



“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8).

Christian Love Covers All

Central Truth: Genuine love will dictate the Christian's attitudes and actions in every situation.

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True love must pervade the whole of the Christian's spirit and relationships. It must dictate attitudes and actions in every situation.

True love is contrary to unredeemed human nature. We are *“hateful and hating one another”* (Titus 3:3) until Jesus changes us. But at Christian conversion, *“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”* (Romans 5:5). That changes all of life. When Christian love flows freely from us, people are aware that we are different in Him. Jesus said, *“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”* (John 13:35).

A discussion of Christian love in its various applications covers Romans 13:8 — 15:33. Indeed, all the personal greetings in chapter 16 are expressions of brotherly love. Paul gives three and a half chapters to this important subject. Since it was that important to Paul (and the Holy Spirit who directed him in that writing), it must be important to you and me.

“Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

I. LOVE FULFILLS LEGAL DUTIES (Romans 13:8-14)

It sounds strange to read, *“he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law”* (Romans 13:8). Surely there is more involved in obeying the law than merely loving, isn't there? No! Not if we consider love to be expressed in action and not simply in emotion. *“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour:*

therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10).

A. Love governs all human relationships (Romans 13:8-10). One who loves will not commit adultery, murder, steal, lie, or covet. Love desires the best for the other person and will do nothing to take that best from him. One who loves truly will be as concerned about the welfare or benefit of the other person as he is about his own good. The same concern is expressed toward God, one's close friends, and strangers (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; 10:19; Matthew 22:37-39; John 13:35). Every human contact is to be governed by love in the life of the Christian.

B. Love inspires holy living (Romans 13:11-13). It arouses one from lethargy (verse 11). It encourages one to a reformation of life whereby he puts off works of darkness and puts on the armor of light (verse 12). It motivates one to live in decency and purity, forsaking the lusts of the flesh and jealous rivalry (verse 13). What a good way to live! Love for God causes one to live that lifestyle (John 14:23). *“The love of Christ constraineth us; . . . he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again”* (II Corinthians 5:14, 15). Does love guide your living?

C. Love disciplines all desires. Romans 13:14 says it beautifully: *“Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”* To put on Jesus means to be governed by His spirit, to reflect His attitudes, and to do what He would do. That will result in one making no plans and providing no opportunity for the flesh nature to manifest itself. And that is normal Christian living. It is following God as dear children, walking in the love of Christ, refraining from fleshly lusts, and producing the fruit of the Spirit, as described in Ephesians 5:11.

Christian love is more than an emotion, more than a desire to see good come to another. It is a commitment to help another regardless of the cost to oneself. It is preferring the benefit of the other over one's own benefit. It is devotion to God expressed in service to people in the name of God.

II. LOVE GOVERNS CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS (Romans 14:1-23)

A. Love makes us patient with brethren with whom we differ (Romans 14:1-5, 13). Early Christian churches had a great problem at this point. Their membership included converts from Judaism who had been taught that certain foods were unclean and certain days were very holy. Their membership also included Gentile converts from paganism who regarded all food as wholesome and no particular days as holy. Imagine the problem that caused as one brother thought another brother was

“unspiritual” because he did not observe scruples, while another thought he was bigoted because he did observe them. Paul wrote, *“Welcome the brother of weak faith and do not pass judgment on him. He is sincere in his convictions. It is up to God to approve or disapprove him. God is his master, so do not judge him as if you were his master instead. Each one must decide for himself.”* *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves”* (Romans 15:1). Bear with the weak brother, encouraging and praying for him, and he will grow to be strong in the Lord. **B. Love keeps us devoted to God** (Romans 14:6-9). If a brother regards a day as sacred, and refrains from eating certain foods as ceremonially unclean, it is because of his devotion to the Lord. Who can condemn him for that? If another brother gives thanks to God for his food, even if he eats what another calls ceremonially unclean, he is eating with thanksgiving to God. Who can condemn him for that?

The secret is not in what food one eats or in what day he observes. The important thing is one's devotion to God. To love God with all of one's heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself is more than all the rituals and rules of religion (Mark 12:28-34). Love keeps that relationship with God in good order.

C. Love encourages us to help one another (Romans 14:13~23). It is not our responsibility to stand in judgment, criticizing one another. It is more important that we not become a hindrance or an obstacle which might cause a brother to stumble.

Jesus teaches that there is nothing profane or intrinsically unholy. But if a brother is so weak as to consider a thing to be defiling, it becomes that to him. He who violates his conscience in eating, drinking, or in religious worship sins against himself. He who does what offends a brother sins against that brother.

The important thing in the kingdom of God is not food. It is rather *“righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 14:17). If a brother fasts, do not judge him. If a brother does not fast, do not judge him. Let this be your guide: *“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak”* (Romans 14:21). Let us give our attention to helping one another grow strong in the Lord.

III. LOVE SOFTENS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS (Romans 15:1-23)

A. Love sacrifices self to serve others (Romans 15:1-4). It is the duty

of us who are stronger in the Lord to put up with the weaknesses of those who are less mature. We must not insist on having our own way. We must give way to a fellow believer in cases where it will result in building him up in the Lord. There must be no divisions among us (I Corinthians 12:24, 25).

Jesus set the example for us. He did not seek to satisfy himself. On the contrary, the Scripture says of Him, *“The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me”* (Romans 15:3; see also Psalm 69:9). That means that He bore the abuses of others. *“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”* (I Peter 2:21). What a challenge that is for us to bear with one another in our weaknesses, even if it means to sacrifice self to serve others! Jesus did.

B. Love follows the example of Christ (Romans 15:5-7). We are admonished to *“be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus.”* That means that we are to do as He did. Philippians 2:5 says it this way: *“Let this mind (attitude) be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”* We must receive one another in the same spirit Christ welcomed us. And in what spirit was that?

Christ did not receive us to condemn us or to force His opinions on us. He received us lovingly, forgivingly, helpfully. We can imitate Him in dealing with one another.

C. Love expects the best from each one (Romans 15:14-16). When Paul wrote that love, *“believeth all things”* (I Corinthians 13:7), he did not mean that love is gullible and easily deceived. He meant that love is not suspicious but trusts and expects the best from a brother. So he wrote to the Roman believers, “I am confident that you are full of goodness, having a knowledge of Christ, and competent to counsel one another. But I remind you to be kind and loving in all your dealings.” Good advice, isn't it?

Let us learn not to be suspicious. Whenever you hear a rumor of wrongdoing against a brother, do not believe it until it is supported by undeniable facts. Expect the best from people and most of them will do their best for you.

D. Love promotes prayer for each other (Romans 15:30-32). How much we need the prayers of those who love God! Even so great a man of God as the apostle Paul requested over and over again that those who knew God in Jesus Christ should pray for him. Jesus prayed for Simon Peter (Luke 22:32). He prayed for all who would believe (John 17:9). God's people have prayed for one another through all biblical history (I Samuel 12:23). It is an excellent way to show our love.

Behold the power of Christian love! No wonder this study is entitled, “Love Conquers All.” It really does!

But remember the meaning of Christian love (*agape*) is different from the meaning of human love (*philia*). Human love centers on feelings of affection. It is expressed as dearness, preciousness. Divine love centers on commitment to help. It is expressed by reaching forth and lifting the other person.

God loves us with an affectionate love. We love one another in that way. But God loves us with the lifting love of divine grace. We are to love one another in that way, also.

The love of the Holy Spirit of God stirs us to intercessory prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 15:30). It is not always easy. Sometimes we “*strive*” (agonize) in prayer. Sometimes prayer is a battle, a wrestling against spiritual forces. But the harder it is to pray, the harder we must pray. Romans 15:31, 32 gives three great petitions for us to offer. (1) Pray for the physical safety of God's servants: “*that I may be delivered from them that do not believe.*” (2) Pray for success in ministry: “*that my service . . . may be accepted.*” (3) Pray for the blessings of fellowship: “*that I may come unto you . . . and may with you be refreshed.*” Those petitions can keep us involved in prayer for a long time.

Where lies the key to a good relationship with God and with people? It lies in the loving spirit. Loving God above all else and loving others as ourselves is the essence of all religious duty. Will you discipline yourself to be such a fountain of love through whom God can flow in blessing?

Questions

1. What does Titus 3:3 say of the natural man?
2. What does Romans 5:5 say of the spiritual man?
3. What does John 13:35 say of the testimony of Christian love?
4. How can you follow the command of Ephesians 5:2?
5. In what way is love the fulfillment of the law?
6. What change does Christian love make in daily conduct?
7. How can love be expressed in church relationships?
8. Why does love motivate us to intercessory prayer?
9. What example of love did Jesus set for us?
10. How can you manifest God's love in you this week?