

**Not Ashamed
(Week 30)
Romans 12:9-21
“Love Must Be Sincere”**

Introduction

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good.” **Romans 12:9**

In **Romans 12:9-21**, Paul continues his discourse on Christian duty and actually lists 25 different attributes of a true believer. The Christian, who has been consecrated as a living sacrifice, will be unlike anyone else in this world. They are no longer sensual, but spiritual, and as such, they will love, not as the world does, but as Christ loves.

A careful reading of the gospels will clearly demonstrate for us the love of Christ. He loved those who loved Him, as well as, those who rejected Him. At Calvary, we see Him praying for those who despised Him. And, as a result of this unconditional love for the unlovable, two men, a Jewish thief and a Gentile Centurion, were converted to faith that day. The Biblical word for this type of unnatural self-sacrificial love is “agape”. It was a word that the Greeks seldom used, for this kind of love was often viewed in Greek culture as foolishness and weakness. In *The New Testament*, it is this Greek word that has been co-opted to describe the kind of love that indwells a Spirit-filled Believer. It is a God kind of love. Paul begins his list of Christian attributes in **Romans verse nine**, by saying: **“Let agape be without hypocrisy....”**

The word that Paul uses to describe agape love is *anyokritos* (literally *un-hypocritical*) meaning *completely honest and sincere*. In Paul’s day, a hypocrite was a play actor. The stage actors in those days wore different masks in order to signify what mood their character was playing in the moment. They would don a mask with a smile, if they were supposed to be happy, and one with a frown to pretend sadness, etcetera. What Paul is telling us is that if we are truly to be living sacrifices, then our agape won’t be something that we have to pretend, but rather, it will be genuine, for it will come directly from its purest source, the Spirit of The Living God. Or, as John the Apostle would say:

“The one who does not love (agapao) does not know God, because God is love (agape). God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His one and only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.”

1 John 4:8-11

Simply put, to be filled with God, is to love as God loves. It is a selfless un-hypocritical love that puts the needs of others ahead of our own. To be sensual is to operate based upon our own senses, but to be spiritual is to operate at the direction of The Spirit. This means we will love and this love won’t have to be manufactured or given to pretense, it will come naturally as God loves through us. This is sincere agape, and it is the defining characteristic of the true Believer.

“By this everyone will know you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:35

It has been said of the first century Church that they so loved one another, they were actually mocked for it, by the pagans who lived all around them. Wouldn’t it be wonderful, if people in our community made fun of us here at Freedom for the way that we love? We have been set apart as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable, and our reasonable service is to love one another, employing the spiritual gifts we have been given to show this love by serving the body of Christ. We are called to love, as He loves, not just loving our Neighbors, but loving our Nemesis as well. For true agape simply loves, no matter the recipient. Let our agape be without hypocrisy.

Love Your Neighbor (vs. 9-16)

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil, cling to what is good. Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in The Spirit; serve The LORD. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”
Romans 12:9-16

The world tells us that it is impossible to separate people from their sin. This is a ridiculously flawed and hypocritical view. To be sincere in agape love is to love that which is good and to despise that which is evil (**vs. 9**). To sincerely love someone is to love the sinner, yet hate the sin. Let me give you an example. My grandfather died of cancer. It was so hard to watch this once strong and healthy man that I loved be ravaged by such a cruel disease. I would have given anything to see him cured of that which was rapidly destroying him. But, I was powerless to do so. The end was difficult for me to bear, as I saw him suffer and waste away to nothing before he died.

In much the same way, sin kills its victims. Paul explicitly describes this for us in the book of Romans:

“The wages of sin is death...”

Romans 6:23

How then, would it be possible for someone filled with agape love to tolerate sin. The world tells us that it is being judgmental, and even bigoted, to condemn sinful behavior. We must, according to the world, “accept people as they are”. This is just how twisted the wisdom of this world has become. To condone sin is not love. In fact, it is the very opposite. As Christians, we know that sin eventually kills its victims (**Romans 6:23**). For a true believer to be accepting of sin would be the same as me saying that in order to love my grandfather I also had to love his cancer! And believe me when I say, I most certainly did not. I loved my grandfather, and I despised the disease that slowly destroyed him.

So, should the church love sinners and hate sin? You'd better believe it! Those who have truly become living sacrifices for Christ will glue themselves (literal translation) to what is good and detest that which God has called sinful. We strive for holiness and forsake sin. Show me a Christian who still loves sin, and I will show you the very definition of a hypocrite. To have a transformed mind is to loathe evil and cling to what is good.

Paul goes on to say that we are to love (agape) those in the body deeply, as bothers and sisters. Have you ever noticed that your church family is often closer and dearer to you than your own flesh and blood? I mean, just because people are related doesn't mean that they are always close. But those who are living sacrifices are bound to one another. You don't really even have to work at it. It just comes naturally. I have been in the ministry for over thirty years now, and some of my Christian brothers and sisters that I knew from many churches ago are still so very important to me. We are bonded together by the blood of Christ. And to be in Him is also to be “in” one another. You will never be able to explain this to a non-believer, but if you are a truly a living sacrifice for Christ, then you know exactly what I'm talking about!

We are to, as Paul says, “take the lead in honoring one another.” (**vs.10**). This simply means that a Christian filled with agape is concerned with the needs of his Christian brothers and sisters above his own. We don't have to be spurred into action, but rather, we are compelled to serve from within. Paul commands us not to allow this desire to serve to fall into complacency, but rather, as we are being daily led by The Spirit, we maintain our spiritual zeal and fervor to serve faithfully. I know lots of people who claim to be spiritual, but the ones, who are truly being led by the Spirit of The Living God, are on fire to serve in His Name. In short, it doesn't matter how many *Bible* verses you can quote, if you're not using them to serve in the Body of Christ.

Living sacrifices are to be a people of hope and prayer (12). We should be an encouragement to those around us and not a source of depression. The world is depressing enough as it is, we don't need anymore "Eeyore Christians" in the Body of Christ, thank you very much. Have you ever been around someone who goes around acting defeated all the time? Blesses your heart doesn't it? I get it. We all go through dark days of discouragement. We all need to be encouraged, now and then, by other believers. But if you're one of those who sees the glass half empty all of the time, then frankly, you need to spend more time at the feet of Jesus and less time wallowing in self pity. (Sorry, I have always been one to rip the bandaid right off, rather than making it an all day event.) Being filled with the Spirit of God brings **Love, JOY, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control (Galatians 5:22-23).**

We are also to see to it that our brothers and sisters in Christ have their physical needs met (**vs.13**). It is not enough to offer "thought and prayers", when our brother needs a bag of groceries.

"If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, stay warm and well fed,' but you don't give them what the body needs, what good is it?" **James 2:15-16**

Good job explaining that one James! I think we can move on without further exposition.

Paul also tells us that we should pursue hospitality. The Greek here actually means *to love and welcome strangers*. Everyone who darkens the doors of this church ought to be welcomed in agape love. There is no worse feeling, that I can think of, than to enter a house of worship and be made to feel that you are unwelcome and unwanted. Agape isn't just for the neighbor that you know. It is for the neighbor that you haven't met yet! Read the parable of the **"Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37)**, and then pray about how welcoming *you* are to strangers. We are really good at loving those we know, but how good are we at loving those we do not?

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." **Romans 12:14**

The placement of this verse, in the midst of the discussion of relationships within the body, should tell us that sometimes even believers get upset with one another. Imagine that!? So, how do you react when someone in the church "gives you the business"? Wait for it... In LOVE, that's how. As a pastor, I can't tell you how many times I've been slandered by some dear "saint" with an axe to grind. It happens. And if I'm not careful, I will get in the flesh and give them a piece of my mind (which I really can't spare). SO... what are we to do? Go off and pray before you speak. Don't give the devil a foothold (**Ephesians 4:26**). Your anger will never accomplish the result that God intends. Get over yourself. Let God vindicate you. He's sooooo much better at it anyway.

Paul sums up this sermon point on relationships within the body by telling us to live in harmony, forsaking pridefulness, and treating everyone the same (**vs. 16**). The child of God has nothing to brag about except Christ. And those who spend enough time with Him, know full well that it is Him, and Him alone, Who is worthy of praise. We are not impressive. We are forgiven. So let us also love as a people who have received grace. The ground is level at the cross. None are better or worse. The Church is no place for prejudice.

"There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus." **Galatians 3:28**

Love Your Nemeses (vs. 17-21)

"Do not repay evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath,

because it is written. Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay (Deut. 32:35), says The LORD. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals upon his head (Prov. 25:21-22). Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good. **Romans 12:17-21**

After Paul describes how the family of Christ should treat one another, he immediately turns the conversation to the ways that a true living sacrifice will show love to their enemies. Anyone can love those who will love them in return, but it takes a supernatural kind of love to have consideration for those who hate us. We are to carefully respond with kindness to those who wish us harm, doing all the we possibly can to live in peace with them (**vs. 17-18**). When we respond to evil with evil in return, the world sees no distinction between the saint and the sinner.

As He was dying, Jesus loved a mocking thief, as well as, a tormenting soldier with the same agape that he showed for his mother at the foot of the cross. The end result was two sinners being saved that very day! Showing love to our enemies can actually make them jealous for the grace we have received in Christ (**Romans 11:14**). So we do not repay evil with evil, but rather, we are to respond to hatred with agape love.

We know that the wrath of God remains upon those who are unsaved.

"The one who believes in The Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects The Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him." **John 3:36**

So, we know that the unsaved will one day face God's wrath. But what we do not know is just which of those, who are currently unbelievers, will in fact turn to Christ and confess Him as LORD. Only God knows His chosen, so therefore, we should leave vengeance and wrath up to God. For those who are our enemies today, could very well become our brethren tomorrow! Only God knows for sure.

Paul teaches here a concept directly from Christ's Sermon on The Mount, telling us to care for the needs of our enemies just as we would for our own brethren. Listen now to the words of Christ.

"You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor (Lev. 19:18) and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For He, causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." **Matthew 5:43-48**

Paul reminds us that by loving those who despise us, we will cause them to be ashamed, or as he puts it, we will **"heap burning coals upon their heads"** (**vs. 20**). It is the type of shame that is meant to point them to the Savior. After all, which would you rather win, an argument or a lost soul? When we show love in the face of evil, we actually overcome that evil with good (**vs. 21**), and God can, and often will, use this love to reach yet another lost soul. Just ask the soldier who pierced Jesus' side, the very blood that was needed to cleanse his heart came out as a result! Who do you bleed for this morning? Do people see Christ pouring out of the wounds that they inflict upon you? That my friends is true agape. It is the love that comes out from a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. It is a sincere love, that simply loves. No matter who it encounters. The agape of a living sacrifice will love its Neighbor, and its Nemesis, with the same spiritual fervor. May this be the way that we love. Would to God that the lost world would mock us for the way that we love. What a testimony for Christ we would become! Let it be said of us that we love.

And let All of God's living sacrifices say... TRUTH!!!