

Genuine Love

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[0 : 0 0] We turn back to the book of Romans chapter 12, Romans chapter 12, maybe by now those of you have been here over the weekend, you know the theme for the weekend, the theme of love.

I'm almost tempted to ask you what verse do you think we'll be looking at this evening, if there's one that maybe stands out. But we're looking at verse 9, and especially just the first few words there, let love be genuine.

Let love be genuine. The theme of love over this weekend has brought us to look at the love of God and his covenant promise to us as we were looking in Deuteronomy.

We've looked at Christ's love as he laid down his life for his friends. Last evening we were looking at the love of God through the Spirit as the gospel spreads to all people, to all nations.

And in that way we've been looking at a love that we have been receiving, a love that has been given to us through God in many different ways. As we come to the end of this weekend of communion together, it's natural for us to look on the Lord and to give thanks to him, to thank him for everything that he has given to us.

[1 : 3 2] And to ask the question, how can we show our appreciation, how can we show our thanksgiving to God? I think James, in his letter, gives a very good answer when he says, do not just be hearers of the word, but be doers also.

And that is really what Paul is saying to us here in the book of Romans as well. He is telling us, let love be genuine. Let your love be genuine.

Let the love that you have for the Lord be shown in what you do. And it is to be especially shown in that we are reflecting almost the fact that we love because God first loved us.

Let your love be genuine. And the word genuine there comes from a word that we have today, hypocrite.

You can translate it as well, let your love be without hypocrisy, without hypocrisy. And you know what it is to be a hypocrite. You say one thing, but you do something else.

[2 : 4 7] People see that. People will speak about that and they say, well there's a Christian who says that they love the Lord, but by their lifestyle, they don't seem to be showing it.

And that is what Paul is reminding the people of here as he writes to them. Let your love be genuine. Let people see your love. As we go on towards the end of the chapter, you see that in verse 20.

It's talking about this. If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will keep burning coals on his head.

It's this idea that what we show to others will really leave them wondering, why would they do this? Why would they help me? Why would they do that for me?

And I want us to reflect on that this evening. What it means really to show our love. What does it mean to let our love be seen as a genuine love?

- [3 : 52] In the book of Romans, as Paul is writing, there's great teaching in the early chapters of the book of Romans. Great theology for us all to learn from.
- But then in chapter 12, there seems to be almost a change. And he's really saying to us, well if you've learned all these things about God, if you've learned all these deep things about Christ and what he has done for you, how do you actually apply it in your lives?
- It's good for us to learn all these things about God, but it's important for us as well to apply them to our day-to-day lives as well.
- And that really is what Paul is doing towards the letter of, the end of the letter of the Romans, he is telling us how we should live our lives in various kinds of relationships that we have.
- In the relationships that we have personally with God. In the relationships we have in our own personal lives, between ourselves and others, and ourselves and God, and among ourselves as Christians.
- [5 : 03] But also how we relate to others around us as well. Everybody who we come into contact with. There's a lot of practical, good practical teaching for us here.
- Much of our Christian life is to be evident, as we've thought about over these days, not just by words, but by action. We saw yesterday how the Lord Jesus said that greater love hath no man unless that he lay down his life for his friend.
- He didn't just say it. He proved it by going through with that himself. He laid down his life for his friends. We are to show that as recipients of that love, we are willing to show that love by following Christ's example.
- Somebody once said, It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian. It just takes all of him. It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian.
- It just takes all of him. To be 100% committed to the Lord. Another one said once, The entrance fee to God's kingdom is nothing.
- [6 : 16] It doesn't cost us anything to believe in him. But the annual dues are everything. We have to give everything for the Lord.
- And so as we come away from the Lord's Supper, from the weekend of communion tonight, and as we go on into the rest of the week, where do we go from here?
- How do we live our lives as we go on from here? As we go on into the week in a variety of places, people that we meet. Of course it's good for us to be in fellowship and gather together over this communion weekend.
- But it's important for us as well as we go on from here to live our lives showing that it's not just here we show that we love the Lord, but every day of our lives.
- And Paul highlights for us three things in this passage that we can take note of this night. Three things that we can apply to our lives.
- [7 : 21] Our lives are first of all to be sacrificial. Second point is our lives are to be sincere or genuine. The third thing is our lives are to be serene.
- Sacrificial, sincere, and serene. First thing is our lives are to be sacrificial. We see that in the very opening words of this chapter.
- I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
- As we give our lives to God, that too is part of our worship to God. We are to present our lives as sacrifices.
- We are to be willing to recognize what God has done for us in the person of Christ and to live our lives recognizing that and showing it in how we live our lives.

- [8 : 33] the context of Paul writing here in the book of Romans is that he has told them all about the love of God through Christ Jesus.
- Now he is saying just as he gave his life as a sacrifice, you follow that example. You follow in that way too.
- And we see that in the first verse that he is using the word therefore. That really shows that in light of what has come before this, therefore, we are to live our lives in this way.
- That is the change we see as we come into chapter 12 here. Therefore, you present your bodies as a living sacrifice. And it is to be a willing giving.
- Just the way we saw that the Lord Jesus Christ was willing to lay down his life for his friends. So we pause appealing to the Romans and to ourselves today to have that same attitude as well.
- [9 : 43] To willingly present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Sometimes for us it can be quite hard to do that.
- it can be easy to be a Christian when things are going well. It can be almost easy for us to enjoy this time of fellowship and communion together.
- But when we go back into the real world and we face up to so many of the challenges that present themselves day after day, it can wear us down.
- It can be hard for the Christian. But we are to remember the example of Christ and to recognize He is with us in all of these things.
- He is there with us. But it's easy for us to expect that it's all about God giving to us. We can be easy, we can become greedy and just say, Lord, give me this, give me that.
- [10 : 48] I read a story recently of a woman who was unhappy because she couldn't live her Christian life the way she felt she should. The more things she tried to get from her walk with God, the more miserable she became.
- She was telling this to her pastor at the time, and she said to him at one point, I've tried to get all I could get out of God. She thought that's how she was supposed to live, getting all that she could get out of God.
- The pastor replied to her, that's your problem. The key to spiritual victory is not getting all you can get, but giving all that you have.
- It's a big difference. And we see it in the world today with various kinds of ministries that take place, that we can come to God and that if we truly have faith in him, he will pour out all his blessings upon us.
- we see it in prosperity ministries around the world and faith healing ministries as well. They say well your faith isn't genuine if you have problems in your life.
- [12 : 06] If you're truly believing in God, you should receive everything from him. But that's not what the scriptures teach us at all. The scriptures teach us that we're not always just going to be getting from God.
- God isn't just going to pour out his blessings upon us day after day that life is going to be full of everything that we want ourselves. Instead we see that ministry that costs nothing really accomplishes nothing.
- But ministry that comes at a cost, and even in our own personal lives, there will often be a cost in our lives in following Jesus. And that is when we will recognize that just as we give our lives as a sacrifice, God loves us to do that.
- He appeals to us to defend our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. If you are looking to follow the Lord by just getting everything out of him, then you are following him in the wrong way.

As we mentioned yesterday as well, if we are to follow Jesus, we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. And that just shows you the difficulties that are involved in it.

[13 : 25] It's not about what we can get from God, but what we can give to him as well. The Lord wants us to live our lives in such a way that we are willing to go the extra mile for him.

That we are willing to put up with all the persecutions that come our way. If we are willing to listen to those who will abuse the Christian faith and stand up against them, to be strong in the faith and say that no longer am I going to just listen to these things, but I'm going to make a stand against it, to show that truly we believe in the Lord.

When we do that, there is often a price involved, there is often a cost, as we might see it, but ultimately it's for our own greater gain.

So our lives are to be sacrificial. Our lives are also to be sincere. Here we look at verse 9 in a bit more detail.

Let love be genuine. If we are to be Christians and following the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to make sure that our love is genuine.

[14 : 42] And again, if we look at the word genuine here, hypocrites, it has a lot to do with acting. That's the way the word was very often used in those days.

Those who were putting on a show would be almost seen as hypocrites. They were imitators. They were just doing a show for other people. But what Paul is saying to us is that it's got to be genuine.

Not just putting on a show so that others might see and living our lives in a different way when nobody is looking. Our love has to be genuine.

It's about living our lives inside and outside the church. We've looked at this verse before. We love because he first loved us.

that's not where it ends in those verses. If you read the following verses after that you read this. If anyone says I love God yet hates his brother he is a liar.

[15 : 53] For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Let your love be genuine. When you watch films on the telly and especially love films you see maybe two actors playing the role of a happy couple who are deeply in love.

And it comes across maybe quite well in the film itself. But in many cases the two actors who are playing the roles they may not even be speaking to each other when the cameras stop rolling.

They may just completely dislike each other and go their separate ways. They're just actors putting on a show. That's the kind of impression that Paul is giving here as well.

That Christians are not to be those who just maybe are nice to each other when they're in each other's company. But then when they go their separate ways they're talking about each other behind their backs.

[17 : 07] All is reminding that as believers we're going to have our differences. We're all members of one body but we're many parts as he has said in verses 3 down to verse 8 there.

All the different functions. We've all the different parts to play but nevertheless we're all Christians. And we should love one another and live our lives in harmony as far as possible.

That's the kind of warning that's being put towards the Lord's people. It's not about putting on a show but being imitators of the love that God has shown towards us.

And he goes on to give us a long list of just the kind of ways that we are to show one another love. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honour. Do not be slothful and zeal but fervent in spirits. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation.

[18 : 13] Be constant in prayer. It's a long list of things and we're not going to go through them all at all but when you look at that kind of list and the heading in the section here is marks of the true Christian.

We have to recognise that this isn't just a list for some people. This isn't just a list for those days. This is a list for ourselves today.

That if our love is truly to be genuine then these are the kind of examples that we have to follow. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Ask yourself this. Do you truly love your brothers and sisters in the Lord? How do one another in showing honour?

You know you're living your lives just to do the best for the Lord. Do not be slothful and steel but fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. You know it's easy as a Christian to sit back and to say well somebody else will do that.

[19 : 22] But instead of saying that how about asking yourself how can I serve the Lord? What can I do to help the cause of Christ here in the congregation of Noc?

How can I be more involved? What kind of role can I play? And the more who are involved in the work the more that gets done.

Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer. Such key things there. Rejoice in hope.

Be constant in prayer. Never dismiss these kinds of things but have confidence in the gospel. Have confidence in the word of God that is able to transform people's life.

As we sang I think it last evening God's law is perfect and converts the soul and sin that lies. Have confidence in that gospel that it can make all the difference to the people of this community and this island.

[20 : 36] Be constant in prayer. Never dismiss the place of prayer in your life but be constant in prayer. We should apply these kinds of things to ourselves.

We should hate division in our midst. We should hate quarreling. We should hate sin. All these things we should really grieve over and come to the Lord and say to the Lord, Lord help us in this.

the list goes on there as well. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. A difficult thing again to do.

Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Again, ask yourself how can that be applied in my life practically?

Are there people who are rejoicing at this time and who I can go and speak to and be with them and to say, I am rejoicing with you? And are there those who are weeping?

[21 : 48] Those who are mourning? Do you know people like that who are maybe just looking for someone to come and speak to them? Weep with those who weep.

And the list goes on still. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. All these kinds of things.

You can go through the list in your own time and just look at them and think to yourself, are there things that I need to address in my life? Are there ways that I may be not honouring God in my life?

if we are truly thankful to God, then we should be living our lives showing that our love for him is genuine and that our love for others is genuine as well.

lives are to be serene. I struggle to come up with a word beginning with S that I can put into this one.

[22 : 59] Serene seems quite applicable. I thought about it even today when after the weather we had last week when it was blowing a gale and pouring with rain and then you get up on a day like this and it's calm, it's quiet and the sun is out.

That's a kind of picture of a serene kind of day, a peaceful kind of picture. That is the theme that Paul sort of concludes this chapter with, that our lives are to be serene, that we are to live at peace with not just Christians around us but with everybody who is around us.

Live in harmony with one another. Paul is telling the Romans to do their utmost, to maintain peace within their communities. And this peace is to have its foundations in the word.

They are not to compromise on truth at all. verse 18 I think it is, makes that clear for us. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

If possible. In other words, there are times when it's maybe just not possible to live at peace with some people. When it is going completely against the truth of God, when it's going completely against what God is asking of us, there may be times when we just have to say to ourselves, well, it's not possible.

[24 : 35] But what he says here is, if at all possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. And this serene kind of life is one that we would love to have.

It's one that we would just long to have in our lives, in our communities. But it's a real challenge to ourselves, as we come away from the Lord's table, this time of communion, to ask ourselves, are we really going the extra mile to live at peace with those around us?

It's a great challenge within our churches and within our communities, to see the love that God has shown to us, and ask ourselves, are we showing it within our communities?

Outside of the church, there are many people in great need. My own congregation in Dumfries, there are various places in Dumfries where I go and I see such great need.

I see people in prison on a weekly occurrence. I visit Bethany Christian Trust in Dumfries usually weekly and I see people who are in need.

[25 : 59] One thing that I would say about it is that very often it's hidden from the eyes of those in the church. Very often because we don't see it with our own eyes, we think the problem isn't there.

That's true in Dumfries. The more you speak to the people who are involved in that kind of work, the more you realise just how many people there are in need. And just what can be done to try and help these people.

And even here in the islands, maybe many of you think that there are those, not that many people with problems around us because we don't physically see it with our own eyes.

But there are those who are in need. There are those who are maybe looking for someone to help them, to speak to them, to encourage them.

Maybe we've been guilty of keeping ourselves to ourselves. But maybe it's time that we maybe opened our eyes a bit more and asked ourselves, well, can we go to this person or that person?

[27 : 08] Can we approach these people and see how we can help them as a church? There are always opportunities there to show the love that we have known and we can reciprocate it to many other people as well.

Jesus said that the peace that Jesus gives is not the absence of trouble, but rather the confidence that he is there with you always.

when you go into places that are maybe uncomfortable, when maybe you see that there are trouble in these places or in that person's life, remember that as a Christian you can have confidence that Jesus is with you, that he has given you the ultimate example of love, that you are to show that your love is genuine, that your love is real, that you're not just putting on a show, that you're not just putting on an act, but that because he loved you, you are willing to show that love for others.

A life of sacrifice, a life of genuine Christianity, a life seeking harmony, is a life walking in love with God.

And the way Paul concludes this chapter, as well, with this picture of heaping, burning holes on those who hate you. And he also goes on to say, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[28 : 57] What is the difference that showing love in your life can make? It can impact on other people's lives. It can make a real change, a transformation in people's lives.

things, not just as individuals, but as a whole congregation and as a church, we should be asking ourselves these questions. Are we showing that our love is genuine?

They are challenging questions. They are searching questions. not just but in light of the love that Christ has shown to us, in light of the greatest love of all that he gave his life for his friends, we have to ask ourselves, are we showing our thanks?

Are we showing our appreciation? Are we showing our love is genuine? By living at peace with all, by showing our love to all around us, not just our friends because that can be easy, but those who are our enemies, those who are against the faith, are we showing that our love is genuine?

Paul says, let your love be genuine. Uphold what is evil and hold fast to what is good. And if we are truly thankful to the Lord, then we should let our love be genuine.

[30 : 28] So may God bless these thoughts to us and encourage us to go on in the joy and strength of the Lord and show his love to others.

We'll just bow our heads in a word of prayer. Our gracious Lord in heaven, we thank you that we love because you first loved us.

The verse goes on to say that we because of that love are to show love to others. Ultimately, Lord, it is sometimes a great challenge for us.

It is something, Lord, that we maybe are not comfortable in doing. It means, oh Lord, very often going outside our comfort zones. But Lord, we thank you that the love that has been shown to us in Christ Jesus reminds us of the great love that has been poured out upon us.

May our love for you be genuine. May it be sincere. May we show it, oh Lord, to those who are around us who are maybe in need, that they may come to rejoice in you and to praise you.

[31 : 40] Lord, we pray that you will give us courage in these days and the strength that we need to go on in that love, to be thankful to you and to rejoice in you always. For you are great, you are an awesome God, and you have poured out everything that we need.

So Lord, help us to look to you not just for what we can get, but for what we can give to you. Lord, be with us, we pray, and forgive all our sins.

In Jesus' name. Amen.