



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## Real Love

July 19, 2020

Romans 12:9-16

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*<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

*(Pastor prays)*

When Jesus spoke of the end of the age in Matthew 24:12, He said: *and because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.* When, in living history, has that ever been more true than it is at this very moment? Not just the obvious rise of lawlessness but the real demise of genuine love. It is an unusual and scary time to be a Christian in America today. As the writer of Hebrews says: "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls." Or as Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7, *for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.* When Paul listed the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5, the first and greatest one he listed is love. In 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul dedicated a whole chapter to genuine Christian love. And when Jesus described going to the cross in John 15, He said, *greater love has no one than this that someone would lay down his life for his friends.* You are my friends. Our entire religion, that centers on the cross of Jesus, is a movement of love. And John 3: 16 says, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life.*

In our passage Paul picks up the mantle and sharpens our understanding of what real Christian love is and does. Just like he did in 1 Corinthians 13, right after talking about gifts we all have, Paul stops and says none of this really matters if we don't have a handle on real Christian love. He makes a statement in verse 9: let love be genuine, or real. If you don't like fake *news*, then you're really gonna hate fake *love*. Nowhere else in all of Paul's writing is there a more concise collection of statements that tell us what real Christian love is. Each one of the statements in this passage could be the text for a full-length sermon. And I counted between 19 and 20 of them. Here you have, right before you, basic Christian living. You can be nice, well read, doctrinally clear and Biblically right and still not love. But Paul is telling us something here, something important for our day.

### **Real Christians Really Love**

That first phrase in verse 9 is the theme. Let love be genuine. And the rest of the passage tells us what genuine love is. Let's take a hard look at it! At least part of it.

### **Love is discerning**

Verse 9b has two really strong words or ideas: Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. John Stott says this takes the sentimentality out of Christian love. Kent Hughes says this puts Christian love on moral grounds. Look how Paul describes real love. Abhor what is evil. Abhor. It is a term used only once in the New Testament. It means it is the strongest repudiation. It is to hate something with utter disdain.

What do you hate? Evil? When you love someone it's not just a kind feeling. You are so passionately devoted to them that you hate every evil thing that might be incompatible with that person's highest welfare and flourishing. You hate any sin that creeps in, any danger that lurks and anything that stunts their spiritual growth. And you pray against it. If you love someone, you hate any sin in your heart or any foulness coming out of your mouth that would harm that person. Love is a moral act that stands against anything that doesn't point someone to Christ. Hate, that's one side of this coin. The other side has a more positive tone. Hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Your translation may say "cling to what is good." It's another strong word. It means to glue or bond yourself and the ones you love to the ultimate good found in Jesus so that your highest and best expression of love is getting the person you love to Jesus. Take her to the cross of Jesus, let her see His perfect life, His atoning death on the cross,

and let her wonder in the glory of Christ's resurrection. Let her see that believing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus will save her.

I want you to do an exercise with me. Think about the people you love the most in this world: friend, parent, fiancé, sister or brother, spouse, children. Okay, this passage is informing you how to love those people with Christian love. It even tells you how to pray for them. Expand that circle to the people in this church, other Christians. It's how you talk or post on social media, hating evil and holding fast to the ultimate good that is Christ. Real Christians really love. Love is discerning.

### **Love is committed.**

What a great verse verse 10 is. <sup>10</sup>*Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.* Here is the deep-seated affection and respect that Christian people in the church have for one another. This verse has two analogies - the first is family and the other is competition. Family. Be devoted. Love one another with brotherly affection! There are two words for love. *Philostorgos* is to be devoted to each other, like a parent is to a child. *Philadelphia* is brotherly love. Paul is bringing family love into the equation to help us understand how we are to love each other in the body of Christ. Just as you don't choose your biological family, you don't choose your spiritual family. And if you are in a family, you love each other even if you get on one another's nerves. If you have a brother or a sister, you might argue, irritate, and even get annoyed with him or her. But you let somebody else come and mess with your brother, watch what happens! Paul is saying that's how we love each other in the church because none of us deserve to be in this family. We are all motherless children, unloved and lost. Yet while we were still sinners, separated from God, Christ died for us, taking the debt certificate of our sin and nailing it to the cross. And then bringing back a certificate of adoption that promises in Christ we are children of God and brothers and sisters to one another, committed to each other like family.

That's one analogy. Family. There is another analogy. It is competition. Look with me at the rest of this verse. 10b - *Outdo one another in showing honor.* Outdo – to compete. One of the things that most Americans have a grasp on is competition. Many of us live like everything is a competition. One of the most painful things during this pandemic has been the lack of sports competition. Even here on our staff there's always a competition. It could be who can go the

longest without a haircut, who can lose the most weight, who can lift the most weight, who can run the fastest or longest. Even now, on my iPhone watch, I have 5 competitions for activity going on. But notice the competition here that's supposed to go on inside the church. *Outdo one another in showing honor*. It's the only competition sanctioned in the church and it's the one we fail the most at. And its been going on since James and John had their mother ask Jesus if they could sit on thrones beside Jesus. Paul knows how we are, how pride and personalities and competitiveness can ruin a church. We all want to feel like we are right and important. And here Paul offers up a radical command of Christian love. That is if you want to compete; let's see who can honor and appreciate who the most. Isn't that what Paul said in Philippians 2:3? *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. This is a radical call of appreciation, humility and forgoing what you feel like you deserve.

This is Christianity. This is what Paul meant when he said in Philippians 2:5-8, *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*. And because of that death on the cross and His resurrection, any person who turns from your sin and believes that Jesus took your sin and that God raised Him from the dead, will be saved. But not only saved, you will be loved by God and by His people, the church. Because real Christians really love. Love is discerning, love is committed and love is found at the cross of Christ.

*(Pastor prays)*