

Genuine Love

Romans 12:9-13

How would you describe the world in which you live? Is it full of love? Or is it full of evil? If you watch the news, or spend much time on the internet, you will likely answer that it is full of hate. But God is at work in his children to fill them with love, His love.

The Power of the Gospel is working in each of us to transform us from lovers of self into lovers of God and lovers of others, particularly other believers.

If we are to learn to love well, we must be renewing our minds as to what love is. Defining genuine love does not automatically transform us into good lovers, but without a renewal of the mind, we are doomed to pursue false loves.

Today's topic is love: Genuine love. Love without hypocrisy. God's love. What Paul has given us is a sort of recipe defining genuine love. It is not so very different than what we find in I Cor. 13, that famous passage on love. It is common in our day to hold up love as the ideal. But when it comes to the specific ingredients that make up love, there is a vast difference between God's recipe and that of the world. As Christians, we must renew our minds as to the very nature of love first. Only when we have the right recipe, can we begin living in a way that is according to the will of God, his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Hopefully, as we walk through the recipe, you will find yourself to be lacking. While it is true that God is working in all of us to become genuine lovers, He is not finished with any of us. As you recognize your failures and inconsistencies, remember Jesus.

The recipe is a guide to direct us to where we are going. But along the way we must continually be driven back to Christ, who forgives us and cleanses us by his blood. And only as Christ infuses His love into us will we ever conquer our own selfishness and even partially imitate his perfect love.

Read Romans 12:9-13.

Our English text begins with a command: Let love be genuine. While I do not have any disagreement with the command, and I understand the grammatical decisions that the translators have made, I believe in this instance it is very helpful to see the Greek.

He agape anypokritos. ~H avga,ph avnupo,kritojÅ

The love – not hypocritical. The love – genuine.

There is no verb in the Greek. When this occurs, it is acceptable to insert the verb “to be” or “is” into the translation. “Let love be genuine.” More simply: Love is genuine. Certainly, we are all obligated to pursue love. But rather than simply urging us to be genuine in our love, I believe Paul is listing the ingredients that go into the recipe of “genuine love”, real love. We need to renew our mind as to the very nature of love.

⁹ Let love be genuine.

... is then more than an encouragement to be “authentic” in our love.

Of course, being sincere is vital. Pretending to love is not love. But every expression of authenticity does not qualify as an ingredient in God’s recipe for Genuine Love. In fact, much evil has been encouraged in our day in the name of authenticity and love.

What is the next command? Abhor what is evil; In the English, you may not see any connection between the command to “Let love be genuine” and the command “Abhor evil.” Abhorring evil does not really sound much like love. But when you understand that the verb “abhor” is a participle, and that all of the verbs in the following verses are participles, you begin to see that they are all connected to the initial statement about genuine love.

Participles very rarely make up the main verb in a sentence. They are verbal adjectives. You don’t really care about the grammar. But what you need to see is that abhorring, hating, evil is connected to genuine love. So, it is grammatically correct to read these two statements this way:

Genuine love...“is abhorring evil.”

The first ingredient in God’s recipe of genuine love is to hate evil. You cannot practice genuine love without hating evil. This cuts at the heart of the world’s definition of love.

I want to be very careful here. Truth is a ridge line. Not every expression of hatred against evil includes genuine love. But if love does not include a hatred of evil, it is not genuine love.

Paul does not go into a definition of evil here, but the Bible throughout is defining evil. Paul gives a brief and incomplete list in Galatians 5.

Galatians 5:19-21 ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger,

rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Evil comes in many forms. But I am going to give three examples of evil that our modern society no longer defines as evil. In fact, they may even applaud these activities as loving. A man or woman leaves their spouse in the pursuit of “true” love. A couple moves in with one another before taking vows of marriage as an expression of their deeper love for one another. Two men or two women seek the bonds of marriage as an expression of their love for one another. In each of these cases God has spoken that the behavior is evil. Adultery, fornication, and homosexuality are all clearly called evil. And yet, our culture seeks to squeeze us into its mold, telling us that as long as you “love” then each of these activities are acceptable.

Not so, says Paul. Genuine love abhors what is evil. And God defines what is evil and what is not evil. Love is not genuine love unless it opposes evil. This is not what the world is teaching. In the world’s definition, love is only concerned with the “feelings of the individuals involved”. We are called to live out our feelings in an authentic way. And for you to love me, you must encourage me to live out my feelings. You must affirm me. If you make me “feel” bad, then you do not love me. As long as I am acting consistent with my “feelings” then I am loving. Affirm and be affirmed, whatever the behavior, and it can be called love.

I am not saying that feelings are irrelevant. Feelings are very important. But they are not very reliable when it comes to defining love. Very often the inner war that we all experience as believers is to bring our feelings into alignment with truth.

We do not naturally hate that which is evil. There is a process in which we must all be engaged, knowing that we will not achieve perfection in this life. We learn what is good. And then we seek grace from God to bring our whole being into alignment with what is good. This is genuine love.

And when it comes to loving other people, we must point them in the same direction. We must not condemn someone when they honestly are struggling to abhor what God says is evil. But neither should we call good what God clearly says is evil, in the name of love.

“Love the sinner, hate the sin” is a popular phrase used in our day. I have issues with this statement, mainly because sin arises from the sinner. We cannot really

separate the two. And God does not merely judge sin, he judges sinners. But maybe it could be better said this way: In order to love the sinner, you must hate his sin.

Sin is evil. And in order to love, you must hate that which is evil. We never have to accept evil in order to love.

Everything I have said is true. At the same time, hating sin is not all there is to love. We must also learn to do acts of mercy and kindness for people before they have rid themselves of all evil. The gospel is clear: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. If we must wait until all evil is removed before we extend love to another person, we will never be able to move towards them in love.

One of the strangest anomalies of war occurs when those who have moments before been avidly seeking to harm one another, now seek to aid one another. Medics and doctors will often seek to save the lives of those who moments before aimed their weapons upon them.

One of the reasons that I love the ministry of the Pregnancy Care Center is that it also seeks this balance. Life is precious. Abortion is evil. But does that mean that we cannot move towards the one who is considering abortion, or who has already had an abortion? Of course not! We must act with kindness and mercy toward them, while never denying the great evils that are occurring.

Genuine love abhors evil. But genuine love does more than abhor evil. (It) holds fast to what is good. Genuine love...“is holding fast to what is good.” Good in this context must mean morally good, in accordance with God who is supremely good. The opposite of evil.

Genuine love is *joined closely with, glued together, united* to the good. Abhorring evil and clinging to the good are two sides of the same coin. In the case of adultery, which is evil, clinging to the good is continuing to pursue oneness with your spouse. In the case of living together before marriage, which is evil, clinging to the good is waiting until marriage to have sex or to live together. In the case of homosexuality, which is evil, clinging to the good is pursuing personal chastity while upholding God’s ideal of marriage between one man and one woman for life.

There are many other things that are good as defined by God. Contentment with the life God has given us is good. It is good to work hard in our job. The regular worship of God is certainly very good. The pure doctrine of the Gospel is good.

When we strive to cling to that which is good, we are pursuing genuine love. The world may not see it as love but that is because they have a different recipe that they are following.

The second ingredient of love is to recognize and affirm the value of every other member of the Body of Christ.

¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection.

Genuine love ... “is loving one another with brotherly affection.”

I chose Joseph and his brothers as the Scripture reading so you would know that the Bible does not always assume that siblings love each other. Brothers often hate each other. But we all seem to know that brothers ought to have affection with one another. And when they do not have such affection, it is sad.

What is important in Paul’s statement is that he assumes the parties involved are of the same family. In order for there to be brotherly affection, there must be a distinction between those who are in the family and those who are not in the family.

The Church is the body of Christ. And the Church is the family of God. The very concept of siblings is interesting. Two people really have no direct connection with one another are very much connected to one another. They are joined through their both being joined to mom and dad.

We are brothers and sisters of one another because we all have Jesus Christ as our elder brother and God as our Father.

Genuine love recognizes this and therefore has brotherly affection for one another.

The one another must mean the other baptized members of the Church. It is easy to think that this is an affection that must be entirely drummed up by us. But the truth is that God himself is working to produce this love in us.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 4:9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,

One aspect of good parenting is helping your children to have brotherly affection for one another. I know, easier said than done.

All of this falls into renewing our mind. The work is to think about the fellow members of the Church in the way that God wants us to think about them. The changing of specific behaviors will flow out of a renewed perspective. We do things for family that we might not do for those outside of the family.

Brotherly affection also helps to see that genuine love for the Church involves feelings. There is an affection that is included. I do not think this affection is always sweet feelings. We do not always like our siblings. But brotherly affection fights through the difficulties and disagreements.

In fact, fighting is so common among siblings that we have a word for it: sibling rivalry. Maybe not as common among girls, but most boys fight with their brothers. We try to establish a pecking order. My older brother beat me into submission. But then I took that out on my good friend, Barney. Instead of having compassion on him, I beat him into submission. Paul says that genuine love acts differently.

Genuine love...

“is outdoing one another in showing honor.”

Outdo one another in showing honor.

There is a battle that goes on between brothers when they pursue genuine love. It is the battle to see who can show more honor to the other. You honor someone by affirming their worth and value. How do you, as a believer, know that your brothers and sisters in Christ have value? They have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Your Lord values them. And God is working in them such that they will become a vessel for honored use:

ESV Romans 9:21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?

All men are made in the image of God and should be given honor and respect because of this. But those who have been bought by the precious blood of Jesus Christ should be given the utmost honor. In the Church we evaluate people through the lens of the cross.

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

The world honors talents. The world honors accomplishments. The world honors external beauty and wealth. But we honor Christ, and all who are in him.

Genuine love hates evil and clings to the good. Genuine love pursues the honor of other members of the body, the family.

Thirdly, genuine love is not lazy in worship.

¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Genuine love...

“is not slothful in zeal”

“is fervent in spirit,”

“is serving the Lord”

Zeal has many expressions. You can find zeal at a college sporting event. Students painting their faces the colors of their team or screaming and waving their arms with great exuberance. But you can also find zeal in the way that a mother diligently considers the welfare of her children, or scientist considers every detail of his research project.

Zeal is always a product of love. Sloth (lethargy) and love are anti-thetical. There is no such a thing as a lazy lover. There are exhausted lovers. But there are no lazy lovers.

Enthusiasm in the things of God is a mark of genuine love for God. Enthusiasm may have a variety of expressions. The worship of God is certainly fundamental, both private and corporate worship. The study of the Word and earnest prayer, fellowship with other believers, service in the Church, missions, hospitality, outreach, discipleship, in all these the genuine love for God is shown when there is enthusiasm and zeal. Not everyone will have the same zeal for each of these. But every believer who loves the Lord will have zeal.

“The temptation to ‘lose steam’ in our lifelong responsibility to reverence God in every aspect of our lives, to become lazy and complacent in our pursuit of what is ‘good, well pleasing to God, and perfect,’ is a natural one – but must be strenuously resisted.”

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The energetic service of God is fundamental to genuine love. Love and service are always intertwined:

Deuteronomy 10:12 ¹² "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

God warns his people of future curses...

Deuteronomy 28:47 ⁴⁷ Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things,

The formal worship of God is a service that we offer to God because we love God.

Psalms 100:2 ² Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

The very purpose of redemption is to enable us to serve the living and true God.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

Genuine love is zealous for worship!

The fourth ingredient: Genuine love trusts the Great Lover.

¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Genuine love is...

... rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, and constant in prayer.

Paul essentially teaches the same thing in I Corinthians 13:

1 Corinthians 13:7 ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

As Christians we believe many doctrines. But at the heart of Christianity is relationship. We are in a love relationship with the God of the Universe. We do not simply trust in the philosophy of salvation. We trust in a personal Savior who we know truly loves us.

It is our trust in Jesus personally, his character and work, that enables us to love him in return. And this love for Jesus drives us to continue trusting in Jesus – even through all of life’s ups and downs. The hope that we have is not wishful thinking that things in this life will always turn out as we desire. The rejoicing in hope that is the fruit of genuine love is a certain hope in the resurrection. It is the hope that is ours through our union with Jesus Christ. Christ has removed the curse over us and has purchased for us an eternal inheritance. It is a hope that cannot be lost or tarnished or destroyed. It is a hope that is kept safely in heaven for us. No number of trials in this life can diminish this hope.

Those who know genuine love also know hopeful joy. And it is this hope that makes the Christian patient in tribulation. It is the knowledge that the God who loves us is working even the worst tribulations for our good and his glory that produces patience deep in the soul. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And so, genuine love drives the believer to prayer. A prayerless life is a loveless life.

What is constant prayer? One way to look at constant prayer is to throughout the day be having this ongoing conversation with God. I would encourage us all to make efforts to cultivate the presence of God in this way.

But I do not think this is exactly what Paul has in mind. I think it is more likely that Paul is encouraging concentrated seasons of prayer, both private and corporate. And he is connecting a persistent prayer life with love for God. I have found that prayer is the one spiritual discipline that is always fading among the saints. Believers always seem to be needing more encouragement to pray. I know I do.

Prayer requires stopping doing other things. In a sense, every time that you pray you are fasting. I know that there is a fasting from meals that is specific. But every time you stop other things and take time to pray you are fasting from something. Prayer, true prayer, flows out of a genuine love for God. Remaining constant in prayer is as difficult as remaining constant in love. But genuine love continues to pray because it must remain connected to the object of its love.

Lastly, genuine love gives to the rest of the family. Genuine love...

13 **Contribute(s) to the needs of the saints**

Ask yourself this question: Is it a higher duty to give to other believers or to give to the lost?

Throughout much of my life there has been a trend for believers to be more considerate of the needs of unbelievers than other believers. We are challenged to minister to the needy out in the community. There is certainly biblical warrant for loving the lost. However, the Scripture places the higher priority on taking care of the needs of fellow believers. Why is this? Because we are the body of Christ. We express our love for God who we cannot see partly through our love of other members of His body, who we can see.

^{ESV} **1 John 4:20** If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

True faith in Jesus goes hand in hand with faithful to love the saints.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 1:15** For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,

And genuine love...

is seeking to show hospitality.

and seek to show hospitality.

What is hospitality?

filoxeni,a, aj, h` strictly *love for strangers* or *foreigners*; hence *hospitality*, *kindness to strangers* ([RO 12.13](#))

Hospitality is being open to meet the needs of strangers. Hospitality welcomes into the family, those who are not already members of the family. Genuine love is not a closed circle. Genuine love searches for ways to bring in those who are just entering the fold. It is important to see here that the hospitality here is directed towards other believers.

1 Peter 4:8-9 ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Why is hospitality so important among believers?

First, when someone became a Christian, they were often ostracized by their family. True of early Judaism. Often true in Muslim cultures. But even in environments that do not shun Christians, the body of Christ is a family. And families share with one another.

Blood is thicker than water is NOT true. The waters of baptism form a stronger bond than blood relatives.

Mark 10:28-30 ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

It is easy to see how this can flow into evangelism as well. But the primary application is to be welcoming to new believers. Genuine love is always reaching out, welcoming others in. This means that we should never be so focused on our already present relationships in the Church that we are not welcoming to those who are just coming into the Church. Reaching out to those who are new is not easy. But it is an ingredient in genuine love. I am particularly thankful for the hospitality of a Christian couple in El Dorado, Arkansas.

My daughter Tara had to find a place to stay for 2 months there as she fulfills her internship requirements for Physical Therapy. How did she find a place to stay? She began contacting pastors in the area. One pastor gave her the name of a potential couple in their church.

This couple was glad to take her in. They are empty nesters. She is having a grand time with them. They invited her to church. They had a work-day at their church and Tara went and did some painting. Hospitality will look different in different contexts. But Genuine love includes hospitality.

Genuine Love

1. Hates evil and clings to the good.
2. Affirms the value of every member of the church.
3. Is not lazy in worship.
4. Trusts the Great Lover.
5. Welcomes the stranger.

Knowing the ingredients does not make you a great lover. But it sets your course in the right direction. Offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice. Ask your loving Father to fill you with his Genuine love!