Living as a Community of Love
Scripture Text: Romans 12:9-13

Introduction

The last time we were in Romans we read about the church being a community. There is more to living as a Christian than your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is paramount to your faith, but there is more. God expects us to live within a community. This passage defines something else about being a community of faith. If someone were to look at us and ask, “What distinguishes you folks from others,” what would it be? It could be many things, but it should be primarily love! We are to live as a community of love. Love is a word often used and also often misused. Love is a thing that is desired, talked about and even sung about so often. Many artists have made their greatest hits singing about this thing called love. Look at the following.

- John Lennon once said “All You Need is Love”.
- The Righteous Brothers claimed that some had lost that lovin’ feeling.
- Queen wrote about “A Crazy Little Thing Called Love”.
- Huey Lewis once sung about the “Power of Love”.
- Stevie Wonder just wanted to call to say “I love you”.
- Whitney Houston claimed to have found “The Greatest Love of All”.
- The Christian group, D.C. Talk, taught us that “Love is a Verb”.

Many artists, many people, speak about love. Even Jesus spoke about it. A lawyer once asked Jesus to tell him what the greatest commandment was. Jesus said that loving God and loving each other fulfills all of God’s commandments (Matthew 22:34-40). Love is important. Love is needed. We desire for this church to be a loving church, a place where love is experienced. In fact, we have tried to capture the importance of love within our church community in the mission statement for this church.

At Good Hope Baptist, we are Sharing the good news about Jesus, creating a Loving place, where His people are Discerning the work He has called them to do, and where His people are Equipping one another to do His work.

What is love, though? What does it look like? It seems that the idea of love has been of major importance in the news lately. Some have long said that two people should have the freedom to love whomever they choose. That sounds nice, in fact, I would say that it is biblical. The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself, which I believe includes all people, male and female. But, the idea of love has been used to say that people ought to be able to be in an intimate, loving, and sexual relationship regardless of their gender. In fact, the Supreme Court just ruled that in the name of love, two men or two women have the fundamental right to be married, because no one should be denied this basic right regardless of whom they love. No matter what the Supreme Court says, or anyone else, God remains sovereign, He sets the rules, and He is also not surprised by what the world does.

Scripture quoted from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.
What is misunderstood about love, I think, is that love does not equate to anything goes. There are limits to what love is. That is why pornography, fornication, adultery, polygamy, pedophilia, bestiality, and yes, homosexuality are sins. These things are not appropriate expressions of love, no matter what people feel about it. God has called these things sin and many are unnatural sins. Not everyone agrees with what God has written in His Word concerning these things. Loving people who live contrary to God’s commands does not mean we have to agree with them. You do not have to agree with someone in order to love them, but you do have to actually love them. In this passage, we find a concise collection of statements for how we ought to live as a community of love. In this passage, we see how we ought to love those in the church. What these verses deal with are basic to effective Christian living.

**True Love is Genuine and Hates Evil**

For one thing, love is not some feeling or sentiment. It is not words but action. Our love has to be genuine, not counterfeit. That is the first statement Paul made in this passage.

*Romans 12:9* Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

This passage begins by calling our attention to the absolute primacy of genuine love. Some view Paul’s exhortation to love as the theme of this passage that is then expanded in the following sequence of statements. I think that is helpful, as the rest of the passage is a description of genuine love. Our love should be genuine or sincere. The word that is used here is related to the word we get “hypocrite”. In classical Greek drama, the hypocrite, or actor, would wear a face-mask to cover himself or herself. What the audience saw was not the real person, but a cover up. In like manner, our love for one another needs to be the real thing. How often do we wear masks and claim that we really love another? How often do we say we love someone, but in reality we are really just putting on an act? True love is free from all pretense and hypocrisy.

Genuine love does not mean we are soft on evil, though. Some have the wrong view about love. They think we should tolerate any sin in the name of love. This passage, however, does not say we are to just love people and ignore wrongdoing. The world may tell us that. The second statement in this verse tells us we are to abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. This is very similar to what the prophet Amos wrote, “Hate evil, and love good” (Amos 5:15). Think about this: God is love (1 John 4:8). God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son (John 3:16-17). Yet, God’s love is not just demonstrated with Christ’s sacrifice for us, but in His justice to punish evil and to make all things new. The Swiss Protestant theologian Emil Brunner once wrote that that love, “If it is not to degenerate into sentimentality…[it] must include a strict objectivity: hatred against evil, faithful adherence to what is good.” In fact, we are to cling to what is good, like a husband should cling to his wife.

To love God is to hate evil. Unfortunately, our current society and culture has been shaped by the forces of Satan that has lulled many believers into a state of general tolerance for sin. For instance, one church member from a previous church I attended
told me that homosexuality is not a sin. I am not sure what Bible that person was reading, but my Bible clearly says that it is an abomination. In this letter to the Romans, Paul called it “dishonorable”, “shameless,” and “contrary to nature” (Romans 1:26-27). I believe that precludes anything such as so-called same-sex marriage. Now, where the Church has gone wrong, when it has actually confronted that behavior, is to attack it (or more likely the person) and not deal with other sins. The Bible that says homosexuality is a sin, is the same one that also calls lust, fornication, adultery, greed, divisiveness, envy, pride, gossip and other things a sin. Why can Christians so readily attack one sin and never be bothered by others? Which sins, what evil, do you not hate?

Hate is such a strong word for a people who should be loving. We are to be a loving people, not a hateful people. While that is true, we are to hate evil because it is the enemy of all that leads to Christlikeness. God is angry at sin and we should be, too. God wants each of us to be like His Son. C. H. Spurgeon once wrote, “The further from a poisonous snake the better, and the further from worldly conformity the better.” That is why He saved us in the first place — to become like His Son (Romans 8:29). But we are to do it by genuine love for each other. We are to lovingly respond to others when we see evil, immorality, and injustice. Warren Wiersbe once said, “Truth without love is brutality, and love without truth is hypocrisy.” I like this quote because it emphasizes the importance of both truth and love. One without the other simply does not cut it.

True Love is Selfless

Have you ever heard the statement “blood is thicker than water”? This basically means that kinship, those within a family, are closer than those outside the family. In a sense, this is true of the Church. The Church is one huge family that is connected by blood. It is not your blood or mine, but the blood of Jesus Christ. Our love for one another should be like the love a family should have for each other. Look at the following verse.

Romans 12:10  
10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Some translations read “brotherly affection” or “family affection,” but it could really be “brotherly love”. It is the same word used for the city of brotherly love — philadelphia. The church is a family, or at least it should be. If we are followers of Christ, we have been adopted into God’s family and we are each brothers and sisters to one another. We ought to have the kind of love that all families should have. Being in a church family excludes rugged individualism or being a Lone Ranger Christian who thinks he can do it alone. It means commitment to the family. Members of a family do not leave because there is conflict or disagreement. They work out their differences. So should the church.

As a result of our affectionate love for one another, we ought to never seek our own good. We ought to outdo one another in showing honor. This means we show deference to one another. We have already seen this mentioned before when Paul wrote about being humble (vs. 3). We should treat each person as the most important person in the church — aside from Christ, of course. This idea is similar to what Paul encouraged the
Philippians to do. He told them to consider others better than themselves (Philippians 2:3). When members of the church spend more time promoting themselves or their selfish desires, they show more love for themselves than for each other. Be selfless.

**True Love Motivates Us to Passionate Service**

Sometimes it is not easy to love. In fact, sometimes, it is downright hard. True love labors. True love is passionate. Look at the next verse.

*Romans 12:11*  
*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

Another way to say this might be to “never be lazy, but work hard.” But possibly a better way to understand this is to never let your zeal for the Lord wane. This seems to make better sense with the rest of the verse. Christians ought to be fervent and passionate. We ought to be living for Christ with enthusiasm and energy. Christians ought to also be the happiest people in the world, and yet, many go around dejected and hopeless. Our energy and enthusiasm comes not from our human efforts, but is rooted in the Spirit living with us. We are to draw upon the Holy Spirit Who dwells within each of us.

Our love for the Lord and for each other should also motivate us to serve the Lord. God has called us together to be on mission for Him. We ought to be passionately working but remember for Whom we serve. A church does not exist to serve itself, but exists to serve the Lord. We are not here for ourselves, but we are here to serve Jesus Christ. Once we stop doing that, we cease being the Church. Regardless of how cultural issues are decided, and no matter what sort of authority Christian values have in culture, we must always be about Jesus’ mission. We ought to be passionate about it. If your passion for service has diminished, pray God will renew that passion.

**True Love is Patient and Prayerful**

The Church may be looking at times of suffering. In fact, we are promised in scripture that we will be hated. Scripture tells us that we can expect persecution. There may be a time coming soon when preaching God’s Word becomes hate speech. What should the Church do? How should we respond? Look at the next verse in this passage.

*Romans 12:12*  
*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

This passage tells us to rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulation, and to be constant in prayer. Should we fear the future? No. We serve a God Who holds the future in His hands. He is not surprised by anything that happens in this world. Should we be angry when sin is celebrated? Absolutely! We ought to still be genuine and seek that which is good. This world will have its full share of difficulties (John 16:33), but the believer is to be steadfast in time of trouble. The realization that life is to some extent an obstacle course keeps a person from being surprised when things do not go as planned. We do not need to fear for we have the greatest hope. If we are in Christ, we do not have to fear the future when it is in His hands. Our God has overcome. Our God is in control.

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Afflictions and suffering will come, but they should be borne patiently. That is easier said than done, but I did not say it. God’s Word says it. The source of spiritual help during such times is prayer. So Paul counseled his readers, “Be constant in prayer”. One of the signs in a video about the Emanuel AME church in Charleston read “Violence is not healthy.” In the aftermath of that horrible tragedy where one lone gunmen entered a church bible study group and killed nine people, the people of that church and community came together in love. They also came together in prayer. In the most difficult of circumstances, true love overcomes through hope, steadfastness, and prayer. True love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7).

**True Love Opens Our Eyes to the Needs of Others**

Lastly, true love opens our eyes to the needs of others and moves us to help when we can. Look at the final verse in this passage.

*Romans 12:13*  
13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Paul indicated the moral responsibility of meeting the needs of others. Because we are members of Christ’s Body, we must take care of one another in every way. When someone is in need, others who have the means should share what they have in order to meet that need, whether financial or daily necessities. This was a trademark of believers in the early church. Look through the book of Acts and you will see the church regularly caring for the needs of others. Is there someone you know who is in need? Can you meet that need, or at least help meet that need? Can you also give to another with no expectation of thanks or return? Let love be genuine and let it be generous.

This does not mean necessarily helping only those in your community. In a day when inns were scarce and not always desirable, it was critical for believers to extend hospitality to believers and unbelievers who were traveling. Showing hospitality to others was a mark of genuine love for others. In fact, we may never really know who we are helping. The author of Hebrews counseled hospitality to *strangers* because we may perhaps entertain angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2). Jesus said helping others, the least of these, was really helping Him (Matthew 25:35-40). Love Jesus by loving others and caring for them. Let our love for others be an outflow of our love for Christ.

**Conclusion**

In closing, to love genuinely is to live compassionately toward others in the way Jesus Himself has already treated us. We love because we have been loved so much. We will be a master at loving others when we have been mastered by the love of Christ. True love is genuine and it hates evil. True love is selfless. True love motivates us to passionate service. True love is patient and prayerful. True love also opens our eyes to the needs of others. Do you love others without hypocrisy? Is your love for them genuine? If not, go to God in prayer and beg Him to melt your heart with the love He has for you. Pray that you will be so overwhelmed by His love for you that you cannot help but genuinely love others. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!