

## 067 What Does Genuine Love for Fellow Believers Look Like?

### **Romans 12:10-16**

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 3/5/2017

#### **Introduction - LAST TRIP TO SAM'S**

Yesterday I was at Sam's buying a large bag of Purina dog chow for my loyal pet, Baylee, the Wonder Dog. I was in the check-out line when a woman behind me asked if I had a dog.

What did she think I had an elephant?

So on impulse I told her that no, I didn't have a dog, I was starting the Purina Diet again. I added that I probably shouldn't, because I ended up in the hospital last time, but that I'd lost 50 pounds before I awakened in an intensive care ward with tubes coming out of most of my orifices and IVs in both arms.

I told her that it was essentially a Perfect Diet and that the way that it works is, to load your jacket pockets with Purina Nuggets and simply eat one or two every time you feel hungry. The food is nutritionally complete so it works well and I was going to try it again. (I have to mention here that practically everyone in line was now enthralled with my story.)

Horrified, she asked if I ended up in intensive care, because the dog food poisoned me. I told her no, I stopped to pee on a fire hydrant and a car hit me.

I thought the guy behind her was going to have a heart attack he was laughing so hard.

Sam's won't let me shop there anymore.

Of course by now most of you have figured out (I hope you have) that that didn't really happen. Was it Abraham Lincoln or circus master Bailey who said:

*You can fool some of the people all of the time,*

*You can fool all of the people some of the time,*

*But you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.*

When we pretend and tell a story that isn't real, it's a joke. But when we pretend to love someone, and really don't, it's not a laughing matter - it's a tragedy.

Do you remember the **two things** about genuine love we discovered last week in our study of **Romans 12:9**?

1. **Real love is sincere** – (The word in Greek is ) **unhypocritical**. *Hypocrite* was a technical term from Greek drama. In a Greek play, one actor would play many characters – holding up a different face for each portrayal.

Too many people who call themselves Christians act the part they are expected to play, depending on the stage!

Real love doesn't wear masks. It's not pretend. It's not patting someone on the back, telling them something you don't mean, and then saying something totally different behind their back.

2. **Love is discriminating**. It hates what is evil, and clings like sticky tape to what is good. It is not some mushy sentimental emotion that embraces all, forgives all, forgets all, and requires nothing.

The word Paul for love which Paul uses in **verse 9** is **agape** love – unconditional love, not dependent on or in response to another's love. It's an action word, used to describe the love God has for us. **Christ demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.**

In verse **10** Paul switches to a different Greek word for love. Hard to recognize in the English versions, but uses it twice.

**Romans 12:10 Be devoted** (that's the verb *phileo*) **to one another in brotherly love** (that's the noun *philadelphia*).

He uses both the verb and noun forms to emphasize the depth and warmth of the love that should exist between Christians.

So, what does "being devoted to one another in brotherly love in the community of faith" really mean? What does it look like? What are some of love's interpersonal, social and practical dynamics?

Paul fires off a series of rapid fire commands in **verses 10-16**. This morning we're going to lift out the ones that have to do with how we relate to those in the church, will come back next week to examine those that focus on how we interact with individuals who are not yet Christians.

**Romans 12:10b Honor one another above yourselves.**

**Romans 12:16b** *Do not be proud,<sup>1</sup> but be willing to associate with people of low position.*

**Romans 12:16c** *Do not be conceited.*

Paul is continuing the theme of how we see ourselves that he started in **Romans 12:3** *Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.*

Any notion that any one believer – that includes you - is better than any other is pure nonsense. In terms of worth or value before God, we all stand on level ground. We are all chosen by God's sovereign will, his choice of us is the result of unmerited favor, and this grace is received through faith in Jesus Christ.

Let's be honest. It is hard to put others first. By nature most of us are anything but humble, submissive, quiet people. Instead we are stubborn, demanding, selfish.

If we truly love each other we will be involved with other believers on a practical level – sharing our hearts and homes and time with them.

**Romans 12:13** *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

This admonition is related to two of the spiritual gifts he mentioned earlier in the chapter: contributing to the needs of others and showing mercy.

I appreciate those of you who from time contribute to the Benevolent Fund of Grace Church. But his idea here is much more than just helping by writing a check.

Uses the cognate of the noun *koinonia*, so literally: "Enter into fellowship with the needs of the saints."

I get the idea he's talking about getting personally involved in the lives of others. **Romans 12:15** *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

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<sup>1</sup> I Peter 5:5 *In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*

Same quote, found in James 4:6, is a reference to **Prov. 3:34**.

He's talking about having emotional empathy. Sensitivity. Walking with other people through both the ups and downs of their lives.

**I Corinthians 12:25, 26** *... in the body... its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

Second part of **Romans 12:13** says *practice hospitality*. Somewhat of a lost art today.

In the days before motels and restaurants, hospitality was essential. Traveling missionaries and ordinary believers depended on the kindness of other Christians. Not to be grudging.

We read in **Acts 4:32** that in the early church *All the believers were one in heart and mind* and they *shared everything they had*. The result: **Verse 34** *There were no needy persons among them.*

The generosity and mutual encouragement and unity of the believers is a direct answer to Jesus' prayer in **John 17** that we might be one as he and the Father are one.

Considering their diverse background, really quite astounding! **Acts 2:9-11**, describing the audience from whom the first 3,000 converts came: *Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome, Cretans and Arabs.*

- Unity is not conformity. Everybody looking alike, sounding alike, smelling alike
- ... not "pattern personality" or
- ... "cookie cutter" Christianity or
- ... "cultural conformity."

Some sadly think that when believers dwell in unity they will see everything eye to eye.

- They'll all use the same versions of the Bible,
- read the same books,
- watch the same TV channels,
- educate their children the same way. . .

If we focus on externals, we miss it! **Vs. 32** says that they **were one in heart**. Scripture uses heart to refer to the deepest part of our being – our inner spirit, the central place where we meet God. Followers of Jesus Christ share an inarticulate bond, a fundamental unity in the core of our beings.

Did you ever meet someone, and before either says a word you know they are a fellow believer? Our spirits bear witness that we are in the presence of fellow children of God.

Also, were **one in mind** (*psyche= their lives, souls*). Suggests were one in their emotional bonds, and also in their thinking.

- Shared the same mental focus,
- thought about the same things,
- had the same “world view.”

Early believers were certainly diverse in terms of food, clothing, language, customs and culture – but what united them was Jesus living in them! He was Lord and Savior of all.

**A.W. Tozer: *Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow.***

Their unity was demonstrated in their generosity and mutual encouragement. **Acts 4:32b *no one claimed any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had***

Once you have been possessed by Christ, you and everything you possess are Christ's possession! Most people aren't very generous by nature apart from a transforming salvation experience.

In the world of non-believers, everybody is usually out for themselves, looking out for number 1. “*What's in it for me?*” is the underlying motivation for most of their actions.

Smart people realize that if you want to get something done that involves other people you have to treat them well.

It's good management to keep other people happy. But the basis is selfishness, not generosity.

It is only when one a person comes to know Christ that they become truly generous. They realize that God didn't have to do anything for us. He could have justifiably just turned his back on all of us and told us to go to hell. But instead the Father sent Jesus Christ, his greatest gift, to die for us so that we might be saved.

I'll never forget a story I read over 30 years ago by **Juan Carlos Ortiz** - at the time pastor of one of largest evangelical churches in Latin America – in response to message (might have been from this very passage) people brought titles to their automobiles, homes.

Prayed. *What do I do?*

Ended up telling the people to “*take them back. Keep them. But never forget whose they are. In future, when missionary or needs arise, I will call and not ask is it okay if....but the Lord needs to use what is his.*”

**Acts 4:33** The unity of the first Christians accomplished two things in addition to provision for those in need:

**(1) Released power for apostles to continue proclaiming gospel.** *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*

Last week we spent time in **John 13:35 *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another***. Christians' love for one another is so radical, unselfish, untypical that Jesus himself said it would be the identifying “mark” of a Christian, causing the world to sit up and take notice that a person is indeed a true follower of Jesus.

Unity – care of one another – is a practical demonstration of love – and so it too is tied in with the effectiveness of the gospel!

**John 17:23 *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and that you have loved them even as you have loved me.***

This is a unity patterned on the unity of the Father and Son. Different persons, different functions within the Godhead, but totally united in mind, will, love and purpose.

(2) **Brought great blessing to the believers themselves much *grace was upon them all*.**

Grace – the favor God pours out on those who don't deserve it. We are saved by grace, kept by grace, healed by grace, sustained by grace . . .

Look at the result of their lack of selfishness: **Acts 4:34**  
***There were no needy persons among them.***

(Alla Fred Craddock): Only two ways to achieve:

- (1) be very selective in your membership; other way
- (2) take care of the needs of the people.

Care is a muscular word. Not just standing around feeling pity for the needs of the world.

**Romans 15:1 ff. from *The Message* *Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"***

To care is to respond in appropriate ways to the condition of every person.

Can't just shrug our shoulders when see needs:

- look at child with distended stomach and matchstick arms and legs, and say, *well, that's not my child*
- look at widow in threadbare clothes, *well, she's not my mother*
- look at old man sitting alone among the pigeons at the park, *well, he's not my dad.*

What an insult to the person of Christ when his body - his hands, and feet - demonstrate by action the attitude *I don't care!* Oh, we would never say it out loud –but our actions speak louder than our words!

The world wants to know: *"Does anyone care?"*

The final description we will look at this morning of what true brotherly love looks like is found in **Romans 12:16a** ***Live in harmony with one another.***

Friday night I attended spring concert of the Joshua Tree Philharmonic Orchestra.

I couldn't help but dream of the day we will have a full orchestra.

We already have an amazing organist, pianist, several horn players, and marimba player. And truly outstanding vocalists. Let's show our dedicated musicians how much we appreciate them (clap).

Have you ever thought about what it takes to have a world-class symphony? Probably the only person who really has an idea of what it would involve is Alberto.

Would need a larger stage – already in planning stages. But just a larger stage doesn't make an orchestra – we would need some more musicians.

Wouldn't be enough to have a stage full of horn players – trumpets and trombones and French horns and tubas, as exciting a sound as that might produce. Would need some strings - violins, violas, cellos, bases; some woodwinds - clarinets, bassoons, oboes, flutes, piccolos. And can't have a really good orchestra with out some deep timpani drums, cymbals, and all the other percussion instruments.

Still wouldn't have a symphony orchestra – just a collection of musicians (hopefully talented). The conductor does more than wave his hands and keep the flies away while the musicians play whatever they want.

He needs to select a single piece of music, make sure each section knows their part, ensure that all the instruments are tuned to the same pitch, and then blend all of the sections into a beautiful symphony of music.

Everybody on the stage has talent – they are very good at what they do. There may be some on stage who really believe that what they do is more important than the role performed by anyone else.

The conductor's job is to transform a large group of extremely talented musicians into a symphony orchestra. When that task has been accomplished, the sound is something worth coming to hear. But it doesn't happen without work on every body's part.

Every person in the body of Christ has something they can do for the Lord that really needs to be done. No one is talent

less. We have differing talents, but each one is important. In the fellowship of the church, as with an orchestra, we have to learn how to acknowledge our own talent, appreciate the talent that others have, and then blend all of our talents together into a common effort to glorify the Lord and expand his kingdom.

No matter how good you are with the talent God has given you, don't get carried away with it. God can save the world on any given day without you. And God also has somebody else who can do exactly what you and I can do, and can probably do it better than you or I can.

So let' adopt the attitudes of brotherly love Paul exhorts us to have and see what God can do with us together, as ***we live in harmony: Not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought, honoring one another above ourselves, not being proud, but being willing to associate with people of low position, not being conceited. Romans 12:16c***

I'm excited to see how God is going to turn us into a beautiful symphony orchestra, making music that will cause the world to stand up and take notice, to the glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

### **Benediction**

**Romans 15:5,6 NIV "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 'so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**