

# Genuine Christian Living

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Rom. 12:9-21

Returning to Romans today, we come to the practical heart of the letter. Though Paul is stranger to most in Rome, he knows precisely what they need for a full and rich Christian life.

*Whatever* else they are, *however* else we pursue life, our lives in Christ need to look like verses 9-21.

We saw last time the gifts. But not all Christians have all the gifts.

But all believers are to love one another and hate evil. Every Christian is to be devoted to each other, honoring one another. All are to be diligent, fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord. And how far would yet get in the new life without rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer?

The body of the church should be well supplied in gifts. But 6-8 leads to the fruit that grows in the tree of 12:9 and following.

And where is this tree rooted and grounded but in verses 1-3 – doxological and humble living. If your tree looks like a dead and gnarled one, you best pay attention!

So let us turn now to this exhortation list of moral virtues. Another such list can be found at the end of 1Thessalonians. Notice how brief and brisk these short statements are. There is not a verb in 9-13 – all nouns, pronouns, adjectives and participles. The first verbs are found 14.

And does it surprise anyone that at the top of the list is *agape* – love, love unhypocritically, hating evil, and clinging to good.

This same good/evil character closes chapter 12 too – do not be overcome with evil, overcome evil with good.

These are not random sayings strung together, like a pearl necklace.

There is a strong spine of love right down the middle – to love sincerely is to love in these ways.

See then love as the engine of a great train. Love pulls these cars in genuine Christian living.

Verse 9 – is the good heart of love; the heart of gold. Verse 10 speaks of the commitment of brotherly love, putting one another first. And then comes the heat of love – read verse 11.

And then the forward, upward lean of love in 12 – hope-filled rejoicing, which perseveres through tribulation, with rising devotion in prayer.

The care of love is in 13.

The graciousness of love even to those who persecute you, blessing and not cursing in 14.

The next car is unity of love – love at all times, rejoicing and weeping.

Then humility of love – that unity that does not leave any out - 16

The respect of love – 17-18 – which strives with all men for peace.

Then the victory of love – overcoming the enemy by love and not vengeance. Ten cars in all with victory bringing up the tail.

Let us see how many we can visit today! And as we do so, let me challenge you – where is our love the weakest here? Where is it the strongest?

Love is good hearted – verse 9.

Do any need reminding that love is rooted and grounded in Christ? This love knows the cross – knows what Jesus has done – stands by the new life that grips and holds us, being transformed forever.

This is love that lives and springs from 12:1-2 – a worshipping heart, by the mercies of God, living for another world, with renewed thoughts and commitments, and approving what God’s will is.

And this begins in love, for what can you do without love? You can have a loud band of noisy gongs and clanging cymbals.

This *agape* is fully oriented to what is good. The first word is “without hypocrisy”; *without a mask, as actors wore on the stage*. The believer’s mask of sin and darkness has fallen before the glory of God shining in the face of King Jesus! His light, love, and life have made us whole.

Many translate the word as genuine, or sincere. Sincere is an ancient word meaning “without wax”. A piece of pottery that has not been repaired has wax in it to fix it. The believer has no glued heart from the old pieces, but you are made whole by Christ.

And this is shows itself in what love hates and what love embraces. Hate goes with love; love hates the opposite of good, or hates evil. The tree of knowledge is here. And Christ puts his love in this good

heart, to choose the good, the right, the true, the holy, and rejects what God rejects.

This is why love must always, always, always be defined. Love has content; it is not mere sentiment or a feeling. And this is what is so sad for unbelievers trying to embrace some of the Christian message of love, but not embracing Christ.

When people say it is loving for a woman with an unexpected pregnancy to take the life of her child – that is not hating what is evil. But they try many ways of twisting what is evil to be good, and good to be evil, all in the name of love.

We will see in Romans 13 that love is the fulfillment of the law – love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Would you choose to be aborted?

The good heart of love is not calling evil good but abhors evil. It is not calling good evil, but serves others first for their benefit.

This heart of good gold is seen in the next car of the train – the car we call “Philadelphia” for that is the word. There are several Greek words that have philos in them – philanthropy is love of mankind; philosophy is love of wisdom.

But the devotion here is another word – philo-storgos – to be kindly affectionate as a family, with a family love, to love as brethren!

The golden heart in 9 here is followed by the golden rule in 10 – love others as you would be loved! Treat others with honor, putting them first, for this is how you would be treated.

Do you love the brothers? The church? The people of God?

The disciple who heard his Lord ask three times – “do you love me”, was very fond of this word. Peter writes:

<sup>22</sup> *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, (1Pe 1:22)*

<sup>8</sup> *To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;<sup>9</sup> not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead... (1Pe 3:8-9)*

<sup>5</sup> *Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge,<sup>6</sup> and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness,<sup>7</sup> and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. (2Pe 1:5-7)*

This calls each of us to outdo one another in putting each other first, out of love.

The next car follows brotherly honor and warmth with high and holy heat.

These first two words are opposites – earnestness and laziness. If someone is earnestly lazy, what is that? Really dedicated to not being dedicated!

This speaks to the heartiness of our love, as the next participle says be fervent. That is a word that means boiling, glowing, burning hot!

Now we leave the lava of 11, to come to the heights of verse 12. Read

This is such a cool verse. The structure in the Greek is like a triple hamburger: in hope rejoicing, in tribulation persevering, in prayer continuing!

Our joy in hope pulls us upward – to heaven and Christ by faith. But this world and its tribulation bring us down – yet we persevere by continuing in prayer.

Why do we pray? Because we are going to glory! Our names are written on his hand, in his heart! It is not a mere hope-so, but a sure and steadfast reality!

What love has He bestowed on us as children of God! This draws us up to the embrace of our heavenly Father! Oh, to be at last wrapped around by those strong hands and stronger arms!

Our world would pry us from our Father's house and hands. The trials are used by the wicked one to drive us from Christ. But His secret power causes us to persevere; and this power is stirred up and heated up in prayer. What is prayer? Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan! John Bunyan! So pray often! Prayer is the breathing of your soul. This is where the world, the flesh and the devil are defeated!

See how this prepares us for the next car in verse 13: the care of our love to the saints and the stranger.

Sharing, is the Greek word *koinonia*. Share with the needs of the holy ones, set apart by the gospel. This is loving generosity to those in the church. And then another word; philo-zenos, love for the zenos, the stranger, the alien.

There is a parallel in Hebrews 13:

Let brotherly love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. <sup>3</sup> Remember the prisoners as if chained with them-- those who are mistreated-- since you yourselves are in the body also. (Heb 13:1-3)

Faith, hope and love translate into outward service, supply and mercy. Luther said it this way: “We live in Christ through faith; but we live in our neighbor through love.”

John drives this note home in first letter:

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 1 John 4:7-12

Well, here are the first five – the good heart of love, the brotherly commitment of love, the heat of love, the forward and upward lean of love, the sharing, caring love to those within and without.

We have before us next time the graciousness of love – to those who persecute us; the utility of love – ready to serve the happy and the sad; the humility of love – 16; and the respect and peace of love – 17-18; then last but not least, the victory of love.

How did you do?

Did you find an area here that you said, “I really need to work on that in my life?”

You who say to yourself – ‘I need improvement in them all! How little is my love next to my Redeemer’s love for me!’ Take courage. There is a time coming and it is soon, when you will perfectly keep all these charges in heaven! You will love perfectly, truly, gloriously!

There are things in this passage that cannot be done in the world to come. So let us be up and about prosecuting and persecuting this charge to lead a genuine Christian life.

How God delights to bring such fruit in us, by His Son’s Spirit, in this fallen, broken, cold and sinful world! How He loves to bring love to bear – His Love – in His Church!