

## Genuine Love Is Intense!

Romans 12:11

June 11, 2006

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Grace Fellowship Church, Toronto, Ontario

“Delighting in God to the glory of God”

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Ten days ago, something very strange happened! You are familiar with our “million-dollar bill” tracts – there is almost always a supply of them at the back table. On Thursday, June 1, Secret Service agents visited the offices of the Great News Network in Texas and threatened Tim Crawford with arrest for hiding evidence in a counterfeiting investigation and seized 8,300 “million-dollar bills.” The agents explained that someone in North Carolina had attempted to deposit one of the million-dollar bills in a bank account. The address of the Great News Network was on the back, and the Secret Service went into action.

Now, this is really quite funny: The gospel is printed on back of bill. There is no such thing as a million dollar bill anyway – you cannot counterfeit what is not real. The address of the printer was on the back, and “**This is not legal tender**” is emblazoned across the front! The bill’s serial number is JOHN316777. Apparently, some people are easily fooled!

We made the point that love can be counterfeited as well. Last week, in Romans 12, Paul described for us Genuine Love. It is this love that is to mark every one of us, especially as we relate to one another. Sincere love in its attitude is very clear: the man who loves is the man who is repulsed by evil and clings to what is good. This is like climbing a tree to get away from a ferocious dog – you push away with one hand and hold on tight with the other! And this simultaneous repulsion and clinging will give birth to definite actions in the church:

“Love one another with brotherly affection.”

This requires a family-level intensity of commitment to everyone in the church.

“outdo one another in showing honor.”

... and seeking to be the first to find good in everyone in church.

Now, I suggested that Paul used those two words “Genuine Love” as a kind of fixed point or hook from which to hang the whole rest of this chapter. So, in some ways, all the rest of these commands that Paul gives are a fleshing out of genuine love. This morning, I want us to consider the next three imperatives, from Romans 12:11:

“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”

Each of these in some measure is what it means to be an authentic lover – continually sacrificing self by obeying what Truth you know. They describe the lifestyle of a woman or man that loves. We will take each of these in order.

## I. Be Tirelessly Diligent

Paul writes this first command as a negative – do not do this: “Do not be slothful in zeal.” “Slothful” is the idea of shrinking, hesitating, being timid. The slothful servant of Matthew 25 is condemned by the Master:

(Matthew 25:14-30) “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave **five** talents, to another **two**, to another **one**, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

**He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”**

Here the slothful servant is condemned not so much for laziness as for timidity, fear, indecision, shrinking back. This is the very thing Paul warns us against. Do not be shrinking in your zeal – your earnestness, diligence.

Now I think it is worth stopping here for a moment to point something out. The Lord has made each of us differently. Some of us are what is often called Type A personalities – we never stop, we are committed to the task, we are nothing but go, go, go. I often say that my co-elder is on the 2-for-1 plan life plan – living, serving, preaching, loving, staying awake the amount of two men, but in the space of one lifetime. There have been times I have tried to keep up – but *try* is the definitive word. I need sleep. Apparently he does not! And if I try to run at his pace, I will die prematurely!

Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking God works in heaven with cookie-cutters and that everyone ought to function at the same capacity. But nothing could be further from the truth. Some people need very little rest and can't stand still. Others require more peace and solitude in one day than their brothers could handle in a month. We must apply the command to each of our situations. One man's zeal is another man's standing still. The point for both men, though, is to not shrink or hesitate or grow slothful in the zeal that matches their personality and giftedness. It is possible that the man moving at a much slower pace is being much more faithful to this particular command than the man running at 200 km/h.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Are you zealous? Are you earnest? Are you diligent? In particular – are you zealous in loving the brotherhood? Are you diligently seeking to offer up your own life on the altar? Are you earnestly seeking to renew your mind? Are you passionately pursuing Christ in your heart and day to day life? Or, have you grown hesitant in looking for good in others? Are you being slothful in that “rigid loyalty bathed in kind affection.”? Hear this warning and ask yourself: Am I coasting? There is no coasting in Christian obedience. We need to seek after being diligent. There are many things to interfere with this: our fears, our laziness, our forgetfulness... so we must consider this Tireless Diligence as a spiritual discipline.

George Whitefield, in whose 34 year public ministry preached 18,000 times, traveled over the ocean five times, preached all over Britain, Scotland and the eastern seaboard of America, and was the means through which God saved upwards of hundreds of thousands of souls, said near the end of his life: “I am ashamed I have lived so long and done so little.”

William Grimshaw, who lived from 1708 to 1763 and was called the “Apostle of the North” (Haworth in Yorkshire) said, “When I die, I shall then have my greatest grief and my greatest joy: my greatest grief that I have done so little for Jesus, and my greatest joy that Jesus has done so much for me.”

## **II. Be Set On Fire by the Spirit**

The next command from Paul comes with its own share of controversy – over the word SPIRIT. Is he talking about our *internal spirit* or is he referring to the *indwelling Holy Spirit*? The answer is not that easy to determine. The grammar would allow for either interpretation and so would the context! So, I am not sure we can be utterly dogmatic on which of these Paul intended. It is appealing to pick both – and “let the reader decide!” Either way there is much overlap.

It is difficult to think of how our spirit could be boiling apart from the Holy Spirit. And the boiling action of the Holy Spirit would presumably have to take place on our human spirit. So, one could suggest that Paul would be happy with either. I am going to land my plane on the side of the river that says this is a reference to the Holy Spirit. “Be boiling in fervency in the Holy Spirit.” You can choose the other if you will, but I think that Paul is saying something quite important here. Whereas in the first part of the verse he calls on all people to not grow lax in their zeal, he balances that out, as it were, by reminding them that they can do nothing apart from the Lord.

(John 15:5) “Jesus said: ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.’”

The greatest zeal on earth is spiritually powerless apart from Christ. There is no question that Paul was a zealous man! It was a part of his natural constitution – evident both before and after his conversion. But he is most careful to say things like this after he is saved:

(1 Corinthians 15:9-11) “For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

(Colossians 1:28-29) “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”

Here is the balance of great and energetic zeal – in full dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is the same kind of thing he urges upon the Philippians:

(Philippians 2:12-13) “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

How is it that we find this to be true of us? I think it is through pursuing these two things at once: a tireless diligence and a boiling Holy Spirit-fervency.

Now we may feel uncomfortable at the thought of experiencing more of the Holy Spirit. After all, we are sealed by the Spirit at the moment of conversion. We are gifted by the Spirit for the work of the ministry and the unity of the Body. These things take place in every true Christian. Isn't it just those crazy charismatic-wackos who look for more of the Holy Spirit? It may be. That does not mean they are wrong and we are right.

Let me be clear – not for one moment do I believe there is some kind of second-blessing, post-conversion experience needed in order to live the Spirit-filled life. That being said, you cannot ignore these passages. First, those passages that warn us against experiencing less of the Spirit's ministry:

(1 Thessalonians 5:19) “Do not quench the Spirit.”

(Ephesians 4:30) “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Second, those passages that command us to seek more of the Spirit's ministry:

(Luke 11:9-13) “And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

(Ephesians 5:17-18) “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,”

The experience of the first Christians confirms that there were *varying degrees of experience of the Holy Spirit in their lives*.

(Acts 4:31) “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit* and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

(2 Timothy 1:5-7) “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you *to fan into flame the gift of God*, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

Are you so full of the Spirit that there is a boiling over in your life? Are you walking with the conscious experience of His presence and ministry through you?

(Romans 8:12-17) “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

What of you? Does His Spirit testify to your spirit that you are a child of God? Are being actively led along by the Spirit? Is there a crying out in your spirit through the Holy Spirit, ‘Abba Father?!’ Are you actively putting inner sin to death through the Holy Spirit?

Surely our experiences of this will vary over time. I think what Paul is saying is to pursue life in the Spirit to the full! Allow the Holy Spirit to set your heart on fire! Give yourself to it! Be made fervent by the Holy Spirit! Use *all your manly strength* to not falter or fatigue in your zeal. And depend on *all of Heaven’s strength* to actually do spiritual good!

### III. Serve Your Master

“Serve the Lord.”

Again, Paul describes what is to be a continual and ongoing activity of the believer: serving the Lord. Some take this last phrase as a kind of summary of all three. There may be something to that – at least in principle. Serving the Lord, then, is using all your strength, in full dependence upon the Spirit of God, to do what you are called to do.

**Offer yourself as a sacrifice** – with all your might – in total dependence on the Spirit

**Renew your mind** – with all your might – in total dependence on the Spirit

**Love the church** – with all your might – in total dependence on the Spirit

**Hate evil** – with all your might – in total dependence on the Spirit

**Cling to good** – with all your might – in total dependence on the Spirit

Make no mistake that when Paul searches for analogies to illustrate this kind of commitment, he writes to Timothy:

(2 Timothy 2:3-6) “Be a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.”

A good soldier... a winning athlete... a hard-working farmer: these describe a real Christian – one who serves His Master with all his might, in full reliance upon the Holy Spirit. All of this quite smashes to pieces the idea that being a Christian is some happy add-on to your life – like getting more RAM on your computer, or two toys in your McHappy Meal! Recall what Paul has already told these Romans and us: “Pursue righteousness with the same intensity you pursued unrighteousness.” Or, what he wrote to Titus:

(Titus 3:14) “And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.”

Is your life full of good works? Will the church mourn your death as they mourned Dorcas' who "was full of good works and acts of charity"? True love is not calculating – it does not give based on what it is going to get. Genuine Love is carried along by the Holy Spirit! Are you boiling with the Spirit? If not, I doubt very much you are a man of love! You may counterfeit love (put on a smile on Sunday mornings, not make waves, etc), but *the Holy Spirit, who's service is in secret*, will see your heart... and one day, you will be rightly exposed for the counterfeit you are. Renew your mind, and let this Truth change your life!

- Be tirelessly diligent,
- empowered by the Holy Spirit
- and Serve your Master!

Amen.

By Pastor Paul W. Martin © Grace Fellowship Church

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