

How Do God's People Share Love For One Another?

Tomorrow is Valentine's Day, the day set aside to express love to one another. As you think about that, how are your love relationships? Not just with a sweetheart, but with people in general? Is getting along with other people a breeze for you? Do you have smooth sailing with all your relatives, your neighbors, your work associates? And if you do, how do you relate to the difficult people around you, or people who are deliberately obnoxious, or whose value systems are the exact opposite of yours?

Paul has moved us through Romans 12 by first talking about how we are to present ourselves as **living sacrifices** to God, and then by telling us to discover and use our spiritual gifts. Now, Paul moves into the area of **RELATIONSHIPS**.

Let's begin by reading the passage we will talk about today, Romans 12:9-13:

Romans 12:9-13 (NLT)

⁹*Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good.* ¹⁰*Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.* ¹¹*Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically.*

¹²*Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful.* ¹³*When God's children are in need, be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night.*

Paul starts this section off with a stern exhortation in verse 9: "Don't just pretend that you love others." Ever done that? Or at least been tempted? After all, we often want to look good to others; we want to look like good Christians who are supposed to love everyone. But, let's face it, loving everyone is very difficult at times. And maybe it's at those times that we are tempted to pretend that we love people. But God, through Paul, is calling us on that. He is saying don't pretend to love others, really love them. Now exactly what are we talking about when we say we are to really love other people? Does that mean we run around hugging everyone we see? No. I believe God is talking here about having *agape* love for the people around us. That kind of love is described in 1 Corinthians 13, especially verse 4 through 7:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, NLT:

⁴*Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud⁵ or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.* ⁶*It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.* ⁷*Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*

What this boils down to is that true love, the kind of love God has for us, is **concerned**

about the welfare of the person being loved. Love doesn't focus on the lover; it focuses on the recipient of the love, "*the lovee?*" So if we love someone we will be patient and kind toward them. We will not be jealous, boastful, or rude. We will not be irritable, and we won't keep score. But notice this next sentence. If we truly love someone we are sorry when we see injustice.

Looking back at Romans 12 we see in verse 9 where Paul tells us to "*really love*" others. Then in verse 10 he says "*love each other with genuine affection.*" And what does he put between them? "*Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good.*" So we see that if we truly love others, we will hate evil; we will hate what is wrong and take a stand for the good, the right. These are pretty strong words and they go against much of what is taken as the norm for our current culture. They go against political correctness.

In order to keep this in its proper perspective it is essential that we understand a very basic fact about God, and that is that God is a God of absolute holiness, purity, and He Himself is without any taint of sin. Consequently He cannot tolerate any evil whatsoever. It would then follow that anyone who knows the love of God and loves God in return would have to hate evil as well. We must therefore have no tolerance of evil whatsoever. Listen to Psalm 101:

1 A psalm of David. I will sing of your love and justice. I will praise you, Lord, with songs.
2 I will be careful to live a blameless life— when will you come to my aid? I will lead a life of integrity in my own home.
3 I will refuse to look at anything vile and vulgar. I hate all crooked dealings; I will have nothing to do with them.
4 I will reject perverse ideas and stay away from every evil.
5 I will not tolerate people who slander their neighbors. I will not endure conceit and pride.
6 I will keep a protective eye on the godly, so they may dwell with me in safety. Only those who are above reproach will be allowed to serve me.
7 I will not allow deceivers to serve me, and liars will not be allowed to enter my presence.
8 My daily task will be to ferret out criminals and free the city of the Lord from their grip

Wow! David is really pumped here, isn't he? David makes it clear that **we are to make no compromise whatsoever with evil.** We cannot allow evil even to have a sufficient opportunity to tempt us. As soon as we see it, we are to turn and walk away from it. That is not to say that we tolerate injustice toward others, but I'm speaking of the kind of evil that most of you understand. An alcoholic shouldn't stop at the bar to have a cup of coffee. A husband and father should stay out of the casino. In fact everyone ought to stay out of the casino. If you're married you don't allow yourself to be alone with someone of the opposite sex in a tempting environment. You shouldn't go to the movies or watch television programs that are obscene or sexually inappropriate. A three hundred pound woman shouldn't go to work for Krispy Kreme, and a three hundred pound man

shouldn't go to work at the chocolate factory. When we place ourselves in the cross hairs of our weaknesses, our chances of giving in to them are greatly increased.

Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:29,30?

29 So if your eye—even if it is your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

30 And if your hand—even if it is your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Jesus was giving a tremendous verbal exaggeration in order to make the point that they must deal with sin drastically because it is so anti-God. We could just keep going on and on with passages in the Bible about the seriousness of sin and evil. How about Proverbs 8:13:

*13 All who fear the Lord **will hate evil**. That is why I hate pride, arrogance, corruption, and perverted speech.*

Our culture today tells us we should tolerate such things and that if we don't we're intolerant. Do you hate pride? Do you hate arrogance? Do you hate the perverted speech on television, radio, movies, and magazines? Or have you grown accustomed to such things in our culture, and do you tolerate them because they're so much a part of what our nation has become? Do you say as David did that you will not allow such a person in your presence because you cannot be a victim of the breaking down of the holy standards of your own life. There's a very powerful statement made in Jude 20-23 (NRSV):

20 But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit;

21 keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

22 And have mercy on some who are wavering;

*23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others **with fear**, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies.*

When a believer is attempting to bring a person to the knowledge of and faith in Christ, that person has to have a healthy fear that they are not drawn in to the other person's sin. So the believer must treat the environment he/she is in with a healthy fear that they not be affected by or drawn into that sin. This is a very serious warning and if you think about it I'm sure you'll realize such a fear is valid.

When a Christian surrounds himself with people and things of the secular world, there is always the danger that he/she may find such things very tempting. And the result is that

instead of changing the unbeliever, the unbeliever successfully tempts the believer into doing something he/she should not do. This is very serious stuff. So we hate sin because we know what it can do.

Someone once said **our only security against sin is to be shocked by it.** And when we stop being shocked by it we're no longer secure against it making inroads into our consciousness. Unfortunately in the world in which we live it's become hard to be shocked by almost any kind of sin because we've become so accustomed to it.

We need to reacquaint ourselves with the necessity of hating all kinds of sin.

Every Christian needs to see the beauty of holiness and the ugly damnable reality of sin. Now because people in our world have become so tolerant of evil, there may actually be some people who wonder what evil actually is. So, perhaps we should ask the ultimate authority to answer this question for us. What does God classify as evil? If you'll turn to Proverbs 6:16-19, we'll find out:

16 There are six things the Lord hates—no, seven things he detests:

17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent,

18 a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong,

19 a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord among brothers.

God hates pride, liars, murderers, wicked schemes of any kind, immoral acts or deeds, people who take pleasure in the evil they plan, people who mislead others intentionally, and those who create trouble within a community. These are the things God hates. And I bet the thing He hates most is false religion and those that teach lies to people about what to believe. It is therefore our position to hate evil as well and to stay away from it. Now please listen carefully because I don't want you to miss the meaning of what I'm about to say. **A good person hates evil not because he/she fears the consequences of doing evil but rather because they love righteousness.** At the end of verse 9, Paul says "*cling to what is good.*" The meaning there means to stick to good as if you were glued to it. Be bonded to what is good. Isn't this what the psalmist said in Psalm 1:1 (NRSV):

1 Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;

This is exactly what happens. First you walk by, then you stop to see what's going on, and then you sit right in the middle of all of it. Then verse 2:

2 but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.

Hate evil and love good. Philippians 4:8 tells us how we can do that:

*8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. **Fix your thoughts** on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. **Think about things** that are excellent and worthy of praise.*

What's the main thought in this verse? Train your mind to think about things that are good. Fill your mind with what is good. Don't allow yourself to be associated in any way with what you know is not true, honorable, pure, lovely, and admirable. That's how you "*cling to what is good.*"

Not only are we to "*fix our thoughts on*" or "*think about*" those things, we are also to take our thoughts captive, take them captive to our obedience in Christ, as we are told in **2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV:**

⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

How would you categorize the following according to the teaching thus far in Romans 12?

- 1 Watching the TV program *Sex in the City*. Good or bad?
- 2 Watching David Letterman or Jay Leno. Good or bad?
- 3 Is there a movie you've seen lately that you'd be able to place in the good column?
- 4 How about being a Brittany Spears fan?
- 5 Having some "*fun*" at the riverboat or casino?
- 6 Spreading that juicy story you heard about your neighbor?
- 7 Watching commercial after commercial as you sit in front of the TV for four hours every night?
- 8 Playing violent video games?
- 9 Not getting around to writing your Congressman about a piece of moral legislation?
- 10 Getting high on drugs or alcohol?
- 11 Working one night a month at a soup kitchen?
- 12 Going to a concert of music by Bach and Beethoven?
- 13 Watching "*reality*" TV?

The list could be unending, couldn't it? We know the difference between what is good and what is not, don't we? Then why do you suppose we just go ahead so frequently and do what we know to be the wrong thing to do? Because we think it will bring us pleasure, and do you know what almost always inevitably results? We feel even more uncomfortable after we've done what we know in our hearts to be wrong than if we hadn't done it at all. If you think we're wrong on this point, please speak up and give us some examples. And do you know who it is who is constantly pushing our weakness buttons so that we keep doing these things? Satan, the Devil, or any number of other names by which he's called. Do you want to know how to get out from under his power

over you to do these things? Verse 9, “*Cling to what is good. Philippians 4:8: Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Don’t allow yourself to remain in the presence of any kind of evil. Flee from it. Seek good and hang around others who do the same. James 4:7 breaks this down into a two-step process:*

James 4:7, Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Surrender to God! Resist the devil, and he will run from you.

We surrender or submit to God and we resist the devil.

Paul told us back in Romans 7:15 that he found himself doing the things he hated to do. He didn’t want to do them and yet did them. His answer to this was that it was the sin in him that generated such behavior. But the key element we see in those verses is that Paul said he hated the sin. And that’s what we’re told to do in verse 9 of Romans 12. Do you hate sin? That’s one of the best tests for a person to determine whether or not they’re saved. Even though you may stumble into sin occasionally, do you hate it when you do so? And if your answer is no, or I don’t know, something is wrong. I know that when I sin I’m filled with guilt and self-loathing. I want to do what is right and when I don’t I just simply hate it and want to be free from it, and yet I know that I’ll probably do it again and I hate that even more. Yet I know God wants to help me overcome that tendency toward sin because He tells me so in **1 John 5:4, 5, NLT:**

⁴*For every child of God defeats this evil world by trusting Christ to give the victory.*

⁵*And the ones who win this battle against the world are the ones who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.*

If you’re wondering how to know what is good, God makes that easy. Read your Bible and you’ll find the answer to that question. I’ve known people who have really wanted to know Jesus as their Savior but they feel that there’s so much junk in their heads as a result of the way they’ve lived their lives that they could never change the way they think. Boy, are they wrong. There are people who are as devoted a follower of Christ as you’ll find anywhere who have come out of the most horrendous of lifestyles. Do you know how they cleaned out their minds? They got re-programmed. People who have brains that are full of filth need to be re-programmed, completely washed out. The only two things that can do that are:

- 1) The washing of the Word, immersing yourself in the Word of God and the things of God that you’ll find in the Bible. This is the “*renewing of your mind*” that we spoke about back in verse 2. As you distance yourself from the pleasure of the world and saturate yourself with the Word of God, **you will have a renewed mind**, and then you will be able to know what is the perfect will of God.
- 2) The second thing is to be filled with the Holy Spirit daily so that He is controlling you.

Ephesians 5:18, NLT

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.

When it speaks of the filling of the Spirit, the Greek word is a word that indicates we are to “*keep on being filled*” with the Holy Spirit. As we said last week, this is not a one-time experience. It is something we ask for frequently and regularly.

Next, in Romans 12:10, Paul tells us to:

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

Paul brings together in this verse two family words, “*be devoted*,” which describes our natural affection for relatives. In this specific case the kind of love a parent has for a child. The Greek word for “*brotherly love*,” actually means the kind of love that brothers and sisters have in their family relationship. Both words were applied originally to blood relationships in the human family, but Paul applies them here to the tender, warm affection which should unite the members of the family of God. For believers their Christian family is often a much more real family than their blood relatives, if those relatives are not Christians. My Church family has often been there for me when my flesh and blood family was not. In the second part of the verse he stresses that love in the Christian family is to express itself in **mutual honor as well as in mutual affection**. It is uncertain, however, whether the command is to esteem others more highly than yourself or whether an element of competition is implied that we should translate, “*outdo one another in showing honor*.” In either case **we are to accord to each other the highest possible honor.**¹

Now in verse 11 Paul begins to get very personal. There are three essential matters that relate to you and to me in verse 11, and they're very important. Romans 12:11:

11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Zeal means *an eagerness in pursuit of something*, and the actual Greek word used in the original translation means *to hurry*. The idea here is don't be lazy in your haste. You're in a hurry. We have to get on with the business of the king, and the king's business has to be done while we can do it and it has to be done now (John 9:4). So don't grow lazy in the work that needs to be done. What does Galatians 6:9 (NASB) instruct us to do?

9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

Then we read in 2 Thessalonians 3:13:

¹ Stott, John, *Romans*. P.331

*13 And I say to the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, **never get tired of doing good.***

There has to be **purpose** and **intensity** in the Christian life. There's no room for laziness. We could go to the book of Proverbs and do a whole study on how appalling laziness is to God. There is no room for laziness in the work of the Lord. Solomon provided us all with some solid advice in Ecclesiastes 9:10:

*10 Whatever you do, do well. For **when you go to the grave**, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom.*

Also in **Colossians 3:17, NAS:**

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

In Matthew 25 we meet an habitually lazy servant who was given one talent (a form of money in those days), was too lazy to make anything of it, buried it in the ground, and it cost him his eternity.

24 "Then the servant with the one bag of gold came and said, 'Sir, I know you are a hard man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. (these word suggest the master to be a cruel and ruthless opportunist, reaping and gathering what he had no right to claim as his own. It is obvious this man is not a genuine believer, for he has no true knowledge of his master).'²

25 I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth and here it is.'

*26 "But the master replied, '**You wicked and lazy servant!** You think I'm a hard man, do you, harvesting crops I didn't plant and gathering crops I didn't cultivate?'*

27 Well, you should at least have put my money into the bank so I could have some interest.

28 Take the money from this servant and give it to the one with the ten bags of gold.

*29 To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. **But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away.***

*30 Now **throw this useless servant into outer darkness**, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

Isaiah writes in Isaiah 56:10-12:

10 For the leaders of my people—the Lord's watchmen, his shepherds—are blind to every danger. They are like silent watchdogs that give no

² Parentheses added.

*warning when danger comes. **They love to lie around, sleeping and dreaming.***

11 And they are as greedy as dogs, never satisfied. They are stupid shepherds, all following their own path, all of them intent on personal gain.

12 “Come,” they say. “We will get some wine and have a party. Let’s all get drunk. Let this go on and on, and tomorrow will be even better.”

Paul is saying in Romans 12:11 that we who are ministering for Christ are to be busy at all times with a maximum output effort, doing the work of the Lord while the work can be done. How many people today have the zeal to stick with the work year after year after year? You hear people say, “*Oh, I’ve taught Sunday school now for three years and I need some time off.*” Of course very few of them ever go back to it. How many people in a church do you suppose never contribute any of their time to do anything? I believe the figure is about 80%. Christians need to keep their shoulders to the wheel while there is time because someone’s eternity may depend on how much zeal you have.

Now tied in with this in verse 11 is the principle of being *fervent in spirit*. Now this is a good combination because fervent means *passionate or marked by great intensity of feeling*. This simply means that not only should you be zealous about doing the work of the Lord, but you should have a great time being zealous. You’ve seen people who work very hard and are miserable about working hard, haven’t you? Paul is telling us to be a believer who takes great joy in being zealous in his/her work for the Lord. **The Christian life ought to be filled with enthusiasm, excitement, and joy.** In fact, this is the true source of the word, “*enthusiasm*”—to be filled with God. So again we are being exhorted to be filled with God, the Holy Spirit of God.

Finally in verse 11 Paul tells us we should have this attitude in *serving the Lord*. We are not to be lazy in our zeal, and we are to be fervent in our spirit as we serve the Lord. I see people who seem to get excited about a lot of things. They get excited about the things they sell. They get excited about new houses, new cars, and new wardrobes. They get all turned on at football games, baseball games, and basketball games and act like absolute idiots. People fall in love and they hear bells ringing and skyrocketing going off and they’re just floating on air. All they can think about is that one and only love that has come into their lives. The other person is in their thoughts every moment of every day and they have that silly little smirk on their face all the time. They go to sleep and dream about the other person and they just can’t get enough of the one they love. Any of us who have fallen in love knows what that experience is like, and it’s a great feeling, isn’t it? **I wonder how many people have experienced the same feeling in serving the Lord Jesus Christ?** We’re called to serve the Lord with enthusiasm. If you can’t serve Him that way the problem is in your own heart. But when people go to serve the Lord with enthusiasm, and zeal, and with a whole heart, you’re going to have some problems, aren’t you? Because you’re going to run into an ungodly worldly system and it’s going to be difficult. So Paul adds three more exhortations in verse 12:

12 Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and

always be prayerful.

No one has fully served the Lord who wasn't constantly aware of hope for the future. Because when you begin to serve the Lord with your whole heart things begin to happen that make you hope for the future. When we pour out all there is in this life and we run into opposition and we run into indifference and we run into apathy and we see our own weakness and our own failure, and sometimes we do things wrong and have to pick up the pieces, we need to have hope for the future. So through all our service to the Lord, no matter how enthusiastic or how committed we are, there is always the hope in our hearts that when all our service is done, everything will be the way it ought to be. The hope of better things is what brings joy to the Christian who serves. I serve because someday I want to go to the Lord and hear, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" We serve with a whole heart here because we know there will be an eternal reward, and we long for that and hope for that. If we had no hope for that it would certainly be a bleak world for us, to serve and serve and serve and so often be defeated and never be able to do all that we want to do because of our own weaknesses. We need to know that day will come. We rejoice in the future hope and because of that verse 12 says that we're able to be patient in our tribulation. Because we see what's coming in the future we rejoice.

And while we're under this pressure verse 12 says "*we are devoted to prayer.*" I believe that one of the reasons God keeps us under pressure is to keep us in communion with Him. Do you believe that? If you don't spend time communing with the Lord it may be that you're not under the pressure and you may not be under the pressure because you're not in the service. I guarantee you this, if you're in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ as a bondsman to Him, doing it with all your heart with excitement and enthusiasm, **you're going to be in the midst of trouble and pressure**. And while you're in all of that you can rejoice in hope because you know what's coming, and while you're in the midst of that you're going to bring those things to the Lord and depend on being sustained by Him. You will be totally dependent upon God.

A Christian whose love is pure, who hates evil, who sticks to what is good, is a Christian who will be tenderly affectionate to other believers, and who will humbly attempt to honor others rather than being honored. As a Christian one's service to Jesus Christ will be total, enthusiastic, wholehearted, zealous, obedient, and diligent. As a result trials, tribulation, and pressure will come but they will be overcome by a strong hope of future glory and reward based on God's promises that will allow that kind of Christian to endure everything that comes and constantly be committing himself/herself and everything they do to the care of the Lord. That's the way to live the Christian life. Then Paul continues in Romans 12:13:

13 When God's children are in need, be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night.

We're to love other believers with a family kind of love, which reaches out to meet their

needs. We need to be committed to providing for the needs of other believers. The world is committed to getting, Christians are to be committed to giving. We are to be partners in one another's needs. Our resources should be for one another. We share as partners. In Acts 2 and Acts 4 we see a description of the early Church selling the things they had when someone had need and taking the money from the sale and giving it to the people who had the need. Hebrews 13:16 tells us:

16 Don't forget to do good and to share what you have with those in need, for such sacrifices are very pleasing to God.

And then in 1 Timothy 6:17-19, we read:

17 Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment.

*18 Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, **always being ready to share with** others whatever God has given them.*

19 By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of real life.

When somebody is in your path and they have a need, you are to try and meet it. If you can't do it yourself, go to the church. But don't lose sight of the fact that God may have put that person in your path so that you would help them. Part of Christian living is just being partners. Think of other believers as partners.

At the end of verse 13, Paul says that we should be **inclined toward hospitality**. Pursue hospitality, the love of strangers. In the first century Christians opened their homes to other Christians who were traveling. In 1 Peter 4:9, Peter tells us:

*9 **Cheerfully** share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.*

In Luke 12:12-14, Jesus said:

12 "When you put on a luncheon or a dinner, don't invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will repay you by inviting you back.

*13 **Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.***

14 Then at the resurrection of the godly, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you."

Learn to cultivate a spirit of love toward those **who aren't in your inner circle of family and friends**. That's what it means to perform your Christian duty. May God help us to live that kind of disciplined life where we eagerly come under the standards dictated by the Bible and live by them with joy and gratitude. Next time we'll continue to explore the

standards by which God wants us to relate one to the other.