

Title: What's Love Got to Do With It?
Date: 2/15/26
Subject: love is at the core of the church
Scripture: Romans 12:9, 10

Ancient Roman society and culture was a sewer of wickedness and moral corruption. It was a difficult place for followers of Christ to exist let alone thrive. They needed encouragement and a challenge to live in ways that pleased God. The letter we're studying called them and calls us to be countercultural.

Read Romans 12:9, 10.

The opening verses of chapter 12 focus on the will and mind whereas v. 9 and forward focus on heart issues. We see this through the repeated use of the word love and a prescription of how to use it.

I. Love must be sincere.

The love the Lord has in mind for his followers to express isn't a low hanging fruit that can be easily picked. It's love from the highest branch. It's the kind of love God has for people shown through him loving the world and sending his Son Jesus to earth to die for people's sins. This love isn't limited to only emotions and feelings. It's an act of the will resulting from a decision to act. It's love demonstrated.

Love is to be sincere. The original Greek language expresses the idea of without hypocrisy and was used to describe clay pots that didn't have cracks. Some merchants at that time used wax to cover cracks in clay jars, paint them and sell them as if they were whole. The buyer would soon find out if they put hot liquid in the jar which would cause the wax to melt and the jar to leak. The jar was insincere.

The word means genuine. The opposite is pretending, fake or hypocritical. It's like two female Hollywood celebrities who don't like each other but happen to be on the red carpet at some gala at the same time. They're required by custom or contract to play nice, greet each other, smile, do the kiss-kiss thing. The scene is a sham or an act of one upmanship. They'd rather use their claws and might in subsequent interviews.

Christian love is to be sincere, genuine, without a hidden agenda. The question may arise: "How can we be sincere if we don't feel like it?" The answer is feelings don't have anything to do with showing love or play a minor role. True love is an act of the will. We act in a loving manner and often the feelings will follow.

The target of love isn't specifically mentioned. It seems to be a broad command including all people. The Bible frequently tells us to love our neighbors. The first occasion was in the OT book of Leviticus. I know, it doesn't seem that should be the case in a book of laws, rules, regulations and commands about Jewish temple worship, priests and ceremonially clean food. But it's there with other aspects of God's moral law: "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another...Do not hate your brother in your heart...Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:11, 17, 18).

It's given other times in the OT and in the NT. Numerous times followers of Jesus Christ are told to love one another. Jesus even said loving our neighbor is the second greatest command. V. 8 of Romans 13 says

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” This refers to God's moral law.

A doctor retired after 30 years of treating cancer patients. He worked with a billing company to resolve his clinic's finances and found people owed him \$650,000. He decided to forgive their debt. He said, “I've always been rather uncomfortable with sick patients not only having to worry about their own health, [but also] their families, and their jobs, [and] money. That's always tugged at me” (Our Daily Bread, 1/2/26).

Imagine the celebration for the people who owed all that money. Party time. It would be tremendous load off their backs and minds. They were free from the crushing burden of debt.

We can't celebrate freedom from the debt to love others. God doesn't relieve us of our debt, burden, obligation. We never get to the point where we've loved enough and settled the score. The reason is it's not a debt owed to people but it's a debt we owe to God. We'll never be able to pay him back for what he's done. We're to keep on loving others in a demonstration that we love him and appreciate what he's done for us.

On the night Jesus was betrayed he gave what he termed *a new command*: “Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34, 35). Doesn't sound all that new. The command had been around for centuries. He says it three times. Repetition doesn't make it special. So, what does Jesus mean when he calls this command “new”?

The Lord added a qualifier - “as I have loved you.” Jesus said he was the model of love, selflessly giving his entire being. Later that evening he said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). All the disciples except one, and not counting Judas the betrayer, laid down their lives for Jesus and for their friends, their fellow believers. Since then there have been millions of Christians who've given their lives for Christ, his cause, and other believers. Not everyone will be required to give their lives. We are required to love others in the same way Christ loved - selflessly and humbly.

Jesus also gives the ability to fulfill his command. He calls upon his followers to abide in him - remain in him, not disconnect themselves from him, but continue to be close. He'll supply the ability to obey.

Christians are under Jesus Christ's authority. He is the master, Lord, who has the right to command us - his followers. Jesus is more than the Master who tells us what to do, who issues commands, but he's not less than the Master. He's also the one who loves us.

Jesus says his followers loving one another will be a testimony to the world. Mike Whitmer struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger on a flight. She said she was non-religious and had moved to a new country to an area where numerous Christians lived and went to church. Mike asked about her experience. The woman said she could never repay their generosity. When her disabled father came to with her, her Christian neighbors built a ramp for her house and donated a hospital bed and medical supplies. The woman concluded, “If being a Christian makes one so kind, everyone should be a Christian” (Our Daily Bread, 3/23/25).

Alexander MacLaren (on Romans 12:9) points out the problem of insincere love and what to do about it: “There are words of love which are like the iridescent scum on the surface veiling the black depths of a pool

of hatred... There is little to be done by the way of directly increasing either the fervor of love or the honesty of its expression. The true method of securing both is to be growingly transformed by 'the renewing of our minds,' and growingly to bring our whole old selves under the melting and softening influence of 'the mercies of God.' It is swollen self-love, 'thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think,' which impedes the flow of love to others, and it is in the measure in which we receive into our minds 'the mind that was in Christ Jesus,' and look at men as He did, that we shall come to love them all honestly and purely. When we are delivered from the monstrous oppression and tyranny of self, we have hearts capable of a Christlike and Christ-giving love to all men, and only they who have cleansed their hearts by union with Him, and by receiving into them the purging influence of His own Spirit, will be able to love without hypocrisy."

The next two phrases steer the teaching on love in a different direction. They're more God-centered as they speak about how we relate to him and his agenda. We can't truly love others if we don't love God.

Hate what is evil. Some translations say abhor or detest evil. However we slice it, it's an intense dislike. It's an aversion to sin, wrongdoing and whatever corrupts God's plan and purpose. We accept God's stance on sin and the harm it causes. Therefore, we run from sin. God's intent is for us to be set apart from sin, be holy.

We are aided in our pursuit of following God as we... Cling to what is good. The imagery is of another sticky substance - a super sticky substance - glue, Not the kind on removable tape but super glue or gorilla glue or the kind used to affix labels on the bottom of coffee mugs. Sometimes the labels don't want to come off. You can soak them in warm water, use Goo Gone, scratch at it till you bend your fingernail backwards, resort to a blowtorch - but there are times when glue residue stays on the mug.

Christians are to be that tenacious in their grip on that which is good. Actively persist in being firmly joined and attached. The first thing that's good is God. Therefore we're to cling to God. Cling to his Word which reveals his teaching, instructions, standards, principles, promises. Adhere no matter the societal and cultural winds that blow.

I mentioned at the beginning of the message Rome wasn't the greatest place to live if you were a follower of Christ. Much of Roman life - pagan culture, worship of false gods including the emperor, anti-Christian philosophy, and immoral lifestyle - sought to tear Christians from their foundation.

Sounds like the world we live in. The back of the sermon notes has an insightful article by a pastor who ministered in the 1800s. He describes the situation Christians in his day faced. You'll not they are very similar to our day. The call for Christians in ancient Rome, the 1800s and for us is to hate what is evil and cling to what is good.

Sometimes we get things turned around and hate what is good and cling to what is evil. We allow temptation to take root in our lives and sin. We begin to follow the world's system opposed to God and are repelled by that which is good, virtuous, righteous, godly and is pleasing to God. It shouldn't be so.

"True affection for God necessarily produces revulsion toward everything that corrupts His good creation... Reverence moves us to refuse compromise with sin in our hearts, homes, and communities... This

holy intolerance protects our hearts from being dulled by a culture that normalizes what God condemns...Genuine love cannot coexist with moral indifference, so we actively reject what grieves God and hold tightly to whatever reflects His character” (Study Bible on Romans 12:9, biblehub.com).

We return to the theme of loving people in verse 10.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

The previous command about love had a universal target. Now love is being dialed in, laser focused on people who are fellow believers, Christians, those in the body of Christ. It's about the family of God.

Some translations say we're to have kindly affection. Seems to sell it at a little short. New Living Translation: “Love each other with genuine affection.” That's good. Love should be sincere, real. But it's deeper. English Standard Version: “Love one another with brotherly affection.” That's better.

Devotion is a commitment. Beyond that, it's a covenant because we're in a relationship based on being united in Christ's body. It's not a matter of expressing it when it's convenient but even when it's inconvenient.

It's more than the devotion of a dog as loyal as they can be. It's more like that of parents for their children. They're willing to do anything to protect the child, stand by them and support them. It's devotion that's deep and unwavering.

This kind of devoted love is to be shown to one another. Christians are to have deep and unwavering commitment of devotion to one another just as Jesus Christ has deep and unwavering commitment of devotion and love to us. “One another” means it's mutual and reciprocal. It's given and received. It's fulfilled through the various one another commands in the Bible - build up one another, be kind to one another, pray for one another, forgive one another, bear burdens of one another, encourage one another, serve one another.

Missionaries in the Philippines set up a croquet game. Some of their neighbors, part of the Agta people group, wanted to join. The game's rules were explained and the new players started out. Then one of the new players hit another person's ball. A missionary explained he could choose to knock that person's ball. The Agta man was confused: “Why would I want to knock his ball out of the court?” “So you'll be the one to win!” The Agta man shook his head and didn't do what the missionary advised. No one followed the missionaries' advice. When a player made it through all the wickets, the game wasn't over for him. He went back and helped the others. The game was a team effort. When the last shot was taken, the whole team shouted happily, “We won! We won!” That people group was a hunting and gathering society where people survived not by competing but by sharing equally in every activity. (Source James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited, pp. 123, 124).

This brings us to another of the one another commands.

Honor one another above yourselves.

To honor is to value and place a price upon a person in a good way, not as a bounty. We recognize the worth of the other person.

This is what Christ has done for us. Scripture teaches we're to “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your

own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:3 - 8).

The opposite would be the conduct of the religious leaders the Pharisees. They wanted to be in the chief spots in the synagogue and at the best seats at feasts. They pushed themselves up and put others down.

This attitude was also found among Christians. The infamous Diotrephes (3 John) loved to be first. He sought to control the church, who was welcomed and who was put out of the church. He was like a dictator, He desired the place of influence. Not Christ-like conduct.

The difficulty in honoring others arises as we carry around "our personal Bill of Rights"- the terms and conditions under which we might consider tolerating the rest of the human race. It's the desire to judge people, beliefs, ministries, parenting skills, etc. by how they fit into our pattern of thinking and personal view.

The problem with this approach is that as Christians we don't have a whole lot of rights except the right to do what God tells us to do. We have duties and responsibilities.

The call is to honor one another above yourselves. New Living Translation: "Take delight in honoring each other." Find our joy in it. English Standard Version adds a competitive element: "Outdo one another in showing honor." Some say the Greek hints at anticipating what other people will do and to honor them before they get the chance to do it takes the lead in honoring. It's a friendly race to the bottom as we seek to serve.

We show respect to the other person. We're to elevate other people's ideas and plans above ours. We give preference to others as we consider their interests and needs first. Listen without formulating our response. Let them have the last word.

Our daughter Tiffani heard from one of the youth group leaders at Community Church about what our grandsons Caleb and Gabey were doing. When it was time for snacks, they were waiting till the end of the line, allowing everybody to go ahead of them. They're 14 and 12 and like most boys their age, their middle name should be food. They've chosen to let others go ahead.

We have the same thing happen here for meal functions. Sometimes it's hard to get somebody to start, not because the food isn't any good. People aren't pushing and shoving because they have to be first.

In the 1960s Lee Iacocca, then vice president at Ford, asked Green Bay Packer coach Vince Lombardi what it took to make a winning team. Lombardi answered: "There are a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don't win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: if you're going to play together as a team, you've got to care for one another. You've got to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself: "If I don't block that man, Paul is going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job in order that he can do his." The difference between mediocrity and greatness is the feeling these guys have for each other."

The Lord knows the winning formula is love for one another.