance of a deep love for God, when really it’s just love of self?

Before we condemn them too harshly, we need to consider how we might be doing similar things. In what ways might we be acting in ways that outwardly look very loving, that outwardly look like we have a deep love for God and a sacrificial love for others, but in reality are motivated more by pride and greed than anything else?

Another helpful illustration is the one James uses in James 2, addressing the evil of partiality. “*My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord*

of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2:1–4, ESV)

Partiality is evaluating individuals based on external things—their outward appearance, or their ethnic background, or their status in society, or any other external criterion. If we give special treatment to certain individuals because they are well-dressed, or because they have a prestigious career, or because they have a similar background as us, then we are showing favoritism. If we differentiate between groups of people based on these outward things, and we give special treatment to certain groups and not others, this is partiality. It may look like we're being very loving toward certain individuals, but if we're showing preference toward individuals who have certain characteristics that we're attracted to, and we're ignoring other individuals who we don't like as well for whatever reason, then it's not genuine love. It's hypocritical love.

The kind of love that Christians ought to exhibit is a love that only God can put in our hearts. Our natural inclination is toward hypocritical love. It's easy to show kindness to folks we naturally like, or to folks who have been kind to us. But to love genuinely is an act of God. God loves us genuinely. He loves us in a way that we don't deserve. And one of the results of Him changing us is that we, too, can now love genuinely.

This is one instance of the connection between the rock-solid foundation of Gospel truth in the first part of this letter, and the life application in the last part of the letter. Let me read you some of the verses about love in the earlier part of Romans. In the first half of the letter most of the statements about love are statements of God's love for us.

The letter is addressed *"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints."* (Romans 1:7, ESV)

"and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:5, ESV)

"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8, ESV)

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35–39, ESV)

God has shown His love for us so powerfully in sending His own beloved Son to die in our place. He loved us, not because of any attractive thing about us, not because of any benefit we could bring to Him, not because of any favor we could do for Him, but out of sheer grace. His genuine and gracious love for us, then, is the foundation of our love for others. And we’re exhorted in this way repeatedly in Romans 12 and following. 1 John 4:19 sums it up well: *“We love because he first loved us.”* (1 John 4:19, ESV)

Love for what is Good

The opposite of love is hate. And the opposite of good is evil. Following the first statement about genuine love, Paul gives these two connected exhortations: “abhor [hate] what is evil; hold fast to what is good.” It may seem sudden to switch so quickly from love to hate. But, in reality, love and hate can both be expressions of the same core commitment. To deeply love one thing is to strongly hate something else. If you love justice, for instance, you will hate injustice. If you love truth, you will hate falsehood. If you love purity, you will hate those sins and temptations that seek to tarnish purity.

A couple weeks ago, in the sermon on verses 1-2 of Romans 12, I made the point that Christianity is not about sacrifice just for the sake of sacrifice. Verse 2 says, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind . . .”*

It’s one thing for something else. We see it again here in verse 9. It’s not hating evil just to have something to hate. It’s hating evil because I love what is good. So the hatred of evil is due to the fact that I don’t want anything to get in the way of me enjoying what is truly good.

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is

commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8, ESV)

When those God-centered thoughts more and more characterize your life, then you will more and more hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good.

Love for One Another

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. (Romans 12:10)

Notice the phrase “one another” in both of those sentences. This is a very important part of the Christian life. This is the context in which we live out genuine love. It starts here, in the family of believers, and then it spills over into the world. Later in Romans 12 we read of the kindness we should show even to those who do evil against us, even those who persecute us. That’s the overflow of a family of Christ-followers who exhibit love for one another.

At the beginning of February I preached a sermon on “Christ and Community.” In that sermon I read a sampling of the “one another” commands in the New Testament. I want to read those for you again this morning. This is not just in Paul’s writings. It is throughout the New Testament. This shows the family ties that we have with other believers.

Be at peace with one another. (Mark 9:50)

Love one another. (John 13:34)

Live in harmony with one another. (Romans 12:16)

Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)

Care for one another. (1 Corinthians 12:25)

Through love serve one another (Galatians 5:13)

Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2)

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32)

Encourage one another and build one another up. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another. (James 5:16)

Love one another earnestly from a pure heart. (1 Peter 1:22)

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (1 Peter 4:9)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:11)

The word Paul uses in Romans 12:10 is *philadelphia*. *Phileō* is a word for love, and *adelphos* means brother. This is brotherly and sisterly love. It's the kind of love exhibited in a strong and healthy family, which is what we're supposed to be.

A strong and healthy family loves to be together, laughs together, cries together, hugs one another, supports one another, gives grace to one another, and on and on.

Another evidence of this familial love is a desire to honor one another. Here's a good way of gauging where we're at with showing brotherly and sisterly love to one another. Ask yourself this question: is it easy or difficult for me to point out an evidence of grace in the life of another believer? I believe that would be a way to honor a brother or sister in Christ—to encourage them, honor them, by commending some godly attribute in their life.

Selfishness and pride and jealousy will make it very difficult to honor others. Competitiveness will make it impossible to complement someone who you see as a rival. But we're not rivals. We're a family. We shouldn't be comparing as though we're keeping score of who's doing the most or who's doing the best. We shouldn't think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, as verse 3 says. And when each of us sees ourselves appropriately, not with a swelled head, then we'll be able to acknowledge the wonderful things God is doing in others. Humility and unity will result in honoring one another. Think of a way this week that you could show honor to another believer.

Love in Action

This is another way that we live out the family relationships we have in the church. We share and we show hospitality. This is

love in action. A family shares its stuff. If I have extra of something, and you don't have enough, I'll share with you. The word for "contribute" is the verbal form of the noun *koinōnia*. Maybe you've heard that Greek word before. It means fellowship . . . sharing life together. Literally this is saying, "share the needs of the saints." Fellowship is sharing life together. One aspect of that is sharing burdens and helping with tangible needs.

Hospitality is another aspect of this. We welcome each other into our homes. We are welcoming and kind to one another. If you're intimidated by this, I would just encourage you to lower your expectations of what you need to do to be hospitable. You don't have to have your house spotless and have a 4 course gourmet meal to serve up. You just need to make efforts to welcome others into your life, showing kindness and compassion. It may be inviting someone over to watch a hockey game, or inviting someone to your small group, or having a few folks over for dessert. This happens not only in our homes, but also in our corporate gatherings here in this building and any other place we gather. Do we have the attitude of "what's mine is yours"? You are welcome here. Greeting visitors on Sunday mornings is one simple application of this. Are we willing to gladly greet and welcome others into this church? Are we willing to share our parking places and share our pews and share our friendships with brothers and sisters in Christ who are new to this church?

Let me close with the example of the Macedonians, which Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 8. He's telling this to the Corinthian church, not to create rivalry and not to manipulate, but to encourage them. He wants the church in Corinth to see the grace and the joy of the Macedonian church in the hope that the Corinthian church will be spurred on by it. Paul wants that grace and joy to overflow in all the churches. And his pastoral concern is not so much about the amount as it is about the motivation. He wants to be clear that Christian generosity flows from God's grace poured out on us, and Christian generosity is for the purpose of God's glory. Biblical generosity is by God's grace and for God's glory.

In 8:1, before Paul even mentions the Macedonians, he first speaks of the grace of God. Paul does want to lift up the Macedonians as a positive example. But he's in no way praising the Macedonians. He is praising God. He is thanking God for this amazing work that He has done. Paul is acknowledging a profound evidence of grace in the life of the Macedonian church. "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia." That's a God-

centered, God-glorifying way of describing the situation. It's also a way of showing honor to the Macedonian church, like I was talking about a moment ago. And this is a great example of how to show honor to individuals in a God-centered way.

We know this must be the grace of God, because everything about these circumstances would incline these people away from generosity. Verse 2, "for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." Who has ever heard of a severe test of affliction and abundance of joy going together in the same sentence? Who has ever heard of extreme poverty and a wealth of generosity overflowing from the same group of individuals? That's the amazing grace of God!

Paul continues to describe the characteristics of their generosity, and it's further testimony of how radically they have been changed by God's grace. He writes in verse 3, "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means . . ." In other words, they gave extremely generously, even as they were struggling to make ends meet themselves. They gave beyond their means.

They also gave "of their own accord." Paul wasn't there trying to squeeze it out of them. Giving beyond their means was not motivated by Paul's heavy-handedness, or anyone else's heavy-handedness. They gave voluntarily. They wanted to do this. They gave voluntarily. But not only voluntarily, also eagerly. It was of their own accord, and with a passion! Verse 4, "begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—" (2 Corinthians 8:4)

That word translated "favor" is the Greek word *charis* which is grace. This would not only be a grace to the needy saints in Jerusalem, it was also a grace to the Macedonians, even as they gave beyond their means in the midst of a severe test of affliction. They were not just doing a favor for those in Jerusalem. They saw this as a favor done to them, to take part in the relief of the saints. They were begging Paul for this grace. "Please, Paul, let us give more. Please, let us participate in this collection. Please, we want to help. We love to give. It makes us so happy to be part of the global body of Christ in this way." That's not normal. That's the grace of God.

It's the grace of God that makes us more and more like our Savior, Jesus Christ. In verse 9 of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul uses that same word again: grace. He writes of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we see in the fact that though he was rich, yet for our

sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich. What an awesome statement of the Gospel that is! That is the grace of the Gospel. It is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who possesses all riches and power and authority and honor, He made Himself nothing. He humbled Himself to become one of us. He stooped to our level, to live among us as one of us, and in order to die in our place. He gave up the riches of His divine status and embraced the poverty of humanity.

This is our Savior, and by grace we are being conformed to His image as we love without hypocrisy, as we love what is good, as we love one another, and as we put our love into action by sharing and showing hospitality.