

Romans

PART 21

IS YOUR LOVE GENUINE?
ROMANS 12:11-21

Being Loved, Love Others

In these next verses of Romans 12, we see the application of Christian doctrine to Christian conduct. The gospel should be seen in how we love. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the holy spirit, and we cannot be separated from His love. That same love should govern our lives in all our relationships within and without the church. For those who have been shown the mercies of God, this text gives the proper way to respond as a living sacrifice: by the power of Christ in us, and not by our flesh, we show God's love to others with a truly genuine, non-superficial love. Being deeply touched by the Father's love in me will in turn spark the Father's love to be shown through me.

Chapter Highlights

VS 9

The banner of this section from verses 9-21 is "love without hypocrisy." In this section, Paul gives 30 commands in the form of descriptive participles. In other words, the following verses all show the defining marks of a sincere love like God's. "Dissimulation" means duplicitous, having a false face, or withholding true thoughts. It comes from a Greek word that refers to wearing masks in theater performances. We are not to love untruthfully this way. We need to examine our own hearts for hypocrisy, removing the beam in our own eye instead of always looking for insincerity in our brothers. I should feel the same disgust when I love others in an insincere way as I would if I myself was falsely loved. Loving God will give us a proper view of good and evil, where we authentically love good and hate evil. We need to have a superglue conviction to the things God approves of.

VS 10 - LOVE WITH AFFECTION, LOVE WITH HONOR

KINDLY AFFECTIONED: we are to have a warm familial love where we cherish each other with a soft heart oriented toward others. We value others with the honor worthy of someone paid for with Christ's blood. We aim to show others more honor than they show us. It is often with the people we know best with whom we need to work on this the most.

VS 11 - LOVE WITH ENTHUSIASM

The way to stay fervent in our service and not get spiritually lethargic is to focus on the lordship of Christ. Seeing his preeminence will guard against half-heartedness in our conduct.

VS 12 - LOVE WITH PATIENCE

We can rejoice in the hope of what's to come, even in the face of the troubles we face today. We can have patience in the midst of suffering, enduring with persistent prayer. This is also part of living out genuine love for God.

VS 13 - LOVE WITH GENEROSITY AND HOSPITALITY

We are to be involved in seeking to relieve other's suffering and help them in their need. Jesus taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." We should roll out the red carpet for those we know well and strangers alike.

VS 14 - LOVE WITH GOODWILL

A good litmus test of genuine love is whether we can bless (speak well of) people who continue to persecute us rather than cursing them. We shouldn't even speak evil of them to God. When James and John were unwelcomed by the Samaritans, they wanted to call fire down upon them from heaven. It's natural to the flesh to want to destroy those who mistreat us, but our new spiritual calling is not only to passively ignore enemies, but to actively desire good for them and speak well of them. This was the heart of Christ while being crucified. He desired good things for those killing him: forgiveness, repentance, and salvation. As those dead to sin and alive with him, we ought to do the same. Stephen also loved this way when he was being killed: *"Father forgive them they don't know what they're doing."*

VS 15 - LOVE WITH SYMPATHY

How do we respond to others' emotions? Do we avoid them? Do we redirect it to ourselves, or do we join in both their joy and sorrow? It can be very unhelpful to respond with pre-packaged, curt advice such as, "just get over it and renew your mind already." Instead, we sincerely rejoice with people and weep with them, sensitive to what they're going through. In Job's grief, his friends weren't unhelpful when they just sat quietly with him in the dust, but when they tried to fix him, they spoke foolishly. Identifying in and with others' experiences is another mark of genuine love, and being apathetic is the opposite of God's way.

VS 16 - LOVE IN HARMONY AND WITH HUMILITY

We are to think the same thing toward one another, being humble among each other as we learned from verse 3. There's no place for snobbery in the body of Christ. We shouldn't be wise in our own eyes, overestimating ourselves and relying on our own intellects.

VS 17-21 - GENUINE LOVE EVEN LOVES ENEMIES

We are not to retaliate against enemies, but we do good to them honestly in the sight of all. It will be a powerful witness to the world that no matter who we're with, we're kind to those who hurt us. We're not responsible for people's actions, but we **are** accountable for our reactions. So as much as depends on me from **my** standpoint, I am to live at peace with all people, even if they refuse to make peace with me. Any ongoing conflict should always be in **spite of me**, not **because of me**. Jesus teaches us, "blessed are the peacemakers." I can pursue peace with you, even if I can't make you pursue it with me. But if their conditions for peace involve joining in or being okay with sin, then we can't compromise on the will of God, and peace is not possible.

We also need to give place to the wrath of God. His justice will make everything right, regardless of the situation we feel deserves retribution. We are inherently biased, and our own justice is not fit to make it right. I just leave it to God, and then I am freed up to love genuinely. We can look at the example of how God treated His enemies. He spared not even his own Son for us while we were His enemies. Similarly, we're called to actively show goodness to our enemies, sincerely trying to help them; offering bread for their need even when they misuse you. Trying to win them back with lovingkindness is the strongest rebuke for their evil, heaping hot coals on their head. This is a metaphor for how our acts of lovingkindness can lead to a burning shame and remorse that convicts their conscience into repentance and heals them. We aren't using goodness to backhandedly wish evil upon them, but the idea is that they would be warmed and the evil would melt away. If we ever think we have a right to get back at someone, we must remember Christ who actually had the right to call the armies of heaven down to save him, but he loved us and those murdering him enough to stay on the cross. Seeing that love, many who called out for him to be crucified later repented and believed in him.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

ROMANS 5:6-8

Conclusion

If I am struggling to love, it is because I forget how I'm loved. We will be most useful for the kingdom when we lay down our flesh and our desire to execute justice. Let our love for those who hurt us be true. Help us, O God to have your heart, so we may serve our Lord effectively.

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