

Do what is right from the heart

A sermon preached at Poplar Baptist Church
on 3rd March 2019

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.
(Romans 12.9)*

Introduction

This verse focuses on the very core of our motivation for what we do. It teaches us that God wants us to do what is right from the heart. It is not merely that we should outwardly do the right thing. Of course our actual behaviour must be right. But God wants much more than that. He wants our heart motivation to be right. He wants us to have genuine love for others. He wants us to truly hate what is evil. He calls upon us to cling to what is good.

If you have been here in previous weeks, you may remember that we are in the part of this letter where the apostle is working out the practical implications of the good news that he has taught in the first 11 chapters. God has lavished his mercies on us in Christ. So, the apostle says, in view of this, we are to offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. We are no longer to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may “prove” the will of God in our lives.

Having laid out these general principles, the apostle then spoke, in verses 3 to 8, about how this is to work out in use of spiritual gifts in the church. We should not be proud of any gifting that we have, but we are to remember that any gifts that we have we have been given as a result of God’s grace. We should use the gifts that we have for the good of others.

Having spoken about spiritual gifts in the church, the apostle then starts a new sub-section, which runs from this verse through to the end of the chapter, where he is speaking about how knowing the Gospel should

affect the way that we relate with God and the way that we relate with each other. In this verse he deals with the foundation of all good relationships: that our hearts must be right. We are to have genuine love in our hearts for all people, and we should hate what is evil and cling to what is right.

The verse divides naturally into three sections:

- 1, The call for genuine love
2. The call to hate what is evil
3. The call to be devoted to what is good.

1. The call for genuine love

Paul says “Love must be sincere”. The word for “love” that the apostle uses is the special word which the New Testament writers coined to speak about God’s love, because no other Greek word that was in existence was strong enough to speak about the love of God, and the love that we should show to each other. The word is “agape”. It speaks of the unconditional love which God has for all men, and especially for his own people, and the love that we should have for each other. This sort of love is a love which is not based upon the beauty, or merits, or worth of the objects of the love, but rather it is an unconditional love which depends on the determination of the one who loves to continue to love, despite the character or actions of the object of his or her love. It is a love which is prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of others, a love which is concerned to give rather than to get.

The immensity of the love of God is shown by the lengths to which he was prepared to go in order to save us, as the great Gospel texts of the Bible show. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3.16). “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5.7 – 8). “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4.9 – 11).

The sort of love that God has shown to us, he calls us to show to our fellow human beings. How will a loving person behave? Paul tells us in his famous passage in 1 Corinthians 13, verses 4 to 7:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

We see here the contrast with the world's idea of "love". The world talks a great deal about "love" in its various songs, films, novels and celebrity gossip chat sites, and yet often what the world calls "love" is little more than finding someone desirable. It can go as quickly as it came. Divorce is often justified on the basis that the person seeking the divorce does not "love" his or her spouse any more.

By contrast, the love that is spoken of in the Bible is a love which continues whatever the other person is like, however attractive or unattractive he or she might be, and however much the other person might let us down or disappoint us.

Love is the whole point and purpose of Christian life and belief. In his first letter to Timothy chapter 1 verse 5, Paul tells Timothy to stay in Ephesus to command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer. He says that "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith". Love is the whole point of correct doctrine. Some Christian believers are very keen on doctrine, and take great delight in it, but seem to show little love for others. But Paul says that the whole point of sound doctrine is that we might be loving. Soundness of doctrine without true love is a monstrous perversion of Christianity.

This love is to be the basis of all our relationships: husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings, church members, friends, work colleagues, strangers and even enemies. When Jesus commands us to love our enemies he uses this very word "agape".

The apostle says in this verse that our love must be sincere. The old King James translated it, "Let love be without dissimulation"; in other words, love should be without pretence. The literal translation is "Let love be without hypocrisy".

The great hypocrites of Jesus' day were the Pharisees. They appeared to be righteous. They appeared to do good and to give to the poor. But it was all for show. They blew trumpets in the street to announce to the world that they were giving, and yet the real reason why they were doing these apparent acts of love was not because they loved others,

but because they loved themselves. They wanted others to think well of them.

Paul says that our love is to be without hypocrisy. We are to love others, not because we want to gain approval for ourselves, but because we genuinely want to do good to others. Those of us who preach and teach in the church must guard ourselves carefully against such hypocrisy. Why do we preach? Is it because we love the people who are listening and really want to do them good, or is it because we want to impress and to build up our own egos? The same can be said for all Christian service. We should do it out of a genuine desire to see God's kingdom extended and others built up, not out of a desire to make others think well of us.

Having genuine love means that you are not two faced. What you say about someone is not present should be the same as you would say to him when he is present. and whatever you say should be loving and true. In the world it is expected that to someone's face you will be charming and polite, but somehow it is not thought of as being bad if you are poisonous about that person in his absence. The Bible tells us that such hypocrisy in relationships is very offensive in God's sight. Psalm 55 verse 21 warns us that the flatterer's speech is "smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords". Proverbs chapter 26 verses 24 to 25 say that "a malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbours deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart."

In the Bible there are some terrible examples of hypocritical love. Think of Joab, the murderous commander in chief of David's army, who went up to his rival Amasa and said, "How are you, my brother?", and then took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him but meanwhile, with his left hand, lunged a dagger into Amasa's belly. Think also of Judas, who betrayed Christ with a kiss.

Sadly, churches can be sometimes be afflicted with this hypocritical love. Members can be apparently friendly to each other at church, and then poisonous about each other behind their backs. We should not speak evil of one another. James tells us in chapter 4 verses 11 – 12,

Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?"

We should not say about someone else what we have not said to his face. We should not speak about someone in such a way as we would be embarrassed if what we have said were repeated back to the person about whom we have spoken. We should only speak about the sins of another person if love dictates that we need to do so to prevent or limit harm.

Love without hypocrisy also means that we should not be a willing partner to gossip. If someone repeats to you the sins of another believer, sins that you do not need to know about, ask him, "Do I need to know about this?" Ask him if he has spoken directly about the matter with the person concerned. Or perhaps say something in defence of the other person. Or change the subject. But do not give someone encouragement to gossip by listening. Otherwise you are participating in the sin.

Instead of speaking about the sins of another behind his back, if you have a concern with the behaviour of another believer you should go and see him and confront him directly with his sin. Jesus says, as recorded in Matthew chapter 18 verse 15, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."

Showing love without hypocrisy will also mean that we will not simply say that we love others who are in need, but that we will actually do something to alleviate their need, as we are able. James speaks about this in his letter chapter 2 verses 15 to 17,

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead".

John says something similar in his first letter, chapter 3 verses 16 – 18:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth".

Love is to be shown not only in verbal statements, but in our actions.

So here is our first point: we must have genuine love.

2. Hate what is evil

In the second part of this verse the apostle says, "Hate what is evil." The word that the apostle uses is a very strong word. It means "utterly hate", "loathe", "detest", "abhor".

God loathes wrongdoing, and we should as well. Godly men in the Bible hate sin, and do not want to have anything to do with it. We should be the same. Hear some verses which speak about how we should hate sin.

Psalm 97 verse 10: "Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked".

Psalm 101 verses 2 to 5: "I will be careful to lead a blameless life – when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. Whoever slanders his neighbour in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure."

Psalm 119 verse 104: "I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path."

Psalm 119 verse 163: "I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law".

Let me ask you, in the light of this, is it right for a Christian to make a joke out of the criminal activity or sin of others? Is it right for a Christian to watch a video where sexual acts are portrayed? Are adultery and fornication laughing matters? Should you, as a Christian, watch video clips of people getting hurt or ill treated? Should you laugh when people around you are blaspheming and using crude language? Should you listen to music lyrics which are verbally abusive or which speak of sexual activity? Should you use crude language?

Jude says in verses 22 – 23 of his letter, "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."

So here is our second point: we should hate what is wrong.

3. Cling to what is good

The third part of the verse says, "Cling to what is good". Once again, this is concerned with the attitude of the heart. We should be those who hold tightly to what is good and right. The word is translated in older translations as "cleave". It could be translated as "be glued". It is the same word that occurs in Matthew chapter 19 verse 5, quoting the key text about marriage from Genesis chapter 1 verse 24, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh".

Have you ever been to the beach, and, as you are going over the rocks, you see a limpet clinging to a rock. If you try to prise that limpet off the rock, it will clamp down and not let go. So we should be with what is good. We should hold on tightly to what is good. We should be passionately in favour of what is right. We are to be "bonded" to what is right, and totally committed to it. Someone might try to prise us away from the right course, but he will not succeed, because we are so firmly committed to what is right.

Conclusion

We have seen today that God wants our hearts to be right. It is no good just learning outward forms of behaviour that are acceptable to others. God calls upon us to have genuine love for others. We are to hate what is wrong, from the heart. We are to cling steadfastly to what is right.

How can this happen?

The first thing that must happen is that we have to be truly born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. In our natural state we are dead in our sins, and we cannot do anything other than being unloving towards others. Naturally we are wedded to what is evil, and we hate what is good. There must be a miracle that takes place inside us, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Has this happened in your life? Some people go wrong here, and imagine that because they have what they think is some spiritual gift they have the Holy Spirit. But Jesus warned us, in Matthew chapter 7 verses 21 to 23,

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in

your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

The key thing is, not do you have some spiritual gift, but has your heart been changed? If you are in any doubt, come to God through Jesus Christ. Ask to be born again and saved from your sins.

Having been born again, we need to cultivate genuine love for others, a hatred of what is wrong, and a love of righteousness. How can we do this? Through doing what the apostle spoke of in verse 2 of this chapter, being transformed in our thinking. We need to meditate more and more on the love of God for us, and on his purity and holiness, and grow in our understanding of God's Word. This is why we must be serious about hearing God's word, and pursuing our own personal Bible reading. It is key to our becoming what God wants us to be.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3319931276680>

This booklet is produced by Poplar Baptist Church, Zetland Street, London E14 6RB, from where further copies may be obtained. Our services on Sunday are at 10.30 a.m. and 5.00 p.m.. You will be very welcome to attend these. The church building is situated on the corner of Zetland Street and the Blackwall Tunnel Approach Road. It is ½ mile south of Bromley-by-Bow underground station, and ¼ mile from Langdon Park DLR station, and the 309 and D8 buses pass the door. If you would like to discuss any spiritual matter arising from this booklet, feel free to contact our Pastor, Henry Dixon, on 020 7001 7776, or enquiries@poplarbaptistchurch.org

Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations are from the New International Version. Copyright © 2019 Henry Dixon. This booklet may be reproduced, as long as it is reproduced in full, and the author and this copyright notice is also reproduced in full. For all other reproduction, please refer to Henry Dixon