

Genuine Love Versus the Counterfeit

Romans 12:9-10

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Grace Fellowship Church, Toronto, Ontario

“Delighting in God to the glory of God”

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"What's Love Got To Do With It"

(Tina Turner)

You must understand
That the touch of your hand
Makes my pulse react
That it's only the thrill
Of boy meeting girl
Opposites attract

It's physical
Only logical
You must try to ignore
That it means more than that

It may seem to you
That I'm acting confused
When you're close to me
If I tend to look dazed
I've read it someplace
I've got cause to be

There's a name for it
There's a phrase that fits
But whatever the reason
You do it for me

[Chorus]

Oh what's love got to do, got to do with it
What's love but a second hand emotion
What's love got to do, got to do with it
Who needs a heart
When a heart can be broken?

We are in this section of Paul's letter to the Romans where he is describing for us how it is we are to live as Christians. He is not describing some optional "Super-Christianity," but just the normal walk or behaviour of every one who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul begins with a vivid picture of this devoted life by saying:

(Romans 12:1,2) "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

This sacrifice of self begins with an honest humility that leads to serving one another using the gifts granted us by the Holy Spirit.

(Romans 12:6) "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:"

Paul then shifts from speaking of individual Christians and their specific gifting by the Holy Spirit, to talking about every Christian's duties and responsibilities – particularly within the Church. He begins this section with two words: SINCERE LOVE or, "non-hypocritical love". Our English Bibles add a verb: "Let love be" – and that is okay. But it seems to me that Paul is standing up these two words as a

kind of chapter heading in his long letter. They are *the fixed point* from which hangs all the rest of this chapter. This is what sincere love *is* and *does*.

That Paul wrote of love should not surprise us. Almost every letter he wrote contained the command to love. It is funny to me when people suggest that Paul was some kind of harsh, doctrinaire chauvinist that thought very little about anyone else. Obviously they have not read much of the New Testament! It was Paul who wrote:

(Romans 13:8-10) “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

(Romans 14:15) “For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.”

(1 Corinthians 14:1) “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts...”

(1 Corinthians 16:14) “Let all that you do be done in love.”

(Galatians 5:6) “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

(Galatians 5:13-14) “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

(Galatians 5:22) “But the fruit of the Spirit is love...”

(Ephesians 4:2) “bearing with one another in love,...”

(Ephesians 4:15) “Rather, speaking the truth in love...”

(Ephesians 5:1) “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

(Ephesians 5:25) “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”

(Philippians 1:9) “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment”

(Philippians 2:1) “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

(Colossians 3:14) “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

(1 Thessalonians 3:12) “and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,”

(1 Thessalonians 4:9) “ Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,

(1 Timothy 1:5) “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”.

(1 Timothy 4:12) “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”

(Titus 2:2) “Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.”

(Titus 2:4) “and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,”

And, of course, it was Paul who wrote that most amazing description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

In almost every letter Paul wrote, the first point of application to that local church was the working out of love. If we read the words of Jesus, or John, or Peter, or Luke we see the same pattern and the same commands. We love because He first loved us and because He IS love. One might even suggest that the primary means to a God-glorifying life is to love. Didn't Jesus say:

(Matthew 22:37-40) “And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

I do not think I need any further proof for the need for Christians to love one another! But all good things can be spoiled by sin, and one of the worst ways of spoiling something good is to counterfeit it.

During World War II, the Nazis attempted to wage an economic war against the Allies with Operation Bernhard. The Nazis took Jewish artists in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and forced them to forge British pounds and American dollars. The quality of the counterfeiting was very good, and it was almost impossible to distinguish between the real and fake bills. These bills would then be circulated into use and begin to devalue the currency of the Allies. But the Germans could not put their plan into action, and were forced to dump the counterfeit bills into a lake: they were not recovered until the 1950's. Over one billion American dollars were forged, and economists estimate that the plan would have seriously damaged the American war effort.

Love can be faked, forged and feigned all too easily. When counterfeit love floods the church – when it becomes the currency of exchange – it will not be long before division, dissension, disunity and decay set in with a fury. Knowing that ever-present danger, Paul is quick to describe the nature of true, Biblical love. He begins by describing the attitude that is the base or foundation of love. From there he will move on to describe the actions of love within the local church. We need to hear both! Paul probably does not begin where you would guess – he suggests that an unfeigned love will be demonstrated by your affections – what you esteem and value. He puts the matter quite simply:

“Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”

I. The Attitude of Genuine Love

A. Genuine love hates evil.

(Psalm 5:4-6) “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.”

We might assume that since “God is love,” we would find His values and affections would be our model for a life of true love.

Paul sets up this first part of the equation by saying that genuine love flows from a heart that is continually hating evil. He uses very strong language here: to *abhor* or *intensely hate*. Murray says this is “the recoil of abhorrence.” What do you hate? A person? How do you feel when they walk into the room? Do you know that sense of “recoil” or “revulsion?” That sense that you must leave the room – you cannot speak with them? I hope you do not! But most of us can identify at least a little with that feeling of utter rejection. Once I was visiting friends and they brought out their pet lizard. They asked if I would like to have it rest on my shoulder, as my host demonstrated. My response? REVULSION!

Now – Paul says that true love will be evidenced by a revulsion, an abhorring, an intense hate of all things evil. That is, all that is opposed to God and Righteousness. Which means, if you delight in pornography or the suffering of the innocent or violence of war – you have a *love* problem. As Amos said to the disobedient people of God many centuries ago:

(Amos 5:14-15) “Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

How does this stance toward evil directly effect my love of others? Good question!

B. Genuine Love is Glued to Good

The second part of this two-sided love coin is found in the ongoing command: “hold fast to what is good.” Again, Paul chooses to use very strong words to describe the intensity of this relationship.

I remember one girl in college that liked me. It was obvious she liked me in all the ways that the time and culture in which I lived communicated interest between members of the opposite sex. The problem was, I was not interested in her. In fact, I was less than interested in her. She did not appeal to me in the least. I found her someone I liked to NOT be around. And as her intentions for me became more obvious, I became more uncomfortable and sought all the harder to avoid, evade and elude this certain girl. It was revulsion at first sight!

However, when I first saw this smiling dame from Indiana... it was LOVE at first sight! And that love made itself known by me doing everything I could to be around, near or at least in visual proximity to her! This nearness had a twofold purpose:

1. To win her by my most winsome ways.
2. To fight off all her other suitors!

When the day finally came for the fog to clear and for her to capture an accurate glance of me and all I had to offer, she too began to desire this nearness. So much so, that one day we were married – joined in a legal, spiritual, physical oneness until death should finally separate us.

The word that Paul chooses to describe our relationship to “good” is the same word he uses in other places to describe this unity between a married couple. It is sometimes used as a euphemism for the sexual relationship, such as in:

(1 Corinthians 6:16-17) “Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

Genuine love is proven by having a heart that is “joined to good.” As Murray suggests, this is a heart that is “in bonded allegiance” to good. It is the same word Jesus used when He quoted from Genesis 2, saying: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to (cleave to) his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” What is more intimate than the physical union of husband and wife? It is gloriously intimate! It is a desired intimacy!

So, genuine love is repulsed by evil and one with good. Glued to good. In bonded allegiance with good! Desires good! Now, love is not just some ethereal, intangible, heart-fluttering emotion. It is *a state of mind that results in action*. And these actions are first described as taking place within the Body of Christ.

II. The Action of Love

A. Have a family-level commitment to everyone in church

“Love one another with brotherly affection.”

“One another” always refers to the church. The NASB translates this: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love...” The type of love Paul speaks of here comes from two words of the *-fileo* word group.

The first word Paul uses is an adjective, used in a verbal kind of way: “be tenderly affectionate; loving; kindly affectionate” to one another.

We know of the city in America referred to as “the city of brotherly love” – Philadelphia. That is the second word Paul uses here – philadelphia - although the word has less to do with “brotherly love” exclusively and more to do with “familial love.” It means less of brother-to-brother and more of the general love that family members share for one another. The meaning is thus:

“Be kindly affectionate unto one another in familial love.”

Here the image of the church as family is seen yet again. How do you relate to your family? In an age of broken homes, divorce, separation, no family meals, etc., many do not have a firm grasp of what this means. The easiest way to describe it is to suggest that you think of the best family you know – or your ideal of the best family – and then relate that to the life of the church. The best family will have unique relationships with each member; marked by loyalty, trust, inter-dependence, inseparability, sharing, common goals, shared values, etc. These are the characteristics, then, of what every relationship in the church of Christ ought to be like. It is *rigid loyalty bathed in kind affection*.

This means a strict avoidance of all things evil in the family. Division, divorce, hatred, envy, jealousy, anger, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions... these things are to be shunned and despised in the family of God. Abhor what is evil! And demonstrate an unswerving loyalty to one another such as is seen in the best of families. Cling to good!

B. Be the first to find good in everyone in church

The second command is a little more difficult to figure out. The NASV translates it: “give preference to one another in honor...” The ESV says: “outdo one another in showing honor.” One is more passive, the other more proactive. I think Paul is suggesting the second.

The first has the idea of Philippians 2:3: “but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” The second has the idea of 1 Corinthians 13: “Love... believes all things, hopes all things...” This second reading seems to be what Paul is driving at here. He is saying: “Be the first to honour others.”

In other words, *always be on the lookout for good in others* and tell other people, not just the person, what you see in that person as soon as you see it. It is proactive, deliberate, purposeful! If I could build a Biblical case for this, I would have you think through the New Testament letters and how the authors were quick to find evidences of grace in the lives of church members. They were hunting for it, like a dog for the neighbour’s cat!

(Romans 1:12) “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.”

(Romans 15:14) “I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.”

(Colossians 1: 3) “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints...”

(1 Corinthians 1: 4-9) “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all

knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The point in all of these, is that they were quick to find good – even when there was not a lot to find! We need to be less ashamed of seeing God at work in each other! I think we do not commend one another enough. Perhaps we are not good at this because *we do not frame our statements in a God-centered way!* We need to learn to say things correctly – so our words match our theology – and that will free up our lips: “I see this [action] of God in your life.” “When you do [insert blank] it brings glory to God who has made you and equipped you to do this so well.” This is not some form of building up pride in each other!

(Romans 12:3) “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

We need to be fanning the gift of God in one another. Here is how I see God working through you. Here is how God used you in my life in particular. And this mindset of seeking to be the first to give honour will create an atmosphere of praise and thanksgiving to God. Be united to good, in each other.

So, love abhors all forms of evil in church relations and is intimately and happily wed to all forms of good in church members! This is real love – non-counterfeit love – genuine love, sincere love. Like all things required of us by God, it requires Jesus. “We love *because* He first loved us.” You cannot expect to love if you have not been loved. You must be born again.

Please note: You cannot expect love to come naturally. Your flesh is opposed to it. The Devil is fighting against you when you try to do it. Your spirit may be willing, but you are weak. It will take planning, self-sacrifice, humility, patience, 1 Corinthians 13, the Holy Spirit!

“What’s love got to do with it?” Everything!

And this Sincere Love will make this place different, as genuine Christians shed all forms of hypocrisy and counterfeit spirituality and live Spirit-dependent, Jesus-pleasing, God-glorifying lives of love.

May He make it so!

By Pastor Paul W. Martin © Grace Fellowship Church

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