

Romans 12:9-18

9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Today we continue where we left off last week. The Apostle Paul is writing to the Roman Christians. His main theme is that of a changed life from the ways of the world to a life of devotion. Paul encountered the resurrected Jesus and offered his whole life to Christ which in his case includes a willingness to be persecuted.

At the time when the Scripture was written, world religion was polytheistic. Judaism was monotheistic but focused on the law and neglected to care for the people. Jesus offered to the world salvation in order to save us from the wrath of God which is brought on by our sins. So, in essence, Jesus came to save us from ourselves. The book of Acts is a book of reformation, replacing judgmentalism and criticism with genuine love. The Apostle Paul is a follower of Christ; his heart is tuned into the heart of Jesus who offers genuine love instead of judgmentalism and criticism. Last week was about presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice but it does not mean you have to suffer. It means that in order to be holy you have to be different from the ways of the world with a renewed mind that is focused on the will of God. We do not all have the same function but we are all parts of the same body.

Today's Scripture is about relating to fellow human beings; it's about relationship in the community. The main theme of Jesus and the Apostle Paul is love. It is not romantic love but sincere care for another. The title is *True Christian*. To be a true Christian means following the teachings of Christ. Love and care for others replaces hatred, judging, and condemnation of others. The Apostle Paul lists a series of 24 virtues for all Christians to follow. We claim to live by the Bible but can we live by two dozen commandments? Each one is a lesson in itself. We may not remember them all but they do function as a guiding light. The major theme of these virtues is a standard Christian virtue. When you follow Jesus, applying the virtues into daily living becomes natural, the virtues follow you. Love is to be genuine with mutual care, trust, and affection.

We are to rejoice in the service of others. Each individual serves the Lord in their own way. The nature of community is that we can join forces together to serve the Lord. We also serve each other with love as it relates to the Holy Spirit. Love must be genuine, it manifests in warm affection. Genuine love does not seek self gratification but is divine, caring like Jesus loves us. It is not romantic but divine. Be careful. You are not to suffer or allow yourself to be victimized by the multiple traps that Satan is anxious to throw in front of the children of God.

The newer the convert the more risk of being tripped up. This is because your social network has not fully embraced your new persona. So, they expect you to be your old self and they will test your faith as if you have to prove yourself to them. Theirs is a selfish position as

they expect you to adjust your life to their satisfaction and feel entitled to judge you. God's impartial love is for all and it is to be emulated. We are to rely on God's impartial love for all as is demonstrated in the love offering of Jesus. We are to follow the example of love that is set before us by Jesus. Love has awesome and tremendous power. Love can transform you, your life, and your relationships. Love has divine characteristics as love is related to the Holy Spirit. We know true love from God and Jesus. It is the love that God has for us that brings us into the family of God. Love motivates us to act out of appreciation to reciprocate God's love for us. We strive to please God because we truly appreciate what God has done for us.

The Apostle Paul knows the principle of love creates the Christian church. His attitude is not to live by flesh but to live by faith. The Son of God loves me enough to gave all of himself for me. It means everything. It is powerful. Love is the key from God to us and to God from us. Love is the key for the true Christian. I am reminded of the movie *Jesus Christ Superstar*. There is a song *I Don't Know How to Love Him*. The singer's familiarity with love is earthly and she has had many men but she encounters Jesus and the love is divine. That love is so pure it does not condemn or judge but accepts. When love is divine there is no comparison. It's magic the greatest thing. Divine love is a quality that keeps Christians motivated and keeps us together as brothers and sisters. Divine love is absolutely sincere, authentic, and pure.

Whereas, the gospel demands love, the problems we face in life is that in the earthly realm love is quite selfish. For many people, love is for your own feelings, what you get out of it, or what you can take from it. Divine love is the opposite. It is outpouring for the benefit of others. Mary Magdalene had a bad reputation. However, nowhere in the scriptures is she labeled a bad woman. The scriptures only tell us that she was possessed by demons which would be beyond her control. This woman of social scorn turned out to be a very exceptional woman. She supported Jesus and his disciples. She followed them and gave financial support to them. She was at the cross. She witnessed the burial. She maintained a prayer vigil. She returned to anoint the body. She has the tremendous great honor of being the 1st witness of the resurrected Jesus. While the world saw a woman in the hands of evil, Jesus saw what the world missed – the makings of a saint. The true Christian sees what Jesus saw. Love has the power to take action. To reach out to others in good will, to serve the Lord with love. Of all the virtues listed in various places throughout the Bible, love is at the top of the list. The virtues is today's Scripture are for the practical care of another. A true Christian loves others like Jesus loves us, pure, clean, and wholesome.