

066 Love Is More than Just a Feeling

Romans 12:9,10

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 2/26/17

Introduction

How do you define love? Ask 100 people to write down tell me what love is, would get 100 different answers.

We use the word loosely and broadly to explain a whole range of things:

- I love the beautiful weather we're having
- I love my job (or being retired)
- I love playing golf
- I love my car
- I love chocolate brownies (e.g. by Dot Reed and Ellie Dzuro)
- I love my wife, my kids, my grandchildren
- I love my church

Obviously don't mean the same thing. It's unfortunate that in the English language we only have one word for love. The Greeks had far more words.

Storge referred to the love between a parent and a child, especially between a mother and a child.

They used a different word **philos** for the kind of love two very best friends would have. It wasn't a romantic love, but an attraction based on commonality and compassion. It was used for a friend who was always there for you, closer than a brother, who shared life's ups and downs.

The Greeks had another word for a passionate attraction: **eros**. While it used to apply to more, its primary meaning has become associated with sexual attraction, "**making love**" with your spouse.

Another word, which is predominately found in the New Testament, is quite different from the others. It is **agape**. Instead of being focused on the attractiveness of the other person, the one being loved, it is centered more in the person doing the loving. While the other terms for love are emotionally-based (and **agape** certainly does have an emotional element), **agape** is much more than just a feeling. It is doing something for

the benefit of another individual. It doesn't ask "*what's in it for me*" nor is it based on the attractiveness of the other person (although they might be attractive). Instead it is an unconditional love, rooted in the person doing the loving.

All of these types of love are gifts from God. Some people misunderstand and abuse them, but the original intent of every type of love was as a gift God gave us to enjoy.

Paul uses two of those verbs in the text that is up on screen. (Read)

Romans 12:9,10 Love (agape) must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. (philos) Honor one another above yourselves.

You'll notice that in our text Paul doesn't define love, but instead he jumps directly into talking about how it functions. As far as I have been able to determine, Paul nowhere defines love. He does however illustrate it. He describes its characteristics, telling us what love looks like, what it does and doesn't do.

In his most memorable passage on love in **I Corinthians 13** Paul lists fifteen facets of **agape** love.

I Corinthians 13:4-7 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)
Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.

⁶ It does not rejoice 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.

Here in **Romans 12: 9** he states two specific things about love. 1. First it must be **genuine**. **Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere.**

We all have an innate, deep seated longing to be genuinely loved. We want to have someone who will stand up for us and believe in us and go to bat for us.

The Greek word translated **sincere** is **anûpokritos**, i.e. "**not hypocritical**." **Upokritos** means "without a mask," and refers to the way actors in Greek theater would carry various

masks to signal the role they were playing. When Paul writes that love is to non-hypocritical, he's saying to drop our masks.

When hypocrisy creeps in "love" ceases to be genuine and becomes something else – manipulation, competition, pretense. We've all been hurt by people who mouthed the words "I love you" but then behaved in a contrary manner. Their empty words left us feeling betrayed.

Let's admit it, and start by looking in the mirror. We are all adept at counterfeiting love, pretending, deceiving others and often even deluding ourselves.

There is no room for playacting with true love, for thinking one way and acting another. Love and truth go hand in hand.

2. Second it must be **discriminating**. *Hate what is evil; cling to what is good* is how Paul states it.

In the Greek *hate* and *cling* are participles, meaning hating and clinging. They aren't separate imperative commands, but are linked to describe sincere love. Could translate it a bit more literally as

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere, hating what is evil, clinging to what is good.

Love is not some mushy sentimental emotion that embraces all, forgives all, forgets all, and requires nothing.

When love encounters what is evil, it refuses to participate. It doesn't just look the other way. Love dares to confront someone, not to browbeat or condemn, but to put the object of its love on the right path.

By contrast, love clings to what is good. The word "cling" is the word Jesus used in reference to marriage, when "**a man will leave his father and mother and be united (or joined) to his wife, and the two will become one flesh**" Matthew 19:5.

In order to repel evil and cling to good, love must be discerning and know the difference.

We've witnessed the terrible flooding in northern California this past month. Estimated one billion to repair damage caused. Charles Ryrie compared love to a river that is bounded by truth on one side and discernment on the other. If

either bank breaks down and the river spills over it causes horrific damage. Must keep love in bounds.

Paul continues his admonition regarding love in **Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (philos).**

If I were to ask, "how many of you here today are Christians?" probably all of you would raise your hands. In fact the majority of people in North America would join you in raising their hands, and say "*I'm a Christian.*" But many who would make such a claim are not genuine disciples of Jesus.

They were born and raised in Western culture. They attend church sometimes, they aren't Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu, or Zoroastrian, or even Jehovah's Witness or Mormon, so they must be Christian, they think. But when you look at them, there's no discernible evidence of the indwelling Spirit or any commitment to God or the things of Christ. They've never been born again.

How can I know you're the real thing? That you belong to Jesus, that you are indeed a fellow disciple of Jesus Christ, that you are a member of the Family of God? How can you know the same thing about me? Where's the proof? To use a phrase coined by Francis Schaeffer, what is the "*mark of a Christian?*"

Through the centuries people have displayed many symbols to show they were Christians:

- placed mark¹s in their coat lapels,
- worn cross-shaped earrings and hung crosses on chains around their necks,
- had special haircuts,
- wore a particular style of clothing,
- bumper stickers,
- drunk their coffee out of a mug with a Christian logo.

¹ In John's gospel there are a couple other passages that indicate a mark by which we can tell we are truly disciples. One we examined already is found in **John 8:31**, where Jesus said, "**if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.**" The other is in **John 15**, which talks about **bearing much fruit** as a mark of being a disciple.

Certain activities have been considered the criteria for showing you are “really” a Christian:

- feeding poor,
- housing homeless,
- protesting evil by marches and boycotts,
- speaking in tongues, prophesying, healing the sick, casting out demons,
- building orphanages and hospitals.

Nothing wrong with these – but a much better sign. The one that Jesus gave his followers on the night he was betrayed.

John 13:34,35 *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*ⁱ

It was a very pertinent and pointed command. Judas had already left the upper room that night. There is no doubt that each of the remaining disciples truly loved Jesus. Whatever he said, they would do. But it is just as certain that they really didn’t really love one another with anything approaching the degree of love they had for their Master.

To the contrary, they were actually jealous of one another, squabbling about who was the greatest. Each was looking out for himself, seeking his own advancement, his own position in the coming Kingdom. They wouldn’t even wash one another’s feet.

About to be taken from them, Jesus points out that now it is precisely one another whom they must love. The vertical love of disciples for Jesus must be expressed horizontally in their love for other followers of the Master. Scripture is clear that the horizontal love, which can be seen by others, is proof of the vertical dimension. As John writes in **I John 4:8**, *whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

Jesus calls his command to love one another a “**new command.**” He had told them before this to “*love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.*”² And he had modeled what that meant.

Does this “*new,*” or “*fresh*” command replace those commands?

Of course not. The “new” command does not in any way negate the priority of loving God, or the ancillary of loving all other human beings. All people have value because they are made in God’s image. We love all men as our neighbor at any cost because of who they are – beings created by God, just like we are - Beings created in his image, for his pleasure and his purposes.

“Modern” man, who has rejected his origin, has no clue of who he is, and because of this can find no real value either within himself or in other people. So he downgrades and ridicules the value of others, depersonalizing them, producing a sick culture in which men and women and children are treated as mere objects to be used.

The whole point of the story of the good Samaritan in **Luke 15** is that all men are our neighbors, and we are to love them as ourselves, protecting their rights, providing for them when they are in need, caring deeply about them. Because a man is a man, and a woman is a woman, he and she are to be loved at all cost.

So when Jesus gives this “new command” to love one another as he has loved us, it doesn’t negate the other commands. It’s not in conflict with previous commands to “*love God*” and “*love your neighbor.*”

They are not antithetical. We are not to choose between loving all men as ourselves and loving our fellow believers in a special way. The two reinforce each other.

The first that that is “**new**” about this commandment is that it adds one more key ingredient, 1. a **new “object”** of love if you would. **Romans 12:34** “*Love one another.*”

Paul makes our double obligation clear: **Galatians 6:10** “*Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of*

² He is affirming what is taught in the Old Testament – see **Deuteronomy 6:5** and **Leviticus 19:18.**

believers.”³ We should consciously consider this dual goal at all times. It should govern all our actions and words.

The second thing that is “new” about this commandment (the first was its object), is 2. the **magnitude** of our love

John 13:34b *As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* The extent and depth of God’s love was going to be seen in less than twenty-four hours when he died on the cross. That love Jesus has for us is the standard, the measure for the love we have for one another.

It is *agape* love – a love that is:

- Not superficial, but sacrificial
- Not casual, but committed
- Not fickle, but faithful
- Not jealous, but generous
- Not shallow, but deep
- Not temporary, but permanent
- Without limit, without reservation.

It’s nice to tell one another “*I love you*” in church, and sing songs about our great love for one another. But how can we really tell that love is genuine, and not just parrot-babble? How can I tell you really love me? How can you tell I really love you? Where’s the evidence? If you really love me, you’ll show it in the choices you make and the way you behave towards me.

The third aspect of Jesus’ short command that makes it new is its **effect**. (First was its object, second its extent, and now third its effect). **John 13:35** *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

The effect of our love for one another extends beyond our own walls, our own circles. It affects the world. It is to be observable love that causes the world to sit up and take notice.

How is God working in the world today?

- He’s not creating the world today – he did that a long time ago.

- He’s not dying and being resurrected for the world today – he did that 2,000 years ago.
- What God is doing today, his present and ongoing activity, is working in and through Christians who love one another, love their fellow man, and supremely love God. People who are not yet Christians can see God at work in us. And that will cause some to fall on their knees and acknowledge him as their own Lord and Savior. To steal a phrase from Don Bierle, we are a fingerprint of God! An evidence of his existence. What a breathtaking thought!

What does this special love look like? Fortunately for us, a number of years later John goes into greater detail in his little letter we refer to as **I John**.

For example, after stating in **I John 3:14** *We know we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers*, he continues a few verses later **I John 3:16-18** *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.* We aren’t often presented an opportunity to literally die for someone else. But we do have many opportunities to “die to self” or sacrifice our own self-interests.

Today’s culture worships self-satisfaction. For example, if you’re not personally fully satisfied in your marriage relationship, break it off (it really doesn’t matter what you pledged “*before God and these witnesses*” when you stood at the altar). But that’s not what the Bible teaches. God’s teaching is that we are to daily die to self in order that the other person might be fulfilled. It is only as we begin to do this that we find our own true satisfaction.

I John 4:20, 21 *If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

The way we treat our fellow believers should be in shining contrast to the way our callous, uncaring, self-centered culture treats others!

³ See also **I Thessalonians 3:12** *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*

Can non-believers tell you are a Christian by the way you treat others? For those who are married and have a family, it begins of course with how you treat your spouse and children.

But that's just where it starts. It doesn't stop with your own physical family. Can non-believers tell we are Christians by the way we treat other believers who have a different skin color, speak a different language, come from a different culture?

It is easier to love, at least to like, those who are most like us. It is harder to have positive attitudes towards are not like us. But when we truly love people who aren't just like us, the people on the outside most clearly see the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ at work!

Our love for one another is a litmus test by which the world can judge us.

I wonder, how do unbelievers talk about us? Do we give them reason to accuse us of bickering, intolerance, petty criticisms, gossip, backbiting, prejudice?

I hope not. I trust they can say, *"Wow! Look how they care for one another, how they respect one another, how they accept one another – in short, look at how they love one another!"*

In closing, let me make a final observation. Jesus doesn't call this a *"new suggestion."* He doesn't refer to it as a *"new request."* He doesn't say *"won't you please love one another?"*

He doesn't say, *"you'll be happier people if you love one another."* Instead it's a new command! If he is truly our Lord and our Master, the one calling the shots, we have no choice but to obey! And in the obeying we will discover that we ourselves are happier people

We often apply this verse it to someone sacrificing their life to save someone else. E.g. on battlefield, someone who throws himself on a grenade and saves his platoon. Or a couple of year's ago when Don Bierle's son jumped in to save his son when he slipped and fell in the ocean, pushing his son to safety but being dragged out and drowned himself.

ⁱ Later that evening, probably as they are walking to Mt of Olives, Jesus says:

John 15:12. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Continues **verse 13 No one has greater love than the one who lays down his life for his friends.**

In context I think he is referring to himself and what he is about to do the next day in laying down his life for them on the cross. As continues the conversation he says ***I no longer call you servants . . . instead I have called you friends.***