

Devotion for Sunday 12 September 2021

“What does genuine love look like?”

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.^[e] ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Romans 12: 9 - 13

Let's reflect on this passage from Romans 12 verses 9 to 13. These verses describe what genuine love is which must not be hypocritical. It consists of six things that are related to each other.

First, he says, hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Genuine love learns to hate evil but not to reject the good. Genuine love looks out for what is best for the other person. When you love someone with God's love, it doesn't matter how that person responds, rather what matters is how you respond. Genuine love isn't always easy to live out. It takes guts. It takes putting aside what feels right at the moment and responding to that person in love. When you choose to love, it makes a difference to someone's life.

Second, genuine love stresses building relationship and not just having friendships. That is why Paul says, we must love with mutual affection or with devotion. The basis of our love for one another is that we want the best for the other person at heart. As Christians, we know that we already have a tie that ought to evoke care for one another. We are brothers and sisters and God is our Father. So, we need to have a warm and fervent family love for one another. Genuine love fosters a family Spirit where we show brotherly and sisterly love to each other.

Third, Paul says that genuine love is seeking to outdo each other in showing honour. We regard others as more deserving of recognition. We must be willing to let others have the credit. If you really don't care who gets the credit, then you can just enjoy yourself and do all kinds of good deeds. Just be glad that it is done, and don't worry about who gets the credit. People in a healthy family want to be sure that other folks in the family get the honour they deserve. They're willing to put others before themselves, and treat them even better than they want to be treated themselves.

Fourth, one of the marks of a Christian walking in the Spirit is that he or she retains enthusiasm. Genuine love retains enthusiasm despite setbacks: Never be lacking in zeal, but be ardent in spirit and serving the Lord. He never lets his spiritual zeal flag or sag, but maintains it. Loving other people can be hard work. It's easy to get tired and it's easy to give up and quit. Don't do it! Don't get lazy. Don't give in to the temptation to quit. Keep on keeping on. To be ardent in spirit is the work of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. So be filled with the Spirit. That will help you hang in there when it's tough. When we allow the Holy Spirit to develop in us a true servant's spirit, we shall be able to keep on loving, even when it's tough. And that's what genuine love is all about.

Fifth, genuine love rejoices in hope. Paul says, be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. You can rejoice in hope because you are patient in affliction, and you are patient in affliction because you have been faithful in prayer. So, when trials come, the thing to do is to spend time in prayer. If you are faithful in prayer, you will be able to be patient in affliction. You will hang in there, waiting until God works it out, not getting impatient and resentful, but quietly waiting for God to accomplish what he had in mind. Our help for stirring up the kind of love that allows us to be patient in affliction is prayer. That's why Paul follows up his exhortation to patience with asking us to continue steadfastly in prayer. If we want to love people sincerely, we will need to be praying for them persistently. Remember, when we're walking in the Spirit, we never give up hope. We keep hoping for the best.

Then, six, genuine love responds to needs. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. In these days when we have so much social help available, we tend to forget that there are still human needs and that we have a responsibility to meet them. Genuine love is always ready to minister in a tangible way with time, money, resources, or anything else that we can give. It is really about forgetting about ourselves, caring about other people and reaching out to meet their needs.

Are we willing to demonstrate Christ-like love? That's the real question the word of God is asking of us. Remember, "God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." That's what genuine love really comes down to. And now he offers us his gift of genuine love, not on the basis of what we can do, but simply by acknowledging our need for his love. Let us respond today and open our hearts that God may pour his love into our hearts.

May God's grace and peace be with you all.

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