

Sermons through

Romans

How Christians Behave

Romans 12:9-13

Part Three

Affectionate Love

With Study Questions

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Affectionate Love

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 (Romans 12:9-13).

Review

I have recently found myself operating in a community priding itself on intellect while they deride various aspects of the Christian faith. One of the common detractions is their perceived reward system contained in the salvation of sinners. They have somehow arrived at a theology where the Christian is hoping they're good enough to make it to heaven – that a good life merits a favorable after-life. Whatever that is, it is not the Christian faith.

Let us be reminded of that as we are at a place in Romans where the Apostle Paul is challenging us to live a certain way – to live in light of the **“mercies of God”**. Nowhere are we taught to earn the mercies of God. If we earned it, it wouldn't be mercy.

Having spent eleven chapters explaining the grace and faithfulness of God – having saved us not by works but by grace alone through faith alone – we are now informed that our **“reasonable service”** is to be a **“living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1)**. There is a transformation by the **“renewing of the mind” (Romans 12:2)** which we must pursue and we are now in the chapters which explain in detail what that looks like.

We are not to think too highly of ourselves (Romans 12:3). We are to understand the unity of the body of Christ (Romans 12:4, 5). We are to exercise our God-given gifts for the edification of one another (Romans 12:6-8). We are now in a short series entitled *How Christians Behave*.

We began by examining what it means to love **“without hypocrisy”** – this does not mean we love perfectly or even have a feeling of contentment in

our love. A godly love may very much be at odds with our passions – so much so that it might feel phony. But being phony or hypocritical does not mean I have a conflict between my convictions and feelings. Being hypocritical means my convictions are not convictions at all but a mere show for the benefit of others. And depending on how good of a show you put on, this can be very difficult for others to detect.

Last time we discussed what it means to **“abhor what is evil (and) cling to what is good.”** To abhor is not entirely synonymous with hatred. It means to shudder or bristle – to be horrified. This is not mere contempt but a recognition that the consequences of evil can be devastating. Along with abhorring what is evil, we are to **“cling to what is good.”**

Obedience to this requires an understanding of what constitutes that which is good. Truth, wisdom, understanding and goodness are not settled affairs in the human heart and mind. They are to be chased and they can be lost. Like Jacob wrestling until the break of day, we are to cling to what is good with all our hearts – like it’s a fight.

Perhaps it is due to the temptation or inclination (in our pursuit of goodness and resistance to evil) to become abrupt and frustrated that the Apostle transitions to a dynamic of warmth in our interpersonal relationships.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another (Romans 12:10).

Affectionate Love

There are two words for love in this verse. Our **“brotherly love”** *philadelphia* should contain an **“affectionate”** love *philostorgos*. This affectionate love is the kind of love we have for our most beloved family members. One of these loves comes naturally while the other, it would appear, requires effort. It has always been very easy for me to love my wife and children. What I am told here is that I should make every effort to extend that same affection to others. This is not always easy.

At the risk of sounding crass (since some may struggle with affections for their family members – and seeking not to lose Paul’s point), I think of our dog. We have a very cute and friendly dog who, because of his cuteness and friendliness, generally gets the warmest greeting of anybody who walks in the door. We should treat each other at least as lovingly as we treat the dog. In

other words, consider those you love the most and begin to seek to garner that sentiment toward others. How do we go about succeeding at that?

We might be tempted to separate the first portion of the verse with the second, but it might make more sense to recognize that the second part of the verse instructs us on how to succeed in the first. The means by which my brotherly love deepens into an affectionate love is by a willful effort on my part to “**honor**” (*time* – to place high value or reverence) others by giving them “**preference**” (*proegoumenoi* – to outdo or be eager to give them priority).

Something similar is taught in Philippians:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves (Philippians 2:3).

One reason the dog gets such nice treatment is because we like the way the dog makes us feel. What we’re learning here is that we are to extend to others (others who may be very difficult people for us to like or love) the type of affection we give to those who we naturally love the most. We are sinful and selfish creatures – and there are few things that I have found that reveal this more than a person’s lack of willingness to love somebody who is not making them feel good.

Jesus expressed it:

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so (Matthew 5:46, 47)?

Of course we recognize human limitations. If your church has hundreds or even thousands of people, it is unworkable (just out of sheer lack of time) to treat every single person like a family member. But even the smallest effort can make a difference. A warm hello as you walk down the hall or a gentle smile is a good start.

I realize we are all different and might express our love to others in a variety of manners. But something to consider before we become too confident that our particular method of expressing love is sacrosanct – simply too sacred to be interfered with – is that within the parameters of genuine love (a love defined by the truth of God’s word) it should be a priority that the person you’re loving is somehow getting the impression that you love them.

This is seen in marriage counseling. One person feels as if they're making every effort in the world to love their spouse, yet their spouse feels unloved. An occasional conversation is helpful where you ask "Am I making you feel loved?" The answer to this question should be listened to and utilized rather than objected to. You may have all sorts of good reasons that your actions should be perceived as loving, but something is getting in the way and it would be quite valuable to find out what that is.

Perhaps you have made this effort. For days, months and years you have sought to cultivate an affectionate love for others only to find zero reciprocation. Maybe there is a need for a more difficult conversation or to bring someone else in to help work through a root of bitterness that is keeping the relationship(s) from moving forward. But when it gets right down to it – you're just worn out and tired of making the effort – in seeking to love others when they seem entirely indifferent and/or unwilling.

The Apostle continues:

"...not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11).

Never Give In

In our "**diligence**" (*spoude* – haste, speed, earnestness and willingness) we are not to lag or be slothful (*oknerous* – lazy or to shrink back). We are called to be "**fervent**" (*zeontes* – enthusiastic, boiling, on fire) in spirit. One is tempted here to sound like a coach, seeking to inspire a troubled and tired team. Or we might look to Winston Churchill's speech to the students at Harrow School in October of 1941 during World War II.

These students had experienced the bombings and devastation of what appeared to be inevitable defeat until the allied powers gave them hope of possible victory. Churchill quotes Kipling in his speech, saying,

We must meet with Triumph and Disaster. And treat those two imposters just the same.

By this is meant that there may be an appearance of victory that is not victory at all and vice-versa. Things are not always what they appear to be.

It was in this famous speech that Churchill utters those words of perseverance:

Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to the force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.

As true as these inspirational words were regarding their historic military efforts, how much more true of the church militant! Paul had earlier taught that even in the face of death – of being **“killed all day long...accounted as sheep for the slaughter...we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:36, 37)**. (Talk about apparent Triumph or Disaster!)

It is in light of a victory that is already ours – a victory over sin and death won by Christ – that we are called to **“endure to the end” (Matthew 10:22; 24:13)**. There is a great temptation to look for an exit rather than to bear up or grind out.

An old friend who was an excellent athlete and understood the hard work necessary for success had been married numerous times. One day we got into a heart to heart discussion and he confessed, in very simple terms that he as an athlete had to admit, that he was a quitter. We’re certainly not saved by works, but we should not conclude that there are no consequences for quitting – for **“lagging in diligence.”**

Those consequences may affect family and culture. They may affect the advancement of the kingdom and the glory of God (2 Samuel 12:13). The author of Hebrews calls us to consider the endurance of Christ that we might not **“grow weary or fainthearted in (y)our struggle against sin” (Hebrews 12:3, 4)**. It is through this battle that God is working holiness in us (Hebrews 12:10). The Scriptures do not present this enterprise as a fantasy of comfort but a reality of pain.

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).

The Apostle knows – God knows – that our efforts to be kindly affectionate to one another – to give preference to one another – can become a wearisome task full of fatigue and discouragement. But the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God in our lives goes way beyond whatever *Triumphs* or *Disasters* we think we encounter along the way. There is a greater end game (what

Calvin calls a “remarkable gradation”) that, if we understand and meditate upon, will cause us to...

...glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ 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 (Romans 5:3b-5).

There is an end game of hope – a hope which does not disappoint. Our trials become a means by which God keeps the eyes of the faithful fixed on Christ, their one true hope. The difficulties we encounter in seeking to truly and deeply love others – even if unanswered, unrequited – have a glorious affect upon our own hearts.

Serving the Lord

I can be confident that the above is true because, in the final analysis, I am not serving my neighbor, congregant, wife or children. As the Apostle teaches, we are “**serving the Lord.**” There is a great judgment-day testimony affirming the sanctifying work of God in the lives of believers – a day when it will be made manifest who they were truly serving.

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:37-40).

It is loving and serving sinners that we love and serve Christ. If our love for one another is grounded in our own personal worthiness, there are a million reasons for us not to love each other. But there is no good reason not to love and serve Christ. And He is saying that the way we love and serve Him is by loving and serving each other – with an affectionate love.

Questions for Study

1. Is it a Christian teaching that a good life merits a favorable after-life? Explain why or why not (pages 2, 3)?
2. Review Romans 12. What does it mean to live in light of the “mercies of God”? What is our “reasonable service”? What does it mean to have one’s mind renewed (pages 2, 3)?
3. Does loving without hypocrisy mean love feels real or feels right? Explain (pages 2, 3).
4. Why should Christians abhor what is evil? How do we cling to what is good (page 3)?
5. What is a brotherly love and an affectionate love? How does one help the other (pages 3, 4)?
6. One is one of the largest obstacles of a true affectionate love (pages 4, 5)?
7. What should our response be when others are indifferent or unwilling to our efforts (pages 5, 6)?
8. What is the end-game to the “remarkable gradation” of our trials and difficulties (pages 6, 7)?
9. How can we be confident that our love and service of others will have a glorious outcome (page 7)?