

Mothers' Day is a great day to talk about love, and so we're going to meditate on St. Paul's words to the church in Rome, "**Let love be without hypocrisy.**" This morning we'll consider what that means for our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

ROMANS 12:9-13

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

I gave you memory verse cards for this passage a few weeks ago. It's a great summary of the Christian life and worth pondering.

This passage begins with the command: "**Let love be without hypocrisy.**" St. John wrote elsewhere that "**God is love**" (1 John 4:8). There is no better rudder for steering our life's course than love.

When Paul wrote, "**Let love be without hypocrisy,**" he was talking about the choices we make for how we're going to live. I'm not talking about how you decide where you'll shop for bread or whether you prefer AT&T or Verizon. But I'm talking about everything we do in our relationships with one another.

Paul gave us this command to not be hypocritical in how we love each other, and then he explained what this looks like in the following verses.

This week we'll cover the first 5-maxims or truths which illustrate what it means to love without hypocrisy. Next week we'll study the following seven.

The first maxim which defines what it means to love without hypocrisy is, "**Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good**" (v.9). These two statements explain the same thing; they are two sides of the same coin.

The church father, Origen, once observed that “we hate things we ought not to, just as we love things we ought not to.” For example, it is in our human nature to be prideful, to think more of ourselves than we ought to, on the one hand, and to not regard others as highly as we ought, on the other.

But Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, **“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).**

When Paul wrote, **“Abhor what is evil, and cling to what is good,”** he was saying, reject whatever is mean spirited and nasty in my own heart, but take hold of God’s gracious promise to renew my spirit, to lift me up in his light, and to make me whole again.

If you’re feeling that this must be about someone else and that you’re pretty much the very embodiment of love, consider the Seven Deadly Sins with me. This is a kind of arbitrary list, but it was a movie.

They are anger, envy, greed, gluttony, pride, lust, and slothfulness. I’m sure we can all identify with one or more of these. Myself, I can be angry, I can even fly into a fit of rage; it’s in me; it’s in here, in my heart. And I don’t like it; I **“abhor”** that part of myself. So I **“cling”** to the Lord’s promise to save me from myself, and he gives me peace in my mind and heart with his Spirit who dwells within me.

The second maxim Paul wrote about which helps us to understand what it means to love without hypocrisy is, **“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor” (v.10).** This is about how we treat each other. Being **“devoted”** and showing **“preference”** means we give each other the benefit of the doubt. It might be as simple as letting someone else take the next place in line at the supermarket when I know I could’ve beat them there!

But it goes deeper than that. Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, **“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).** Love is a funny thing. It is in our nature to love a person who loves us back. But that’s not what it means to love without hypocrisy. This kind of love is about loving persons whom I would not have loved if it was not for the fact that Jesus

loved me first. Being devoted, giving preference, carrying each other's burdens is to live like Jesus lived.

Paul's third maxim is that we be **"not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord" (v.11)**. The literal translation is more interesting: **"in zeal not being lazy; in the Holy Spirit blazing, serving as slaves to the Lord."**

When your belly growls, you feed it. When your spirit growls, do you feed it too? Jesus didn't tell us to be baptized, to pray and worship, to commit themselves to acts of charitable service as busy work! But we do these things for the sake of our own spiritual health. Brothers and sisters, let us be **"in the Holy Spirit blazing"**!

The fourth maxim is to be **"rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer" (v.12)**. In chapter 8 of this same letter, Paul wrote, **"we HOPE for what we do not see, with PERSEVERANCE we wait eagerly for it. ²⁶In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to PRAY as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:25-26)**.

This is a miracle; our hope in Christ's redemption of creation is a miracle; our perseverance amidst suffering is a miracle; and our prayers to God, prayers rooted in the belief that he loves us and hears us is a miracle. It's the miracle of love, a love which lifts up our hearts, fills our spirits, and moves us to do things for others we never believed possible before.

The fifth maxim is to be **"contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality" (v.13)**. Paul had a vision for what the church looks like when it is enveloped with God's grace, a human institution manifesting the Spirit of the Living God in love.

Paul was showing us a way to live that is not exclusive, a lifestyle that is not based on social or economic or ethnic divisions. He was describing a lifestyle that will transform our community into a neighborhood of light, a neighborhood filled with life.

Paul was describing a way of living that is not restrictive, a lifestyle that is not filled with all kinds of rules and laws. He was showing us how to live our lives in the freedom Christ purchased for you and me on the Cross.

To love without hypocrisy is to live in the grace of the living Christ. We just celebrated his resurrection from the dead. He lives. And so too we live. We live in God's love. That's the message: We live in God's love, a love that is for us to share freely and unconditionally with people everywhere.

This week as we reflect on the awesome love God has for us, let us pray that we might receive this love as our own in our hearts.

This week as we receive this love, may we become dispensers of it to the people in our lives, especially those who are hard to love.

And this week may we have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.