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SINCERE LOVE

Romans 12:9-10

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Romans Lesson 81

Sincere Love
Romans 12:9-10

When sin entered this world, its immediate effect was to damage relationships. Adam and Eve were instantly separated from the God whose fellowship they had formerly enjoyed. Guilt prompted them to try to hide from Him. And they were suddenly estranged from each other. Before sin they were naked and unashamed in one another's presence, but after they sinned, they sewed fig leaves together to try to hide their shame from one another (Gen. 2:24, 3:7). Sin always damages relationships.

And so the whole thrust of the Bible is to show us how we can and should love God with our total being and love one another as we in fact love ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40). To love God, we must first understand that He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Romans 5:8 puts it, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ had to die to pay the just penalty for our sin that we deserved. God offers a full pardon and complete justification as a gift to all who will trust in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-26). Believing the gospel reconciles us to God and floods our hearts with His love so that we can begin the lifelong battle of loving Him and others more and more.

And it *is* a lifelong battle! Because of indwelling sin, our default mode is to be selfish, not to sacrifice ourselves in love for God and others. And so the Christian life is a constant battle to dethrone self and enthrone Christ. It isn't automatic. It's a fight. And one of the most practical tests of whether Christ is truly our Lord is seen in our relationships. Am I growing in sincere love from the heart for my family, my fellow believers, and the unbelievers that I know and have contact with? Sincere love for God always spills over into sincere love for others.

This is the consistent message of the New Testament. The apostle John unmask's our tendency toward hypocrisy in this matter of love when he writes (1 John 4:20), "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has

not seen." He also says that our love for one another is evidence that we have been born again (1 John 3:14): "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." (Also, see 1 Pet. 1:22-23.)

The apostle Paul also puts a strong emphasis on love in all of his letters. It's interesting that in 1 Corinthians 12 he talks about the body of Christ and spiritual gifts and then follows with his famous chapter on love. Here, more succinctly, he talks about the body of Christ and spiritual gifts (12:4-8) and then talks about love (Rom. 12:9-10): "*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor*" The theme of love actually runs through verse 21.

It's difficult to know how to outline verses 9-21 and to divide it for preaching. Paul gives in machine gun fashion a series of practical commands, most of which have to do with loving relationships. If it weren't for verse 14, we could say that verses 9-16 deal with love in the church and verses 17-21 with love toward enemies outside of the church who wrong us. But in the middle of commands that relate mostly to the church, verse 14 interjects how to respond to those who persecute us.

Because of that, some argue that verses 9-13 focus on love in the church, while verses 14-21 deal with loving our enemies. But then verses 15 & 16 don't seem to fit that theme. And, while verses 17-21 mainly apply to relationships with those outside of the church, most of us have been wronged by someone in the church. In fact, those are often the most difficult wrongs to deal with! And so all of verses 9-21 apply to love in all of our relationships.

To break it into a manageable size, I'm going to limit this message to verses 9-10, which we can sum up:

Sacrificial, transformed living calls us to love others sincerely.

I say "sacrificial, transformed living" because the commands in 12:9-21 are built on the foundation of 12:1-2. Paul is showing us the practical outworking of those important verses. At the heart of everything are the mercies of God. If you have not experienced God's mercies in Christ, as Paul spelled out in chapters 1-11, you cannot begin to apply Romans 12:9-21.

Then, based on God's mercies, you are to present your body as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your rational service of worship (12:1). Then you are not to be conformed to this age, but rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you prove in practice God's good, acceptable, and perfect will (12:2). So verses 9-21 spell out in detail what God's good, acceptable, and perfect will looks like in loving relationships.

Before we work through verses 9 & 10, note that consistently throughout the New Testament love is not an uncontrollable feeling that comes over you once in a while. Rather, it is a commandment to be obeyed. The Lord Jesus made this explicit (John 13:34), "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." The supreme demonstration of Jesus' love was when He went to the cross and bore God's wrath on our behalf. He didn't do that because He just felt an impulsive urge to do something nice for us. He did it in obedience to the will of the Father.

Based on Christ's self-sacrificing love on the cross, we can define biblical love as *"a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved."* If you're not seeking to live out that kind of love in your relationships, you're disobeying God. By the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, you can choose to sacrifice your selfish interests on behalf of others with the aim that they will be conformed to the image of Christ (their highest good). The first fruit that results from walking in the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:16, 22-23). In our text, Paul spells out four aspects of biblical love:

1. Biblical love must be without hypocrisy (12:9a).

Paul would not have written that unless he knew that there is a strong tendency, even among believers, to put on a mask of love to cover hearts that are full of selfishness, jealousy, manipulation, and even hatred. The epitome of "love" with hypocrisy was when Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Luke 22:48). Outwardly, it looked as if he really cared for Jesus, but in reality, he was giving Jesus over to bloodthirsty men who would torture and kill Him. But Paul is calling us to sincere love from the heart.

The English word "sincere" comes from two Latin words meaning, "without wax." Dishonest merchants would fill a crack in

a pot with wax and glaze over it, selling the defective pot as if it were just fine. Only later would the buyer discover that the pot was worthless. So honest dealers would stamp *sine cera* on the pot, verifying that it was without wax.

The Greek word that Paul uses means "without hypocrisy." The word was used of the masks used by actors on the stage. You have probably seen these in advertisements for stage plays in our day. Some of the masks were happy, others were sad. The actor did not necessarily feel as the mask signaled, but the mask showed the role that he was playing. Paul says that our love for one another is not to be a phony mask or role playing, but rather be the real thing. We should genuinely desire God's best for others and speak and act toward that goal.

The apostle John puts it (1 John 3:15-18), "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

Biblical love must be wise and discerning, always keeping in mind the highest good of the one loved. It may not be for the person's highest good to dole out money to him, because you may be helping him to continue an irresponsible, lazy way of life. You may be enabling him to continue an undisciplined pattern of spending on frivolous things. Or, you may be contributing to his dependence on alcohol or drugs. So biblical love sometimes confronts sin, rather than just being nice and ignoring sin. Positively, to show love, you may need to teach the person biblical principles of stewardship and spend time helping him establish a budget or control his spending. Your heart motive is to help him grow in godliness.

So Paul's point is that your motive must always be sincere, to seek the other person's conformity to the image of Christ. If you're just looking out for your own interests and trying to manipulate the situation for your own benefit, you're not practicing biblical love. If you praise the person to his face and then run him down behind his back, you're not practicing biblical love. Biblical love is without hypocrisy. It is sincere.

By the way, as far as I know, the Bible never commands us to *like* everyone, but it does command us to *love* everyone. Liking someone is a matter of our mutual personalities and our enjoyment of similar things. It is one basis for forming close friendships. But loving those I may not choose as my close friends means that I genuinely care for them and I'm committed to help them be all that God wants them to be.

2. Biblical love must be holy (12:9b).

"Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good." In the Greek text, "abhor" and "cling" are participles that show how love without hypocrisy operates: "abhorring what is evil; clinging to what is good." In other words, biblical love is discerning (Phil. 1:9). It never endorses, aligns itself, or encourages in others attitudes or behavior that is evil. Rather, it embraces what is good in God's sight: His good, acceptable, and perfect will (12:2).

Paul's words obviously imply that there is an objective, knowable standard of what is evil and what is good. This standard does not change with the times or with different cultures. God has revealed His holy standards of right and wrong in His Word. For example, if His Word plainly states that homosexual behavior is sinful, then it does not change when public opinion polls or a U. S. President say that it is acceptable. If it is sin in God's sight, then it is not loving to treat such behavior as morally acceptable, because sin hurts people. Rather, the loving thing to do is gently and with compassion, tell the person the truth about his sin and point him to Christ so that he can be saved from it before it destroys him.

Did you see the recent "Dear Abby" column where a mother whose son just came out as homosexual wrote to Abby about her confusion? She wasn't sure how God really views gays and lesbians. She knew that some religious people think that they will go to hell. She tried to read the Bible to find out what it said, but couldn't understand it. So she asked Abby if she believes that a gay person will go to heaven.

Abby explained (*Arizona Daily Sun*, 4/30/2012), "I believe that entrance to heaven is based upon a person's character, not his or her sexual orientation. Today, because of modern scientific studies, we know more about homosexuality than was known when the

Bible was written, and that sexual orientation is not a 'choice.'" I am not aware of any scientific studies that have proved that homosexuality is genetically caused. But even if such studies exist, they do not refute God's moral standards, which are not subject to so-called "science." So if God's Word is true, then Dear Abby gave the most hateful advice possible, because she did not abhor what is evil and cling to what is good. We do not love people who are in sin (whether homosexuality or any other sin) if we overlook or, worse, endorse their sinful behavior.

Also, note that Paul doesn't just say to avoid evil, but to *abhor* it. We are to detest it, or hate it. The Greek verb (used only here in the NT) has the nuance of shrinking back in horror from evil. It is an emotional reaction against all that displeases God. Since God hates sin, to be indifferent toward sin is to be indifferent toward God. Obviously, to laugh at evil or be entertained by evil, whether in person or on a movie or TV screen, is not to abhor it.

The opposite of abhorring what is evil is to "cling to what is good." The verb, "cling to," literally, is to be "glued to." "The good" is God's good, acceptable, and perfect will (12:2), His moral will, which is revealed in His Word. In Philippians 4:8, Paul instructs, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

We must hold tightly to that which is good because the enemy is always trying to get us to loosen our grip on the good by being more tolerant of what is evil. He whispers, "You need to be more accepting, don't be so judgmental!" One of his favorite verses to quote out of context is (Matt. 7:1), "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." Jesus is clear that first and foremost, we must judge our own sin before we judge others for their sin. "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:5).

But once we have judged our own sin, we are still to hate evil and cling to what is good. Psalm 97:10 commands, "Hate evil, you who love the Lord." Or, Proverbs 8:13, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate." Loving God and fearing Him are the basis for the

proper hatred and disgust of all that is evil. It is only to the degree that we love Him for the beauty of His holiness that we will hate evil and cling to what is good.

3. Biblical love must be brotherly (12:10a).

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love” Paul uses the word, *philadelphia*, which refers to the natural love among brothers and adds another word that refers to family affection. James Boice (*Romans* [Baker], 4:1598) gives the sense, “In respect to the love of our Christian brothers and sisters, we are to be marked by a devotion that is characteristic of a loving, close-knit, and mutually supportive family.”

Again, this is a command, not a suggestion to try when you're in a good mood. But it involves our emotions. So how do you command your emotions?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Romans: Christian Conduct* [Banner of Truth], p. 349) points out that it never works to approach the emotions directly. Rather, he says, “Feelings are always the result of something else, the result, ultimately, of understanding and of thought.” He points out that if we just put on a cloak of feelings which we do not have, it would be sheer hypocrisy. Rather, we must go back to the doctrines that Paul has expounded in Romans 1-11, and to the logical conclusion that he urges in 12:1-2. Then we will realize that by God's mercy, we have been born into His family, along with all others who have trusted in Christ. None of us deserved it. But now we all are related through the new birth and we will be spending eternity together. So heartfelt obedience to these commands comes from responding to the teaching of who we are in Christ (Rom. 6:17). All who believe in Christ are a part of God's family. We should feel closer to a brother or sister in Christ than we do to a relative who does not know Christ.

Thus sacrificial, transformed living calls us to love without hypocrisy. This love must be holy. It must be brotherly. Finally,

4. Biblical love must be selflessly humble (12:10b).

“Give preference to one another in honor” The Greek word translated “give preference to” means to lead or go before, thus to set an example. Dr. Boice (*ibid.*, 1599) says that Paul means, “Don't wait around for people to recognize your contributions and

praise you. Instead, be alert to what they are contributing and honor them." We are not to seek honor for ourselves, but rather genuinely to rejoice when others receive honor and we don't. That's easily said and hard to practice!

We need to be clear that Paul is not saying that we should set aside our gifts or our knowledge and practice a kind of mock humility where we say, "I'm nothing! I'm a nobody! Don't regard what I say." That would contradict what Paul said in 12:3, that we are "to think with sound judgment as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." For example, when Paul went to Jerusalem to confront the Judaizers, he was not overawed with those in power so that he just kept quiet and listened. He says of those who were of high reputation (Gal. 2:6), "What they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality." So Paul defended his gospel before James, Peter, and John (Gal. 2:9). Again, when Peter came to Antioch and withdrew from eating with the Gentile believers because of his fear of the Judaizers, Paul openly confronted Peter with his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-14).

So when Paul says, "Give preference to one another in honor," he doesn't mean that we should deny our gifts or knowledge. Rather, he means that we should have a true estimate of ourselves. We should not over-estimate ourselves and under-estimate others. As Paul says (1 Cor. 15:10), "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them [the other apostles], yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

Conclusion

How do we grow in this sincere love for one another? Here are four practical ways:

First, instantly judge your selfishness and anger as sin and ask God's forgiveness. Self is the main enemy when we fail to love others. Sincerely ask forgiveness from the one you sinned against (beginning with your mate and kids!).

Second, focus on God's love for you at the cross. In Ephesians 4:32-5:2, Paul writes, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in

love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

Third, walk moment by moment in submission to and dependence on the Holy Spirit. When we walk in the Spirit, we will not carry out the deeds of the flesh, which include “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envying” (Gal. 5:20-21a). Rather, His fruit will grow in us: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Fourth, memorize 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, so that you can evaluate whether your attitudes, words, and actions are in line with biblical love: “Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Read those verses over each morning until they shape the way that you relate to your family and to others.

I pray that in our homes and in this church it may be said of us, “They love one another without hypocrisy, abhorring what is evil and clinging to what is good. They are devoted to one another in brotherly love. They give preference to one another in honor.”

Application Questions

1. Why is it important to recognize that love is a command, not a feeling? If we obey the command without the feelings, are we being hypocritical?
2. It is often said, “Love the sinner, but hate the sin.” Is this biblical? Consider Ps. 5:5-6; 139:21; Jude 23. Should we be friends with evil people? What are the biblical guidelines?
3. How can we develop godly hatred for evil?
4. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (p. 357) says, “A wrong view of self is the source of nearly all evil.” How can we develop a balanced view of ourselves?

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