

Romans

- I. A look at love as a vital principle and a standard for Christian living
 - A. Though today's teaching is a continuation of our study of Romans 12, we won't begin in Romans 12, but rather in 1 Corinthians 13:4. And the reason for beginning in 1 Corinthians is so we can examine a topic that is essential to living according to all that is taught in Romans 12-15.
 1. The topic I am speaking of is love. And I am confident this topic is familiar to each one of us – for who among us doesn't want to be loved.
 2. Besides, the topic of love is the subject of stories, poems, music, and movies. Even the Bible addresses it numerous times and in a variety of ways.
 3. For example, Paul affirms the importance of love for living the Christian life when he reminded Timothy that, "The goal of their instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5).
 - B. Prayer
 - C. 1 Corinthians 13:4 begins with the words, "Love is." These two words present us with an important and even profound truth that we must embrace if we are to love as God wills us to love.
 1. For example, if 1 Corinthians 13:4 began with the words, "Love ought to be," it would leave room for us to conclude that, given our human weaknesses, it is normal for love not to be always loving. And once we conclude that it is normal for love not to be always loving, we then can assume that our love for those who are near and dear to us is genuine love – even though we occasionally yet repeatedly treat them in selfish, unkind, and sometimes even mean ways.
 2. However, 1 Corinthians 13:4 begins with the words "Love is," which leaves us room for only one conclusion: love is always loving. In other words, the normal for love is to be loving. Therefore, always being loving is the standard of love. Anything added or taken away from that standard changes love into something other than love.
 - a. We talked about this a few weeks ago when I was explaining that love never fails to act like love because there are no impurities in love.
 - b. For example, there is no selfishness, no pride, no ill-will, no desire to get even or hurt back, no meanness, no ungodly anger, no

unkind words or abusive speech, no sexual immorality, no unfaithfulness, no injustice, no ungodly jealousy, no unwillingness to resolve conflicts, no aggressive or controlling behavior, no nagging, no resentment or bitterness, no unforgiveness, or any other such impurity in love.

- c. Love is pure, which is why love never fails to act like love.
3. However, the sad reality is, we can know this truth, and nod in agreement with this truth, and believe we have this kind of love for those around us – all while continuing, from time to time, to treat those around us in selfish and unkind and sometimes mean ways.
 - a. In other words, though we may agree love is always loving, our tendency is to think and speak of our love as genuine, even though we freely and repeatedly add selfishness, unkindness, and even meanness to the mix.
 - b. When we do this, we are thinking and speaking as those who believe love ought to be always loving, so that even when it isn't, it still can be called love. And we support this false belief by making excuses, or giving explanations, or blaming the bad behavior of others, or living in denial when we repeatedly fail to love according to the standard of love.
 - c. And what I hope you can see at this point is how easily we disconnect the reality that love is always loving from the reality that we are diluting love yet still calling it love.
4. Now you may be thinking that I am saying that you must live love perfectly or you don't love at all. But that is not what I am saying. The point I want to get across is that in spite of our imperfections, love is always perfectly loving.
 - a. Therefore, though we may love imperfectly, we never treat love as if it can be diluted and remain love.
 - b. We never lower the standard of love so we can claim we are loving when in thought, word, or deed we are not being loving.
 - c. And we never justify or excuse any failure to love. Instead, we measure our failures against love's standard so that we can know what to confess, what to make right, and where to return to in order to love as love loves.
 - d. Therefore, though we all love imperfectly, no one who believes in love and is committed to love settles for, or justifies, or excuses, or overlooks their own failures to always be loving.
5. As many of you know, the scripture uses four different words for love. And because it does, I want to address this as well.

- a. Though love is always love, it expresses itself in different ways and engages at different levels – depending on the type of relationship in which it is being expressed.
 - b. For example, there is married love. There is the love of parents for their children, the love of children for their parents, and the love of siblings for each other. This love among family members is commonly referred to as brotherly love and is spoken of as the love that is to exist in the church. Then there is the love shared by friends, and the general love we have for all mankind. Finally, though not least, there is the emotionally driven love which is commonly associated with the experience of “falling in love.”
6. These different levels of love raise the question: “If love is always love in these differing relationship, then what is love?”
- a. The definition I like is, “Love is seeking the good of everyone who in any way is affected by my choices and behavior.”
 - b. I prefer this definition because it applies, in the broadest way, to every relationship we might have and every situation we might encounter. In addition, this definition comes the closest to explaining Romans 13:10 . . . Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
7. Of all the truths that can be drawn out of Romans 13:10, and there are many, there are two that I want to point out for our study today.
- a. First, love never does anything wrong!
 - b. Second, love always does what is right. We see this is true because vs 10 says that love fulfills the requirements of the law – thus it does what is right.
 - c. In relation to love doing no wrong, I could give you a list of wrongs love never does, but I won’t, because I just did that a few moments ago.
 - d. In relation to doing what is right and good, consider this list: love is just, honest and fair in all its dealings, truthful, merciful, gracious, compassionate, forgiving, sympathetic, tender, gentle, kind, humble, eager to serve, patient, long-suffering, persevering, grateful, encouraging, edifying and supportive.
 - e. Love also warns of impending trouble or potential punishment that will come due to foolish or rebellious behavior. Love teaches right from wrong. It disciplines, tactfully criticizes, and speaks truth – even when the hearer doesn’t want to hear the truth. Love punishes those who will not respond to exhortations or discipline. And when necessary, love shuns.

- f. And so we see that love does no wrong, and does what is right.
- 8. Now, there are those who treat love as something that is owed them, or they use expressions of love to get what they want.
 - a. However, those who treat love as something owed or as a tool to get what they want often behave in selfish, self-centered, self-pitying, discontented, unhappy, angry, ways.
 - b. But it doesn't stop there, because they believe the purpose of love is to make their life happier and easier, they commonly view as unloving anyone's behavior that gets in the way of their life being happier or easier.
 - c. For example, they view you as unloving if you correct them, criticize them, discipline them, give them consequences for bad behavior, or punish them for repeatedly doing what they know is wrong.
 - d. However, their perception of love's actions makes love's actions no less love. Therefore, it is up to us to realize that when they claim such things are unloving, they are behaving selfishly in that they are using love to get what they want.
- D. Now you may be thinking that the definition of love I use and all that I have said about love to this point doesn't leave room for those powerful emotions that mysteriously flood our heart when we fall in love.
 - 1. If you are thinking this, you are wrong. Those powerfully sweet emotions associated with falling in love are as much a part of love as any other authentic expression of love. But just as love is not all mercy or punishment, so love is not all powerfully sweet emotions.
 - 2. The powerful feelings associated with falling in love are only a part of love, they are not the sum total of love. Or in other words, they are not love itself.
 - 3. And those who are older know this is true, because experience has taught us that these feelings rise and fall. They come on strong and they disappear. And all these changes are primarily based on the way we are being treated by the one for whom we have such feelings.
 - 4. Does this mean we ought to ignore or refuse to enjoy these wonderfully sweet feelings of falling in love? NO! But neither ought we think they represent love itself. To love is to seek the good of everyone who in any way is affected by our choices and behavior – regardless of how they are behaving or how we feel about them.

- E. Though there is more we can say about love itself, I suspect you know most of what can be said about it. Therefore, I want to spend the rest of the time urging you and helping you look at yourself for the purpose of examining yourself in relation to love. And to do this, I am asking you to consider this question: “Are you committed to love, or to something that at times looks like love, but isn’t?”
1. When I ask if you are committed to love, I am asking if you believe that love is pure and therefore always loving. And I am asking if you believe that love is the only acceptable standard for determining and measuring your thoughts, desires, words, and deeds, in every relationship, and in every choice that effects anyone beyond yourself.
 2. So let me ask again, “Are you committed to love, or to something that at times looks like love, but isn’t?” With this question in mind, listen to the following statements and see if they can help you discern where you are in relation to love.
 3. If you choose to treat Romans 12:9-21 as idealistic in its teaching and impractical in its application, then you are not committed to love.
 4. If you do not see the need to pursue Christ-like meekness and humility in order to rise to love’s standard, then you are not committed to love.
 5. If in any relationship there are situations where you feel justified to do what is evil or fail to do what is good, then you are not committed to love.
 6. If on any issue or in any area you knowingly hold yourself to a lessor or easier standard than you hold others, then you are not committed to love.
 7. If you appease others by compromising what you know is right and true, and you do this to gain acceptance and approval, or keep things seemingly peaceful without resolving the differences or conflict, you are not committed to love.
 8. If you protect yourself from being emotionally hurt or relationally rejected, and you do this at the expense of open, honest, and shared relationships, then you are not committed to love.
 9. If you justify things like unkind words, putdowns, name-calling, disrespect, resentment, ungodly anger, and returning mistreatment for being mistreated, you are not committed to love.
 10. If you want to be loved by a particular person or group of people while failing to give them the love they want or need, you are not committed to love.
 11. Now I know there are more statements I could make, but this should be enough to make the point that there is a world of difference

between being committed to love, and being committed to something that at times looks like love, but isn't.

F. And so here is a second question: "Do you remember where we began today?" We began with 1 Corinthians 13:4 and those words, "Love is." We began there because the reality we Christians are called to embrace, and to believe in, and to commit to – for the rest of our lives – is that love is always loving.

1. There may be times when you fail at love miserably or practice it imperfectly. And without question, such failures are never the failure of love, but the manifestation of your own selfishness and sinfulness.
2. But when you are committed to love, then you know what to confess, and what to repent of, and where to return to when you fail.
3. When you are committed to love, you will love your neighbor as yourself, even when the circumstances or your neighbor's behavior make selfishness seem safer or less costly than loving according to love's standard.
4. When you are committed to love, you will make the personal sacrifices necessary to live according to love when others are acting selfishly, or taking away your freedom, or disrupting your routines, or getting in the way of your privacy.
5. When you are committed to love, you will bless those who are making your life miserable, or even persecuting you.
6. When you are committed to love, you will refuse to return evil for evil – in any form and at any time.
7. When you are committed to love, you will do your part – to the fullest – to be at peace with everyone around you.
8. When you are committed to love, you will trust God to be your provider and protect, even to the point of leaving revenge in His hands.
9. When you are committed to love, you will be committed to overcoming evil with good – which in essence is overcoming evil by continuing to do what is right and loving.

II. Conclusion

A. To conclude today's teaching, we are going to share in the Lord's Table and partake of communion. We are concluding with this because it was love, that is, the love that is pure and therefore always loving, which God showed us when He sent His son, Jesus Christ our Savior, to the cross for our redemption.

- B. To affirm this, listen as I read from two specific scripture passages.
1. 1 John 4:10 . . . In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
 2. Romans 5:8 . . . God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
- C. Therefore, as I pass out the bread and the cup, I encourage you to thoughtfully reflect on whether the love you believe in and are committed to is the same love that God is, and that God is committed to, and that God manifested through Jesus Christ, and that God continues to express toward us day after day.
1. And as you reflect on that, consider where you would be – today and in eternity – without the love that never fails to be loving.
 2. And as you reflect on that, consider how much better your home and your workplace and your community and the Body of Christ will be if you – even if you are the only one – if you are committed to love.