

## Truly Love

Romans 12:9-13, 15-16

I love eggs benedict. I love playing and watching sports. I love sunsets on tropical beaches. I love potato chips and pop...but they don't love me. Love is way overused. Yet love is still expressed as the supreme goal of human relationship. Most pop songs are about love. Sadly, the greatest percentage of hit songs are about sex – like it's the central expression love. Love is being sold as a warm, joyous or rapturous feeling. Where do you go to find the standard for love? Many go to 1 Cor 13. *Love is patient, Love is kind.* Others might go to God's great expression of God's love in John 3:16. When I'm instructing couples aiming to commit for life, I use Ephesians 5. What about love in the church? Ever thought of Romans 12 as your go-to passage? Perhaps you will after these next two studies.

### PRAY

#### Review: Getting our Lives in Order

What's the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment? And the next according the Jesus? Romans 12 helps us put our lives in order. First is our personal responsibility to God (Rom 12:1-2). And that leads to a whole new way to see ourselves and how we belong in His family. Right thinking begins by remembering God's mercies and knowing who we are in Christ. It stirs the embers of our love for Him.

Right thinking continues by trusting the Spirit's lead in relating to others. And then we experience the power of the Gospel.

If God's grace gifts are so important, why don't we spend more energy on discovering them so we can be effective? If we start at the human end and focus on our effectiveness, we tend to focus on us. It quickly becomes a self-development program. And before you know it, people are doing humanly effective things with human power. Our motives can so easily shift from glorifying God to finding that feeling of fulfillment or to please a person or to out-perform others or to resent God for not giving us more.

First, we offer our lives to God (gripped by His grace through Jesus Christ: Justified by Faith). This is an appeal to deny self (the enticements of this world). We choose to have our mind changed by God instead of letting the world shape us. By faith we choose to be Spirit-led. This is taking up our cross. We identify with Jesus. It makes us strange. Even a threat or an annoyance to some people who don't want to be reminded about God. Of course others are attracted by the way, the truth and the light of Christ. With our minds set on obeying God, we step out in

faith. This is following Jesus. And by stepping out, we test and approve God's will. God's will is His best for us (including trials and discipline).

We are seeing that God's will is for us as a church, is to be one (Jn 17). Like one body with Christ as head (Rom 12:5). The grace gifts help us to be one. As we obey God and serve in His grace, we become interdependent. Each one has something to contribute and receive. Each one matters to all the rest.

Must we go on a quest to find our fit in order to be used of God? I'm not as convinced as I was earlier in my life. I think it's something we become more aware of as we engage in caring for His people. Jesus says come and see, follow. Trust God and He will work through you. Paul urges Timothy to fan into flame the gift he received from God (2 Tim 1:6). How would we do that? Be gripped by God's mercy, deny worldly thinking and let Him lead.

Interesting: if you read Paul's instructions to Timothy –who's going to Ephesus to set a church straight; or or Titus –who planting churches on the Isle of Crete: No mention of gifts. The focus is on developing a core of mature believers to serve the church in leading and ministry direction. There are tools that believers have developed for gift discovery and practise you can explore. But God is most concerned with our responsiveness to Him and our mindset. Engage with right thinking. In

view of the Gospel and with the faith God gives, not the strength we have. We are to speak as if it's coming from God and serve with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 4:11). Amen? Our obligation is to be good stewards of God's grace to one another...just as God intended it to be distributed (R12:3).

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus taught that believers would live in a way that fulfills not just the letter of the law, but the spirit of God's will (Matt 5-7). This is only possible as saved and surrendered people. In our passage today, we have the update. A look at what God expects from His people in the NT church. We go beyond obligation to deploy God's grace gifts. Love takes every bit as much faith and right thinking as stepping out to serve. The style of this section is more like James or proverbs, where each phrase is a study on its own.

### **Read R12:9 Not play-acting**

The NIV translates the first sentence, Love must be sincere. NASB is closer to the Greek. Let love be without hypocrisy. Back in the day, play actors were called hypocrites because they were required to change roles (masks) depending on whether it was a history, comedy or tragedy. So, let

love be without play-acting. But if we're really getting technical with the original language, there was no verb in this phrase. It reads: the love not hypocritical. That helped me see this phrase as the heading for a list. Not hypocritical love is. Or **Sincere love is...**

Now the next part makes sense. Sincere love is first of all, **Pure**. God knows people can 'fake' love. He knows our very thoughts and motives...right to the heart. The first place to start for expressing true love is an x-ray into our heart. We must first take off our mask before God. The love God wills for us to show is marked by **purity**. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Hold on to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:1-3). Abide in Christ (Jn 15). Be aware of God's presence everywhere...maybe less texting pleas. Be nourished in His Word daily. But what about hating sin? What if we agreed to help each other hate sin? What if we could share our deepest struggles with a mature brother or sister in the Lord...and keep in contact about how it's going. And in failure, to have them take the sin seriously, yet gently restore us...to fellowship with God and His family. That's carrying one another's burdens to deny sin's grip on our family (Gal 6:1-2).

Lets be alert to helping one another hate sin. Gossip, and slandering. Bragging or taking credit. Put downs. I trained the youth group to say Woe in response to a put-down. Woe stands for Words Of Encouragement. Lying and cheating kill godly fellowship. Let's not give in to worldly humor and overindulgence. Let's be honest and help when we see our brother or sister being swayed by worldly friendships. Let's agree to nix media aimed at appealing to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. That's a pretty lofty goal. But think about what's at stake. What happens when children observe a pattern of hypocrisy in the home? Stats (Barna) show that children form their faith and values by age 13. And sure enough, Junior Highs are leaving the church in droves. And it has nothing to do with youth groups being 'cool' enough.

Our heart has a back door to evil.

### **Read James 4:1-10**

When our selfish desires rise up, don't give in!

1. Admit our weakness to God (humble). God is gracious to the humble.
2. Submit to God's Spirit. Resist! And the scheming devil will flee.
- 3 Come near to God (And He will too). Scripture, prayer (worship) and suffering bring us near to God.

So when God convicts us of sin, don't grieve the Holy Spirit. He wants fellowship and to see us experience sincere love in His family. Pretending is not ok. Clinging sin is not good with God and it's not good between us either.

Verse 10 has two 'one-another' commands.

### **Read V10 Devoted and Honoring**

The first is brotherly love – *philadelphia*. In natural families it means, from the same womb. In spiritual families it's born of the same Spirit – adopted in Christ. The easiness way for me to explain **devoted** is how functioning families look out for one another, protect one another and share expressions of love for one another. There may be rough and tumble, but you know they will listen to understand. And you know they would sacrifice for you. For those who did not grow up in a loving environment, perhaps you have found that family-like love with this diverse and wonderful group. It gets expressed through: words of encouragement, practical service, devoting time, giving gifts, a hand on the shoulder and prayer.

Now how on earth do we to accomplish a family-like connection in a public service for 1 hr 15min once a week? Not fully, that's for sure. Remember, we're talking about love

that's not play-acting. One of the first things I noticed about this church was how many people were going out for lunch together after the Sunday service. Parents, I'm not trying to put extra financial burden on you. I understand. I couldn't afford that either. That's why summer is so great and we can take food to the park. And sharing meals in the home happens often, too. That can be more economical as well.

As a relatively new empty nester, I was wondering how life would be without our kids and their friends. We miss them greatly but we're not in a grey cloud most of the time. Why? Many in our church act like a family. Let's not forget those who are working and miss this connection. There's almost no protection for family time on Sundays any and it puts many families in a real bind. Pray for them. And find ways and times to express that family-like devotion.

A word to our more expressive family members. We can't force something that only God can do. Remember love is patient. We'll try not to be mug you and shove bibles into your pockets right away. OK? But those who are engaging know there is so much more.

The second command is to **honor**. It expresses the humility of Christ very practically. The great battle is to fight

down pride. It's things like letting another take the credit. Giving a commendation rather than waiting to be given one.

Remember the last supper? Christ got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, wrapped a servant's towel around his waist and got down to washing and drying His follower's feet. Peter didn't get it at first. Do we? How can we esteem someone better than us?

I heard one example from Alistair Begg. He reminded me that even when I'm doing something good...I can have mixed motives. My flesh is there wanting me to get something extra out of it. But when I see someone else doing good, I will choose not to assume he or she is doing it with those mixed motives. I will consider them better than myself.

What's the best way to fight our pride and suspicion of others? Pray God's blessing in their lives. **Phil 2:3** wraps it up well. *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

If you think about it. Isn't that the way you want to be treated? In Verse 11 and 12 there are six commands so we will look these next week.

Darlene and I play a game with our friends called, Bonanza. It's a trading game. The goal is to gain the most gold coins. But you'll find that making trades that benefit others, helps your game too. Unless you're too generous. A scrooge will rarely win because he has to depend more on luck. It sounds all pure but in the end, you win by looking out for your own interests a bit above everyone else's. I act like the benevolent underdog...but my goal is still to gain the most gold.

In the 'game' of relating as a church the goal is to give God the glory. His rules are to look out for the other person's interests...above our own. You mean we play to lose? No. We play to help others stay pure, befriend and honor them. So God wins. Jesus died for us, when we didn't deserve it. And believers are given the honor of a new name, purpose and belonging forever. Amen.

In God's Kingdom economy, looking out for our own rights and privileges first, gets us to the back of the line. But serving the most, makes us great in God's eyes (Mk 10:43-44), which is forever. That's why Jesus is the greatest of all - ruling in heaven, soon to return. Look to Jesus: Lord and Savior, Ruler and Friend.