

LOVE IN ACTION

Romans 12:14-16

"Let love be without dissimulation." When thinking of the Christian responsibility toward others, you can sum it up in a call for genuine love. We are to demonstrate unhypocritical love toward God, fellow believers in the church, and toward the outsider.

In this extended series of exhortations, Paul amplifies exactly what he means by unhypocritical love. Already we have observed six basic features of this love, especially as it is manifest in the Christian fellowship. Before us in these verses we have it as it is especially manifest toward the outsider as well as toward fellow members of the Christian congregation. The last part of this chapter will set before us the reaction of love when it is under fire, when it is being tested by enmity and opposition.

Surely what we need now is love--especially if it is of the genuine kind. This becomes even more obvious when you look carefully at each of these admonitions connected with it. The ones in this text can be arranged under three basic actions. If love is real, if it is genuine, it will act in this way.

GENUINE LOVE BLESSES

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." To bless someone is a special Christian work. Such work can be done by doing them good.

Whenever you benefit from the activity of another person, it would be proper to refer to this as being blessed by them. However in this verse to bless is a little more specific. It refers to offering a prayer to God for some special benefit to come upon this particular person, It would be the opposite of "cursing" them.

The object of the words of blessing expressed by genuine love is the interesting part. They are those "who persecute you." To persecute someone is to pursue them with a view of doing them harm. Whenever you realize someone is on your trail to do you harm, you are to bless them by offering to God special prayers for some special good thing to come to their lives.

You can be sure that this is not a normal response. The natural inclination is to "curse them". This does not refer to what we would call cussing them, or to calling them bad names. Really it means what is usually behind the practice of cursing or cussing someone out. It means to verbally call upon God to impose something terrible upon them. The curse that calls on God to damn someone would be close to what the Apostle is talking about. Only he is speaking of it in a very serious way, as a serious act of approaching God to do someone evil.

Before us then are the words of genuine love. The words of genuine love call for blessings upon someone, especially upon those who would do the person harm. The Bible provides us with a notable example of this in the death of Stephen, as well as the death of our Lord. The man writing this letter would never forget the day when he watched a dying man do this very thing. When the crowd with the cooperation of Paul had condemned Stephen to death, and was in the process of stoning him to death, Paul heard Stephen bless the crowd. He prayed earnestly while their stones were striking their death blows, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." "Do not lay this sin to their charge." Nothing except genuine love could enable a man to pray after this manner. Natural man would have prayed, "O God send the fire to consume them, they are mistreating me."

This blessing them can also involve what we say about them to others. Do we malign them in our speech? Do we tell every bad thing we can find on them? Not if we truly love them. Love will put a spirit of kindness into the tongue and will make it speak words of sweetness. When a tongue is constantly spitting forth bitter, critical words, it is a sure sign that the love is not genuine. Genuine love blesses with the words that it speaks.

GENUINE LOVE SYMPATHISES.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." We have a special word for this--sympathy. Wherever we meet people, whatever their emotional or

physical condition, we should be able to understandingly identify with them. We are not to be aloof from those about us.

The Apostle includes the two extremes in this admonition. The rejoicing people are those to whom some special joy has just arrived --- it could be prosperity, a long sought blessing, or an infinite number of things. Many expositors have discerningly observed that this is much more difficult than weeping with those that weep. If we are not careful when we encounter those whose hearts are overflowing for joy over some special blessing, it will cause us to become envious, and cause us to wonder why it did not happen to us.

Let me illustrate. Just suppose that someone who works with you gets some special recognition for his effective work, maybe even gets a promotion. He comes into the work area almost beside himself with joy over what has happened. As he shares with you the good news, he can hardly keep his feet on the floor. What will your reaction be? Will you be able to honestly rejoice with him? Or will you begin to feel sorry for yourself that no one ever recognizes how hard you work, no one ever recommends you for a promotion, So while you may be outwardly smiling with your fellow-worker, and may even be offering congratulatory words, you are actually smarting down deep inside. The only way you can so rejoice with those who rejoice is to really have love.

Or let us imagine another situation. Suppose another person works on a sales force with you. She comes to the sales meeting bubbling over with joy because she has been able to set a new record in sales over the last week. You know that this means an unusually high commission for her. How will you react to such joy? Will you really be able to be happy because of the happiness that has come to her, or will you secretly resent her success. It all depends on how much you love.

Or ladies suppose you go to visit the neighbor next door and find that she has been able to re-furnish her house throughout. She has it furnished so appropriately and richly -- she is just bubbling over with joy at her good fortune. As you admire her home what will really be in your heart. Will you be joyful over her blessing, or will you secretly resent the fact that your husband is not able to afford such finery? Will you be wondering why nice things like this never seem to happen to you?

Or young people, what is your reaction when you hear that the girl who sits right across from you in English has been elected the class favorite, or that the boy who sits across from you in math has been elected the most handsome in the class? Will you be able to rejoice with them over their honor, or will you secretly be wondering why you were passed over?

True love can also weep with those that weep, When you really love, whatever makes them sad, makes you sad. Whatever brings tears to their eyes, will so bring tears to your eyes.

Was not our Lord the ultimate example of such love? Never do we find Him in a situation in which He could not feel with those around Him. When they were genuinely blessed, He was glad. Whenever they were broken in heart, he became a man of sorrow and tears. What we are talking about here is really the feelings of love. Love is able to reach out to others wherever they may be sympathetically and is able to identify with their situation.

LOVE UNIFIES

"Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." Already we notice the words of love, and the feelings of love, so now we come to the mind of love. The mind of love, that is the thinking of love, is such that it makes unity possible.

This is a word that may be applied to the local church, or may also be applied to our relationship to others out in the world.

Each of these three admonitions is speaking to the same basic thing--an humble mind that makes right relationship with others possible. Let us look at them individually.

To "be of the same mind one toward another" involves having a harmonious attitude. You must be willing to seek to understand the mind and thoughts of your fellowman. Instead of striding forth into life like you is the only one who knows anything, and that everyone should agree with you, if you really love you will always seek to encourage unity of thought, especially as it relates to your fellowman. Are you always willing to seek to understand why your friend holds to a different view on a certain subject? Love encourages unity, but not uniformity.

"Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." This really touches on one of the major causes of disunity among men--selfish ambition. To mind high things is to be selfishly ambitious. To condescend to men of low estate may be better translated to "be carried along with low things." The word can refer to either lowly men or lowly things. Because of the contrast, it would seem to be better to relate it to lowly things. Instead of being driven by selfish ambition, we must be willing to involve ourselves in the lowly places and the lowly things of life. We must not allow ambition and false dignity keep us from being all that God wants us to be. To remove this selfish ambition and false dignity will be to remove a major barrier to unity of the Spirit.

"Be not wise in your own conceits." Again this touches on your opinion of yourself. You must not be thinking of yourself as possessing all of the wisdom of the world. You must have a teachable spirit toward others in the world.

How does your love measure by such a standard? Most of us will want to humbly confess our failures, and seek a fresh expression of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

He does produce this kind of fruit in the life of those who learn to walk in the Spirit.