

Romans
12:9-21



Authentic

Love



Romans

12:9-21



Introduction

In contrast with much of Romans, the problems with this section do not so much concern understanding exactly what Paul means. The degree of difficulty is striving to put into action what he is teaching! The heading of this section, *“Authentic Love,”* attempts to convey the actual nature of the opening phrase of 12:9, which we will discuss momentarily.

Paul begins to expound upon the authentic love in this texts, and then, he returns to use the verb *“to love”* (ἀγαπάω) three times and the noun *“love”* (ἀγάπη) once in 13:8-10. Thus, it seems most proper to view all of 12:9 – 13:10 as Paul’s explanation of authentic love. Love, then, not only includes the items detailed in today’s teaching, but also involves submitting to the authorities (cf. 13:1-7).

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Introduction

This love defining section vividly demonstrates how Paul's God-given understanding of love stands in sharp contrast with what the world perceives love to be. In this fallen world, love degenerates into seeking favorable treatment from someone or, in the least, garnering a favorable response. Such *"tit for tat"* love offered only selectively and exclusively is conditioned upon personal satisfaction. Paul clearly calls such *"love"* hypocritical.

Hence, it is clearly evident in our culture that love consists primarily on subjective emotional feelings and/or sexual gratification. Paul engages the matter of proper and improper sexual behavior in other letters (cf. 1 Cor 6; Eph 5; Col 3; 1 Thess 4); yet, and strikingly, he only addresses improper sexual conduct quite briefly in Roman (1:24, 26-27; 13:13).

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Finally, in response to God's love and mercies shown to us, Paul intends to elicit love from us chiefly by portraying what love is in action, rather than issuing injunctions which orders us to produce love...which isn't possible, anyhow!

Introduction

Romans

12:9



The
Source of
Authentic
Love

⁹*Love [is] without hypocrisy...:*

Paul begins with a straightforward statement, which may lead you to ask, first of all, the classic Lutheran question: “What does that mean?”

You could then ask a follow up, which may be more precise, “*What does authentic love look like?*” Paul answers these two questions beginning with the last half of v.9 through v.21 by explaining what *authentic love* looks like in action!

Romans

12:9



The
Source of
Authentic
Love

⁹Love [is] without hypocrisy...:

Before we proceed, you must understand how Paul uses the noun “love” (ἀγάπη). His use of love in Romans communicates the love of the Holy Triune God: The Father (5:5, 8; 8:39), Christ Jesus (8:35), and through the Holy Spirit (5:5; and soon in 15:30). His love is for you!!! The same is also true of the cognate verb (ἀγαπάω) (cf. 8:37; 9:13, 25). Only here does Paul begin to use ἀγάπη for the Christians’ love. Hence, love from God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit to you then serves as the foundation and motivation for all Christ-like behavior.

Romans

12:9b



The
Source of
Authentic
Love

^{9b}...*abhorring the evil*, *clinging to the good*,

Paul now begins his rather long discussion of *authentic love* by asserting that it entails “*abhorring evil!*” The verb that Paul uses for “*abhorring*” is related to the word that he has used to describe fallen humanity as they are “*hating God*” (1:30). Paul then follows with another very strong adjective: “*evil*” (πονηρόν)! Properly, this word means pain-ridden, emphasizing the inevitable agonies (misery) that always come with evil.

Paul then counters by stating, “*clinging to the good*” which conveys an emphatic, even an intimate sense that is Christ-like. Hence, in Romans 12, we see how Paul demonstrate this general content and we also see the same structure in 1 Thess 5:21b-22.

Romans

12:10a



Familial Ties

^{10a}...in brotherly love [showing] familial affection for one another,

Paul now adds a comment about Christians relating to each other in “*genuine love*” by using two other “love” terms: “*brotherly love*” (φιλαδελφία) and “*familial affection*” (φιλόστοργος). First, “*brotherly love*” is a word that most of us can understand (and of which we have a city in PA named). This noun properly refers to the love of brothers and sisters!

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12:10a

Familial Ties

^{10a}...in brotherly love [showing] familial affection for one another,

Secondly, “*familial affection*” refers to parental love or the reciprocal tenderness of parents and children. Paul is describing the love that Christians are to have for each other should be that of the love found in a loving family! As Paul has already stated, “*we, the many, are one body in Christ*” (12:5), so as these members “*do not have the same function*” (12:4), so in a family there is also a difference between grandparents, parents, and children. This leads into the next section, which details how Christians honor and serve one another!

Romans

12:10b-11



Love in
Action!

^{10b}... in honor leading the way for one another,
¹¹in zeal not [being] lazy, in the Spirit blazing,
serving as slaves to the Lord,

Paul's next string of statements depicts actual expressions of authentic love within the Christian family and he concludes with yet another "love" term "*love of strangers*" (v.13). In 10b, Paul makes an important statement that is awkward when translated into English. Essentially, he is saying that you must not wait to be honored by others, and do not seek honor for self (cf. St. Luke 14:7-11; 20:45-47). Instead, take the initiative in honoring others! This is very hard in our present day culture, but this is a sign of authentic love that Christians are to exhibit!

Romans

12:10b-11

Love in
Action!

***11in zeal not [being] lazy, in the Spirit blazing,
serving as slaves to the Lord,***

Before Paul begins to describe negative characteristics, he begins v.11 by providing a positive attribute, **“in zeal”** (τῇ στουδῇ). This is a very interesting phrase that uses the very same noun that Paul employed to commend the **“zeal/eagerness”** of those in leadership roles in v.8. Therefore, zeal comes forth out of love and gives it warmth, in sincerity! Then Paul counters the positive with an opposing negative expression: **“not [being] lazy”** (ὀκνηρός). This is passive laziness that is an oxymoron to being a **“living sacrifice”** (v.1).

Romans

12:10b-11



Love in
Action!

***11**in zeal not [being] lazy, in the Spirit blazing,
serving as slaves to the Lord,*

Paul uses a Greek present participle (ζέοντες) that can mean “bubbling,” “boiling,” or “blazing.” Literally, it’s to “*be deeply committed to something, with the implication of accompanying desire (love).*” Thus, the Christian’s “**blazing**” is the result of the Holy Spirit’s work in us and through us. “**Blazing**” also captures the essence well since both the OT and NT regularly connect fire with the Spirit (i.e., Pentecost, Acts 2:2-4). Together with “*...serving as slaves to the Lord...*” reminds us that being set on fire by the Holy Spirit leads to our service to the Lord. It’s the Holy Spirit who drives the authentic love within us that is self-sacrificial and a willing enslavement to the Lord!

Romans

12:12



Hope and
its
Companio
ns

¹²rejoicing in hope, enduring amid pressure, holding fast to prayer,

Now Paul offers three brief portrayals of authentic love in action! The first two have deep roots in Romans. In chapter 4, Paul discusses Abraham's "**hope**", built on faith. As with Abraham's hope, the hope of the Christian conveys a confident expectation, a notion rooted in faith in God's Word, in Christ! We know that God is trustworthy to fulfill all His promises! And, by the way, in the secular Greek culture, and even in ours today, hope was/is an unknown fate.

"Enduring amid pressure" also connects with what God seeks to accomplish when various sufferings take place in our lives. As Paul is making clear, **authentic love** flows out from God's love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. All our blazing in the Spirit stems from His gift of love and that the pressures that have and are to come cannot separate us from Christ's love.

Romans

12:12



Hope and
its
Companio
ns

**12 rejoicing in hope, enduring amid pressure,
holding fast to prayer,**

In the meantime, as we journey through this barren land, whatever we may encounter along the way, our responsive love, authentic love, exhibits itself very confidently by “**holding fast to prayer.**” Surprisingly, this is the first time that Paul uses the common noun for “prayer” (προσευχή). As we studied in Hebrews, because of our Lord’s work, we now have “**freedom of speech**” and can cast all our cares on Him, and He cares for us. Paul understands and clearly communicates that the Spirit enables, empowers, and encourages all the actions which Paul calls for and forth in v.12.

Romans

12:13a



Sharing
With and
Serving
Strangers

^{13a}sharing for the needs of the holy ones, pursuing the love of strangers.

Paul is now preparing his listeners for his exposition on how and why we are to share our *authentic love* for those outside of the Christian congregation. But before he does so, he closes by ensuring that Christians understand their general display of *authentic love* in action when **“sharing for the needs of the holy ones, pursuing the love of strangers.”**

The first clause refers to supplying the physical necessities of your fellow Christian. The important word **“needs”** (χρείαις) indicates a focus on material poverty. This is your ongoing expression of *authentic love*. Thus Paul, like our Lord Jesus, urges you to have fellowship with, to participate in, the **“needs”** of your fellow saints (cf. Matt 10:42; 25:34-40). These needs, put simply, are food, clothing, and shelter.

Romans

12:13b



Sharing
With and
Serving
Strangers

^{13b}pursuing the love of strangers.

In light of what Paul has just written, he now moves to the “**love of strangers**” (φιλοξενίαν), which seems like an expansion away from “**holy ones**” to “**everyone.**” However, the Greek noun that is used is a compound word. It joins together two separate words to convey a single thought that’s not evident in English. The two words are “**friend**” (φίλος) and “**stranger**” (ξένος) with the literal meaning of entertaining in one’s home; to show hospitality. This obligation to be hospitable was and is highly regarded in oriental society. Hospitality is a good translation, however, it is actually much deeper than that; it actually means to provide food, shelter, and other necessary essentials.

Romans

12:13b



Sharing
With and
Serving
Strangers

^{13b}pursuing the love of strangers.

God regularly reinforces this idea in His Word. Throughout the NT, we see that Christians were to be willing to entertain “**strangers**,” those not in one’s family. As you may recall, to receive or to reject an emissary, an itinerant minister(s), is to either receive or reject Jesus (St. Matt 10:40-42; St. Luke 10:9-12, 16).

At the same time, the participle that Paul uses “**pursuing**” (διώκοντες) communicates more than just simply openness to hosting other Christians. It means that *authentic love* actually “*seeks out*” opportunities to demonstrate such love for “**strangers!**” The Greek verb also provides a link to the next section as Paul will use this verb again (διώκω), yet with a starkly different sense, that being: “**persecuting**” (διώκοντας).

Romans

12:14



Blessing Persecutors

¹⁴Bless the ones who persecute [you]; bless and do not curse!

Authentic Love Extends Beyond the Christian Community (14-21)

This section of chapter 12 now moves beyond the bounds of the Christian community and St. Paul will begin to demonstrate the necessity for *Authentic Love* for all people, even the non-Christian. Even more astounding, Paul asserts that you are to show *authentic love* to those who persecute you and Paul is following the commands of our Lord from His Sermon on the Mount (cf. St. Matt 5:44; St. Luke 6:27-28).

Romans

12:14



Blessing Persecutors

14 Bless the ones who persecute [you]; bless and do not curse!

You must understand that persecution, in all its various forms, is unavoidable. The commands of our Lord, and St. Paul, were and remain countercultural! Paul uses the verb **“to bless”** (εὐλοεῖτε) with the meaning of the comparable Hebrew terminology of the OT, and not of the Greek culture (to speak well or praise another). The epitome of **“blessing”** is the Aaronic Benediction, which you have been blessed with today, with its Tri-fold invocation of **Yahweh** to bestow His grace, favor, and peace (Num 6:24-26). Hence, for the Christian to **“bless”** their persecutors is to ask that they too might, through repentance and faith, receive the fullness of God’s gracious blessings in Christ Jesus, in fulfillment of the Aaronic Benediction.

Romans

12:14



Blessing
Persecutors

¹⁴Bless the ones who persecute [you]; bless and do not curse!

Conversely, to “**curse**” (καταρᾶσθε) would be to request of (or even command) God that they be cut off from His grace in Christ, which is contrary to His salvific will (cf. Romans 10); however, we do know that the final state of the unbeliever, due to their unbelief, will be God’s wrath. Lastly, we, as our Lord’s children, do respond to His command, in that our response to persecution and hatred is one of *authentic love* which is unique.

Romans

12:15

Empathy
For All

15To rejoice with rejoicing ones; to weep with weeping ones,

This verse is filled with infinitives, which means that it shows pure action...or the action of *authentic love*! Therefore, *authentic love* means to **“rejoice with rejoicing ones”** and to **“weep with weeping ones.”** How does this relate to those outside of the Christian community? By following Paul’s directive, to engage those outside of the church in such a matter would be appropriate and effective. It would shine the light of our Lord into the darkness! Sadly, all too often, we do just the opposite; due to our fallen state, all too often we weep (**are green with envy**) over those who are happy; and when our brother fails, we leap for joy!

Romans

12:16



A Proper
Mindset

16having the same mindset toward one another, not setting your mind on the haughty things, but associating with the lowly ones. **Do not become wise beyond yourselves;**

Authentic love, among believers, consist of these four connecting clauses:

1. having the same mindset toward one another; (set your mind on the single goal of the congregation being united in grace!)
2. not setting your mind on the haughty things; (your only reliable source of self-worth come from God's mercy on you for the sake of Christ Jesus, your Lord!)
3. associating with the lowly ones; (this demonstrates what God the Father is like in choosing that which appears foolish and weak (cf. St. Matt 5:3-5; 11:29) and,
4. **do not become wise beyond yourselves** (see #2).

Romans

12:17



Love for All:

Even in
Response to
Evil

¹⁷giving back to no one evil in place of evil, but being preoccupied with the excellent things before all people,

Once again, this is *authentic love* in action and it is radical! Paul begins a new thought by the use of **evil** (κακός), twice. So, rather than returning evil for the evil done to you, Paul describes *authentic love* as “*being preoccupied with the excellent things before all people.*” A renewed mindset, therefore, involves thinking beforehand about doing what is, in any respect, unobjectionable, blameless, or excellent, so that others can clearly see and understand.

However...who determines what is excellent? Let's read 2 Cor 8:21; and Paul draws upon Proverbs 3:4! St. Paul is drawing us to conclude that there's a both/and sense of excellence which extends out, and ought to be acknowledged as such, in the public square.

Romans

12:18



Peace!

Without
and Within

¹⁸if possible [in] that which is from you, being at peace with all people.

Paul now adds a ***double qualification*** that, in the first, might not always be possible; followed by the second which expresses “*insofar as it depends on you.*” Jesus has already extended this idea by blessing “***the ones making peace***” (St. Matt 5:9); and that we are to “***be at peace with one another***” (St. Mark 9:50). So then, if God’s children live in peace with one another by the Gospel, this will display what is truly “**excellent**” to the unbelieving world (cf. St. John 8:31; 13:35).

Romans
12:19 w/
Dt. 32:35

God's
Vengeanc
e

19While not avenging yourselves, loved ones, rather, give a place for the wrath [of God]; indeed, it stands written: “Vengeance [is] for me; I myself will pay [it] back’ says the Lord.”

You have been wronged! You may be persecuted! And living in peace, in this earthly life, may prove to be nearly impossible. In such cases, your fallen human nature wants to react by striking back, repaying evil with evil, and even taking vengeance on your enemy. Yet, Paul reminds you that *authentic love* does not respond in such a way. So Paul reminds you that the One who will exact His vengeance upon your enemies is God.

Vengeance is left in the hand of the Lord since He reserves it for Himself.

Romans 12:19 w/ Dt. 32:35

God's Vengeance

19While not avenging yourselves, loved ones, rather, give a place for the wrath [of God]; indeed, it stands written: “Vengeance [is] for me; I myself will pay [it] back’ says the Lord.”

Paul makes it very clear that God will avenge as he quotes Dt. 32:35. The Greek word for vengeance is **ἐκδίκησις**, which literally means a judgment which fully executes the core-values (or standards) of the particular judge.

In the case of our Lord Jesus, His judgment will be perfect, holy, and **FINAL!** So the sense is that our Lord's vengeance will be fully poured out on to His enemies (and by extension your enemies) on Judgment Day. All who have done evil against His saints will not ***“get away with it.”*** God's great day of wrath is clearly outlined in Rev 11:18; 19:15 and it's wise for you to remember that God's judgment, wrath, and vengeance are far greater than yours!

Romans

12:20-21



Responding
to Enemies
And
Overcoming
Evil with
Good!

20But “if ever your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is ever thirsty, give him a drink. For while doing this, you will heap burning coals of fire upon his head.”

21Do not be conquered by the evil, but conquer the evil [thing] with the good.

You have the blessed assurance that God now currently acts through earthly authorities, which moves you to respond with *authentic love*. This love does not remain passive in the face of evil, but goes the “extra mile” by responding with active excellence and blessing. What Paul is calling for matches the radical sentiments expressed by our Lord Jesus (*The Sermon on the Mount* (cf. St. Matt 5:38-44)). Paul also calls those (you) who have received God’s love (since you are “*loved ones*” (ἀγαπητοί) to exhibit or, better yet, reflect that *authentic love* even in the midst of the evils of this world.

Romans

12:20-21



Responding
to Enemies
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Good!

20But “if ever your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is ever thirsty, give him a drink. For while doing this, you will heap burning coals of fire upon his head.”

Accordingly, the metaphorical language of v.20 is found in Proverbs 25:21-22a. However, what exactly does Paul mean? Directly after citing that the Lord will carry out His vengeance, Paul moves the force of our actions in a completely different direction with the use of “[B]ut” (ἀλλά)! At times, in English, “but” can be used to negate, that is, to make a clear positive statement and then to reverse it with a negative. However, in this case, Paul’s use of “but,” still as an adversative; yet, in the opposite direction. While we give place to God and His righteous, judicial vengeance, we are to show genuine, authentic love...even to our enemies.

Romans

12:20-21



Responding
to Enemies
And
Overcoming
Evil with
Good!

20 But “if ever your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is ever thirsty, give him a drink. For while doing this, you will heap *burning coals of fire* upon his head.”

What about the “*burning coals of fire*” (ἄνθρακας πυρὸς)? Paul’s view of the “coals of fire” is a metaphor for “*the burning pangs of shame.*” Acting kindly toward one’s enemy is meant to lead them to be ashamed by their conduct or words, and, perhaps, to lead them to repent and turn to the Lord whose love we embody.

However, we also know that, according to v.19 and along with 1:18 – 3:20 (e.g., 2:5, 8; 3:5), provides ample support for acknowledging that God will fully carry out His vengeance by *heaping coals of His divine wrath* on all those who resist the call to repentance.

Romans

12:20-21



Responding
to Enemies
And
Overcoming
Evil with
Good!

20But “if ever your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is ever thirsty, give him a drink. For while doing this, you will heap burning coals of fire upon his head.”

At the same time, God does yearn for salvation for all. His patient kindness is intended to lead all men to repentance (2:4). Equally, the overall content of Romans 12 indicates that providing food, drink, and shelter for an enemy serves as a concrete demonstration of *“love without hypocrisy”* (v.9). Paul also calls on all of God’s children to refuse to retaliate against those who do evil to you. Instead, you are to “bless the ones who persecute [you]” (v.14) and to strive to peace with all (v.18).

Romans

12:20-21



Responding
to Enemies
And
Overcoming
Evil with
Good!

21Do not be conquered by the evil, but conquer the evil [thing] with the good.

Paul closes Romans 12 by asserting that responding with good points forward to the ultimate hope of actually overcoming evil with the good (v.21). Therefore, Paul's exhortation should primarily be understood as desiring a positive final outcome, even and especially for an enemy! And, finally, the command to "**conquer**" (νικά) stands firmly grounded in the victory already accomplished, for you, by your Lord Jesus Christ; even though the final vanquishing of all your enemies is yet to come!

*NEXT
SUNDAY*

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

13:1-7

**Submitting to Earthly
Authorities**

PEACE
IN CHRIST
JESUS



AND BEGIN TO
PONDER OUR
NEXT STUDY!