

Marks of Christ-Like Love

Romans 12:9-21

St. Paul closed Romans 11 with a summary of God's mercies to both Gentiles and Jews, and then he wrote a hymn of praise. "Who has known the mind of the Lord," Paul asked, that he or she could anticipate or explain such a plan to rescue sinners?

In light of this, Paul appeals to us, by the mercies of God, to live holy lives as our act of spiritual worship. Furthermore, we are not to be conformed to this world, but rather be transformed by the renewal of our mind in order to discern the will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

Paul then goes on to list various gifts we have by God's grace in Romans 12:3-8. He follows this in Romans 12:9-21 by exhorting (encouraging) us to display marks of Christ-like love. Paul is encouraging believers to "be who they are in Christ" as a response to what Christ has done for us by His death and resurrection, and the renewal of our mind to be more like His.

Read Romans 12:9-21.

Why is the renewal of our minds necessary to be able to carry out the encouragements (exhortations) Paul gives in Romans 12:9-21?

"Genuine love" is not just a feeling or an emotion. "Genuine love" is very active. It will be "hating what is evil, clinging to what is good, being devoted to one another with brotherly love, etc."

These words are a continuation of what Paul has been writing from 12:1. He has just talked about faith and love expressing itself through the use of spiritual gifts in service to the Body of Christ. He is going to continue the theme of "faith and love in service to others" in the remaining verses of chapter 12. As a believer uses his/her gifts in the Church, it must be prompted by genuine love - agape love - love that is selfless and service-minded. Paul will go on to give examples of how agape love expresses itself.

Considering the commands of this passage, why must love be genuine (unfeigned, without hypocrisy)?

What is the relationship between love, abhorring evil, and clinging to good? See John 14:21 and 1 John 3:10,18 for help.

So much passes for “genuine love” but in reality it is not. Christians may display outward love, but inside conceal hatred. As Paul talks about how Christians deal with one another, this “false love” is exposed when a brother/sister in Christ says nothing to a fellow believer who has sinned. Luther points out this lack of genuine love in the way Christians abandon each other in times of trial or adversity. They thought they loved each other, but hardships test the genuineness of that love.

Why is this often the case? What are some ways we can overcome this sinful response?

Using Romans 12:9-16, which godly directive (provide the verse #) applies to the following situations?

- _____ 1. A neighbor calls you a fool for the Christian faith that you confess.
- _____ 2. A poorly dressed family is ignored by everybody in your apartment building.
- _____ 3. A sister in the faith is saddened by her troubled marriage and family life.
- _____ 4. A fellow believer is making plans to be married.
- _____ 5. Friends of yours are grieving the death of a dear grandparent.
- _____ 6. You are trying to help a member of your congregation who is lazy and extremely critical of others.
- _____ 7. You learn that a member of the church is unemployed and cannot meet his living expenses.

Our merciful God emphasizes His command that we “show hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

How do we show godly hospitality? Read Hebrews 13:1-2 and 1 Peter 4:9.

We are commanded to live peaceably with others in so far as we are able (Romans 12:18). Sometimes conflict with the world is inevitable. **Read John 16:33.**

Why might it not always be possible to live peaceably with others? Read Romans 16:17-18 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

Both Paul and Jesus teach that we must do good to our enemies. What good might result from doing good and thereby heaping burning coals on their heads?

Along with doing good to our enemies we must not avenge ourselves. Why is this so? Do you have a situation you must leave in God's hands rather than taking revenge?

Paul's final command in this section is, "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good". How does living the life of Christ-like love enable us to overcome evil?

Paul has given us some challenging encouragements (exhortations). The ones we struggle with reveal to us the areas where we need to be transformed; and all of God's Word gives our minds truth to grab hold of.

What area have you been challenged in and need to trust God to transform you?

In view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices. This is your spiritual act of worship! And with transformed minds, you will display the marks of Christ-like love:

- In your daily life decisions.
- In your use of your God-given gifts.
- In your dealing with all your neighbors.
- In your response to those who are unkind.

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 1 John 4:12