

Authentic Christians

by Ray C. Stedman

This last week, through the magnificent ministry of Major Ian Thomas, we heard about the indwelling life of our Lord Jesus Christ lived again through the Holy Spirit expressing himself in terms of our humanity. We learned why our Lord has moved into human life and how he has done it.

Now, as we turn again to the twelfth chapter of Romans, we are coming to a section which describes what the Christian life is like when it comes into contact with the commonplace conditions of life – when it comes to grips with the world in which we live. In this wonderful passage in Chapter 12, Verses 9-21, we have a description of a Christian life being lived.

In the words of Ian Thomas, “This is a life not explainable in terms of human personality, but it is explainable only in terms of God.” This is the only life worth living – I hope you have discovered that!

The first thing that Paul says, in Verse 9, is: “Let love be genuine.” The rest of the chapter is simply an exposition of that phrase. I hope you have learned that under no circumstances is the Christian life a matter of imitation. It is never that. It is never you trying to do your best to imitate the character of Jesus Christ. This is impossible. Yet it must be a life of genuine love. God is love, and, if the life that we live is God the Son living his life again through us, then it must be a life of genuine love. It won’t be any flabby, cheap, sentimental imitation. This is what this chapter expounds to us and there are two divisions to it: Love extended – love reaching out to those around about – and love offended – love slapped in the face, and how it reacts.

Let’s look at the first section – **love extended**:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another

in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. {Rom 12:9-13 RSV}

1. The first quality that marks genuine love is that *it is faithful*. As Paul says in Verse 9, “Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.”

Notice how that marks the balanced quality in love. It isn’t love which simply manifests itself in affection for everything – that is sentiment. Nor is it love which cuts everyone off in an attempt to be rigidly faithful to the truth and is harsh, unyielding, and difficult – that isn’t love. Love is a balance. It is hating what is evil, and holding fast to what is good.

This must begin with ourselves, and it is interesting that the Scriptures say we can only love others in terms of ourselves. The Law says, “Love your neighbor as yourself” {see Luke 10:27}. We must begin with loving ourselves in a genuine way before we can love anyone else. How do we do this? Well, it begins with hating what is evil and holding fast to what is good. The measure of what is evil must be determined, not by what we think is evil (or what our up-bringing has been, or our reaction to it), but by the Word of God. That is what determines evil. And that which is good is determined, not by the way we think or react, because the one thing that the devil does in the world is to try to make evil look as though it is good, and good to look as though it is evil. So, if we simply judge by outward appearances we can never love. It is only as we walk, think, and look at life in the light of the revelation of the Word of God that we can hate what is evil and love what is good.

This must begin with ourselves, and this means, as we think of ourselves, we learn not to justify evil in our life. Oh, how frequently we do this! We love to call it by another name, and, thus, make it look acceptable. We look at our lives and we see *worry*, but we don't call it *sin*, we call it *concern* which is simply to call it by a name that sounds more acceptable. But it isn't *concern*, it is *worry* – and worry is sin. To love ourselves as God loves us is to look at ourselves and call that evil which is evil. In this case, we must call it worry and treat it like a sin, not like a poor relation to be kept in the back room; that is, we don't actually kick it out, but we don't bring it out in the front room either. The first aspect of true and genuine love is to hate what is evil.

On the other side, love does not reject that which is good. We don't become falsely humble. We don't act, for instance, as if the body were evil, because God says that it isn't; he says it is good. There are those who try to manifest a love for themselves by rejecting what God calls good, and this is wrong. Love is always the hating of that which is evil and the holding fast to that which is good – it is being faithful to reality. Love is always eminently realistic.

Now this is true also as we move outside to the circle of family. Love doesn't spoil a child by saying that we hate to hurt it. Many parents are literally wrecking their children's lives by the fear that they are going to hurt the child in some way. Children need to be hurt. If they are not hurt it means you don't love them, because life hurts children. Either they are hurt in a small way where they learn how to adjust to a principle, or they grow up absolutely protected from all hurt till they come to a place where the barriers can no longer be maintained or upheld and they are exposed to life and are hurt in a terrible way that utterly destroys them, and breaks your heart in the process. Love is not that way. Love begins with facing small hurts now, and being able and willing to expose our children to them, that they might learn how to live.

But neither does love act in harshness, rejecting a child because there are a few faults in him, and demanding a toeing to the mark in unyielding insistence on carrying our a stan-

dard, without ever relenting or yielding to any degree. It is not that either.

Genuine love is God's kind of love, which hates what is evil – relentlessly, inevitable, and inescapably. Genuine love never varies, is without shadow of turning, never compromises with evil, never pats it own back and says, "This is going to be all right; let's forget about it." Genuine love never does that. It does not reject what is good, nor does it ever call good "evil" or treat us as though we were unimportant, or act as though there were nothing of any real value. There is real value in each one because God has made us, and what he makes is good, and he treats us this way.

This is love. What a wonderful description of it we have here. It approaches all of life realistically. It doesn't exude flabby, sentimental nonsense and gush. It doesn't deal harshly or critically because of the presence of evil. It doesn't throw out the baby with the bath water. It deals with life realistically because God is a realist and God is love. Therefore, the mark of love is to hate evil and to hold fast to what is good. That is faithfulness.

2. Then, in Verse 10, we see that the next mark is that *it is courteous*:

... love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. {Rom 12:10 RSV}

Did you wonder why it says "brotherly" affection? Some of you who remember back in the days when you lived with your brothers in the home are wondering where the affection was. Yet what this is saying is that we who are members of the body of Christ should love one another with "brotherly" affection. I think it simply means that wherever brothers have learned to be affectionate to one another (there are brothers who are like this, and you meet them quite frequently), it is because they have learned to live closely together with mutual respect. You can't have affection for someone with whom you are closely bound, in terms of living together or ties of relationship, without it being based upon mutual regard for each other's welfare, property, and so on. Brothers learn affection only when they are willing to do

so on the basis of a mutual respect for each other. That is what this is talking about. When Christians love, they are to love this way: Showing regard for someone else, “in honor preferring one another” {Rom 12:10 KJV}, asking the other one to step first, to have the preferred seat, the preferred honor, the preferred place. This is having a due regard for the welfare and the importance of someone else. That is genuine love – just simply courtesy – and it’s something that is greatly lacking today.

I don’t know how many married couples I have counseled with in which the problem would have been solved by the simple showing of courtesy, one with another, in the home, just not allowing themselves to fall to the level of speaking discourteously to each other, but to simply be respectful of each other’s person and property. That is courtesy.

3. The third mark of genuine love is that *it is available*. Look at Verse 11:

Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. {Rom 12:11 RSV}

Zeal is simply “a willingness to be available, a readiness to minister.” That is zeal. The sources of it must be the glowing of the Spirit within.

Have you ever noticed that, by nature, we are all of us moody and easily grow reluctant to do things for people by ourselves. We only want to act when the mood is on us. We say, “Oh, I don’t feel like doing this.” A call comes for service, and we say, “Well, I’d like to, but I am not in the mood right now.” Or, after we have undertaken it for a while, we say, “I’m tired of it. Let someone else take it for a change.”

This is not the mark of genuine love because genuine love is *available* – it is zealous, it is eagerly ready to minister. The secret of it is that it has caught the glow of the Spirit within.

We read that our Lord Jesus on one occasion went into a city after he had spent long hours throughout the day healing, preaching, teaching, and ministering to those in need about

him. Then he went into the house to rest, but the evangelist records that “he could not be hid,” {Mark 7:24}. Why not? Because, in the next verse it says that outside there was a woman who had a daughter who was afflicted with an evil spirit, and she had come to Jesus. He couldn’t be hid because there was something that demanded his ministry, and he couldn’t be unresponsive to that. So, outside he went to minister to her. This is what you have here.

Genuine love is available. It is love that doesn’t shut itself away in a closet, or build inaccessible fences or barriers around it so that it cannot be reached, but it is always ready to minister. That is availability.

4. The fourth mark of genuine love is that *it is rejoicing in hope*. Paul says in Verse 12:

Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. {Rom 12:12 RSV}

Genuine love is always rejoicing and giving thanks. Remember that definition of a Christian?

A Christian is one who is:
Completely fearless,
Continually cheerful, and
Constantly in trouble.

Why? Because he has hope.

Do you know what hope is? Hope is the anticipation of future delight because of present circumstances. Hope is the onward look which sees in the present something which, in its final resolution, is going to bring delight in the future. Hope is looking right at the present, seeing it exactly as it is, and seeing within it the seeds of something which, when they come to germination, will bring a delightful expression. That is hope.

A farmer plants his grain in hope, doesn’t he? He puts the seed into the ground, and he anticipates a harvest. Why? Because he knows that there are forces at work, in the process of which he has fulfilled, that will bring the harvest: There is life in the seed; there is power in the sunshine; there is fruitfulness in the soil; there is release in the rain. These forces combine the very things that are

needed, and are now at work, that will produce the very harvest that he is looking for. That is hope.

Hope isn't just a blind, vague, misty desire for something to come in the future – that is never real hope, that is blind hope and it is utterly worthless.

True hope is something that is based upon present circumstances, and this is what we have in the Christian. He is going through tribulation and trial, and it isn't pleasant, but there is something about it that he sees that is producing and working toward a culmination which will be delightful beyond measure. This is why he rejoices in his tribulation.

As Paul says, "We know that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," {cf, Rom 8:18 KJV}. "This light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us the exceeding eternal weight of glory," {cf, 2 Cor 4:17}.

And it is these very circumstances that is making the glory possible. Now that is what hope is.

5. Therefore, genuine love is always revealed in a cheerful countenance, in a face of radiant hope, being continually aware that even though the present circumstances are dark and unpleasant, yet forces are at work in them which are bringing about that which will be delightful beyond measure. Therefore, it is "*patient in tribulation*" – no murmuring, no complaining about what you are going through, no taking someone else to task or blaming them.
6. It is "*constant in prayer*" – always dependent upon the Lord, always aware that he is the vital factor in every situation, always believing that he is transforming and changing each situation to work out his way. This is the normal, natural, "plain vanilla" Christian life. There is nothing unusual about it. This is the way it should be. This is rejoicing in hope.
7. The last mark is given in Verse 13: *It is generous*. Genuine love is generous:

Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. {Rom 12:13 RSV}

It is generous because it recognizes that there is plenty more of what it has received, and, therefore, it can give liberally, gladly, and freely because the supply is inexhaustible. The one who supplied this that we have now will supply more; we don't have to hang onto it then. We can give it freely and distribute it to the needs of the saints.

This is most markedly evident in someone who doesn't have much to give – as Paul said of those Macedonian Christians, "Out of their deep poverty they gave liberally, ... first they gave themselves to the Lord, and then they gave themselves to us," {cf, 2 Cor 8:2-3}. This is the normal Christian life – it is easy to live with, it is easy to work with, it is a wonderful kind of life.

When you meet people who, like this, are showing the genuine love of the Spirit of God, you find that they are delightful people –

- You love to be around them,
- You love to work with them,
- You find them pleasant and approachable.

James describes these people in his letter: "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason [i.e., approachable, easy to be entreated], full mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity," (Jas 3:17 {RSV}). That is generosity!

This, then, is genuine love – but the most revealing test of love is yet to come. It comes in the time when love is extended to someone else and is rebuffed. What would you do when your motives are twisted and perverted, sincerity is doubted, and your goodness is met with malice and with hate on the part of those you are trying to help? Here we see the real test of whether love is genuine or not.

Let's look at it in this section, **love offended**:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for

evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. {Rom 12:14-21 RSV}

1. You’ll notice that it begins with *the attitude* first.

What is your attitude? How do you feel inside when somebody does something evil back after you have done them a favor? Is it, “Well, that’s the last time I will ever help him”? Is it a tendency to run them down, degrade them, curse them? Well, genuine love says, “Bless them – do not curse them.” It gets practical too. It moves right into the realm of activity in Verse 15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Now, this isn’t just an extraneous thought that is thrown in here out of some other part of Scripture; it vitally ties in with what he is talking about. He is talking about these who offend us, these who have injured us in some way. He says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” That is, don’t withdraw from them, and shut yourself away from them, and say, “Well, this is the last that I want to do with them.”

This is what we do, isn’t it? Somebody does something back, and we say, “Well, that is the last time I will ever have to do with them! I’ll never waste any time with them again.” We withdraw ourselves and go our separate ways and never speak to them again. No, that isn’t right. You see, if we live on this level, as Jesus said, “What do ye more than others?” {Matt 5:47 KJV}. What is there about our life that is any different than any other life? How can we be explained on any other level than what is just ordinary human reaction to things? “What do ye more than others?” Jesus said. If you love those who love you, everyone does that. It is when you begin to love those who don’t love you, and you love the unlovely, and you bless those who curse you that you are

beginning to demonstrate a life that cannot be explained in terms of your own personality, but must be explained only in terms of *God in you*. Bless those who curse you – don’t avoid them, don’t withdraw yourself. When there is something for rejoicing in their lives, go and rejoice with them – even though they don’t like you. Send them a note and say you are glad to hear what has happened to them. If there is sorrow that comes, don’t say, “It served them right; I knew something like this was going to happen.” Rather, go and weep with them.

Then, in Verse 16, we have wonderful insight into the nature of human life, where Paul says, “Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited.” Why does he put that in here? Well, if you have ever tried to fulfill this word of loving someone who has harmed you, you’ll see why. Have you ever really put this to practice, and gone out of your way to do a good deed in response to one that was evil? If you have, how did you feel when you got through? Didn’t you feel like patting yourself on the back, and saying, “I’ve really done all right – I have really shown that person what a Christian is.” And you go away feeling ten feet high, as though you had done something really unusual. That is the subtlety of the flesh. It wants to take something that God has done in you, and through you, and twist it so that you become proud over it, and, therefore, you lose all the benefit and blessing of it in your own life. So he adds this word, “Never be conceited.” As Jesus taught his disciples, “When you have done all these things which you ought to do, then say to yourselves, ‘We are but unprofitable servants. We have only done that which was our duty to do!’” {cf, Luke 17:19}.

There is nothing unusual about showing this kind of love – or at least there shouldn’t be. This is the way Christians ought to be, and there is no credit to us when we behave this way. This is just the manifestation of the normal, natural, Christian life.

2. Paul moves a step further – from the attitude it moves to *the outward act*. In Verse 17 he says, “Repay no one evil for evil.” Here is a prohibition against any kind of act of retaliation.

What do you do when somebody does something to you that you don't like? You say, "Well, I'll show him how it is." And you retaliate in some way. You don't get along with your neighbor, maybe he does something difficult, so you throw your garbage over his back fence. You'll show him!

I remember when I was a boy in Montana in the cattle country. One frosty morning, I looked out and saw the cattle in the corral. There one old cow who, in turning around, bumped another cow. That cow kicked at her, so the first cow kicked back, but she missed that cow and hit another one. Pretty soon they were all kicking one another. The entire corral full of animals was kicking at one another. What a demonstration this is of the folly of kicking when you get kicked!

Have you ever seen a family behave this way? One little act, perhaps unintended, of injury to one member of the family, and that one strikes back, and somebody else gets into the act, and pretty soon the whole family is yelling and screaming at one another. That is because we are not acting like Christians; we are acting like what we are. There is no genuine love being evidenced, and we need to judge it on that very basis.

3. Then, in Verse 19, there is a third degree of this spirit that says *never attempt revenge*: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" That is, revenge goes beyond just getting even. Revenge is excessive retribution. It is not only getting even, but it is giving him something else besides. God says:

- Never do this,
- Never try to get even in the first place,
- Never go beyond that – ever,
- Never attempt to exact vengeance.

That is God's job. When you try it, you are usurping his job without his power and wisdom, and the result is that you will inevitably make things worse.

We only have to look around us at our life, and the life of our family, and our nation, to see how true this is. Vengeance only perpetu-

ates the evil, expands it, and flings it out wider, so that it touches more lives and hurts more hearts. The only one who has the wisdom and the power to do this rightly is God himself. Therefore, he says, "You leave vengeance to me. I will take care of the individual that has injured you. You must never try to handle this yourself."

Furthermore, he says in Verse 20, "... if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink..." I wish that some of these misguided saints, who are so conscious of truth and the need to be faithful to truth in these days, but are so harsh and unrelenting to those who disagree with them, would read this verse again.

"If your enemy is hungry," what do you do? Do you cut yourself off from him and refuse to have anything to do with him? Do you refuse to talk with him and run him down on every side? Do you print up pamphlets and distribute them so that you can tear him down? No! Read the verse again: "If he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."

Now, don't misunderstand that verse. "Burning coals" does not mean that you will make him feel so ashamed of himself that he will finally come around, and say that you were right after all. It isn't making him so miserable that you can sit back and say to yourself, "Uh-huh, I've got you now. You are really squirming." No, that is not genuine love. *Burning coals*, here, means "the hot coals of love." You just heap more love on him because of the evil he is doing – that is what Paul is saying. Remember what love is – not sentimentality, not just gush. Rather, love that hates evil but holds to what is good is what you are heaping upon him. It must be genuine, of course, you can't have ulterior motives of trying to reduce this person to a state of shame or self-reproach – that can't be the motive.

During the war, I remember hearing of some American soldiers in China who found that life there was very delightful because they had Chinese houseboys who were assigned to them to do all the dirty work. They did all the cooking, laundry, sweeping, and cleaning; they took care of everything in the house. In certain ways, this life was wonderful because the sol-

diers had everything done for them. There was one group of soldiers who had a fine houseboy whose Chinese name they couldn't pronounce, so they called him "Charlie." They used to play tricks on Charlie. It was fun, for them at least, to nail Charlie's shoes to the floor, so that when he put them on he couldn't move. And they would put buckets of water up over the door, and, when Charlie came in, the water would fall on him. They would laugh at his expense. They would short-sheet his bed, and play all the other little, diabolical tricks that young people know. Invariably, Charlie took it with wonderful grace; instead of getting angry, he would laugh along with them, and he seemed to almost enjoy it. Finally, they began to feel ashamed of themselves. One day they said, "You know, we really shouldn't do these things to Charlie. He has been so gracious about this, and is always so ready to serve us, and then we repay him with these dirty tricks." So they felt ashamed of themselves, and said, "We'll never do this again." And they called Charlie in, and said, "Charlie, we want to tell you that your attitude has made us feel so ashamed of ourselves that we are not ever going to play these tricks on you again." He said, "You mean, no more nailie shoes to floor?" And they said, "No more." And he said, "You mean, no more bucket over door?" And they said, "No more." And he said, "You mean, no more short-sheet bed?" And they said, "No more." He said, "Good! Then Charlie no more spittee in sou-pee!"

You see, if you have an ulterior motive, you are not demonstrating love. This isn't it. This is simply a farce, an outward front. No, as the Word says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals [of hot love] upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil..."

That is what happens when we try to repay or avenge ourselves. We are "overcome by evil." We are the losers. We have lost that battle. Instead, we should "overcome evil with good."

Now, all of this, you will recognize, is simply the manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ at work. You go back through the passage and you'll notice

how parallel it is to First Corinthians 13, but even in a more practical sense. This is what love is, and all of it is Christ at work. It is impossible for *you* to do this, but it is not difficult for *him*. He can manifest this kind of an attitude and heart without any difficulty at all – he did it all the way through his life and ministry.

So don't try to imitate this. If you think you are going to go out now and try to do this kind of thing without depending on him to do it through you, you never will. If you do try, the result will be some cheap, shoddy thing that everyone will see through, except yourself. This is the sentimental kind of affection with which Christians sometimes meet one another.

Have you ever been talking with someone about a person, and the conversation has been very derogatory? Then that person has walked up, and you say to him, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you! We have just been talking about you and how wonderful you are." That isn't love. That is a cheap, imitation, shoddy kind of thing.

Genuine love is the kind of love portrayed in this passage of Romans. If you don't have this kind of love, and if you are not living this kind of love, it will do no good to just try to force yourself to it. The answer is that something is blocking the flow of his life in your life, because he delights to be this kind of a person through you. He is ready. He is available. You don't have to plead with him, and beg him, to be this kind of love. You don't have to say, "Lord, give me love." He can't give love – God is love, and he can't give it. He is it. There is no use to beg him, or try to plead with him, to do this because he is ready to do it. He is eager to be this through you.

- If this isn't working in you,
- If this isn't the thing that is manifest in your life,
- Then it is because, somewhere along the line,
 - You are trying to cling to your life and show forth his life at the same time,
 - You are insisting on being unloving and refusing to give up that attitude,

- You are not facing what you are,
- You are covering up or protecting it in some way,
- You are justifying it,
- You are saying, “Well, I have a right to be this way!”

So long as you do that, you are clinging to your own natural, Adamic life, and you cannot have his life flowing through you. There is a block because, as we have been reading all through Romans, it is not “Christ and I.” It is, “not I, but Christ.” The thing to do, then, is to come to grips with what is blocking the flow of his love through you. As Jesus said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone,” {John 12:24 KJV}.

- If it isn’t willing to yield the kind of life that it has now, it never will have any other kind of life.
- If it is still determined to run its own life, be its own boss, run its own affairs, set its own standards, make its own way, it will always be exactly what it is – nothing but a corn of wheat.
- But, if it dies,
 - *Then* it will discover the hidden Lordship that is built into a corn of wheat, which takes over and begins to direct its life from then on; and
 - It becomes, *then*, abundantly fruitful, and all that it ought to be in reproducing itself in a tremendous way.

This is what Paul is saying here. All of this chapter is simply impossible, depressing, and discouraging if we have not discovered that it is possible only if Christ lives his life through us. He is quite willing to do this. When we are willing to stop living our lives on our own, *then* his life is instantly available.

Paul said this in Second Corinthians 4:10: “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.” That is the cross. That is the facing of the end of my kind of life in order that the life of Jesus might be manifest in my mortal flesh.

This life is available to me now so that I may be all that is set forth, all that he is.

Prayer:

Our Father, how thankful we are for the Lord Jesus Christ and his availability to us today. And, as we measure our lives by this standard, we see how little there is of genuine love in us. Lord, keep us from the folly of thinking that we can produce this by our own efforts, or that we try to love. Rather, help us to see that the only thing that is standing in the way is the clinging to some part of our life that has been judged at the cross – our unwillingness to lay aside the bitter spirit, the resentful attitude, our unwillingness to allow others to be blessed without any apparent reason for it, our insistence that they come and minister to our pride, or in some way grovel before us, that we might feel a sense of satisfaction. Keep us from this, Father. May we judge this evil spirit, and, thus, allow the full course for the flowing of his life through us – this wonderful life, this attractive, compelling life which makes us easy to live with, easy to work with, and returns good for evil. For we pray in his name. Amen.

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