

The Challenge To Love

Romans 12:9-13

Introduction

The theme of chapter 12 is service. True service begins with personal consecration (v.1) motivated by love (v.2). Remember Paul said, “I beseech you”(v.1). Paul has issued the call to dedication (vv.1-3); transformation and honest evaluation. Paul has said, “you are gifted” (vv.3-8). Our gifts are to glorify God and edify the body. A failure to recognize and exercise our gifts results in a weak and ineffective church body! We should not only have an honest evaluation of our gifts; but we must lovingly participate in the Body of Christ, exercising grace; we are to love the people in the church (vv.9-16); and people in the world (vv.17-21).

We are members of a body (vv.3-8) and members of a family (vv.9-13). We not only have a spiritual service to perform but we have a way to behave in an intimate family. We are not only to reflect the Lord Jesus in our beliefs but also in our behavior. We need a way to express our love. James Montgomery Boice writes; “love is not some mushy emotion that embraces all, forgives all, forgets all, and requires nothing. . .In fact, you will notice at once that in our text Paul does not even define love. He passes immediately to how love functions” (Romans Vol. 4; *The New Humanity; (Romans 12-16); p.1591*).

Paul defines love elsewhere (1 Corinthians 13); That definition is given in the context of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12); but here Paul makes the challenge to love. How does love work? How does it function? Paul knows that central and essential to love is its sincerity, it is genuine, without hypocrisy and discriminating.

This comes as a surprise to some!

The Love That Discriminates (v.9)

Romans 12:9 (NKJV) *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.*

We all know that Jesus wants us to love each other. We all know how difficult loving people can be. Jesus told us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matt.22:37). We are all familiar with the passage “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matt.22:39). John 13:34; “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

We must lovingly participate in the lives of others. For some of you this is extremely difficult. You would much rather be alone. Yet we are commanded by Christ to love each other. How in the world will we do what Jesus expects? We must be empowered by God’s Holy Spirit; mastered by Christ; so we can be mastered by love.

For many of us we say—“I want to—but I don’t know how.” Paul says—love sincerely; without hypocrisy. Serve the Lord (v.12); conquer trials (v.12); meet the needs of others in an unselfish way (v. 13).

Imagine a person thinks to herself or himself; “I don’t want to. I guess I’ll have to pretend, to make Jesus happy, to make my wife happy, to make my family happy, to make my church happy. I guess I’ll just have to pretend, to go through the charade and the motions.” But Jesus will find out.

Paul begins by describing the quality of love; it must be without hypocrisy—that is in all sincerity. The word for love is the familiar word agape. Agape has been described as undeserved love. J.B. Phillips renders the verse; “Let us have no imitation love”. No posers please.

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Paul understood that it was possible to use a spiritual gift in an unspiritual way. He writes (1 Cor.13) “Love must be genuine, honest, sincere. This kind of love is humble and not proud.”

But we live in a culture that values symbol over substance; we live in a culture that values the image of something rather than the thing itself. Our commercials pound into our senses; ‘image is everything’.

The Lord Jesus in the most radical counter cultural way demonstrates that love must be sincere; and that sincere love is not limited to the saints on the inside but the ain’t’s on the outside. The believer must not pretend to love. We must show love, respect, interest, care, concern—not from an impure motive. Can you think of some impure motives? “What’s in it for me?” What can I gain? How can I gain status, position, how can I push myself forward? How can I find favor? Do you go to church to sell your product or your network? Do you go to church because you love the Lord and the Saints?

If the quality of love is ‘no hypocrisy’ than the morality of love is ‘abhor what is evil’.

Does the Bible condemn discrimination?

There is a wicked kind of discrimination that is associated with racism, sexism; this is an unhealthy bias or bigotry or narrow-mindedness or intolerance! Yet discrimination can also have something to do with the ability to distinguish, to discern or to differentiate.

We live in a world where we are told that every idea, every ideology, every viewpoint is valid and must be affirmed. Some suggest that truth is subjective and that each person must determine for themselves what constitutes right or wrong or good or evil.

The moment you embrace the belief that there is something true, or good or right and you dare express that sentiment you are labeled intolerant by those who do not share your views.

The Bible stands in opposition to those in the world that embrace or share a distorted view of ‘tolerance’. God is not in the least threatened or intimidated by those who dismiss His existence; deny His Word; or doubt His ability to effect His will.

The Bible speaks of God’s standards of justice and righteousness and goodness and describes them as absolute, true, unchanging and applicable to all.

The very fact that Paul writes; “. . .abhor what is evil” means there is something or someone that can be called evil and the fact that we can “cling to what is good” requires something to fall into the category of good.

One very practical way to love others—is to hate evil. The word ‘abhor’ is one of the strongest words in the Greek language. It means to hate with intense feeling, to loathe, to look upon something with horror. This is the way my wife looks at snakes! She shudders!

Love desires the very best for people—and therefore it requires hating the very worst—because that which is evil will destroy life. Another way to practically love people is to cling to what is good.

Cling means to fashion, attach, cement, glue—make a permanent connection to that which is good. Love is never soft on evil. Evil must be hated. If it is not hated it may be tolerated, accommodated, and eventually celebrated! Again Phillips writes; “Let us have a genuine break with evil and a real devotion to what is good”.

C.S. Lewis wrote; “ I remember, Christian teachers telling me long ago that I must hate a bad man’s actions, but not hate the bad man: or, as they would say, hate the sin but not the sinner. For a long time I used to think this a silly, straw-splitting distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the

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man? But years later it occurred to me that there was one man to whom I had been doing this all my life—namely myself. However much I might dislike my own cowardice or conceit or greed, I went on loving myself. There had never been the slightest difficulty about it. In fact the very reason why I hated the things was that I loved the man. Just because I loved myself, I was sorry to find that I was the sort of man who did those things. Consequently, Christianity does not want us to reduce by one atom the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery. We ought to hate them. Not one word of what of what we have said about them needs to be unsaid. But it does want us to hate them in the same way in which we hate things in ourselves: being sorry that the man should have done such things, and hoping, if it is anyway possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere, he can be cured and made human again” (Mere Christianity; Christianity Today, Vol. 29; no 17).

In order to hate what is evil—you must be willing to break with what is evil. God hates divorce. Do you know why? Because divorce destroys marriages and therefore families. Divorce alienates and impoverishes all who participate. We stand against evil when we stand against poverty and hunger and hurt and pain. We stand against alcohol and drug abuse, cursing and bitterness, impurity and indecency, we stand against hoarding and divisiveness and disease and suffering and godless education, filthy talk and sexual immorality; greed and corruption. You show love when you hate and fight against evil. “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (I Thess. 5:22). “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

We begin to realize something; love effects our character as well as those we come in contact with—we change on the inside—so we must act differently on the outside.

The Love That Incorporates (v.10a)

10Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love

This is the love that includes—rather than excludes. This is love’s commitment to the church. “Be kindly affectionate to one another” means devoted to one another. The word was used in family relationships (*philostorgos*). Here Paul combines the thought of family devotion and friendship devotion. Look at what Paul does not say; ‘be indifferent—cold—cautious—indifferent—apathetic’—we love—by giving preference to one another.

This is the love and warmth we have for members of our family; this is the kind of love that makes allowances for weakness and imperfections; and still retains a sense of commitment and support.

The Love That Vacates (v.10b)

... in honor giving preference to one another;

The expression “in honor” means respect or esteem. We vacate the first place—and we take the second place. We look at each other and say “please—you first”. Christian love inspires us to honor all.

We value people because they are created in the image of God. We respect and recognize fellow believers; but we also understand that all people require respect. Christians are fellow heirs with Christ; and the unbeliever is created in the image and likeness of God and are loved by God.

How do we take Paul’s exhortation to heart? Speak to people. Engage them. Have you ever talked to someone who left the Church because the people ‘were not friendly’? Strangers, visitors sometimes feel slighted, overlooked, not honored—taken for granted, not thanked, not recognized, not appreciated.

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I read this story; “Once a beloved servant of Christ was in a side room with other notables before a meeting. Several had already moved on to the platform and then it was his turn. When he appeared at the door, thunderous applause broke out for him. He quickly stepped aside and applauded so that he would not share the honor he sincerely thought was intended for others” (Believer’s Bible Commentary; p.546).

Love of the brethren is proof of spiritual life. 1 John 3:14; “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.”

To dwell above, with saints we love,
That will indeed be glory;
To dwell below with saints we know;
Well, that’s a different story!

The Love That Serves (v.11)

11not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

Think of the challenge Paul lays before us: our love effects our character; those to whom we come in contact—and now our conduct!

The NLT translates this; “Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically”.

This is love’s energetic expression. “Fervent” in spirit means ‘burning’. “Never lag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord” (RSV).

Warren Wiersbe makes this challenge; “If Christians cannot get along with each other how can they face their enemies?”

The context is the ‘work’ of love as a gifted person in the Body of Christ. You are not to be lazy in the spiritual gifts you’ve been given. You are not to be lazy in your assignment to love. We are to boil over in enthusiasm.

In Paul’s challenge to love we move from the character of love, and our contacts in love to our convictions in love!

The Love That Hopes (v.12)

12rejoicing in hope,

NLT “Be glad for all God is planning for you”

This is love’s expectation! Those who follow Jesus will encounter opposition, discouragement, even Satanic attack! The Christian knows that trial and suffering and persecution are all a part of the Christian’s commitment to Christ. Humility and the willingness to share and bear burdens are all marks of the Christian.

Love looks past the present trial and into a future hope. We see the future. We see Jesus coming back. We do not ignore the struggles in the present—but we anticipate the wonders that tomorrow will bring.

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The Love That Endures (v.12)

patient in tribulation,

When you love Jesus and you love others; rest assured, it will cost you something. When Paul writes; ‘patient in tribulation’ it is connected to ‘rejoicing in hope’. Our present tribulation cannot diminish our future hope.

We are to exercise patience and endure hardship like good soldiers of Jesus.

This is the love that holds on and holds tight. Perseverance is patience in deep difficulty.

The Love That Intercedes (v.12)

continuing steadfastly in prayer;

Hope. Hardship. Prayer.

We pray ‘steadfastly’. We pray in Jesus’ name. We pray and we unite God’s omnipotence and will and His power becomes our power, His will becomes our will, His love, becomes our love.

Steadfastly—speaks of devotion—a lifeline—connected to His love. The Greek word means “to attend to constantly”. We attend constantly to prayer. What in the world does prayer have to do with love? It is in prayer that we learn to love—we learn that those who hurt us, or torment us, or anger or irritate or aggravate or alienate; are loved by God. Jesus loves them. Jesus died for them. We take everything to God. Jesus is the source of love and wisdom. Jesus deepens our love. Informs our understanding.

John Phillips writes (pp.199-200); “Praise! Patience! Prayer! The Christian has an anchor for the future; he has hope! Not just a vague and sentimental optimism, but hope as bright as the promise of God. The Christian does not rebel in tribulation nor rashly accuse God. He is patient, knowing that God is too wise to make mistakes, to loving to be unkind and too powerful to be thwarted in His ultimate aims.”

Our challenge to love is our challenge to exercise gifts and grace that grows our character; effects our conduct, informs our convictions—and addresses our concerns!

The Love That Helps (v.13)

13distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

Hope. Hardship. Prayer. Helps. Hospitality.

Love helps. Love cares. Love shares. Paul knows that love sees need as an aggressive opportunity to help. When Paul saw the needy he took up a collection and gave it to the poor.

“A lavish generosity with one’s worldly goods is a mark of true discipleship” (John Phillips; p.200).

I read an illustration given by Harold St. John.

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We are all familiar with the story of the widow and her two small copper coins in Luke 21:1-4. Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And a certain poor widow place two coins; and said, “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had” (vv.3-4).

“There (in the temple court in Jerusalem) stood thirteen chests, each with a brazen, trumpet-shaped receiver into which the worshippers dropped their offerings; nine of them were marked ‘for Jehovah,’ and four where marked ‘for the poor’. The widow would fain manifest her love to the Lord and to her neighbor as well. If she cast the mite into His chest it will be known in heaven that one of the Lord’s lovers has been in the treasury that day; if she casts it into the box marked ‘for the poor’ it will show her care for her fellows, but it will not seem to place human need above divine worship? The solution she adopts is both simple and costly; she will balance the claims of heaven and earth, and drop two mites into separate chests. With eager joy the Lord called the attention of the twelve to her actions, and offers them a problem in the arithmetic of heaven. She loved God and her neighbor” (Harold St. John quoted by A. Naismith, 1200 Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes; Chicago Moody Press, 1962; p.80).

The brother of Jesus—and Pastor of Calvary Chapel in Jerusalem writes; “If a (Christian) brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? (James 2:15-16).

The answer is clear—no use. The world’s love grabs—and God’s love gives. When we love the way the world loves we want it for ourselves to keep for ourselves.

Hospitality is the love that leads us to care for strangers or meet the needs of others. The Greek word is *philoxenia*—*philos*—love—*xenos*—*strangers*. Here *xenos*—are people who are foreign to us—different from us. This is the love that fights our fears and our prejudices. This is the love that looks past color, or nationality, or religion, or gender, or age, or fashion sensibilities, etc.

Conclusion

Alfred Tennyson wrote; “Tis better to have loved and lost Than never to have loved at all.”

Tennyson touches the nerve—he pokes and prods; love makes us feel things that are unexpected and sometimes unwelcome; pain, loss, disappointment, rejection. Love is risky. Sometimes loving someone means pain or loss and why risk that? Some want to love but have no idea how to express that love. Paul says love that is genuine, love that discriminates, will express itself in devotion, unselfishness, enthusiasm, hope, consistency, prayerfulness, generosity, hospitality.

There are at least three forces; three pressures that squeeze and cloud and cover the challenge to love. The first is fear; open your heart, someone can break your heart. Care—and people can reject—a lifetime of rejection can make anyone fearful of loving. The second is delaying—or waiting—or hoping that someone else will care first; we won’t take the initiative; we won’t make the first move or offer care. The third is preoccupation; we are so preoccupied with our own lives, our own family, our own church our own pain; our own trial; our own troubles; our own Doctor’s appointments; our own living; our own survival; we don’t have a single drop of compassion; we have no room; no time; no love available—for anyone else.

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We are frightened and uncomfortable with anyone or anything that might make us care.

We chant the mantra of a broken generation; “I find it hard to trust people.”

Tennyson claimed that losing a love by death—was better than never loving at all. C.S. Lewis claimed that never loving was a kind of death all by itself:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in the casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.

Does expressing God’s love to others sometimes bring danger? It all depends if you find rejection, hurt, or betrayal dangerous. But is there something worse—even more dangerous than not expressing; not sharing; not willing; not caring to share God’s love?

We then risk living—but we can’t in good conscience call it life. We are content to live in fear; live in passivity and live in our present preoccupations.