

LET LOVE BE GENUINE
(SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2013)

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 6; Rom. 12:9-13

Introduction

What were sermons like in the first century church? While we have a number of sermons in the NT in the gospels and in the book of Acts, the best example of a sermon preached to a first-century church is the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 13:22, the author of the book calls for his readers to bear with his word of exhortation. The expression “word of exhortation” means a sermon.¹

The book of Hebrews can be outlined as a six-point sermon.² It takes about one hour to read through the entire book of Hebrews.³ This is interesting in light of the statement in Hebrews 13:22 that he has written a short sermon and also the earlier comment in Hebrews 5 that his listeners were not as mature as they should have been. What might the author of Hebrews have said about our own congregation?

In Colossians 4:16 Paul gave instruction that his letter to them be read to the congregation and that it was also to be read in nearby Laodicea and further the letter that Paul wrote to the Laodiceans was to be read in Colosse. I think it is safe to say that Paul’s letters were not just merely read but also explained. We can judge that the Christians in Rome were capable of receiving deep truth and also that further explanation of the letter Paul wrote to them was given.

And so when the first listeners heard the instruction given in Romans 12:9-13 there would have been further explanation of the many points that Paul makes in these verses.

This is true of this congregation also. We need to hear the reading of God’s Word and God has given instruction that ministers faithfully explain the inspired and infallible Word of God.

The verses that we cover this morning are the first part of a very important section of Romans where Paul continues to expand on the opening theme of Romans 12, presenting your bodies a sacrifice and the need for transformation by the renewing of your mind.

¹ Dennis E. Johnson (2009-11-24). Him We Proclaim (Kindle Locations 3099-3101). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

² Ibid, location 3133.

³ Ibid, footnote 260.

The verses that we consider today stand out in terms of style. There are places in Romans where Paul argues carefully in great detail and then places where Paul speaks almost in bullet-point form. Paul gives 13 descriptions which can be translated as commands. The first description or command some believe is actually a heading for the rest of the chapter.

Look closely at verse 9. Note that two words in italics have been added. Literally the text could read – love without hypocrisy or this is authentic love.

I have heard 20-point sermons before. I suppose this text could be a 12 or 13-point sermon. I wrestled this week with the best approach for dealing with these verses. I think it makes sense to cover the verses separately. The five verses that we consider each are part of the description of what authentic love is and who we must be in light of God's sovereign work of grace in our lives.

As an initial summary, let me give a partial description of authentic love based on verses 9-13.

Authentic love is based on a hatred for evil and a passionate embrace of good. This love is to be demonstrated in meaningful ways to other members of our congregation. There should be many real examples of brotherly love as we seek to outdo each other in showing honor. It is very easy to give up or be slack in our described duties. We must seek to be fervent through the Holy Spirit and keep our focus on Jesus Christ. Let hope cause us to rejoice even as we pass through times of testing. Prayer is not optional. Further love must be expressed in very practical and outward ways.

Love without hypocrisy.

Let us now give closer attention to Romans 12:9-13 by looking at each verse separately.

1) AUTHENTIC LOVE – HOLY HATRED AND A PASSIONATE EMBRACE, v. 9

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

Technically there are no commands in these verses, but many versions rightfully translate these verses as commands. This is who we are to be and so these are the things we must do.

As I mentioned earlier some scholars believe the first phrase in verse 9 serves as a heading for the entire section. And it does stand out from the other phrases in that there is no verb in the phrase. Let your love be genuine.⁴ This is a good summary for verses 9-21.

⁴ Moo citing the translation of Black, 773.

The word love here is the Greek word you likely know, *agape*. Douglass Moo says that the early church chose what was a relatively rare term to express the distinctive nature of the love that was to be the foundation of all their relationships.⁵ Love can in some cases be faked or we can act like we love without much substance following. Churches can be incubators for a fake, superficial love. This was true during the time of the Apostle Paul and it is true today.

I should point out that the love described here is not just a love for others. It first must be a love for God which then includes a love for other believers and even for those who hate and persecute us as we see in the later verses.

We have reflected before on the warning given to the church in Ephesus which had lost its first love even though it had done so many good things. This is a relevant warning for our congregation. Seek that your love is not just for show, because although we may fool each other who can fool God?

What follows is the description or command – Abhor what is evil. This is the only place in the NT where this strong word for hatred is found. It is a strong feeling of horror for that which God's word defines as being evil.

I believe this holy hatred for evil must have at least two dimensions. There must be a personal dimension and a societal dimension. These two aspects work together. And what I mean by these two aspects is that we must hate the sins and temptations that we face individually and hate the evil that is present in the world.

R. C. Sproul in his commentary on this verse wrote:

I believe the greatest ethical issue today is that of abortion. In recent years many have come to see terrorism as more concerning than abortion. I am baffled by that, because more people were killed on September 10 in the womb than were killed on 9/11 in NYC. More babies were slaughtered on September 12 than adults were killed on 9/11. If we had a camera on the womb so that CNN could show us graphic videos of what actually happens in the slaughter of unborn children, abortion would be quickly abolished, but the reality of it is covered up. If there is one thing I know about God, it is that he hates abortion.⁶

⁵ Moo, 775.

⁶ R. C. Sproul, 422.

We must seek to demonstrate a holy hatred for abortion, homosexuality, pornography, the taking of God's name in vain, and many other sins which are celebrated today in the name of freedom.

There also must be a hatred for the sins and temptations that can easily lead us astray. And this again where I caution everyone here in your own choices you make concerning entertainment. So much of the music, movies, and other forms of entertainment encourage you to laugh at evil. We easily make excuses for our own preferences. Don't be a fool when it comes to the exercise of Christian freedom. Is there a clear testimony in your life that you abhor that which is evil?

The next command well follows. **Cling to what is good.** This is another strong verb. Your attachment to that which God's word defines as being good must be passionate, we can say, as the verb cling is used to describe the bond of marriage and our bond with Jesus Christ.

The word good here should be connected back with verse 2. Your mind needs to be renewed so that you can test and prove that which is good and acceptable and perfect in terms of God's will.

2) LOVE AS FAMILY, v. 10

10 *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

The city of Philadelphia today is today in many ways not a very nice city. It was founded in 1682 by William Penn as the city of brotherly-love, something it lacks today with a crime rate that exceeds even violent Chicago.⁷

There are two philo-words in the first part of verse 10 translated as kindly affection and brotherly love. The word translated as kindly affection is one used for both family and non-family in Greek writings. The word has the idea of devotion and true attachment.

Another translation reads, "Show family affection to one another with brotherly love."⁸

Our love for each other must not be faked. It must be as real as the love we have for our own family members.

⁷ <http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=crime+philadelphia+chicago>

⁸ HCSB

The last part of verse 10 adds to this description. There are two ways the last part of verse 10 can be translated which is reflected in different translations. Both are powerful statements. The NKJV reads, “in honor giving preference to one another.” The ESV reads, “Outdo one another in showing honor.” I can’t say which translation is better because scholars are divided, but I like the reading found in the ESV.

It is very easy to fall into a spirit of trying to appear better than someone else. We may not aspire to be holy and perfect but we are going to attempt to look better than someone else. What we should seek is to outdo one another in showing true honor and respect to each other. This is the right spirit of competition we should have.

Phil. 2:3 *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. **4** Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

3. DON'T QUIT IN THE PURSUIT OF TRUE LOVE BUT BE FILLED WITH HOLY SPIRIT FERVENCY AS YOU SERVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, v. 11.

11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

The ancient historian Josephus used the word translated as **lagging** to describe military attacks which slowed down because those fighting became soft and lost heart. The same Greek word is also used in Proverbs to describe the sluggard who needs to study the ants.⁹

Don't be a one-hit wonder as it were. The camp or conference high quickly runs off. You hear an inspiring sermon on Sunday and all can be forgotten by Monday not to mention Thursday.

Where you see yourself lagging or being lazy, seek for repentance and change.

Where you see yourself slipping in terms of private devotions and prayer, renew your effort.

The rest of verse 11 I think specifies how you keep from lagging.

Most English translations have the word **spirit** in verse 11 as a lowercase word, referring to the human spirit. But I think it makes more sense to see that Paul is commanding that your fervency come through the working of the Holy Spirit. A number of commentators also take this position. John Calvin asks the question if our fervency comes through the Holy Spirit, why

⁹ GNT Key, s.v. Romans 12:11.

is the command given here? He answers that it is a duty given to the faithful to shake off laziness and to cherish the flame kindled by heaven and that most often the Holy Spirit is suppressed through our own fault.

You are to seek the fervency that comes through the Holy Spirit and pray specifically for such and beware of actions which lead to lethargy and the suppressing of the Holy Spirit's work.

The last phrase of verse 11 appropriately follows this reference to the Spirit.

Though we all must desire to be fervent through the working of the Holy Spirit, we also must make sure we are directed in serving Jesus Christ.

Douglass Moo wisely observes,

“The encouragement to be ‘set on fire by the Spirit’ is, as church history and current experience amply attest, open to abuse.”¹⁰

The reference here to the Lord Jesus Christ is given also to encourage you to not be lazy. Did Jesus ever live for the weekend or for empty pleasures? No, his focus entirely was set on doing the will of the Father. When you are being spiritually or physically lazy, you can be sure you are not directed in serving Jesus Christ. Make Him your focus and pray for true fervency through the Holy Spirit.

4) GENUINE LOVE REQUIRES HOPE, PATIENCE, AND PRAYER, v. 12.

12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

The threefold pattern of hope, patience, and prayer can be compared to Romans 8:24-27.

Rom. 8:24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance. **26** Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. **27** Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

The words of Paul also bear similarity to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5.

¹⁰ Moo, 778.

Matt. 5:12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In Luke 10:20 Jesus said that the reason we are to rejoice is not because demons are subject to us but rather because our names are written in heaven.

No one could excuse our Lord of being so heavenly minded that he was no earthly good. As I have mentioned I think the problem of most Christians is not that they are too heavenly minded but rather we lack a proper focus on eternity.

The basis for true joy is not simply earthly blessing. Oh, we all enjoy much in terms of earthly blessing, but hope sees beyond the temporal and rests in the eternal.

If you are often discouraged, it may be that you simply do not have your focus where it should be. Rejoice on the basis of true hope.

This is followed by the difficult command to be patient in tribulation.

The language here is also connected to an earlier part of Romans, Romans 5:2-3.

2b and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **3** And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

What we can say for all of Paul's writings is that they are very realistic. In God's sovereignty He has not determined to deliver His people from every difficult situation. This is the problem with so much of the false gospel proclaimed today that you can eliminate unhappiness and pain if you just had enough faith or followed some easy steps to conquering all problems. Yes, sometimes problems are the direct result of sin, but that is not what Paul is speaking of here in Romans 5 or Romans 12.

What you need in the midst of tribulation is endurance. And even more we glory in tribulations because they help produce that spirit of endurance that is needed.

Very appropriately, God then commands you to be steadfast in prayer.

The word translated as steadfast is an important word in the early chapters of Acts.

Acts 1:14 These all **continued** with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 2:42 And they **continued steadfastly** in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

We all have busy schedules but no one is exempt from such a command. In fact we of all people should be able to give more time to prayer than we generally do. Think of the hundreds of hours given to entertainment and other activities. Do we give 1/10th the time to prayer as we do other activities?

5) SHOWING LOVE IN PRACTICAL AND DIFFICULT WAYS, v. 13

13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

When Paul wrote this letter first to the church in Rome, he obviously did not put in verse divisions. These were added much later, but the verse divisions do help us see the parts of Paul's commands here. In the verses we consider today, you can see a focus both on what we might call private duties as well as duties to others. This follows the pattern of what Jesus called the first and second greatest commandments – to love God completely and to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.

Here in verse 13 Paul focuses again on love to others. There are two related commands or descriptions given here.

Love is to be authentic and should be demonstrated by true fellowship.

As I have pointed out before, we often define fellowship as spending time together. We have fellowship meals and the like. That is not completely wrong, but fellowship is not just eating a donut or enjoying some time together. That can be part of fellowship but not its essence. Here the verb fellowship is translated as distributing in the NKJV or as other versions read contribute to the needs of the saints. You can translate this more literally has have **fellowship with the needs of the saints**. I like to define fellowship as conversations and activities that are focused on kingdom gain. Giving money and effort to see the gospel faithfully proclaimed is fellowship. Helping those in this congregation with needs and other believers who have needs is fellowship. Let us seek that the time we do spend together is more focused on actually seeking the expansion of Christ's kingdom.

The final command in the list is that you be given to hospitality.

Hospitality is literally the love of strangers and means to give assistance and housing to brothers who travel in the spread of the gospel.

Heb. 13:2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels.

Look at the word given in verse 13. It is the same verb which is used in verse 14, translated there as persecute. Obviously the verb has a different meaning in verse 14, but in both verses it is a strong verb. The word given is a good translation. It means something you truly pursue, like those who are given to sports or to other quests. Pursue hospitality.

Generally speaking there is not a great need in our congregation to host travelling missionaries or out of town pastors. It does happen, but not much more than once or twice a year. So what does it mean in our own context? I think an application is that you pursue going out of your way to help those who are focused on kingdom work. Go out of your way to be of assistance. It is not something trivial or easy. Pray that God might guide you in fulfilling this great duty.

CONCLUSION

Authentic love is based on a hatred for evil and a passionate embrace of good. This love is to be demonstrated in meaningful ways to other members of our congregation. There should be many real examples of brotherly love as we seek to outdo each other in showing honor. It is very easy to give up or be slack in our described duties. We must seek to be fervent through the Holy Spirit and keep our focus on Jesus Christ. Let hope cause us to rejoice even as we pass through times of testing. Prayer is not optional. Further love must be expressed in very practical and outward ways.

Prayer

Hymn: 283

Benediction – 1 Peter 5:10-11

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.