

## **Romans 12:9-12.**

### **Love Without Dissimulation**

---

Approximately the first half of Paul's letter to the church in Rome is a detailed, doctrinally comprehensive presentation of the gospel. He describes man's need for salvation from his deserved condemnation for sin, and God's plan and purpose that provides for that salvation through faith and trust in God. Paul<sup>1</sup> describes Jesus as YAHWEH, the LORD, God Himself who came to earth to bring the message of salvation and pay the penalty for sin that man cannot himself pay, fully resurrected to life, and then returning to His position in heaven with a promise of His return at the end of the age. God only requires that we place our faith and trust in Him as our Savior and LORD, and by so doing He forgives us of all sin, forever removing the ability of that sin to separate us from God any longer.

In the second half of the letter, Paul moves on to practical instruction in Christian ethics: how to live a life that is pleasing to God, a life that demonstrates one's submission to His Lordship. Just as a sacrifice was something given totally over to God, Paul exhorts Christians to make their own lives a living sacrifice, and by so doing, surrender our very lives wholly to His authority. Paul presents this as an obligation<sup>2</sup> rather than an option.

The text of Romans 12:9 is the hinge point between these two presentations. In many ways, this verse is the keystone of Paul's teaching. Herein he lays down the foundation for Christian living: uncompromised and sincere love for all people. This is the focus of the biblical passage for this study.

Next to the need to turn to God in faith, there is probably no greater command to every Christian than the imperative to love unconditionally. It is also probably one of the most difficult commands to obey. We may have been trained or conditioned to think that we consistently demonstrate love as God would have us love, but when we really look at what love is, we will probably come away seeking forgiveness for our own hypocrisy. There are many commands and illustrations in scripture that teach us how to love, and we have the life of Jesus as an example of how that love is expressed. Love is the foundational spiritual gift, for it is the one gift upon which all of the others are based.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, there may be no more important lesson for us to learn than that of the application of true Christian love in our lives.

---

<sup>1</sup> As well as the other New Testament authors including John: John 1:1-4, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:1, e.g.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13.

Paul's literary style of exhortation takes on the form of short and concise imperatives, a style that is common in ancient Greek writing. Often, the statements are clear enough to his ancient audience that he does not need to provide additional commentary. Consequently, it is important that, as we study Paul's imperatives, we have a good idea of just what it is he is saying. His words may have exhibited clarity to an ancient Greek-speaking world, but much is lost when the message is transmitted across the dynamics of two millennia of culture and multiple language translations. Biblical students may want to chase down some of the meanings of the words, particularly when different English translations present different interpretations. This writer did not get past five words of this passage, when out came the Greek reference tools.<sup>4</sup>

**Rom 12:9a. *Let love be without dissimulation.***

Though this word, "dissimulation" was in common use in Old England, it is not a word that is in common use today, and very likely there are very few people who know its meaning without having studied this one biblical verse. In order to find the source of the word, "dissimulation" we need only to look at William Tyndale's 1525 Greek to English translation of the Bible, a primary source for the 1611 King James Bible. Wycliffe's earlier translation (1384) that served to establish the written English language renders "with outen feynyng." Neither earlier form gives us much help. This is a foundational verse for the entire passage to follow, so it is very important to understand clearly what Paul is stating. This phrase is an English rendering of two Greek words, *αγαπη ανυποκριτοζ*, or transliterated, *agape anhypokritoz*. The understanding of both of these Greek words is paramount to understanding how Christians are to express love as a response to what God has done for them.

The first word, *agape*, comes as no surprise to most Christians who have been introduced to the Biblical message. Its use by first-century Christians gave this word a then-new definition, one that is better understood by observation of godly Christian behavior than by the study of any ancient dictionary. The early Christians used this word to describe the unconditional, selfless love for others that is intended to mimic the unconditional love that God has for His creation. This would not have quite matched its use in other ancient non-Christian literature.<sup>5</sup> The Apostles who wrote what is now part of our New Testament

<sup>4</sup> Berry, George R. (1958, 1981). The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. ISBN 0-3102-1170-0. p. 427.

Kittel, Gerhard, e. al. (ed.) (1972). Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Vol. VIII. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. ISBN 0-8028-2250-9. p. 570.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, Michael. (2005) Romans 9-16. Explore the Bible Adult Commentary, 10(2). Nashville, TN: Lifeway Christian Resources. p. 62.

canon started using this word in a new way since there was simply no word in any common language that refers to God's unconditional love. The very idea of a loving God was foreign to ancient cultures.

The use of this word is unique among all common languages. It refers simply to God's unconditional love. Consequently, agape love is absolutely unconditional. Its expression is based upon a uncompromisable decision to love without any regard to the loved one's perceived value, their deservedness, or their ability to reciprocate. Where *eros* love is motivated by hormones, and *phileo* love is motivated by emotions, *agape* love is motivated by volition: a simple decision to love unconditionally as God loves. *Agape* is a love that is sacrificial, inspiring one to seek to meet the needs of the one loved with little or no concern for the personal cost of doing so.

Certainly, some people are easier to love than others. We tend to lavish our love on (1) those who love us in return, and (2) others who are similar to ourselves. Our natural bent to sin leads us to withhold love from those who do not fit neatly into these two categories. Those who withhold love on such bases live a divided ministry, claiming to love others, but free to express apathy, bigotry and prejudice towards those who they choose. I am reminded of hateful racial supremacy groups in the American 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that counted "Christian" leaders, respected deacons and elders, among their own. However, this form of love is not *agape*, it is the worldly form of love, referred to as *phileo* in the Greek language. True *agape* love knows no such distinctions. True *agape* love knows no such hypocrisy, bringing us to our second word.

Much of the English language comes from Greek, and it is not uncommon for a preface of "an" to refer to "not", such as "anaerobic," without oxygen, or anti ... etc. The Greek word, *anhypokritoz*, is literally, *an-hypokritoz*, not-hypocritical, meaning "without hypocrisy." Paul is instructing Christians to demonstrate this *agape* love without any form or mixture of hypocrisy. The Greek word *hypokritoz* comes from the theater stage where an actor puts on a mask so that he/she can pretend to be another person, a false representation, a fantasy figure. One who demonstrates this form of hypocrisy is one who can be two or more different people to different audiences. Recently this skill has been referred to as "compartmentalism" and deemed in secular-humanistic circles as a virtue. This term is used to describe anyone who has the ability to put on a "different face" to match any immediate audience at hand. This skill may be useful in the secular political arena, but is not an appropriate way of expressing Christian love.

With these two words, we have a foundational truth concerning the Christian faith that seems to have been largely forgotten: *agape* love is absolutely and unequivocally unconditional. One who expresses *agape* love cannot discriminate

among who will receive such love and who will not. *Agape* love describes that love that God has for His creation, a form of love that is not a "respector of persons,"<sup>6</sup> or one who does not favor one over another. Christians are to demonstrate unconditional *agape* love because God is demonstrating the same for them. *Agape* love cannot harbor anger or hold a grudge. *Agape* love cannot discriminate against someone based their social status, whether it be racial, economic, or for any other definable distinction.

It would probably be instructive to conduct an attitude check at this point before going on. When you look at your own life, can your love for others be described as *agape* without hypocrisy, *agape anhypokritoz*? Or, do you think less of others of another race or social strata? Are you as apt to love your close friend from your church fellowship as you are to love a stranger? It is not until your life is characterized by *agape* love, and not until that love is fully unconditional, will you be consistently in agreement with Paul's admonition. It is easy to think you love everyone when you surround yourself with those who you find lovely. But, honestly, can your collection of relationships be described as a "comfort zone" that you would rather reside fully within? If your attitude check reveals issues concerning the conditionality of the love you are willing to express, this would be a good time to *seek* forgiveness and work on a plan to correct this sin.

It is not in the nature of man to express *agape* love. Man's nature is to express the worldly, conditional *phileo* love in platonic relationships and *eros* love in romantic ones. These are forms of love that are based upon the state of our emotions. *Agape* love is not a product of our emotions: it is a product of our deliberate choice. The only possible way that one can express *agape* love is to make a positive and clear decision to do so, a decision that is motivated by our understanding of God's unconditional love for us, and empowered in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Those without the presence of the Holy Spirit cannot express *agape* love, and *agape* love cannot be expressed without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. *Agape* love is expressed when one makes a firm and deliberate choice to love all others without any conditions, to love when every fabric of one's own natural being shouts out against it.

The remainder of this chapter, as well as the content of the next several chapters provide instruction on how to develop the consistent expression of *agape* love in one's life.

---

<sup>6</sup> Acts 10:34.

**Rom 12:9b. *Abhor that which is evil;***

We live in a world where sin is rampant. This world is like a great lake of deep, dark, and insidious sin in which all are forced to swim. Christians are immersed in this sin. Because of this it takes a deliberate decision to rise above that sin. If a Christian exhibits unconditional *agape* love and does so with no mixture of hypocrisy, there is simply no place for the acceptance of that which is not godly. The word rendered "abhor" refers to the finding of something so offensive as to fully and wholly reject it.

Like a fish that has never seen any environment other than the water in which it is immersed, Christians have been immersed in this sinful world so fully and successfully that they sometimes may not even realize that they are wet. We also may be so accustomed to the temperature of the water and the direction of the current, that we no longer notice that we are even swimming, much less that we are going along with the flow of this evil world. As we become more accepting of the demands of modern culture, we may even begin to accept the rationalized euphemisms of this evil world and fail to see the truth of their ungodliness. For example:

- **Abortion.** Many who are sincere in their claim to be Christians accept the wholesale killing of millions upon millions of unborn babies as a form of convenience birth control as being a positive thing, referring to it as "pro-choice" and claiming it as a simple women's right.
- **Homosexuality.** We have come to accept the abomination of homosexuality as an "alternative lifestyle" with all manner of redefinitions of gender assignment. Homosexual behavior is now being pressed into an acceptable way of life by those who publish it in children's books and cartoons.
- **Racial Prejudice.** We accept racial prejudice by arguing that "they" deserve to be treated differently. Genocide, the murder of entire ethnic groups, is now called, "ethnic cleansing" as if it is some form of positive act.
- **Social Decay.** Liberal special-interest groups are working to normalize virtually every form of ungodly behavior. These are all evil attitudes that should be abhorrent to the sensibilities of a faithful Christian.

The list goes on and on.

We bring much of this evil world culture into our own homes through the media, whether by television, radio, smartphones, the internet, and other forms of electronic entertainment. The most popular television shows and movies are those that stimulate the prurient interests of viewers, whether the content is

violence, or sex, or any combination of these two most common subjects. Situation comedies and "soap opera" dramas almost universally project messages of illicit sex, promoting as much sin as the media censors will tolerate. Many of these media presentations use the shock of coarse and foul language that no faithful Christian would ever repeat. This is all material that a person of faith should find VERY offensive. Consequently, it has become quite difficult for a faithful Christian to find acceptable entertainment in the various forms of modern media.

**We have become desensitized to the godlessness around us.** I used to find my visits to the video rental/sales stores to be an exercise in increasing frustration, finding it advantageous to take with me someone who is a better fisherman than I. Surrounded by literally thousands of movies to choose from, not only is it difficult to find one that would be welcome in my home, but I am forced by the searching process to become immersed in the vulgarity of the genre in order to find that pearl among the swine. I now find the same frustration when browsing the similar shelves in on-line databases like Amazon Prime®, Netflix® or DirecTV.® Many people of faith have become so insensitive to the content of this genre as to not even comprehend its vulgarity. We have been lulled to sleep; our conscience has become numb and unaware of the offense that such material is to that which is godly. We have not only come to accept that which is worldly and vulgar, in many cases we have come to embrace it.

**What does it mean to "abhor" something?** I have tasted liver. I detest the flavor of liver so much, that if I accidentally place some in my mouth, my body starts to wretch and gag. There is no other food that I am aware of that causes in me such a violent physical reaction. One cannot trick me into eating liver. I can recognize the taste before it comes within reach, with even its odor producing a negative response. If I should place liver in my mouth I have all I can do to just spit it out. This is an excellent example of the application of Paul's word for "abhor." I absolutely and positively abhor liver. Christians who are characterized by *agape* without hypocrisy will find similar offense in that which is evil. They recognize that which is ungodly without compromise and simply find it offensive enough as to choose not to taste it.

This brings us to our second attitude check: Do you find today's movies, sitcoms, and soap operas that bombard the viewers with illicit themes to be offensive or entertaining? Do you find the glorification of violence in television programs and movies to be entertaining or distasteful? Are you stimulated by R-rated fantasy and its penchant for profanity, prurience, and vulgarity, or do you find it offensive?

The biblical mandate is clear: to summarily reject all that is evil and ungodly, to abstain from engagement with the exercise of any activity or attitude that is contrary to God's imperatives to love one another with sincerity and integrity.

Just as the expression of *agape* love is the product of a decision, the abhorrence of that which is evil is also the product of the firm decision to do so. Rejecting that which is ungodly is not a natural thing for us to do. Such rejection is a decision that is based upon our love for God, and an uncompromising demand for our own lifestyle of godliness. Paul refers to this as the statement continues.

**Rom 12:9c. *cleave to that which is good.***

The word rendered "cleave" is the opposite of that rendered, "abhor." This verb refers to a firm, intimate, and unbreakable embrace. Consider the following illustration of this verb: You are standing on a small flat, open, platform that is suspended very high in the air, and because of its precarious setting, you are firmly holding on to a solid and reliable pole that has a firm foundation on the ground far below you. You are holding onto the pole for "dear life," but you are not yet cleaving to it. Suddenly the floor of your platform falls away leaving only your grasp on the pole to keep you from falling. What kind of attention are you now willing to give to your grasp on that pole? That embrace would be firm and uncompromised. You would not let go of that pole for even the shortest amount of time. That pole is the very object of all of your attention. You are now "cleaving" to that pole.

One who demonstrates *agape* without hypocrisy has a lifestyle that holds with this type of an embrace to that which is good and godly. It is an uncompromised embrace that simply cannot be broken, even for the shortest amount of time. To break such an embrace would be to experience the offense described in the last phrase in this passage. One literal example of cleaving to that which is good is demonstrated in one's relationship to God's Word.

To many Christians, God's Word (whether it be the Bible or any expression of its power) is a reference work that, like a dictionary, encyclopedia, or spiritual Google® search, should be employed when needed, or when one is curious about its content, but otherwise set aside to gather dust in a bookshelf. For these, God's Word may be occasionally experienced in the context of a message brought by a pastor on a Sunday morning and easily tolerated for 20 to 30 minutes or more. While the Word is preached, this individual may be more interested in, and daydreaming about, the activities that will take place for the remainder of the day, daydreaming that is interrupted by occasional glimpses of a timepiece. This individual will become annoyed if the preacher's message is longer than preferred. Upon leaving church, the pastor is complemented on how

much he/she "enjoyed" the message, and then the message is simply forgotten.<sup>7</sup> God's Word is conveniently set aside until the next Sunday morning. Pastors know enough not to ask what part of the message was "enjoyed," since any attempt to answer could cause the church member no little embarrassment.

One who demonstrates *agape* without hypocrisy and is cleaving to that which is godly would find this scenario to be foreign and disappointing. One who cleaves to God's Word would always strive to learn more of it, and demonstrate continual and uncompromised obedience to it through *agape*-based living, considering the Word of God as the very foundation and edifice of life. This individual will take an active role in deepening his/her own knowledge of God's Word, utilize prayer as an open channel of communication with God, and demonstrate a genuine effort to live a life that is obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

This individual would never think of looking at their watch to estimate when the preacher will be done, but rather hope that the opening of God's word will continue. We see many examples of preaching in the first-century church where the teaching went on for hours. How would Paul have responded if he were told by a church he was visiting that he must limit his message to 20 minutes? Such a demand communicates the low priority that it has assigned to the dissemination of the Word of God in their fellowship. If Paul were treated this way he probably would have shaken the dust off of his shoes and gone to another city.<sup>8</sup>

Somehow, many of us have been lulled into an apathy towards God's Word and other virtues of the faith. Our apathy diminishes our appropriation of God's Word in our hearts, and limits our relationship with God. Such an attitude is an indication that the individual is not expressing any measure of *agape* love. If satan can convince us to fail to cleave to that which is godly, only he wins.

We have an opportunity for a third attitude check: Do you fully embrace that which is godly as you reject that which is not? Do you fill your life with Bible study, prayer, and genuine Christian fellowship? If you like to read, do you choose the writings of Christian authors that present fiction, non-fiction, and reference works that consistently illuminate godly virtues?

**Love without hypocrisy, abhor that which is evil, embrace that which is godly.** These three exhortations in this one short verse represent the very foundational set of choices that describe a life that acknowledges the Lordship of God. If one is to compromise in any of these three areas of life-choices, one is stepping back into the secular and pagan world that comes under the authority, not of the LORD of LORDS, but of the impotent prince of this world. When we

---

<sup>7</sup> James 1:23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5.



are immersed in this evil world it may be easy to overlook satan's power to deceive us, leading us to think that because we claim to love the LORD, we are fully obedient to God. However, when we look deeply into scriptures like this one, we may come away recognizing that we have allowed some measure of compromise. We may be allowing some hypocrisy in our spirit as we pick and choose whom we will love. We may be accepting ungodly influences into our lives. There may be some times when our embrace of that which is good is stronger than others. Such variety illustrates hypocrisy.

**Rom 12:10a. *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love;***

I am not sure where the phrase came from, but I have repeated it: "The Christian army is the only one that shoots its wounded." In our attempt to portray some image of goodness or godliness, we in the church often disdain our own church members who fall into sin and troubles. Some Christian denominations systematically discriminate against those who have a criminal record or have experienced divorce. Paul has, in his previous verses, emphatically stated that Christians are saved from the condemnation of sin, yet we still tend to condemn one another for their sin while we rationalize away or ignore our own. Sin has lost its power to separate us from God, but we employ our judgment of other's sin to separate us from one another.

Certainly all people, at all levels of faithfulness, deal with sin and its consequences. Sin may no longer condemn the faithful to eternal separation from god, but it has not lost its power to diminish the quality of our lives as it produces all manner of separation here on earth.

The one place a Christian should feel accepted and cared for is within the sanctuary of the Christian fellowship. That same *agape* without hypocrisy that Paul describes as a preferred Christian characteristic fully applies when exercised within the fellowship of believers. Many churches, rather than serving as sanctuaries, are Christian-themed social groups with a well-defined pecking-order of power, are fully secular in organization, and Christian by name. Recognizing this, Paul turns his discussion about *agape* without hypocrisy first to the church body.

Two key words are used here that are rendered "affectioned" and "brotherly love." The affection that Paul refers to is simply the full and caring acceptance of another without regard to their flaws. A parent who appropriately loves their own child experiences this form of affection. We can see this affection demonstrated even in the secular culture when we find a parent who is fully dedicated to meeting the needs of their own special-needs child. If it is possible for secular

and pagan parents to demonstrate such affection, how much easier and natural should it be for Christians to express that same affection for one another?

"Brotherly love" is a rendering of the Greek word, *φιλαδελφια*, *philadelphia*, a slight variation of the word used for "affectioned." Based on the word for love, *φιλο*, *philo*, this is the love that is felt among close family and friends. It is from this word that we build the word, philanthropy. When we look upon others in the Christian faith, we are looking upon close family. This family crosses lines of gender, ethnicity, culture and language. I have experienced this form of love frequently when traveling in foreign countries in a missionary context. Often, when meeting Christians of other nationalities, without speaking a single common word, we know immediately that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, and begin to embrace and encourage one another.

There is simply no place for hypocrisy within the body of believers. When we express *agape* in this context, we find that there is also no place for a pecking order. We are all brothers and sisters who stand at the same level at the foot of the cross of Calvary as we seek to be obedient to the same LORD and Savior who is the One authority in our lives. We are all sheep who were led astray,<sup>9</sup> but are now led by the One Great Shepherd, Jesus, Christ. Even the distinctions of clergy and laity are a creation of church polity as the LORD has called upon sheep to lead sheep. When we observe the love expressed by Jesus for all people, and as we observe His compassion among his own disciples who seemed to never quite, "get it right," we see an image of how we, as Christians should relate one to another. Jesus drew no distinctions concerning those who He chose to love, and seeking to imitate Christ, Christians are called by God and led of the Holy Spirit to do the same. **It is only our own sin and self-centeredness that causes us to be selective in our love for others.**

What should we do when one of our own is wounded from their warfare with sin and its consequences? Most secular armies have an inviolable policy that they never leave a wounded soldier behind. An army that turned its back on its wounded would not stand long in battle. Those who are wounded on the battlefield are those members of the unit that are in the greatest need. Those within our fellowship who are wounded are also those who have the greatest need, and deserve our greatest expression of love. They are our "special needs" family members. Just as soldiers will detach themselves from the mission to recover a wounded comrade, Christian soldiers must do the same, giving preference to those who are in greatest need.

---

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 53:6.

Serving those with special needs may take a greater sacrifice and require a greater risk than sharing our fellowship with others who are not experiencing such conflict. However, the wounded Christian often has only that one, single place to turn for help: the church. However, rather than finding encouragement, support and love, they often find themselves shunned. Those whom they trusted as friends when the sun was shining become distant and disinterested when clouds of darkness block its rays. It is no surprise that many of those who despise the organized church point back to a time when they have been hurt by it.

Paul describes a love that is without hypocrisy, and reminds us that this love is to be expressed especially within the sanctuary of the Christian fellowship. If there is any one place where we should be able to learn *agape* love it is within the body of the Christian fellowship.

**Rom 12:10b. *in honour preferring one another;***

Paul literally states, "giving honor, going before one another." The rendering of "going before" as "preferring" can be unfortunate if we ignore the context of scripture. *Agape* without hypocrisy disallows our preference of Christians over unbelievers, or some Christians over others. The Greek word for "going before" draws upon the same family relationship expressed in the first half of the verse, as one serves to meet the needs of another. To "go before" is to prepare the path for another. A secular parallel idiom might be to "roll out the red carpet." This concept both honors the one who is coming, and prepares the way for him/her. This is similar to a Hebrew idiom that is often translated, "make the paths straight,"<sup>10</sup> referring to the preparation of the roadway for the coming of a new and victorious king.

Christians are to receive one another with this form of honor and preparation. It is easy for us to do this for a Christian who is easy to honor and respect. If someone of the celebrity and respect of a Billy Graham, James Dobson, or Chuck Swindoll were to visit our congregation, we would have no problem demonstrating this behavior. However, the context of Paul's discussion clearly shows that we are to show no favoritism, and this same honor and preparation is to be given to every believer, especially those who have the greatest needs. I have read enough of Graham, Dobson, and Swindoll to know that they would each gladly give up their red carpet for another person of less honor and greater need. We need to do the same.

---

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4.

**Rom 12:11. *Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the LORD;***

Paul's writing is so intense, that it is tempting to take this imperative and break it down into its three parts. The word "business" would lead us into a direction of considering the application of *agape* in the workplace, and this is a valid endeavor. However, there is no literal inference to "commercial business" in Paul's statement. Paul's statement is literally a pairing of three subjects and verbs offered in this exact order:

- In diligence: not slothful.
- In spirit: fervent.
- In season: serving.

Up to this point in this chapter, Paul has been describing attitude. The Christian is to have an uncompromised love for all people, *agape* without hypocrisy. When we bring this into our lives, our very lifestyle changes as all of our choices are informed by the *agape* love of God. Paul first mentions three areas:

- **Diligent in their Work.** One who is excited in their faith and is eager to serve the LORD will be diligent in all that they do. There will be no hint of laziness or slothfulness in their spirit, in their attitudes, or in their actions.
- **Fervent in Spirit.** One who is excited in their faith will demonstrate that fervency in all that they do. They will be open about their faith, eager to share it with others so that they too might come to know the *agape* love of God.
- **Serving in season.** The lifestyle of a Christian is characterized by an exercised desire to serve others. The idea of "in season," is simply to say that one who is excited in their faith will be eager to serve others each and every time such an opportunity presents itself.

In the next couple of verses, Paul describes putting this attitude into action. It is one thing to claim to love and care for another, but a claim without consistent action is simply a lie. From these three subject-verb pairs we get a clear message that our love is to be expressed in action, expressed in non-slothful diligence that is characterized by a fervent spirit that leads us to serve others when opportunities arise. These refer to actions that we take among one another, actions that are motivated by *agape* without hypocrisy.

**Romans 12:12. *Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;***

Paul continues his reverie in subject-verb pairs, turning from actions that we take among one another to actions that we take in our relationship to the LORD, again motivated by *agape* without hypocrisy. Again, Paul's writing is literally:

- In hope: rejoicing.
- In tribulation: enduring.
- In prayer: steadfastly continuing.

**Christians all share a hope.** There is a sincere and secure hope in a better place, away from this world of sin and its constant barrage of sin's consequence. There is a hope of an eternal relationship with the Creator who loves us. This hope becomes action when we respond to it by rejoicing, by an active response of appreciation for what God has done. Christians can be genuinely glad and joyful when they consider what God has in store.<sup>11</sup> This joy should always be evident when we worship, and any time we gather to do so, if there is no joy, there is no worship.

**Christians all share tribulation.** Life on this earth will never lack tribulation since we all are still immersed in this sinful world, and the conflict between this evil world and God's call to purity and sinlessness will not end until the end of the age. If we try to develop a doctrine that salvation results in a life without tribulation, we are declaring a false gospel, an heresy. We need only to look at the life of Paul to find that doctrine to be nothing short of heresy. Paul's experience with tribulation and persecution started when he surrendered his life to God. All the apostles found themselves suffering persecution, and all but John suffered a martyr's death. Jesus Himself experienced persecution and derision at the hands of those to whom He most desired to bring His message of grace. These all experienced death as the culmination of persecution. Christians are given the resources to endure tribulation, and both Paul and James repeatedly describe the function tribulation has in the spiritual growth of a Christian. James states, "Let tribulation complete its work in you".<sup>12</sup> Our natural desire is to avoid tribulation, to take steps to protect ourselves from its stress. However, by sidestepping tribulation, we may be stepping outside of the ministry or task that God has for us. Christians are called to endure tribulation, and God has promised to provide the resources to get the Christian through it so that His work can be accomplished.

---

<sup>11</sup> John 4.

<sup>12</sup> James 1:4, paraphrase.

**Christians all have been given the gift of prayer**, the ability to approach God directly in communication. A secular television program recently tried to "cover" the subject of prayer. Whenever these secular agencies try to cover spiritual matters, their ignorance of the context of spiritual truths often leads them to make misleading and condemning judgments. One amusing anecdote that was proffered was, "When someone says they talk to God, we say they are praying. When someone says God talks to them, we call them a lunatic." The world cannot understand the process of prayer, and when Christians are well-entrenched in the world culture, prayer may be equally ineffective or irrelevant. Paul did not understand the nature of prayer to be an activity that takes place at certain hours of the day, or offered in a particular physical position, or even requiring any particular words. Paul's prayer life was an open channel, a continuing conversation with the LORD that touched his every thought and action.

If we express *agape* without hypocrisy in our prayer life, we find that God, in His omniscience, is open to our every thought and word. Our conversation with God can be continual, a part of our everyday activities. At the same time, God speaks to us through a variety of ways, revealing His will and purpose through the Holy Spirit who brings to mind images of peace and truth when we seek Him in prayer, illuminating truth in His Holy Word, and illustrating His will in the circumstances we witness within the lives of other Christians and in the circumstances of this world.

Paul describes *agape* without hypocrisy as a keystone in the bridge that connects us with God and with one another. When the integrity of the keystone is compromised, the integrity of the entire structure is compromised. Is the love that you have for God, and the love that you have for others unconditional? Or, do you reserve your love for those whom you choose to love? Much of the conflict that we see in the church body, among one another, and even between ourselves and God can be traced back to fractures in this keystone, fractures that come from a love that is less than *agape*, and a love that is hypocritical, based upon the worldly *phileo*. If one submits fully to the LORD, the fractures in that keystone can be repaired. Let us each seek the LORD's promised help as we develop a love for one another that is more fully *agape*, and one that is fully impartial. Such a love, demonstrated in us, will have the full power of the light of the Holy Spirit, a power that can change lives and bring both ourselves and others closer to God. How do we do this?

- Choose to love unconditionally.
- Turn away from that which is evil.
- Embrace that which is godly.
- Love one another, preferring others over ourselves.