

Video:
Discussion with Jenny Reeve and
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Chaplain's Office
University Passage Resource

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Authenticity in Practice
Romans 12:9-13

Paul's exhortation to let love be genuine is a pivotal point in this section of his letter. It can be either a summary of everything that has already been said, or the overarching theme of everything that is to follow. To surrender our very selves to God as living sacrifices is nothing less than genuine love for God. To humbly accept our place in the Body of Christ, where our gifts can be used in service according to the grace given to us, is nothing less than genuine love for the Church. Genuine love is also to hate what is evil. It is not to hate evildoers; they are fellow human beings who can be redeemed by the power of love. Rather, it is to hate the spirit and phenomenon of evil itself, that demonic force or lifeless field that warps humanity, clouds judgment, ruins Creation, and opposes God.

After all, what is love? Love is thoroughgoing care, compassion, commitment, and concern, particularly in its expression toward other human beings. It therefore aims to vanquish every force and field that undercuts these nurturing expressions. Those who strive for love are careful to avoid the acerbic, self-serving remark or personal attack. They decline underhanded, conniving dealings. They refuse dishonest, hypocritical behavior. They reject words and actions that are hurtful, demeaning, and insulting. In short, they hold fast to what is good. When there is a choice between promoting good or its opposite, they always choose the good.

If, in the previous verses, Paul portrayed the Church turned outward in ministry to the world, in these verses he speaks of the Church turned inward in ministry to one another. "Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor." This is a beautiful picture of the inner life of a congregation. Both dimensions of the Church's life, the outward and the inner, are necessary.

Paul goes further. He then focuses on the inner life of the believer. Showing zeal and an ardent spirit as one serves the Lord, along with joy in hope, patience in suffering, and perseverance in prayer, are the outworking of love. Paul then returns to the theme of ministry turned inward and outward, where the believer at once contributes to the needs of the saints and shows hospitality to strangers. Genuine love is all-around love.

Regrettably, popular culture is not lacking for counterfeit expressions of love. As a result, confusion abounds over what love really is. It is not because the lessons of real love have not been taught; it is because these lessons are not being heard. Let us seek ways to make the lessons heard. Let us seek ways to make Scripture heard.

1. What examples of genuine love have you seen in your life?
2. What advice would you give to someone on a quest for genuine love?
3. How can we tell the difference between genuine love and counterfeit love?