

# Radiant Love

Romans 12:9-13

## Introduction

In Romans 12-15, Paul is describing what a life transformed by the gospel looks like. In 12:3-8, it looks like believers humbly using their spiritual gifts to serve one another. In 12:9-21, it means radiating love. Radiant love spreads from a transformed heart, to the Christian family, and to an unbelieving world. This sermon unpacks what it means to radiate love FROM a transformed heart (v. 9) TO the Christian family (vv. 10-13).

## The Aim

The aim of this sermon is to understand how the gospel transforms our love, and how that love radiates to others.

### A. Don't Forget the Mercies of God (12:1-2)

Paul is describing a life transformed by the gospel. Having explained what God has done through Jesus Christ, and what happens to believers when they receive the promises of Jesus by faith, Paul is now describing what a life transformed by the gospel actually looks like.

But we need to be REALLY careful here! Everything we're about to read and hear from Romans 12, including the remaining chapters, assumes ONE critical thing. If you're going to read this section of Romans properly, then you must understand the mercies of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The only way to do what Paul commands us to do is by being changed—by being transformed—by being changed from the inside out by means of believing the gospel and by being renewed by it.

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. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Remember that these verses are the umbrella under which the rest of Romans must be understood. The reasonable response to what God has done in Jesus Christ is to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. As we break out of the mold of worldly thinking, and as we're transformed by the renewal of our minds—literally to undergo metamorphosis (change from the inside out)—we can test and discern what God's good and acceptable and perfect will is.

This is where the gospel rubber meets the road. Which begs the question, what is God's will for your life? Anybody ever ask what God's will for your life is?

Last week we saw in verses 3 through 8 that God's will is for Christians to humbly use their spiritual gifts. This week we're going to see that God's will is for Christians to radiate genuine love, which we begin to see at verse 9.

### B. Let the Gospel Transform Your Love (12:9)

On one hand, what we're reading here in Romans is just a long list of commands—14 in just these verses. But rather than see this merely as a list of 14 commands, I'd like us to see how Paul is describing a love that radiates from the heart (that's in verse 9), to the Christian family (that's verses 10-13), and to the unbelieving world (that's verses 14 and following). From the heart; to the Christian family; to the unbelieving world.

When Paul says "Let love be genuine", he is talking about a condition of the heart.

I once read an article in Christianity Today called “10 Objections to Christianity and How to Respond”. The author of this article was a professor of evangelism, and he listed what are possibly the 10 biggest objections to Christianity, along with how to respond to each one. The list included questions like

If God is loving, why does He send people to hell?

If God is good, why is there evil in the world? Why is there suffering?

How can Jesus be the only way to God?

These are all very good questions. But the number one objection that was at the top of his list was the complaint that **Christians are hypocrites**. Christians are hypocrites. Have you ever felt this way? Have you met a Christian hypocrite? What is a hypocrite anyway?

A hypocrite is literally someone who “plays the part”. It’s like being an actor—you’re pretending to be someone you’re not. You say things that are part of the ROLE, but it doesn’t represent anything REAL. And when Paul says, “Let love be genuine”, he’s saying “Let love be without hypocrisy” (NASB). “Let love be sincere” (NIV). Let love be more than just pretend.

You see, Paul is telling these believers to let the gospel transform their love.

### Let the Gospel Transform Your Love

He said back in verse 2 not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of their mind. What does this mean? The idea of being “conformed” has to do with being pressed into a mold. And the truth is, no matter who we are or where we’ve come from, we’ve all been pressed into a certain mold of living. A way of thinking and a way of doing life.

Many of us have been pressed into a mold of performance or acceptance. You feel you have to talk a certain way, dress a certain way, act a certain way in order to “fit in”. Try being different, try being yourself, and you risk being rejected.

Others of us have been pressed into a mold of socioeconomic status—where education, wealth, and materialism become status symbols and keys to entering the upper class of social elites. You’re elitist and look down on others.

Some of us have been pressed into a mold of dysfunction where the lines between right and wrong, good and bad, moral and immoral have been blurred or erased. Our values, our vocabulary, our behavior just aren’t very good.

No matter who we are, we’re all emerging from a mold. We’re all good at faking it, pretending to be what we’re not. But Paul says to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. That means to let God renovate your thinking. Most of you know the kind of work that goes into renovating. It’s messy. It takes hard work. It takes time and effort and persistence. God wants to renovate our thinking—to tear down the bad and build up the good. And he does that as we read His word, and meditate on who he is and what he’s done, as we pray and trust and obey his promises. As we do these things, God renovates our thinking—he renews our mind.

And as this happens, we become free to be our true selves as followers of Jesus. We don’t have to pretend. We are secure in God’s love and our identity in him.

And part of this transformation results in “**abhorring evil and holding fast the good**”—do you see that in verse 9?

The word “abhor” is a very strong word meaning hate or detest. It has the idea of sending shivers down your back you hate it so much. Paul says abhor evil. Hate it. Despise it. And hold fast the good. “Hold fast” here literally means “be glued to it”. Be glued to good. Cling to the good. We know what it’s like to be glued to our TV and computer screens. Your attention is rapt—you’re captivated. So Paul says, cling to good. Abhor evil; cling to the good.

Now if we think about it, these are kind of general terms—they’re ambiguous: good, evil. So, how can we really know what Paul means here? Well, there’s different ways of thinking about this, but the simplest answer that I would suggest for us is to remember that God alone is truly good. Jesus said this in Mark 10:18 when someone came to him and called him “Good Teacher”. He said, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18).

Now there's more to this interaction than we might realize, but as we study that passage, I think we're meant to make a logical deduction. If Jesus is good (and his life demonstrates that fact), and only God is good, then what does that make Jesus? Not only is Jesus making a statement about who God is, he's also making a statement about himself. But the point is, not only is God alone ultimately good, but Jesus—as God—is the manifestation of that goodness. In other words, if you want to see and know what's good, watch Jesus.

Most of us here today are followers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, abhorring evil and clinging to good means hating what Jesus hates and loving what Jesus loves. But to do that, we need to know Jesus. Don't we?

In order for our love to be sincere, in order despise evil and cling to good, we must let the gospel transform our heart—we must glue ourselves to Jesus.

I mentioned how critical understanding the gospel is to properly understanding these passages. If we don't understand the mercies of God—if we're not being transformed by the gospel, having our minds renovated by his truth—then we won't have what it takes to be genuine and sincere lovers of good. We just can't do it.

Tim Keller describes something along this line when he writes about marriage. You see, marriage is a very profound object lesson of Christ and the Church. And so there's many lessons that are easily transferable between both of these relationships. One he mentions is this:

“After trying all kinds of other things, Christians have learned that the worship of God with the whole heart in the assurance of his love through the work of Jesus Christ is the thing their souls were meant to “run on.” That is what gets all the heart's cylinders to fire. If this is not understood, then we will not have the resources to be good spouses [Christians].” (Keller, Meaning of Marriage, 50)

Folks, our souls were meant to “run on” the gospel—the assurance of God's love and grace and provision in Jesus. Once we understand this, we can love genuinely—unhypocritically, without pretending—hating evil and clinging to good. This is a description of love radiating from a transformed heart.

### C. Love Radiates to the Christian Family (12:10-13)

Notice, first of all, how this list describes love within the Christian community. Paul refers to loving one another with brotherly affection, contributing to the needs of saints and showing hospitality. But I'd like us to see three themes within this passage: that Christian love is COMMITTED, PROACTIVE, and GENEROUS.

First, that Christian love is committed. Notice that the language of verse 10 is deliberately family-oriented. None of the English versions translate this well, but the ESV is close.

“Love one another with brotherly affection.” (ESV)

“brotherly love unto one another loving dearly” (literal wording)

Literally Paul says “brotherly love unto one another loving dearly”. This is a very family-oriented phrase. To go a little further, the word meaning “brotherly affection” there, “loving dearly”, reveals a deep family connection. Notice these entries from a couple of Greek Lexicons

Properly of love of near relations... (Alford)

Tenderly affectionate, very loving...particularly to members of one's family or in-group. (Friberg)

Loving affection...used chiefly of the reciprocal tenderness of parents and children. (Thayer)

[This word] is common in Wills... (Moulton & Milligan)

Now let's summarize this. Love of near relations; particularly of one's family or in-group; like the reciprocal tenderness of parents and children; the basis for including a person in one's Will.

Are you getting the picture? Paul is calling for family-style love within the church. There is no more committed love than family love. Blood is thicker than water isn't it?

### Christian Love in the Church Family

Think of the implications of committed family-style love in the church. Some people don't know hardly anyone in church. So, there's a lot of ground for them to make up. Others know quite a few people. But do you REALLY know them? Do you know their birthday, or one of their favorite food, or how they like their coffee (if they drink coffee)?

Some have known people in this church for 30 years or more. Is your affection toward them even close to what you have toward your parent or your child? Are you as affectionate toward them as your grandchildren?

Think of your "in-group". Where do you go where you can truly bare your soul? Where you can be totally vulnerable, totally yourself, without fear of rejection? Are those people in this fellowship, or are they friends and relatives that live somewhere else?

Paul is calling for deep emotional connection among the family of God. But, as you know, this is very difficult to attain.

Now, I don't want to belabor this too much, but it's worth noting that as difficult as this is, small churches have an advantage in this area. Until about 8 years ago, most of my and Gloria's church experiences were in small churches of less than 75 people. The advantage to that size of church is building strong relationships. You get to know everybody, your meeting times are heavily relational, and so over time close relationships develop.

The larger a church becomes, of course, the more difficult this is.

And E-Free is not a small church. Therefore, we have to be more creative and intentional about how these relationships are formed. That's why we're trying to raise the value of our small groups. I'm convinced that the best way to create the connection that Paul desires for the church is by people committing to smaller groups where those relationships can develop. But in order for that to work, people must invest time and commitment.

Isn't that what you do for your kids? Most of you parents respond to your kids at the drop of a hat. You'd fly somewhere, drive all night, take the day off if it meant helping your kids. And your grandkids? You'd give up an arm and a leg to see them! Are we, as Jesus-followers, able to show the same brotherly affection to our church family? That's a hard question.

The truth is, we can't. We cannot do this on our own. We need the gospel to transform our love. Remember what Keller said,

Christians have learned that the worship of God with the whole heart in the assurance of his love through the work of Jesus Christ is the thing their souls were meant to "run on." That is what gets all the heart's cylinders to fire. If this is not understood, then we will not have the resources..."

So, we need to let the gospel transform our love.

Love that radiates to the Christian family is COMMITTED because it's a family-style love.

But love that radiates to the Christian family is also PROACTIVE. We see this in verses 11 and 12, "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

There's a line of thought here that many of us need to be reminded of. Some of us have been following Jesus for a number of years—20, 40, or 60 years! And as with any relationship or experience, things can become dull or life-less. We experience what commentator Everett Harrison describes:

After converts have experienced the initial glow and ardor of Christian life there is often danger of their slipping back into a deadening spiritual inertia. (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

Isn't that true? Are you tired? Are you weary? Is there a danger of you being spiritually lazy? Paul is urging fervency and diligence. But how? How can we regain zeal? How can we become fervent in spirit? How can we renew our service to the Lord? Well, I think the primary answer is the last item in that list—prayer. Paul says "be constant in prayer".

Again, we need to be careful here—I'm not just saying "You need to pray more"! Remember, the theme throughout this section is to let the gospel transform our love. Remember, our love radiates from a transformed heart.

But how does prayer fit into this?

The answer isn't so much THAT you pray, but HOW you pray.

There are two realities that always motivate me to pray. No matter how tired or grumpy or distracted I am, two truths always motive me to pray: God is worthy and I am needy. God is always worthy of my praise and I am always needy of his grace and mercy. These involve both adoration and confession—adoring God for who he is and confessing my shortcomings before him.

But here's the thing, adoration prayer—worship-based prayer, praising God for who he is—actually cultivates our love for him. Worship-based prayer deepens our affection for God and therefore helps us overcome "deadening spiritual inertia".

And it's not hard. You just say, "Father I love you because...". "Father, I praise you for..." "Father, you are wonderful because..."

So the love that radiates to the Christian family is committed—it's family-style.

The love that radiates to the Christian family is proactive—resisting spiritual inertia through worship-based prayer.

Finally, the love that radiates to the Christian family is generous. We see this in verse 13, "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."

We've mentioned before, and I'll just say again, that E-Free has been a very generous church. Your ministry generosity is evident by our facilities, by our staffing, by our missions, and by many other ministry initiatives. And I can hear the Apostle Paul saying, "And I pray that you'll abound more and more."

But notice the second part of this verse, "seeking to show hospitality." I'd like to mention a couple of things about this phrase.

First, the Greek word for "hospitable" is philo-xenos, which means "fond of guests" or "fond of strangers". Maybe you've heard the word xenophobia, which is the opposite. It means to fear or be prejudiced against those from other countries.

Biblical hospitality is primarily about loving the outsider. Loving the stranger. It has very little to do with the formalities of hosting—whether decorating or cooking—and much to do with the fondness for people.

One scholar, Frederick Danker, actually defines this word as

Regard for one who comes from outside one's group or on a visit...

Biblical hospitality is an expression of love—especially love for outsiders. More than this, though, Paul says to "seek to show hospitality". The idea here is to chase hospitality down. Pursue it. It's the same word as "persecute" in verse 14. Look at it.

"Bless those who 'persecute' you"—seek you, pursue you. In other words, people may be seeking you to do harm, you seek the stranger to show love. "Seek to show hospitality".

Now think of the possibilities. Our communities are full of outsiders—neighbors, coworkers, students. What an opportunity to show hospitality. Pursue hospitality. Let your love radiate to them.

And don't let Covid and quarantine get in the way. We need to get past this and make the most of every opportunity we have. Whatever sphere you are in, and whatever your conscience will allow, share a coffee time. Do a brown-bag lunch together. Go to a restaurant that's open. Go on a walk. Say hi. Do something! Pursue hospitality.

Let your love radiate from a transformed heart, to the Christian family, and to an unbelieving world.

## Application

1. **Describe the “renewal of the mind” (12:2).** How does this work for you? What has been most helpful? What has been least helpful? Why? Where does God need to do a “renovation” project?
2. **How are you “loving genuinely” (12:9)?** Are you able to be brutally honest with yourself and others? How has the gospel freed you from a previous mold of living?
3. **Consider the three aspects of Christian-family love (12:10-13):**
  - a. **Committed:** What is getting in the way of you experiencing family-style love in the church?
  - b. **Proactive:** How would you describe your prayer life? What’s going well? Where are you struggling? Tell God today that you love him and why you love him.
  - c. **Generous:** Who is an outsider that you can seek out?