**Romans 12:9-21**

Introduction

I. Love is the primary theme of this passage

A. A definition of love

1. Agape love is an unconditional, self-giving kind of love. It means truly wanting what is best for another person, and acting on that, even if it costs us something.

2. John Piper on loving our neighbor as our self: “this means making our self-seeking the measure of our self-giving. It is taking our skin off and wrapping it around another person and seeing ourselves in them with all our longings and needs and desires.”

B. Love is the essential response of the Christian life

1. See Ro 13:8-10, Matthew 22:34-40, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, John 13:34-35, Galatians 5:22

2. When we thinking of growing spiritually, do we primarily see that in terms of becoming more loving people?

 C. Love is simple to understand and very difficult to do

1. Love taps into everything we are, and it is not easy to become the kind of people who can love well

2. Analogy: Golf is a simple game, but it takes a lifetime to become the kind of person who can regular hit a ball into a hole

3. It takes a lifetime to become the kind of people for whom love is natural

II. Loving one another in the body of Christ (v. 9-16)

A. Love must be sincere

 Sincere = “un-hypocritical”

Paul is calling us not to be people who are focused on ourselves and the impression we’re making, but rather who are focused on others and are loving them genuinely

B. Hate what is evil, cling to what is good

Our love should be a discerning love that doesn’t just allow a person to live however they want, but is actually devoted to their good and to pursuing what’s best for them

C. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love

 = to have tender affection for each other

We are called not only to love each other but also to like each other and foster affection and fondness for each other

D. Honor one another above yourselves . . . Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

= are we seeking to draw attention to ourselves or to encourage others?

= do we naturally only gravitate towards people who are successful or beautiful or rich, or do we associate with all types of people?

E. Share with God’s people who are in need, v. 13:

= recognizing that all our stuff is actually God’s stuff and being generous with it for the needs of others

F. Practice hospitality: v. 13:

Hospitality is literally “love of the stranger”

Are we actively pursuing and watching out for people who are in need of a welcoming person?

G. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn

 Do we genuinely and deeply enter into the experience of others?

H. Live in harmony with one another

Do we pursue peace and unity, or are we always trying to stir the pot?

I. Challenge this week

Choose one of these commands, memorize it, and prayerfully pursue acting on it during the week

III. Love of enemies (v. 17-21)

 A. Jesus gives four commands that involve a passive response of non-retaliation

 1. Do not repay anyone evil for evil

2. Do not take revenge, my friends

3. Do not be overcome by evil

4. Do not curse

B. The underlying premise behind non-retaliation is the justice of God

1. v. 19: Leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.”

2. God is a God of justice and ultimately he will set things right, so that frees us from having to enact justice ourselves

C. Jesus gives four commands that involve an active response of love

1. Do good in the eyes of everyone. Live at peace with everyone.

2. Feed your enemy and give him something to drink.

3. Overcome evil with good.

4. Bless those who persecute you.

5. This is similar to Jesus’ teaching in the sermon on the mount: turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile. The idea is to do something unexpectedly loving to the person who is mistreating you

 D. The underlying motivation is to bring this person to repentance

 1. v. 20: In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.

2. The idea is to do something unexpected and surprisingly loving that serves as a wake-up call for that person with the hope of leading them to repentance

Conclusion

I. How do we become the kinds of people who love others, even our enemies?

II. Answer: As dearly loved children, live a life of love (Ephesians 5:1-2)

A. We need to fix our eyes on the love of God for us expressed most fully on the cross. As we do that, his love becomes are all in all, and we are filled with his love and able to give that love to others

B. So this is not just a to-do list; it’s a call to become people who have received God’s love so that we can give it to others

**Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss the comment made on Sunday: growth in the Christian walk is fundamentally growing in our ability to love others more fully. Is that how you think about Christian maturity? Why or why not, and what implications does this have?

2. Consider the various commands on loving one another in the body of Christ given in Section II above. Was there anything said about any particular command that added a new insight or perspective to that command?

3. Which specific command do you want to pursue more intentionally, and do you have any specific ideas for how you want to go about that?

4. Consider Paul’s comments about actively loving our enemies in v. 17-21. Notice the motivation in v. 20: “in doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” What might Paul mean by that statement? Consider it in light of the following verse: “do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

5. Consider the announcement made on Sunday regarding the possibility of moving to two services. What was helpful for you in that announcement and what was concerning?