

How to Love Others

Romans 12:9-21

*Love your neighbour as yourself.
(Lev 19:18; Rom 13:9)*

One of the greatest love-songs of the Bible has God saying to his wayward people: ***I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you to Me with loving-kindness.*** (Jer 31:3) Long before that, God had told his people that he had ***chosen them out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his treasured possession*** (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6) – **not** because of some virtue of theirs – but *because the LORD loved them.* And **love** looks for, longs for, a **response**.

For 40 years the prophet Jeremiah had a ministry of reaching out with God's love to an unresponsive, rebellious people. Out of this experience, and the knowledge of his own heart, Jeremiah came to realise that **no amount of outward religion** would change his people – ***what they needed was change from within.*** This God promised to do – *I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts...* (Jer 31:33)

This is still true, isn't it? Our religion can just be ***an outward performance***, with no real love for God in our hearts, no love for Jesus for having died for us, so that our sins could be forgiven. We can go through life, with ***God's great love for us personally***, meaning little, or nothing, by way of **an inward response of love and commitment** on our part to Him, who loves us passionately.

Without this relationship we find ourselves unable ***to love others, as our passage***, that we heard read, ***wants us to do!*** Let's look at it, and see, if what I've said, is true or not!

How does Paul start? “Don't just ***pretend*** to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ***Love each other with genuine affection*** and take delight in honouring each other.” Paul is here speaking to Christians about their love for fellow-Christians. This should be straightforward, shouldn't it?

Paul continues, “Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ***Rejoice in our confident hope.*** (He's talking about our assurance of being with our Lord in heaven when we die.) Be

patient in trouble, and **keep on praying**. When God's people are in need, **be ready to help** them. Always be eager to **practice hospitality**."

These last thoughts were very relevant when Paul wrote, as is true today in many countries, where Christians are a persecuted minority, often poor, often displaced and in need of accommodation. Would **we** be **eager** to do this?

Paul goes on to speak of loving others who are not Christians, beginning with those who **hate** Christians: **"Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them.**

Be happy with those who are happy, and **weep with those who weep**. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!"

Paul had begun this chapter by saying, "Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but **let God transform you into a new person**, by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to **know God's will for you**, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (12:2) What is a typical worldly way of reacting to those who treat you badly? **Isn't it to pay them back in the same way?** But Paul goes on:

"Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honourable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, **never take revenge**. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, **'I will take revenge; I will pay them back'**, says the LORD. (Deut 32:35)"

"Instead, 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.' (Prov 25:21-22) **Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.**"

It's wonderful advice on how to make the world a better place, but most of us don't go about doing it! **But it's more than advice, it's God's command to everyone of us!** We fall short, we need God's

forgiveness and the grace He can supply to those who have asked Jesus to come into their lives as Saviour and Lord.

That is the Good News of the Christian faith! We've heard how we **ought** to behave, to live at peace with others, and to have a good relationship with God – but **we don't do it**, and we find **we don't want to do it**, for **we just want to please ourselves**. We are sinners, and our sin cuts us off from God.

That is the reason that God came to rescue us, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. **Jesus came to receive the punishment our sins deserve** (he had no sins himself). He died the awful death of the Cross because **we can't save ourselves**, but Jesus loves us and took our place!

Paul wrote earlier in this letter, "We know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." (Rom 5:5) God hasn't just made it possible **to forgive us** our sins, He has made it possible **for us to change!**

Possible, you say? **We must ask Jesus to come into our hearts**, to save us. and to be our Lord. As I've said earlier, we must give him the love and commitment of our hearts! **Then** he will begin to change us, so that we want to be like him and love him and others!

Let us pray, and talk to Jesus ourselves! And then thank God for his great love to us!

Amen.