

## Truly Love: The Right Way

Romans 12:11-13, 15-16

**Read Rom 12:9-16.** That is God's will for how we express His love for one another.

Paul's letter to the believers in Rome spells out God's expectations for sincere love in any culture and any time. These demands should not be so surprising if we think about Jesus – who's likeness, we are being conformed to (Rom 8:29). After Jesus washed the disciple's feet, here are His words: **Read John 13:34-35**

How far was Jesus willing to go?  
Remember the cross.

Jesus made the sacrifice to redeem us by His blood...so we would let the world know God's love by how we love one another(John 17:21).

### **Prayer** (purity)

Spirit-led believers are gripped by God's mercy. We want to live for God – to trust God with a blank check that says, "I am yours". When our will is turned over to God, we say 'no' to the squeeze and schemes of this world and 'yes' to making Jesus Lord. God's indwelling Spirit gives us a thirst for knowing and following God's will. The final authority for God's will is His written word. God guides us as we stay in communication.

But our first roadblock is that we are still confined to these fallible, corruptible bodies (R7). How do we

live like this? We need to see ourselves in view of the Gospel. Believe we are united 'in Christ'. Otherwise we will trip over ourselves, missing the life and peace we were meant to have (R8). Being Spirit-led affects all areas of our life and changes us from the inside. Jesus and the Apostles clearly taught that loving God is proved by our obedience (Jn 14:21, 1 Jn 5:3). And God's will for us to love one another sincerely. When we believe that God has given us the grace and faith to fulfill His will (Rom 12:3-8), we experience the peace of knowing who we are, where we belong and what we're here to do.

We are God's grace pipeline for each other. We are united like a body with Christ as head – each connected to the other. One could say that the blood pumping through Christ's body is sincere love. The real you (the person God made you to be), shares God's grace with sincere love. Sincere love is to be pure...**untainted by sin**. What does it mean to abhor sin? It is vile. It makes you want to vomit. Like that container in the back of the fridge you're getting up the nerve to clean out.

*What lurks at the back of our heart?*  
Pointing fingers does not help. The way to drop 'play-acting' love, is to be

real about our sin with God. Being real matters to God.

In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira agreed to put the Spirit of God to the test. They wanted to have a reputation like Barnabas (Acts 4:32-37) but didn't want to pay the price. They lied about the extent of their giving and held some profit from the sale of their property for themselves. They were struck dead to warn the church. Do we think we can fool God? Honesty is vital for Spirit-led love. When we hate sin and cleave to what is good, His love through us is sincere, timely and effective.

Here's when we know we're on the right track. Instead of asking, "How far can we go before it's sin?" Ask, "How close to purity can we get?" And deep down, we already know in most cases. Not grieving the Holy Spirit is an act of the will. The heart is deceitful. It must be guarded. Otherwise, it's swayed by feelings and enticements. I'm convicted too. And sometimes I wimp out in a group where the conversation has taken a turn for the worse. Lord, help us when we give in to the wrong kind of community. The Holy Spirit does not take a coffee break and say, "Ok guys, I know you've been vigilant for a while so you can stop denying your selfishness while Christ looks the other way." No, it's more like when Peter's eyes met Jesus' while he was

denying he even knew Jesus. Sin we don't deal with, leads to self-loathing and a low view of others (not sober judgement). And it will leak out in the way we avoid godly people, avoid sharing from the heart and avoid praying. Mask on. Hypocritical love. God longs for us to come home, come clean (1 Jn 1:9) and be restored to Gospel-powered fellowship (Rev 3:19-22). Our personal or group time is always with Jesus. We can help one another if our goal is **reconciliation** and our motive is **love** (Gal 6:1-2, James 5:16, Matt 18:15-17, 1 Tim 5:19-20). Be real with God about sin, hate it and clinging to good things instead. Peter's heart was not hardened...He wept bitterly. And Jesus gave him another chance. Let us determine to make our gatherings a safe place to be pure. Safe enough for a new believer to be learning from us. That's when the real you (sincere and pure v9) meets real needs (brotherly devotion, honoring v10). Our real need is for a godly family that is affectionate, sacrificial, protecting and honoring. God transforms us so that our spiritual family is a treasure...where our heart is (Matt 5:21). Believe God made you to belong and can use you to meet His family needs. And as we do, He'll help us meet real needs in the right way.

This section of Paul's letter on God's will for us is rapid fire style. It's

difficult to pin down the themes that tie the commands together. Scholars call it a Parenthesis style. Ancient Greeks and Jews would catch people's attention with several ethical admonitions in a row...like a string of pearls. You'll find similar style in James and Proverbs. I'm emphasizing it's God's will for love to be expressed in the right way. Verse 14, we'll study next week, when we talk about responding to ridicule, hate and persecution. As God's instruments of sincere love, we are to rely on God's strength and words to meet needs in the right way.

**Read v11: Zealous to serve as for the Lord**

Not lazy but zealous. Set on fire by the Spirit: God's passion lived out. Church history shows that following passion for spiritual things can be abused. We need objective standards – set forth in Scripture. The motive for enthusiasm is tempered with our goal, to serve the Lord. Not our egos, not a magnetic personality and not a slick sounding human objective. When we live by faith, we don't rely on our own resources. It's so freeing. We put our faith in the limitless love and wisdom of God. As God's grace pipeline via the Holy Spirit, we meet real needs **with diligence and enthusiasm** (Spirit's fire), not laziness. How do we keep our

spiritual fervor up day after day? The key is in the next verse.

**Read v12: Sustained by Prayer**

The key to ongoing spiritual fervor is abiding in our relationship with God. Timely and appropriate love has root in consistent time spent with God in prayer. There's ongoing conversation with God; dwelling on His word to seek direction; and there's time alone with God - worshipping, confessing, thanking, praying for others and surrendering to His will be done. I suspect that most of you are the same as me and need to rethink how much time devoted to appointments alone with God. Jesus kept His appointments with God – whether in the middle of the night or before dawn. Our focus on God keeps us in tune with our identity united with Jesus (belonging, purpose, eternal glory). And keeps us in tune with sharing His grace with others. Our hope stirred by faithful prayer gives us patience and endurance to bear up under great burdens. When our human reserves are long gone and we want to blow up or running away, God is right there to help us remember who we are, because of Jesus.

I watched the latest Spiderman movie last year and was reminded of a part where he was fighting evil without his high tech suit. A warehouse was caved in on him. The bad guy was getting

away and it seemed hopeless. Where did he find the drive to ignore his pain and weakness to push on? His identity. He coached 'Peter Parker' and 'Spiderman' to lift that massive load and get on with the mission. We have an eternal identity: written in the book of life. We are united with Christ: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all things. We have been justified by faith, set free from sin's realm to walk by the power of the Holy Spirit. If God is for us, who can be against us? No being, power or disaster can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8)! Amen?

Remain faithful in prayer and God will use us (His adopted children) to meet needs with diligence and appropriate care...even when it seems impossible.

### **Read v13: Meeting Practical Needs**

As I was studying, it hit me that *koinonia* is used more than one way. It usually means a fellowship gathering of people united by Christ. But this time it's a shared care expressed through meeting practical needs for our spiritual family members. When God introduced the world to His church under Christ, it was amazing. No language group in the area was left out. It exploded in size. There was great devotion to God. And there was an astounding expressions of practical care. **Read Acts 2:42-47**

Am I saying it's time we had everything in common – selling property as needed to provide practical needs? That's up to the Holy Spirit's work in us...individually and together. But we're not living in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem at the dawn of the church. We live in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada, 2000 years later. Those were Spirit-led believers demonstrating *Koinonia* in fellowship and meeting practical needs. How is the Spirit leading us to demonstrate Koinonia? One thing I observed right away in this family, was a core of people listening to God and meeting practical needs. And I believe it's catching on. If you're new and haven't experienced it or served in that way...lean in more. Engage. God is still guiding and empowering people for His grace to be shared.

We may need to refresh our view of hospitality. When hospitality is viewed as entertainment, the house is never ready. How is entertaining different from making people feel welcome and at home? Certainly, atmosphere makes a difference...location, furnishings, temperature, odors, noise level. But what is at the core of hospitality? In the OT, there was an emphasis on taking foreigners in (Lev 19:33-24). Good old Abraham generously gave to some strangers and it turned out to be the Lord and two angels.

Jesus and the apostles depended on hospitality as they travelled from place to place. We had a stranger stay overnight. It provided him safety, dignity, fellowship and rest. In the end, the only thing we can take with us, is our story. In our paranoid culture, we're made to feel irresponsible if we let a stranger into our home without a police check...especially overnight. Scripture does warn against taking in a person who openly teaches against Jesus being fully God and fully man (2 Jn 1:10). But Jesus says you honor Him by providing practical care for one of the least of God's children (like taking in a stranger, Matt 25:35). Hospitality is a mark of the children of God's kingdom. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom urged members of his congregation to make a guest-chamber in the home. A bed, a table and chair and a candlestick. A room to which Christ may come. Why do we make it more complicated? Strategic hospitality asks: How can I draw people into God's graces by the use of my home or church facility?

**Read v15-16: In Harmony with Christ**

I've picked verse 16a as the core theme in this section. Live in harmony with one another. Think the same thing toward one another. Have the same attitude (as Jesus the servant Phil 2). When a group of people sing or play

instruments, it sounds wonderful when each person makes a little room in the musical scale and rhythm so everyone plays together with one song. But if even one doesn't listen to those around them or doesn't follow the song, it doesn't sound so good. Then we all suffer. When the music is in harmony, we all rejoice.

If you're suffering or in mourning, you don't need Flouncy challenging you to sing, "I've got the joy joy joy." You need the compassion of a Psalm read to you. If you have something to celebrate, you don't need Eeyore telling you all his problems or reminding you of your troubles. What you need is someone to share the joy. We're God's grace agents.

Pride kills koinonia. He mentioned the issue of pride back in v3, too. *Don't think too highly of yourselves*. Pride shows up when people think they are always right and others wrong. Or when people need to take credit. A conceited person is wise in their own estimation. So, their favorite two topics are 'me' and 'I'.

Want to fight down pride? Take the humble task. Associate with the fringes, the poor and needy. Be carried away with devotion instead of self-promotion. Pride is a dangerous sin. It is the sin that began the rebellion against God. Let us be diligent to help one another with the

sin of pride...for the sake of *koinonia* and right relationship with God.

Harmonious caring is humble. It makes sure no one is left out. When you put it all together: God's idea of Sincere love is...

Pure, Zealous to Serve (as for the Lord), Sustained by Prayer, Meeting Practical Needs and in Harmony with Christ. It's the place I want to be.

How about you?

Lord willing, many more will share *koinonia*, even in rugged Lillooet.

Let God have His way...in how we extend His grace to one another.

What are the barriers for family-like devotion and honor. Can we believe God will help us love the way He expects?

Today: Think about someone who's been a real brother or sister in the Lord to you. Let them know how much it's meant.

This week: Have at least one spirit-led conversation or caring act with another in this fellowship.

Pray every day. Ask for God's blessing in your brothers and sisters – to receive God's love to overflowing (Eph 1 & 3). So they would be God's vessels of grace.

In Christ, the real you meets real needs, God's way.

May God, reign in us.