

## What Does Love Really Look Like?

A Sermon By Pr. David Johnson

As we've been reading through our Epistle lessons the last couple weeks, we've been walking through Roman's 12. I know that many years ago we journeyed through the entire book of Romans, but when we got to this passage, we kind of "skipped a rock across the water" of this section of the book. So I would like to go back and delve a little more deeply into this section of the chapter.

As Paul challenged us to think seriously about the cost of our discipleship, he didn't simply urge us to take on *some* of the characteristics of a believer. The apostle Paul commanded us to become completely different people; laying down our lives in the process of transformation. We talked about this a couple weeks ago.

**Romans 12:1-2** Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

God doesn't simply want us to build compartments for our faith, He wants the entirety of our lives to be consumed by our faith. God wants us absolutely and completely; to be utterly transformed from head to toe. That renewal is to begin with how we think, empowering us to both reason and act in ways that honor God.

Paul continues his instruction down the path from submission to God, to mutual submission; if I die to self and submit to God, then I must also consider myself as a co-servant with other believers. Paul explains this by using the wonderful example of spiritual gifts.

**Romans 12:3-5** For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup> For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

When the topic of "spiritual gifts" comes up, we often link Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 together. And for good reason. They both discuss the unique gifting of each true believer, and the critical role that each gift plays in the overall health and function of the Body.

**Rom 12:6** Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, {each of us is to exercise them accordingly;} if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Oh, if only we could fully understand how our submission to God needs to drive our mutual dependence and cooperation with others. What could the church accomplish if we'd only value one another, and play to each other's gifts? What mountains could be moved, or what lives restored if the right-hand not only knew what the

left-hand was doing, but sincerely cared and supported its efforts? Nehemiah would be the only example of a mighty wall built quickly and well.

However, just as Jesus never limited His instruction to religious duty, so also Paul takes the disciple further on to the intersection of character and deeds, of attitudes and actions. Paul makes his readers consider their motivation. **Rom 12:9a** {Let} love {be} without hypocrisy.

Just as Paul moves from spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 to the "still more excellent way" of LOVE in chapter 13, so he does the same in Romans 12. Paul progresses from personal submission to God, through the cooperation of Saints in the Body, onto the challenge of each believer showing their sincerity through genuine love.

"'Hypocrite' was the term for show actor, and the ancient actors always wore a mask while they were on the stage... Genuine love is Paul's bidding: Not stage-actor love; no mask of love!"  
- CPH

### *Ignorantia juris non excusat*

This is Latin for, "ignorance of the law does not excuse" or "ignorance of the law excuses no one." It's the legal principle that a person who is unaware of a law can't escape liability for violating that law. So, as if to take away any excuses, Paul dives into a detailed explanation of how Christian love and service should be applied - closing out the chapter with this list.

- **Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good;** (Detest) all that's wicked! Be glued to all that's good! A Christian can't live in the gray. Understand and admit that wickedness and goodness are polar opposites – *always*.
- **{Be} devoted to one another in brotherly love;** Love one another as family, as Brothers/Sisters.
- **Give preference to one another in honor;** Leading each other, in giving honor, (*outdo one another in showing honor*)
- **Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;** - Don't be poky in diligence.
- **Rejoicing in hope** (*of God's promises/faithfulness*), **persevering in tribulation** (*when times get tough, the tough keep going*), **devoted to prayer** (*staying steadfast in prayer – especially in the tough times*). **Faith Is For Trials**
- **Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing** (pursuing) **hospitality;** Christians are to live with open hands.
- **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse;** "Be Blessing" your persecutors (pursuers) – don't curse.
- **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.**
- **Be of the same mind toward one another;** Reciprocity – Think of others, as you would think – in like circumstance.
- **Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly;** Don't seek to impress – Peter with the Judaizers.
- **Do not be wise in your own estimation;** Don't think of yourself as wise or practice conceit.
- **Never pay back evil for evil to anyone;** Two wrongs don't make a right – tit-for-tat is not love...or godly.
- **Respect what is right in the sight of all men;** Respect (*think about*) what is right (*excellent*) in front of all men.

- **If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men;** Make sure your side of the table is clean.
- **Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath {of God,} for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.** In Exacting Justice – trust God. Leave room for our All-Wise God to balance the scales.
- **"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."** Personal kindness often leads to contrition – It is “the kindness of God that leads you to repentance.” Romans 2:4
- **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good;** Don’t be conquered by evil, but be conquering evil with good.

Each of these instructions act as general guides for our application of Love in our daily lives (*just as the 10 commandments is an overview of the Law*). Paul isn’t trying to be exhaustive, nor is he covering every circumstance we might encounter. It’s his desire that every believer have a snapshot of what a transformed and submitted life might, and should, look like. It is this life expressed in an attitude of love that will set a Christian apart from their culture.