



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
January 17, 2016

ROMANS 12:9

Romans Series: How God Changes People

[PRAYER] Lord, the songs that we've sung so far have talked about your love and our dedication to you. Those two things are wrapped up pretty closely together. I just want to thank you right now for the love you provide for us. Thank you for the love that I experience from you, the affirmation that comes into my heart because of my relationship with you, and the privilege I have to enjoy that love. Lord, I know that there's a lot of brokenness in our world and in our lives, and that that love provides a lot of healing for us. We need that unfailing love in our hearts and we need that healing to take place inside of us. So we ask that you would help each person here to get a greater vision for what that love looks like from a personal God who cares. Lord, we have some specific needs that exist in our fellowship. We've got folks out of work looking for jobs. We've got people who are sick. Even this morning we ask that you would be working in the lives of people individually to demonstrate your grace and your love today.

Now Lord, as we look at your word and as we open it up, we want you to have the freedom in our hearts to move things around, to adjust our values, and to convict us of things that need to be changed and adjusted. So we're asking that you would do that now, that deeper work inside of us. We surrender our hearts to you and dedicate ourselves to you during this sacred time when you might do some surgery on our hearts that we need in order to be most effective for you. So Lord, accept our willingness now as we look at your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

As we're studying through Romans, we come to Romans 12:9-21. In Romans 12:9-21 there are twenty commands. Twenty of them! There are ten that are actions and ten that are reactions.

I went through these this week and as I looked at them I thought I'll just run through all twenty of them for you and you'd have this report card. But as I did that, I was feeling at a sense of loss because each one of them is so important. I thought maybe we ought to spend one week on each one of them, but I thought that might keep us in Romans for a little longer than maybe we want to spend.

But I would commend this passage to you to look at as a way of evaluating your own heart. Young people, especially, I just want to say one of the things you're trying to do (as all of us are trying to do) is learn how to live in this broken world that we live in as Christians. What does it mean to be a Christian – a real, authentic Christian? In order to do that, I think we're going to look at passages like this one that condense a lot of the commands.

This is like the twenty commandments of the New Testament are all stuffed together in this one passage. We're going to look at them and they give us guidelines, they give us instructions, they give us ideas about how we might live the life that God has given to us more effectively.

I want us to enjoy that a little bit because it's a way that we understand how God helps us to change. God wants us to grow to be the kind of person that we can be to be most effective. So as we do that, we're going to come to ten commands that are action commands and then ten responsive kinds of things in verses 14-21, which are the responses.

Now I think when we do that not only are we going to grow personally, but we're also going to grow as a church. So we ask, what does the church look like when it's being vibrant and the heart is beating? What does it look like? We're going to go back to this passage in Acts 2:42-47, a description of the early church. This is what we want to be, I believe, as a church.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

That is a picture of a vibrant church. That is a picture of a church that is alive, a church that has a heart that's beating for the Lord, a church that's characterized by closeness, by cooperation, by sacrifice, by growth, by power.

As we look at that kind of a passage or we look and understand what the early church was like, I think what we're going to see is they're doing the things here. Because now Paul is going to write to the Romans and he's going to say to them, "Let me show you how to be the church of God. I want to explain to you what it means to be the church." He's going to share that with them because there are certain characteristics that make a healthy church.

Now I want to ask a really interesting question. If God calls His church a family and He wants His church family to be successful and He gives these instructions to the church throughout the Bible (for the New Testament and the epistles in particular), can we take those same ideas that He gives for His church, His family, and apply them to the earthly family so that our families could be successful?

I believe the answer is yes. We can take the same ideas that make the church successful as a family and bring them into our earthly homes and they can be successful as well. So we can have a strong marriage. I think we can have a healthy parent-child relationship. I think that we can look at the family in a way that is an extension over spirituality. I would suggest that one of the greatest ways that we serve the Lord or we worship the Lord is in family. That we're trying to be the people that God wants us to be in the midst of those challenging situations.

So let's look at the first two of the commands today. They're found in Romans 12:9. If you look there, it says this: *Love must be sincere*. Now the word for *love* is the word *agape*. There are four words for *love* in the New Testament and we're going to see three of them in our passage between verses 9-21. This is the word *agape* love and it's the one we're going to look at today.

Now *agape* love is characterized by sacrifice and commitment. It's when you lay down your life for someone else. This isn't the mushy, feeling kind of love. In fact in this passage Paul doesn't really define love. He has in his mind, yes, a definition of love because he shares it with us in 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter, we call it).

This is a definition more of love. I'd like to read this because I want you to just focus on this one command that he's giving to us here. The first command, to love. What does it mean for us to show love to someone else? I think this particular definition of love that he gives in 1 Corinthians 13 pricks our hearts and the Lord uses it to stimulate us in particular areas.

Love is patient. See, as I start reading this and I see that *love is patient* I immediately start thinking of people that I need to be patient with. *Love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*.

Love. Am I that kind of a person that can demonstrate that kind of love? We live in this imperfect world that has imperfect people, and we are them. We are the imperfect people that live in this world. Sometimes I think of the imperfect people that I have to put up with, that I live with... (not that I live with – I live with a person who's not hard to live with)... but you know the people that we live with in life. Okay? And when I think of those kinds of things, I tend to think those are the people I need to love. But I'm the person who needs love. So when God's love does something to me in my heart it changes me. It makes me into someone who can share that with someone else.

The theme of all of chapter 12 as we're seeing this unfold, remember, is we *dedicate our bodies as a living sacrifice* in verse 1. We're *transformed by the renewing of our mind* in verse 2. We're talking about humility, *not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought* in verse 3 and following. Then we talk about the spiritual gifts and how we use them. All of that is in the previous verses. So we're talking about this theme of consecration and spiritual service and using gifts in the body. Concepts like transformation that they're learning about in the discipleship group this morning. The idea of humility and recognizing who we are. All of those are important.

I think how do we do that? If we focus on this *agape*, this love that God wants us to have, those things somehow work themselves into our lives in some strategic ways. People need love today. If you just look around at the people who are so angry in their hearts or they're malicious or they're just lonely or sad, you look at those people and you say, "Wow, what they need is this love." And so God has given Christians a command and that is to share it. He's loved us with this infinite love, this *agape* love that He's given to us, and He's given us this command to share it with other people because people need it.

When we experience that within the body, we exchange it together and there's this something that happens here. We're being the people that God wants us to be. Or we take that home into our home and we're giving that sacrificial love to each other. It does something to the human heart. God knows that and that's why He makes this the first word of all the commands that He's going to give here, this word *love*.

It's not the kind of love that says I'll give you my attention if you do what I want. This is the sacrificial love that says I'm going to go out of my way to help you. If I'm doing it for myself it's because I want to be known as a loving person or I want to obey God and I want to experience His pleasure, and so I'm going to give myself to someone else. Not because they're going to do anything for me. That is the love that we're talking about. In a very real sense, it's what characterizes us as Christians. So in John 13:35 it says, *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

This word *agape* is a strategic word that characterizes who we are. It means it needs to be part of our hearts so that we have something to give so that we're sharing this very concept with other people.

When Jesus was asked the question, *Teacher, what is the greatest commandment?* He said to them... It says *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

So if we look at this imperative that God has given to us, that Jesus continually said to us, love is a priority for us, if we go to John 13:34 it says, *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* So this love that we have is a love that we have received.

I would suggest that there are some people who grew up in family situations where that love has been challenged in one way or another. I work with adopted children in my practice and I teach parenting seminars and I'm often working with kids who are in foster care or so on. I'm convinced that every person who's adopted experiences heart damage. By the very nature that the person who bore them isn't the same person who's raising them. Sometimes all that person needs is the freedom to live in a loving home and God does the healing in that person's heart. But I find that many of those people need extra work as people who have been damaged somehow in their lives they need extra work to appropriate and receive this love that God wants.

I think that's why God not only says, "I love you with this everlasting love," but He says, "I'm going to put you in a community where you can experience this and I'm going to call it a family." So He places every one of us in this place where healing can take place and we can grow in our understanding. Jesus' love was a personal love that He had. It was sacrificial. It was relational. And we lovingly participate in the lives of other people.

I think that's hard. There are some people that are easier to love than others, wouldn't you say? It's hard for us to share this love, to give this love to others. We know it's an expectation, but we

have a hard time loving sacrificially because we just have this problem with this person or they don't give us what we want or whatever it is, and so we have a hard time with that. That's why I think it's so important to recognize that God not only gives us the command, but He gives us the power to do it.

That's when Galatians 5:22 talks about the fruit of the Spirit. The very first part of the fruit of the Spirit, just like the very first command in Romans 12, is the word love. Where He's saying I'm going to empower you with the Holy Spirit that's going to allow you to love someone more emphatically, more powerfully in a way that they need.

We all come with love needs and I think some the prickliness that we have in our lives is because the love needs to wear that off. So being in a family or being in God's church is a way for God to do that.

Now He doesn't just say love in verse 9. You see that. The first command is a command that is talking about love with another word. I'm just convinced that the heartbeat of the church is this love that we're sharing with other people. I think it's very important for us to do that. But he uses this word to describe the word in verse 9. He says, *Love must be sincere*.

Now the word *sincere* in this passage is the word *hupokritos* which is where we get our word 'hypocrite' from. It says do it without being a hypocrite. Not hypocritically.

The word 'hypocrite' in the Greek has to do with the mask that you put on. It's the idea of not really having in your heart the same thing that's showing on your face. And so remember Jesus criticized the Pharisees when He was on earth and He said, "They are hypocrites." Why? Because they look good on the outside, but they're evil on the inside.

So what now Paul is saying to us is that we need to have a genuine, authentic, un-hypocritical love. That's hard to do, I think. It's a love that proves itself by its actions. I want to have that. It's a hard thing, I think. I think it's hard for all of us. It's a command that's there for us to develop and God has given us that command so it becomes a part of who we are as Christians that we are characterized by a sincere kind of love.

I was studying this passage this week and as I did I went to get a haircut. This is my barber, Mateo. He speaks Spanish and a little bit of English, and I just met him. He's my barber. Right away we started talking about spiritual things. He's a Christian and he gave me permission to share this story with you.

The last three years he's been on fire for Jesus. He's passionate about the Lord. I was just so inspired about his story because God is doing some really good things inside of his heart. Amazing things.

His wife lives in Mexico and five years ago because of some mistakes and bad decisions (as he would say it) that he made, they separated and he came to America. But for the last three years he's really wanted to reunite with his wife and he wants to do what's right. "In the last two weeks," he says to me, "I've been praying am I doing enough to win my wife to Jesus," because

she's not a believer and she lives in the southern part of Mexico. Someplace I don't understand what he was saying, but some southern part of Mexico that's where she lives. "Lord, is there something else I should be doing, my actions, what should I do?"

The Lord led him to a verse. This is the verse in English, but I'll tell you the verse in broken English that he shared with me. He said, "This verse in John 15:7 says if I stay in Jesus and His words stay in me, then I can ask God for something." So he says, "I really want to be reunited with my wife, but I think the verse was reminding me that I need to stay in Jesus and have His word stay in me. So that's what I'm working on." He's studying the Bible. He has his Bible right there on his counter there in the barbershop.

But he says to me, "Two days ago I talked to my wife and she says, 'This lady came to me and she shared with me about Jesus,'" and, Mateo was saying to me, shared the gospel with her. She says, "I'm going to give it a try." So he's so pumped right now that God might be doing something.

Now for me, I'm excited because I love to watch God work. Here God is working in the barber, Mateo, and he's working in me through the barber. This guy's preaching the sermon to me and I'm going, "Boy, this is great!" just like being in Sunday church for me. I'm just enjoying the sermon that he's preaching to me by his life.

I'm inspired by the fact that hundreds of miles away (I have no idea how many hundreds is this south Mexico) God's Holy Spirit is working there in the midst of some situation and evangelism is taking place and this woman is saying, "I'm going to give Jesus a try." I'm going, "Yes! I am so grateful to be a part of the church and what God is doing all over the place."

But one of the things he said is this, and this is what drew me into this passage again that I was learning. He says, "I'm trying to help her see that my love is genuine." I'm going, "That's the same thing we're talking about here!" He's trying to, over the next period of time, help her see that this isn't just a mask, a face that's put on. He is genuinely changed. He is genuinely loving.

That's the message that God wants to have for us. Our love is sincere, it's genuine. It's tested when there are challenges. When there's difficulties, when there's problems, that's when our love is tested.

I'm going to show you another passage. I'm going to read this passage to you. This is 2 Corinthians 6. But right in the middle are the same words – un-hypocritical love. So that's right in the middle of this passage. But all surrounding this are different ways where someone would have to demonstrate this authentic love.

Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger (reminds me of parenting); in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we

live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Wow. He's just saying it's making my picture of sincere love grow. God wants us to have this sincere love inside of our hearts so that we understand what that looks like and we're doing that. Love without hypocrisy is what he's saying here.

I think there are some people who can do this. God has just worked something in their heart that they're givers, they're compassionate. They're the kind of people who can go out and use those. If we look at the different parts that we've already come through, we talk about spiritual gifts. I think it's impossible to use spiritual gifts to serve others without this idea of love being a key part of this. Sincerely.

In our culture people are often more concerned with the symbol than the substance or the image that's out there instead of what's really inside of the heart. God is saying there is a genuineness about your love that people are going to appreciate. There's a stamp of authentication on who you are. People are going to see that and they're going to say I want that. There's something there I really want. I want to be that kind of person, personally, who's giving love like that and sharing that love with other people.

The book of Acts is the book about the first church. There's lots of demonstration of love even though the word love is not used in the book. There's all kind of activity that's happening. If anyone ever proved their love, it would be Jesus.

You think about the things that Jesus did. He washed the disciples' feet. He served them. It was a demonstration of His love. When He fed the 5,000 it was a demonstration of His love. When He taught the people, it was demonstrating love. When he forgave the woman caught in adultery when others wanted to condemn her, it was a demonstration of love. Just continually He was a person who was loving other people. We're called to be like Christ. Of course the greatest demonstration of His love is that He died on Calvary for us so that we could have a close relationship with God. Wow.

Love must be sincere. I need to meditate on those words because I think if I practice this one command it will change who I am and God will change others through me.

The second command is in that same verse, but the remainder of the verse, and it has two parts that I want to draw attention to. I'm counting this as one command. *Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

I don't know if this strikes you as it does me, but we go from love to hate in the same verse. A Christian should love and hate both of those things. That's very important for us to understand. This word hate or to abhor something with intense feeling. To hate something. And what are they hating? Evil. Something that's morally evil. Something that's against God's truth. Something that's wrong. Christians are to hate things that are wrong. Hate the evil.

I'm against discrimination. I think that if someone is discriminated against because of the color of their skin, that is wrong and I'm to do anything I can to influence our culture and our world against that because I think it's wrong when people are discriminated against in regards to color of their skin. I think it's wrong when women are discriminated against and so I'm all for equal pay for equal work. I think that's very important. Discrimination is wrong. As a matter of personal justice and justice in the world, God has called me to take a stand for those kinds of things.

But we live in world where this idea of discrimination is not understood and so some would even say today that all discrimination is bad and that if someone has an idea, their idea is just as good as somebody else's idea. So we don't discriminate against anybody else's idea. One's better than the other. We just tolerate everybody else's opinions, their ideas of morality, and their opinions of life.

That is wrong. That is a false understanding of this idea of discrimination. We need to have spiritual discrimination. We need to recognize there is a right and there is a wrong. There is a black and there is a white and God has outlined in His word what right is. And so we want to follow the right and we want to hate the wrong. Not the wrong person. We're not saying we the evildoer. We hate the evil itself. Why? Because that evil is destroying a person.

When someone says, "How can you be a Christian and judge me? Yes, I'm sleeping with my girlfriend, but we're in a committed relationship," what the person's then saying is this: You and I share the same value that we don't sleep around, that casual sex is not good. We share the same value that sex needs to be in a committed relationship. So why are you judging me because I don't get married. That idea is a perversion of God's instruction in regards to this subject because God has outlined there is a right and a wrong in regards to premarital sex or sex outside of marriage. God has designed that that take place in the marriage relationship.

So why do we hate evil? Not the evil person. But why do we hate the evil? Because the evil is what destroys the person on the inside. It ruins them on the inside. It's deceptive. It hurts and damages. I think that's why as Christians we take strong stands against evil when we see this.

You've got to understand this. It's very important because there are some people who say (because people know that Christians are characterized by love), "You're a Christian. You're supposed to be loving other people. Why are you judging people?" We're not judging people; we're taking a stand against sin. Because that's what God says in this command. You have to take the first commandment with the second one. The two of them go together. It talks there about how we need to hate evil. We don't just love sincerely. But right away then there's this command to hate what is evil.

Why do we do that? Because it destroys. And that destruction that takes place is so damaging in a person's life. Oh they think that it's okay. But 1 Thessalonians 5:22 says *reject every form of evil*. Or *abstain from the appearance of evil* is another translation. Why do we do that? Because the evil is so dangerous. It's so harming to a person. When a person lives their life in a particular way that they start disobeying God, then bad things happen. And so he's talking about this hating of evil. Evil destroys the freedom and so we are not soft on sin.

If evil isn't hated then it starts to be tolerated. Then once it's tolerated then it starts to be accommodated. And once it's accommodated then it's celebrated. And so we have people celebrating evil today and our world gets turned upside down in its moral structure. So we as Christians take a stand. We are different than the world. We love sincerely and we hate what is evil.

But he doesn't just leave it there. He goes to the second part of that same command. I've kept them together. Not only *hate what is evil*; he says *cling to what is good*. The word *cling* is to glue yourself. The idea here is to attach yourself permanently to what is good.

I think when we realize this idea that love really starts to affect us. It changes our outlook. That we want to be all-loving to people. We want to be caring, sacrificially giving to people. But we take a stand to sin. There's a right and wrong and we choose to attach ourselves to those things that are nutritious, that are positive, they're right. And so we choose in our lives to attach ourselves to those things.

So how do we apply this? Let's just ask the question, how do we take this idea and apply it to our lives? I want to suggest this is what you want to do. I think you want to take a moment, sometime get alone with the Lord and say, "Lord, I'm looking at the verses that we looked at today, this one verse in the Bible, Romans 12:9 which says *love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good*. Lord, I want you to draw out the words from that passage that you want me to focus on in my life. I just want to open my heart and I want you to speak to me. Is there a way I could live more sacrificially? Are there some things you want me to deal with in regards to evil in my life? Or is there some good you want me to cling to in my heart?"

God will apply that specifically to you. He will tell you what you need to do and He will help you to make the changes necessary. It's a powerful thing that happens.

I'm looking forward to going through these twenty different commands. This is just the first two. The first ten are actions and the last ten are reactions. But all of them form this idea of what does it mean to be a Christian. If you're exploring that idea of what Christianity is, I'd encourage you to read a passage of scripture or hang around here on Sunday mornings as we go through these a little bit at a time to understand what does it mean to be a Christian. Not just a Christian here at church, although that's a part of it, but a Christian at home, a Christian in the work world. What does it mean to be the person that God has called us to be? It's just fascinating to me to understand about God's love.

I chose a lot of songs for our worship today about the love of God and how much He loves us. Because I'm convinced that once we understand then we start allowing God to allow His love to creep into the crevices of our pain, that He heals us and allows us to be able to extend that love to others in a powerful way. So we're going to sing a song now that does talk more about the Lord's love for us.

As we do maybe God is speaking to you and you're saying I need that love more than I have it. I just encourage you to sit in your seat and just pray and ask God to reveal that love to you all the more and show you what He wants you to do in response to that, in regards to that.

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then I invite you to do that. There will be prayer counselors on the side who will pray with you and they'll guide you through the process of understanding God personally and coming to a place where you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, it's comforting to come back to this one attribute of who you are, that God is love, and see how much that means to each of us. It creates this foundation for us to extend ourselves to others, a foundation for us to live in a family, a foundation for us to be the people that you've called us to be. Lord, as we look at our own lives, each one of us, we can see damage that needs to be healed by your loving hand. We thank you that you are there continually offering that love to us. So Lord, we place ourselves under that spigot of your love this morning and ask for you to do that healing work deep in our hearts, personal work. Do that now, we ask. In Jesus' name, amen.