

"Getting Real" & Fitting In With "One Another" Romans 12:9-12

Portions adapted from "Building A Caring Church" by Jerry Flury @ SermonCentral.Com

Some children were asked to write letters to God. Here's what they had to say.

- Dear GOD, it rained for our whole vacation and my father was mad! He said some things that people are not supposed to say, but I hope You will not hurt him anyway. Your friend (but I am not going to tell you who I am)
- Dear GOD, maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother.
- Dear GOD, thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy.
- Dear GOD, did you really mean, "do unto others as they do unto you"? Because if you did, then I'm going to fix my brother!
- Dear GOD, I bet it is very hard for You to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it.

Sound familiar? So much for the perfect family!

Last week, we were reminded that we are a family of believers and while we are not perfect, we need one another to be transformed and renewed, and to live that life which honors God. So there's a whole lot more to this family than weekly reunions.

- Remember, that Romans 12 opened by declaring only logical response back to God for all the love He has shown us was to commit ourselves to **live holy lives** that would honor Him.
- And the only way to live such a holy, God-honoring, life is by **being transformed as we renew our minds** – in other words becoming different people as we begin to think and act the way Jesus thinks and acts.
- And the only way we can hope for such renewal is by **being an active member of a Church**, the local "Body of Christ," using our various God-given gifts in service for every one of all the other members and receiving ministry back from them (remember: *All for one and One for all!*)

Which brings us to today's portion of scripture, verses 9-12. At first glance these verses seem little more than a shopping list of good things to do. But if you look more closely, you will see a pattern begin to emerge. So, let's take a look together ...

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; Romans 12:9

This is actually Paul's main theme for the rest of this chapter (verse 9-21); **to honor God and live within the family of God our love needs to be genuine love for both God and "one another"**. But what is genuine love? That's a question that the next few verses will describe for us, but first here's an example of non-genuine love.

A Marine Captain was driving through Washington DC, trying to get to the Marine Barracks. Being new to the area, he got thoroughly lost. So when he spotted an Army Base, he stopped to ask the gate guard for directions.

The young guard was courteous, his directions were very clear and easy to follow, and the Marine drove away thinking how nice it was when the various branches of the military cooperate with each other – that is until he arrived at the given destination which turned out to be the National Zoo. So much for love between the branches.

What Paul actually wrote was, *let love be non-hypocritical*. The word he used referred to actors who wore masks while performing on stage (it's the Greek word "hypocrite"). Genuine love wears no mask.

In other words, faked love doesn't cut it in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Bibles translate "non-hypocritical" with the word "genuine," other translations use the word "sincere" which has a very interesting etymology. **Sincere** comes from the Latin words for "**no wax**." Back in the days of ancient Rome, dishonest potters would sometimes use wax to fill in the gaps and flaws of cracked pottery. Then they would paint over the wax and sell it. Then, once you bought that wax repaired pot and put soup or hot water in it, guess what happened? Which spawned another Roman merchant's phrase: *caveat emptor (let the buyer beware.)*. So honest potters would assure clients that their pottery was "*sine cere*" (without wax). It was whole pottery, with no cracks, nothing faked. Paul says our love should be sincere, genuine, never wearing a mask, never faked, having no hidden cracks.

Then Paul's next two phrases describe what **genuine love** looks like. Our Bible translation says that *genuine love hates what is evil and holds fast to what is good*. But such wording is confusing, how can love hate?

What Paul actually wrote was that genuine love should "*shrink away from, or abhor, the evil and cling to the good*." Which indicates both choice and movement on our part: **If we truly love God and wish to be a vital member of Christ's Church family, then the life we live should abhor and pull away from the evil that we see around and within us in order to grasp hold of and cling tightly to the good that we find.** This is how we become "transformed," how we become different people, as we are renewed within the body of Christ: moving away from evil and moving towards good.

So genuine love makes choices, thinks, acts, and decides, because this type of love that Paul is talking about is not an emotion. It is an attitude, a mindset. Both Moses and Jesus commanded us to "love our neighbor as ourselves," and to "love one another," This kind of love is therefore a choice that we make, our decision to act. To be sure, I do not think that any of us can love the way the Bible asks us to without the enabling grace of God. Love is not something that can ever be entirely the product of human will. But our wills are involved. The Spirit may foster love within us, but it is our job to cooperate with the Spirit (Moo, New Application Commentary, p.416).

And in contrast to the situation ethics of our day, genuine love will be in full accord with the God's "good, acceptable, and perfect will." These days the cultural standard for morality is to "do whatever is loving;" with very little definition of what love actually is. So we rationalize that sex outside of marriage cannot be wrong because it is the natural outcome of a "loving" relationship. Church members often refuse to confront other believers about a sin because that would not be a "loving" thing to do. But God has established standards for right behavior, revealed in scripture, and God inspires love for others within us; the two cannot ultimately be in conflict. That is why Paul defined genuine love as *shrinking from the evil and clinging to the good*. Genuine love is a love in motion, traveling along with our transformation and renewal as we grow up together in the body of Christ.

As Jesus said ...

*"By this everyone will know
that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another."
John 13:35*

So people who have genuine love should be and look a lot different from the general population; which is the problem. As Jerry Vines, one of the prominent pastors in America noted, *Our churches are in serious trouble today. There is virtually no difference between the average church member and the person who is not a Christian. God meant for the Christian to be different, to live a different kind of life, and to be on a different moral level from those who are not Christians. And yet, there is practically no difference in lifestyle.*

Paul said let your love be genuine, abhor and flee from evil, run towards and cling to the good. This is a quality that we will acquire if we are willing to be transformed as we are renewed in our thinking, growing strong in the body of Christ.

With this thought in mind, Paul next gives examples what genuine love looks like between individual brothers and sisters within the body; between "one another." And also love in the service of Christ, love in a time of trial, and even love close to your wallet.

love one another with mutual affection;
outdo one another in showing honor.

Romans 12:10

In verse 9, the word "genuine love" comes from the Greek word "**agape**" meaning love that is of God. Love that decides and acts. Now here in verse 10, this word "**mutual affection**" comes from the Greek word "**philadelphia**" (brotherly love). Brotherly love is the affection that exists between friends and family members; it is a love that grows as you get to know each other. It has an emotional component to it. We might say of a long term friend, "I not only love this person, I also like them;" which is *agape* and *philadelphia* working together.

And we act our genuine *agape/philadelphia* love for our brothers or sisters, by *outdoing one another in showing honor*. But how do we do this? How do we honor each other? In his letter to the Church in Philippi (another "city of Love"), Paul writes...

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,
but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

**Let each of you look not to your own interests,
but to the interests of others.**

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...

Philippians 2:3-5

The western world's religious mold will only give you an idol that looks just like you. The "me generation" has become the cultural standard; self-happiness the new religion. We are told that the highest value in life is whatever makes us happy. But for the Christian, genuine love and affection "one for another" in the Body of Christ means that you put their concerns before your own.

I counsel young engaged couples that in a Christian marriage, both spouses pledge to "*prefer each other above all others,*" which in a very real way means that they are giving ownership of their life over to their spouse; they become mutual love slaves to each other, serving each other's needs before their own. Which is really quite practical. Because if each spouse sits around waiting for the other to serve them, then nobody gets any service. But if each dedicates themselves to serving the other then they both get 100% service.

One way of showing such oneness and mutual honor is for the married couple to continue holding hands as they walk through life and the Mall (*this of course also has a practical value of keeping one or the other from slipping away uncontrolled into their favorite store*). Another way is for the husband to always open the car door for his wife

(unless he's on crutches, then she should be holding the door for him). There is a truism that states, *when a man holds the car door for a woman ... one of them is new*. Mutual affection says that the wife should always be treated as new and precious.

And very simply the mutual affection that we should be showing our spouses in marriage is also the standard for how we should be treating one another in the Church. Our genuine love for God and for the family of God would have us demonstrating our mutual affection for each other by looking to their needs first before our own ... just as Jesus did for us. To fully incorporate this "one another" attitude into our lives would certainly make us stand out in this culture as a different people.

Think about this: One of the greatest expressions of genuine love is simply to notice people and to pay attention to them. According to U.S. News & World Report (4/22/96), 89 % of Americans think incivility (or rudeness and lack of respect) is a serious problem:

73 % - Think mean-spirited political campaigns are to blame:

67 % - Think rock music is to blame

52 % - Think talk radio is to blame:

1 % - Think their own behavior is uncivil.

In the triangle of Christianity, God is first, others are second, and self is last. You can know that your transformation and genuine love is growing when you can sense your concern for others outweighing your concern for yourself. So, as Paul wrote the Galatian Christians:

whenever we have an opportunity,
let us work for the good of all,
especially for those of the family of faith.
Galatians 6:10

That's how we are suppose to lovingly serve one another. Up next is how genuine love impacts our service for Christ.

Do not lag in zeal,
be ardent in spirit,
serve the Lord.
Romans 12:11

I know this sounds like Old English, or Yoda speak, but I love the way Paul phrased this: *in zeal not slothful, in spirit burning, the Lord serving*.

Have you ever heard of someone being "on fire for the Lord?" This is where that expression comes from. And when you think about it is there any other way to live a

life that honors God. If you're going to give yourself to sacrificially live for God, there is no half-way to do this. You just can't "sort of serve the Lord?" God doesn't have a weekend warrior program. If you going to give you life for God, give Him everything: your time, your talents, your passion, your enthusiasm; sacrifices are always completely given to be used up in the worship of God. If you genuinely love Him, then catch fire for the Lord.

The Polaris Submarine has been a "priceless asset" in American military power around the world. The man responsible for the development of the Polaris was **Rear Admiral William Raborn, Jr.** He carefully recruited his top management personnel. And when they came on the job he would give them and their families a patriotic pep talk on the importance of their assignments. On those occasions when it appeared that someone was not doing his best, he would call him into his office for what he termed, "**rededication.**" One officer, recalling one of those emotional sessions, said, "*When I walked out, I knew I was ready to die for someone. I didn't know whether it was for the admiral, the president, my mother, or the head of the Boy Scouts, but brother, I was ready to die if necessary!*"

Now that's enthusiasm, that's being "on fire!" Enthusiasm has been defined as "energy that boils over and runs down the side of the pot."

What the Church now desperately needs is Spirit-filled souls ablaze for God. They love with a love that glows. They believe with a faith that kindles. They serve with a devotion that consumes. They hate sin with a fierceness that burns. They rejoice with a joy that radiates. Love is perfected in the fire of God. (Samuel Chadwick, 1832-1917).

When people watch you, do they see someone on-fire for the Lord, someone pleasantly different from the everyone else. Has your faith now noticeably changed you? Do you show genuine love and affection for everyone you meet, are you excited about your love for God? If you do this, if you give your life to live for God, He'll give it back to you spades.

Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life and have it in abundance" John 10:10
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The only way to get such abundant life if first to give it to God – which is what He has asked you to do.

Rejoice in hope,
be patient in suffering,
persevere in prayer.
Romans 12:12

But what happens when times get rough; your having personal, financial, family, medical struggles and life doesn't feel so abundant?

Paul says you can always rejoice in the **hope** that you have, your salvation in Jesus and his promised eternal home with you, which will give you the **patience** to endure any temporary setback – and in view of eternity, everything here is temporary. As the saying goes, *don't sweat the small stuff. And realize that everything is small stuff.* In comparison to who we have become and where we are headed everything here – good and bad – really is just small stuff. But don't forget to pray about it.

Prayer is probably one of the weakest muscles in our spiritual body, when it should be one of the strongest. More than talking to God, prayer is spending time listening to God, communing with the spirit of Jesus gaining strength and courage from him to face the challenges of your day, and the rest of your life.

when once asked what his plans, for the following day were, Martin Luther answered: "*Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.*"

Thus, to persevere in prayer means that it is not the last thing you do when facing a challenge it is the first thing. *You can do more than pray after you have prayed; but you can never do more than pray until you have prayed* (A.J. Gordon). If you genuinely love God, then spend some quality time talking with Him. And finally this week

Contribute to the needs of saints
Extend hospitality to strangers
Romans 12:13

So now, let's bring genuine love for God right down to your wallet (*Oh No! you just knew the preacher was going to talk about money!!*). But it's not me talking to you it's God, it's the Bible. If you genuinely love God and love your neighbor then nothing in your life is off-limits for sharing. As the aged Apostle John wrote to us.

he [Jesus] laid down his life for us
we ought to lay down our lives for one another.
How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods
seeing a brother or sister in need and yet refusing help?

Little children, let us love,
not in word or speech,
but in truth and action.

1John 3:15-17

Contributing to the needs of your family, both biological and Christian, showing true hospitality to the stranger who comes to live among you, that's how you live out your love for God in this world. What the world needs not is more of this particular kind of love.

Singer John Charles Thomas, at age sixty-six wrote to syndicated columnist Abigail Van Buren: "I am presently completing the second year of a three-year survey on the hospitality or lack of it in churches. To date, of the 195 churches I have visited, I was spoken to in only one by someone other than an official greeter and that was to ask me to move my feet."

Thankfully, I thinking we've got this problem resolved at Bedford Presbyterian. We are very hospitable to the people who come into our worship services. But how are we doing with the strangers we meet on the street? Maybe there never really was a time, when as Blanche Dubois famously commented one could "*always depend on the kindness of strangers.*" (streetcar named Desire, T. Williams), But there was once a time that it was more true than now. Today the stranger is feared and that is sad. Our world has grown much darker due to fear and the lack of hospitality.

But as the Bible says, *perfect love casts out fear*" ! John 4:18). Here he was talking about our relationship with God; but if we have this relationship, this genuine love for God, then certainly it should easily reflect out even to the stranger in the street.

Now I must be honest with you, this is an area where I could still grow a lot in my own faith, loving and trusting God enough to trust every other part of my life – even in showing hospitality to strangers – to His care; living completely for Him which will allow me to live completely for one another.

- Having a genuine love that abhors evil and clings to the good
- Affectionately serving and putting our brother's and sister's needs before our own.
- Living a zealous life that is on fire for the Lord.
- Hopefully, patiently, enduring suffering, giving it back to God in prayer
- Supporting the saints and welcoming strangers.

That's enough to think about for this week
And it is certainly something to pray about now.