

Sermons through

# Romans

## How Christians Behave

*Romans 12:9-13*

*Part One*

*Love Without Hypocrisy*

*With Study Questions*

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*Romans 12:9-13*

*Part One*

*Love Without Hypocrisy*

***Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; <sup>11</sup> not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; <sup>13</sup> distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality (Romans 12:9-13).***

## **Introduction**

Years ago Loren Leland and I had one of the most unusual experiences in our visit to an underground church in China. The church, which consisted of about six to ten thousand members, was meeting in what appeared to be an abandoned paint factory – at least that’s where they met that day. Being out of favor with the government, they generally withheld the location of their service until early in the morning on the day of. Then, through a networking of phone calls, they managed to inform these thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ of the time and location of church.

The church service would last for many hours, after which hundreds of small vans hurried into paint factory and within minutes it was empty. You couldn’t help get the feeling that they wished they could remain and enjoy each other’s company – to fellowship with one another.

Being raised in a highly evangelized nation like the USA, it has not been the common experience for Christians to be out of favor with their culture. We live in a very Christianized society. Perhaps an unintended consequence of this is a very casual pursuit of brotherly affection – depending on the level of our theological convictions, we can find fellowship almost anywhere. But we need to recognize that for quite some time there has been a hostile trend fomenting toward Christians in the west. It makes us a bit more like the churches we read of the New Testament – surrounded by Romans with their weapons and Greeks with their philosophies.

Unlike China though, we have not yet arrived at that level of disfavor by the axes who boast over the One who swings them (Isaiah 10:15). We don't live in fear of imprisonment or banishment. But if current trends continue, the value – the necessity – of true Christian fellowship will become much more apparent; it will become more obviously critical. The world will not suffer the folly of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18). It will either seek to snuff out the church or (more likely) demand the church simply become a religiously bland extension of its own ideals – something we see these days with great regularity.

Around the same time Loren and I visited China, I visited another church here in the South Bay (for the purpose of possibly leasing the facility). The service began at about 10:00, ended about 11:00 and the entire campus, including the pastor, emptied by about 11:10. But this was not for fear of persecution – as with the church in China; it was simply disinterest. People have plenty of friends. What need is there for the person who has been sitting in the pew across the way for the past ten years whose name I simply can't recall?

One of my great joys is to observe members of our church enjoying each other. I will walk about between the church service and Sunday school and see children playing with each other and people talking and laughing. There is a warmth, and that warmth needs to be fueled. And the fuel is the gospel.

## Review

We are at a place in Romans where the Apostle Paul is challenging us to live in light of the **“mercies of God”**. Having spent eleven chapters explaining the grace and faithfulness of God – having saved us not by works but by grace alone – we are now informed of our **“reasonable service” (Romans 12:1)**. There is a **“renewing of the mind” (Romans 12:2)** which we must pursue and we are now in the chapters which explain in detail what that looks like.

We are not to think too highly of ourselves (Romans 12:3). We are to understand the unity of the body of Christ (Romans 12:4, 5). We are to exercise our God-given gifts for the edification of one another (Romans 12:6-8). The Apostle continues:

***Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good (Romans 12:9).***

## The Debt of Love

Sadly, I sat at my computer feeling jaded at the prospect of writing about love. It is the zenith of virtue yet has been grated into an almost meaningless shibboleth. John Owen wrote:

**“Love,” says an old author, “is the sum and substance of all virtues. Philosophers make justice the queen of virtues; but love is the mother of justice, for it renders to God and to our neighbor what is justly due to them.”**

There is no shortage of passages in Scripture which elevate love as the sum and substance of all virtues. Later in Romans Paul will write that we are to

**Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law (Romans 13:8).**

It is written as if love is a debt we owe to all men rather than a pursuit which falls within our own convenience. A heavenly love is a love which stands at odds with our convenience – a virtuous love is a love which wars against our inclinations and intuitions. I daresay the way love has become almost universally defined (a heartfelt passion and enjoyment of another person) is, according to Jesus, the paltriest kind of love.

**But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:44-48).**

We generally use this passage as an argument for common grace. But the message of the passage is the indiscriminate nature of love. The rain is not picky about where it might fall. We think, during times of drought, that there must be a better way to harness the waters. And that may be true. But our incompetence at building reservoirs does not hinder the rain. It keeps falling – as we are to keep loving. Love is the soul of our unity.

**And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:14).**

## **Objective and Subjective Love**

Two more thoughts about love before we move on. Certainly there is a subjectivity to love which leaves it open to our own interpretations, opinions, emotions and judgments – the feelings part of love. Many relational problems rotate around this subjectivity. A spouse may interpret the tone in their partner’s voice as unloving. We should not be insensitive to the subjectivity of love.

But there is an objectivity of love which is superior and not so open to interpretation. It is fact-based, measurable and observable. All this to say that love is an action based upon a choice. The Apostle John put it this way:

**For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).**

Simply put, we love God and love one another by keeping the commandments (Matthew 22:37-40). You might feel a subjective love for me while lying to me or stealing from me – but objectively, you’re not loving me.

## **Love Without Hypocrisy**

We’re told that our love should be **“without hypocrisy”**. In light of the objectivity of love, it is worthy discussing how so many Christians have lost sight of what the word hypocrisy means and we’ve been duped into embracing the exact opposite of the message conveyed in Scripture. It’s been said:

**The world won’t mind your Christianity provided it contains an acceptable level of hypocrisy; but it must be their kind of hypocrisy. With moderate contempt they will endure the double-minded man who tethers his religious convictions to the post of his home or church but not the public square. The other kind of hypocrite – the one who routinely falls short of his ideals (which is not true hypocrisy but simple, sinful humanity) but seeks to be faithful to them in all spheres – the world will not suffer such a hypocrite as that.**

The point being that hypocrisy is not synonymous with failure. If such were the case, the word would be meaningless for it would describe all of humanity. Hypocrisy pertains to pretense. It was a drama term describing the acting of a stage-player. And here is where it gets tricky.

More than once I have encountered a person who has such contempt for another (and sometimes understandably so) that to seek to love them, even objectively, is amazingly difficult. It runs so counter to their own feelings that the extension of their hand in love feels phony. They will say to me, "When I interact with them in that manner, I feel like a hypocrite." Leaving for now that true love may include rebukes and confrontations, the notion that I feel like a hypocrite when I seek to love someone I view as contemptible betrays a self-idolatry – as if the way I feel is the oracle of truth – as if my own flesh is the shrine. This is nothing but a hallowed carnality. And our contempt for our neighbor should be subsumed by the horror of the darkness of our own unloving and unforgiving hearts.

Loving without hypocrisy does not mean that we love perfectly or even have a feeling of contentment or sanguinity in our actions. An unhypocritical love is a which proceeds from a soul that has been touched by the love of Christ. It meditates upon its own foul nature and how the love and tender mercies of God vanquished our otherwise dark and wayward hearts. And we have some glimpse – some impression – be it ever so slight that we are to extend that same love and mercy to others.

We will soon go to the Lord's Table. We will eat and drink and think. We will think of our sin and how Jesus died for the remission – the payment of it. One of the great infractions we see at the church of Corinth (where we see Paul write of the Lord's Supper in some detail) is their lack of consideration of one another. One thing that our participation in the Lord's Supper should yield is a deeper grasp of the grace of God – the love and grace in which we stand. This cannot help but produce in our hearts a conviction to extend similar love and grace to others.

## Questions for Study

1. How is today's church in the west becoming more like the churches we read about in the New Testament (pages 2, 3)?
2. Why is fellowship so valuable/critical, especially in light of the direction of our current culture (pages 2, 3)?
3. What does it mean to live in light of the "mercies of God"? How does this relate to "our reasonable service" and being transformed by the "renewing of the mind" (page 3)?
4. Discuss the idea of owing someone love (page 4).
5. How/why is the most prominent definition of love today the paltriest kind of love (page 4)?
6. What is the difference between subjective and objective love? What is the higher love (page 5)?
7. What is hypocrisy and what does it mean to love without hypocrisy (pages 5, 6)?