

Re-set: *Love at Lake*

Romans 12:9-13

In our “Re-set” series of messages from Romans 12-13, the issue that I want to re-set today has to do with our love for one another within this church family. So, here is our **re-set phrase of the week**:

In view of God’s mercy, let your love for your LAC family be genuine and without hypocrisy.

To get to this, **let’s review** what the Apostle Paul has told us so far in Romans. He’s told us:

- 1) How much all of us need God’s mercy (Rom 1-11),
- 2) We should live in view of that mercy (12:1-2), and
- 3) Lives re-set on the mercy of God will always lead to us using God’s gifts to serve one another (12:3-8).

In our passage today, Rom 12:9-13, we discover that all the giftedness in the world will do us no good if we do not love one another. This is, of course, fully consistent with what Jesus taught. When he met with his disciples in his farewell address, his first directive was this:

My children, I will be with you only a little longer... You can’t come where I am going. A new command I give you: Love one another! As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (Jn 13:33-35).

I think Jesus knew it would be hard for churches actually to do this so, in his one prayer for us prayed just before he died on the cross for us, this is the one thing we hear Jesus praying:

My prayer, Father, is not for these twelve disciples alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father... May be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you love them... (Jn 17:20-23).

The Call to Love without Hypocrisy in Romans 12:9

Love must be without hypocrisy. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Jesus lets us know that there is a lot at stake in us obeying this command, doesn’t he? Probably with Jesus’ words in his mind, the Apostle Paul says, in Rom 12:9, a passage calling us to love our church family members: “Let your love be genuine, i.e., without hypocrisy.” Of all the things he could have said that our love should be -- like great, warm, bold, etc. -- he says, “Let love be without hypocrisy.”

The word that the Bible uses for “without hypocrisy” or “genuine” is one that refers to us being the same on the outside as we are on the inside. In our culture, we seem always to be encouraged to hide things about ourselves -- to sell ourselves to get a job or to get acceptance. We tend to hide things that we’re ashamed of. All that doesn’t facilitate transparency and genuineness, does it? It’s hard to be transparent when we think we will lose a job or lose respect from our family, friends and colleagues if we open up what is inside us. So, let’s face it, as we live our daily lives, all of us are strongly tempted to mask what’s inside and even to fake a love for people that we don’t really have for them. To all this, the Bible says that **we can’t genuinely love unless we love genuinely**.

And this, of course, forces us to come to grips with the words in the Bible that immediately follow on this call to love church people without hypocrisy in **12:9b**, i.e., to “*hate what is evil and cling to what is good.*” These are very strong words: Abhor evil! Be bonded to what is good! What is the Bible asking of us in this?

I think this takes us back to **Rom 12:1**, a verse that forces us to acknowledge that there is evil inside each one of our hearts. We all need God’s mercy. Here is the message: If we will love other imperfect people, we must first acknowledge our own evil and hate it. When we do, it will eradicate the pride that keeps us from loving others.

But, then we remember the good too. We must remember that, when we bring our sin and shame to God, he shows us mercy. We should bask in the fact that, though God knows we need mercy, he also sees good in us, a good he can redeem. God can take us from our paths of self and sin and put on a path of Christ-like love.

In **Rom 12:9**, God calls us all to examine our own hearts both to acknowledge that there is sin in us that is to be abhorred as well as to acknowledge that God himself has seen something good in us worthy of redemption. God’s Word teaches that abhorring evil and clinging to good will lead to us living lives of genuine love.

How does that work? I think it's like this: When we see the effects of sin in our own lives, we hate it. Then, when we see our brothers and sisters devastated by their sin as well as by the sin and injustice in our world, we will hate that too. At the same time, because we are experiencing the goodness of the love of God in forgiving us and blessing us and changing us, we should cling to that and want to pass on this kind of love to others, i.e., we will want to love as God loves us – offering others hope, help and new beginnings. It's a love that that genuinely flows out of us having received mercy ourselves. It's a love that must start with us loving our own church family without hypocrisy.

What Love Without Hypocrisy Would Look Like at a Church like Lake?

I want to summarize the way that the Apostle Paul summarizes what love without hypocrisy looks like in a local church. It's found in short statements in vv.10-12. In those verse, Paul summarizes the kind of culture that should be pervasive in a loving church. I'll walk through them with you. As I do, see if you would long for our church family to become more and more like this. A church that loves genuinely will be marked by:

Unbreakable Affection -- *Be devoted to one another in love* (12:10a).

The two words in v.10a are family words: 1) brotherly love (from the word, philadelphia) and 2) devotion to one another (a word of constancy and affection). These words were rarely used in the 1st C world of the Bible of anything other than of blood relationships. But, the Bible applies them to us! When we enter a church family, we belong to each other – like a family is identified with one another. This is call to us to love one another in church the way we think a good family should love one another. That means that we will surely come to recognize our imperfections as family members always do. At the same time, we will stick together and not disassociate ourselves from one another. My older brother Chuck – a football player, weight lifter, and truck driver – knew his younger brother's flaws and sometimes pointed them out. But, if he heard anybody else tearing me down, he suddenly became my biggest defender. I usually walked to school with my brother – and, being in the family with the biggest and strongest kid in school meant I rarely had to deal with bullies. Our church family should be something like that.

Mutual Respect -- *Honor one another above yourselves* (12:10b).

This is the 2nd “one another” command in this passage. The way the Apostle Paul wrote this phrase is very descriptive because it can be taken in two ways:

1. It is a command – esteem your brothers and sisters more highly than yourself (Phil 2:3). In other words, it never says, “The most important thing in this family is what I want”. No, the first question is, what is important to others in my church family. I've preached about this often. The only way that we will ever be able to be a unified family with the diversity of God's family is if we will apply this command, one that is also expressed in **Phil 2:3**: “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.*”
2. It is a challenge to a healthy competition – The phrase could be translated, “Outdo one another in honoring others above yourself.”

In either case, it means to show the highest respect at all times to your brothers and sisters in Christ, even when you have to disagree or confront. And, let me say as your Sr. Pastor: I have experienced that you do to toward me better than any church family I have ever been a part of – and I am grateful. I pray that I might honor you as you consistently honor me. Indeed, I want to outdo you in honoring!

Spirit-fueled Strength – *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord* (12:11).

With v.11, we're suddenly moved into the real challenges that all churches face, i.e., we get tired of loving imperfect people. We lose our zeal for the same old kinds of flaws and irritations that are a part of every group of people, including church people, this side of heaven. If we will love people in a church as filled with imperfect people as Lake is, we desperately need the power of the Holy Spirit. But, not this, that's exactly what we have. God's Spirit is here and among us. He has the power to keep us going.

V. 11 tells us all to keep our enthusiasm for loving your brothers and sisters in Christ. When we love one another, ultimately we are serving the Lord, the one who has shown us mercy. I love the idea of loving

with zeal coupled with this requiring spiritual fervor. I also resonate with the fact loving church members is not only service to them but also to the Lord. When you don't want to love us any more, go to the Lord and be re-set "in view of God's mercy".

Hope-filled Patience – *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer* (12:12).

These 3 phrases in v.11 combine to say, "Family, stay on the course together." Here's what we should do:

- Remember our shared hope -- Always take time to remember that God is present and working all things together to make all things new. Remember that, whatever happens to you or to our church, the end of our shared journey is assured. Our Father will finish what he has started. Be joyful in that hope.
- Never give up on one another -- When there are afflictions or challenges, don't look for a more perfect local church family. Be patient with one another even when difficulties come.
- Pray together – that love and understanding will deepen and that we will know God's good, pleasing and perfect will for us as a church family. Be patient in prayer.

Putting it all together, Rom 12:10-12 teaches us about the kind of culture that should pervade our church family. The word in 12:9 for the love we're to have for one another is "agape". It's a word that, in Romans, is used almost exclusively for the love of God. We are to love one another here at Lake the way that God loves us.

Sure Evidences of Genuine Love -- *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality* (12:13).

In v. 13, we read powerfully about two of the ways that genuine love always shows itself in our actions.

What will agape lead us to as church people?

1. **Sharing when there are needs** – The word translated "share" is *koinonia*, meaning that a church is a fellowship of people who know one another, care about the needs of one another, and then share as we have resources to meet the needs of those in the church family who are hurting. The needs this verse refers to are surely financial – but they are not only financial. The word for "needs" has to do with any kind of need that a church family member might have – emotional, relational, guidance, etc.
2. **Hospitality to those who visit us** – Writing to churches in Rome, Paul knew that there was a constant flow of Christians who traveled through the city, often on business. He wanted church people to know that we should always look for those who are visiting -- who are traveling through the town or who come and go as their work-lives allow -- and make sure they are welcomed and have a place of belonging. I've never been in a church that has more people who are traveling through and stop by our church than this one. I think this verse has direct application to us – and calls us to be a welcoming place making sure those who visit are welcomed and assured that, here, they are at home.

This kind of love can only happen, of course, when we know one another. How can that kind of relationship be established? I think that it requires an attitude of love that leads us to enter into a relationship and cares about what that other person might be facing at the time. 1) That can happen, albeit not deeply, before and after our times of gathered worship. 2) Even more, we get to know needs in small group communities. If you are in one here at LAC, please use those times to allow people to communicate their needs and to share life in those times. And 3) we develop the kind of relationship that flows into love when we serve one another. That why this call to love genuinely flows directly out of the command to us to serve one another in 12:3-8.

Note this: When we serve people out of our love for the Lord, our love for those we serve is kindled. Not only that, when we serve others, we experience more deeply what the love of God is like. Most of the people I know who share how they have experienced the love of God in church say that the main place they have done so is in the context of service.

So that you might see one practical way that this works out, I've asked one of our church members today to tell us how the choice to serve in our church family as a response to God's mercy has led to experiencing God's love personally...