

Practicing Christ-like Love

(Romans 12:9-21)

Intro: Paul, having called on every believer to offer or present their body to God as a living sacrifice (12:1-2), and discussing the principles governing the proper use of Spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ, the church (12:3-8); he next proceeds in verses 9-21 to issue a series of exhortations calling for the continual exercise of Christ-like love in every area of our Christian lives. Commentators have noted that “Nowhere else in Paul’s writings do we find a more concise collection of ethical injunctions. “They provide us with the basics for effective Christian living” (Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, 236).

Paul’s development here is similar to his discussion in 1 Corinthians 12–13. After talking about Spiritual gifts in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, he continues in 1 Corinthians 13 by talking about practicing Christ-like love. The two go together you see. When we serve the Lord, we must serve Him in Christ-like love.

In order to help you better understand this series of miscellaneous exhortations to practice Christ-like love I have grouped them into 5 categories. The first category is introduced in verse 9, **Let love be without hypocrisy (NASB).**

I. True Love Promotes The Positive (v. 9)

1. Let love be sincere and not hypocritical (v. 9a)

v. 9—Let love be without hypocrisy (NASB).

The series begins by calling on believers to recognize the absolute primacy of genuine love. Paul says literally, “Unhypocritical love.” This opening statement actually serves as a title for this entire section. Practicing a sincere and genuine love towards others drives the following sequence of exhortations. This observation is supported by the fact that there is no verb in the Greek text of verse 1. In fact, from verse 9 through 13 the original Greek contains no verb, but is made up of a series of participles and adjectives calling on believers to ***continuously practice*** a sincere and genuine love towards one another. In other words, every believer is to stop feigning or pretending to love others, and to start truly loving others. “True love is free from all pretense and hypocrisy.” (Mounce, *Romans*, 236). Practicing the love of Jesus Christ toward people who desperately need His love can produce eternal consequences.

Consider the story of a boy named Ted Stallard

Miss Thompson recalls her first meeting with Ted Stallard. Ted was a student in my fifth grade class. The poor boy was turned off by school. Very sloppy in appearance. Expressionless. Unattractive. At first, I enjoyed bearing down on my red pen, as I placed Xs beside his many wrong answers.

If only I had studied his records more carefully. They read:

1st grade: Ted shows promise with his work and attitude, but (has) poor home situation.

2nd grade: Ted could do better, but his Mother is seriously ill. He receives little help from home.

3rd grade: Ted is a good boy but serious and withdrawn. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year.

4th grade: Ted is very slow, but well-behaved. His father shows no interest whatsoever.

Christmas arrived, and all the children piled elaborately wrapped gifts on my desk. Ted brought a gift too. It was wrapped in brown paper and held together with Scotch Tape. I opened each gift, as the children crowded around to watch me. When I opened Ted's package a gaudy rhinestone bracelet with half of the stones missing, fell out on my desk, along with a bottle of cheap perfume. The children began to snicker. But I silenced them by splashing some of Ted's perfume on my wrist, and letting the children smell it. I put the bracelet on too. At day's end, after the other children had left, Ted came by my desk and said, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother. And the bracelet looks real pretty on you too. I'm glad you like my presents." Ted left, and I immediately got down on my knees and asked God to forgive me and to change my attitude.

The next day, the children were greeted by a reformed teacher—one committed to loving each of them unconditionally. Especially the slow ones, and especially Ted. Surprisingly—or maybe, not so surprising, Ted began to show great improvement in his school work. He actually caught up with most of the students and even passed a few of them up. Time came and went as it tends to do. I didn't hear from Ted for a long time. Then, one day, I received this note: Dear Miss Thompson: I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Ted

Four years later, another note arrived: Dear Miss Thompson:

They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be first to know. The university has not been easy, but I have liked it. Love, Ted

And four years later, I received the following note—Dear Miss Thompson: As of today, I am Dr. Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. Also, I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year. I attended that wedding, and sat where Ted’s mother would have sat. The compassion God had helped me show that young man provided me with one of the greatest blessings of my entire life.

Miss Thompson’s conversion from a cold and unloving teacher, to a caring and loving soul, who turned a lost boy’s entire life around, is the subject Paul discusses next. In the section before us this morning, Romans 12:9-21, Paul exhorts believers to practice Christ-like love. A love that is sincere and genuine, a love that is void of hypocrisy.

Warren Wiersbe writes: “Love is the circulatory system of the spiritual Body, which enables all the members to function in a healthy, harmonious way.”

The first command to practice a sincere and genuine love toward others is followed by a pair of contrastive commands in v. 9b,

2. Love abhors evil, and clings to what is good (v. 9b)

v. 9b—Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

These are very strong expressions, conveying an absolute revulsion of evil, and a total commitment to what is good. The human attitude must follow God’s in His hatred of evil. His eyes are too pure to look upon evil (Hab. 1:13), and He cannot be tempted by evil (James 1:13).

True Christian love seeks to promote the positive in other’s lives, while rejecting the evil that so easily entangles us. Sadly, in far too many instances believers have embraced evil cultural practices and policies promoted by Satan, all in the name of religious tolerance. Believers are commanded to hate evil because it is the enemy of all that leads to Godliness and Christlikeness.

Not only are believers to turn away from all evil, they are “to cling to what is good.” This Greek participle “cling to what is good” comes from a verb (*kollao*) that means “to glue or join together.” When God instituted marriage in **Genesis 3:24**, He commanded that a man “is to leave his father and his mother, and

cleave to his wife.” This Hebrew word “*cleave*” is our same word (*kollao*), “to be wedded to, or super-glued together.” As we cling to Christ and practice Godly virtues, we will no longer be inclined to practice evil.

In addition, instead of condemning our sinning brother or sister, we need to pray for them, and do whatever we can to help them overcome sin in their lives.

This leads to our second category in verse 10:

II. True Love Fosters A Family Spirit (v. 10)

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love;
give preference to one another in honor;

Paul continues by exhorting believers to be completely devoted to one another in the bonds of brotherly love. The Greek word translated “devoted” is used of the tender and affectionate bonds that exist between family members. As members of God’s family, believers are to be fully devoted to their Christian brothers and sisters.

This exercise of Christ-like love will be displayed by giving preference and honor to one another. In other words, believers will happily and readily put the needs of others ahead of their own. Paul admonished the believers in Philippi to always “consider others as better/more valuable than themselves” (Phil. 2:3).

STORY: Newspaper columnist and minister George Crane tells of a wife who came into his office full of hatred toward her husband. “I do not only want to get rid of him, I want to get even. “Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he has hurt me.”

Dr. Crane suggested an ingenious plan “Go home and act as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Spare no efforts to please him, to enjoy him. Make him believe you love him. After you've convinced him of your undying love and that you cannot live without him, then drop the bomb. Tell him that you're getting a divorce. That will really hurt him.” With revenge in her eyes, she smiled and exclaimed, “That’s a great plan. Will he ever be surprised!” Well, the woman went home and began loving her husband with enthusiasm. Acting “as if she truly love him.” For two months she showed him unconditional love, kindness, listening, giving, reinforcing, and sharing.

When she didn't return, Dr. Crane called. "Are you ready to go through with the divorce?" "Divorce?" she exclaimed. "Never! I discovered I really do love him." **Her actions had changed her feelings. Motion resulted in emotion.** The ability to love is established not so much by fervent promise as often repeated deeds.

I am convinced that if just one person in a troubled marriage would commit to love their mate unconditionally, in Christ-like love, divorce attorneys would go out of business in short order.

So, true love promotes the positive and fosters a family spirit. The third category of exhortation is: True Love Keeps On Keeping On (vv. 11-12).

III. True Love Keeps On Keeping On (vv. 11-12)

This category actually contains six exhortations warning believers to remain vitally connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. The first in v. 11 is:

1. not lagging behind in diligence (v. 11a)

Paul warns his readers of the danger of slipping away from God. We must be diligent to spend time with God everyday. We need to take steps to protect against becoming spiritually lazy. Set aside time to read God's Word and to commune with Him daily. Don't lag behind in your spiritual development.

2. fervent in spirit (v. 11b)

Second, believers are to be fervent in spirit. This word "fervent," means "boiling over." The believer who has surrendered his life to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), lives a life boiling-over with the Holy Spirit. This is described by Paul as a supernatural fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

3. serving the Lord (v. 11c)

Third, a Spirit-filled believer lives his/her life to serve the Lord, Jesus. They pray and ask God to reveal their spiritual gift or gifts to them (vv. 3-8), and then in the power of the Holy Spirit, they employ their gifts in service in the church, and for the glory of God.

The next three exhortations in verse 12 provide additional descriptions of how

believers should live their lives in total dependence in the Lord.

4. rejoicing in hope (v. 12a) **We rejoice in hope, which provides us with**
5. persevering in tribulation (v. 12b) **strength to persevere in tribulation.**
6. devoted to prayer (v. 12c) **The believers source of spiritual help during times of tribulation and trial is prayer.**

The next category of exhortation calls on believers to Contribute To The Needs Of Others, And To Practice Hospitality (v. 13)

IV. True Love Contributes To The Needs Of Others (v. 13)

v. 13 Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

Returning to a Christian's responsibility to other believers, Paul exhorted his, Roman readers to contribute or better share with God's people who are in need, and to show hospitality to strangers.

The level of poverty, and need for help in the early church was acute. The early chapters of the Book of Acts show how believers in the Jerusalem church came together to meet the needs of the rapidly growing church (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-37). Paul routinely called on the Gentiles in the churches he planted to take up a contribution for the saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Rom. 15:25-27).

In addition to helping meet one another's needs, believers are exhorted to practice hospitality toward strangers. This involves opening up your home to house, and to care for visiting saints. Both ministries, meeting needs and being hospitable, involve helping others.

Paul's exhortations in this fifth and final section, verses 14-21, relate to a believer's reaction to the actions and emotions of others, whether Christians or not, and especially toward one's enemies.

V. True Love Ministers To One's Enemies (vv. 14-21)

1. Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not (v. 14)

The hatred displayed in persecution usually evokes response in kind, but Paul commanded, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” Again, this is only possible as we trust in God’s Spirit who indwells us and provides us strength to bless those who persecute us. Some feel that Paul’s exhortations in this remaining section, calling for believers to show God’s love to their enemies, may have been derived directly from the teachings of Christ. For instance, Jesus taught His disciples in His Sermon on the Mount “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt. 5:44 and Luke 6:28). Jesus certainly embodied these principles. He endured intense persecution and suffering through His trials, beatings, and crucifixion, and yet He reviled not His tormenters. Our fallen human nature desires to curse those who persecute us, God says, “Bless them and curse not.”

2. Paul next calls on believers to share one another’s joys and sorrows v. 15

v. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

While it is easier to rejoice with those who rejoice, Christians should be willing to empathize with other people, Christians, as well as unbelievers. Related to this command is the next command in verse, 16, exhorting believers to live in harmony with one another.

3. Be of the same mind toward one another (v. 16)

Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.
Do not be wise in your own estimation.

The command to “be of the same mind toward one another,” means literally to have the same attitude toward one another. This involves not being proud or haughty, and being willing to associate with believers of a lower social standing than oneself. He concludes that we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we should—“Don’t be wise in your own estimation.”

In the next exhortation in v. 17, Paul issues another appeal to never retaliate

4. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone (v. 17)

Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

The following exhortation in verse 18 continues the thought in verse 17b, for believers to respect and to be at peace with all men.

5. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (v. 18)
Believers are to do everything in their power to promote peace with all men. They are never to take their own revenge (v. 19), but to leave room for God to exercise His wrath, v. **19**
6. Never take your own revenge, beloved (v. 19), but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord (Deut. 32:35; Psalm 94:1).

Instead of seeking to get even with someone who has wronged us, Paul admonishes believers to leave them to God. What is more, he continues in verse 20 by commanding believers to care for the needs of their enemy.

7. Care for the needs of your enemy (v. 20)

v. 20 “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 UPON HIS HEAD” (Prov. 25:21).

“Heaping burning coals on the head of one’s enemies” is a quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22. The imagery here is thought to refer to “the burning pangs of shame and contrition” that an enemy may feel in light of the gracious treatment he receives from a loving Christian.

Paul concludes in v. 21 with a final a pair of contrastive commands.

8. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (v. 21)

Do not be overcome by evil, by giving in to the temptation to retaliate, but overcome evil with good.

Leonardo da Vinci painted the fresco “The Last Supper” in a church in Milan. At the time that da Vinci painted “The Last Supper,” he had an enemy who was a fellow painter. da Vinci had had a bitter argument with this man and despised him. When da Vinci painted the face of Judas Iscariot at the table with Jesus, he used the face of his enemy so that it would be present for ages as the man who betrayed Jesus. He took delight while painting this picture in knowing that others would actually notice the face of his enemy on Judas. As he worked on the faces of the other

disciples, he often tried to paint the face of Jesus, but couldn't make any progress. da Vinci felt frustrated and confused.

In time he realized what was wrong. His hatred for the other painter was holding him back from finishing the face of Jesus. Only after making peace with his fellow painter and repainting the face of Judas was he able to paint the face of Jesus and complete his masterpiece.

One of the reasons we may have a hard time accepting the forgiveness of God is that we find it hard to forgive others. That's why Jesus said, "If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt. 6:14,15). If you want your relationship with Jesus to be all that it should be, forgive your enemies and do all you can to demonstrate Christ's love to them. (Wayne Rice, *Hot Illustrations For Youth Talks*, Zondervan, pp. 161-162).

Closing: Do you demonstrate Christ-like love to family, friends, and foes alike. I have to admit that I have not been showing Christ-like love to everyone in my life. I have asked God to forgive me, and to help me exhibit Christ-like love to everyone in my life. This is putting feet to my profession. How about you? Do you have an enemy that you need to get right with? Ask God to help you and He will.

As you all know, the greatest need we have as fallen sinners is to be made right with God. Have you made peace with God by accepting His Son Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin and death? We would invite you to receive Christ as your Savior as I close in prayer. Let's pray:

Closing song: More Love, More Power . . .