

**Proper 17 (A)**  
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Romans 12:9-21  
TLC, Keene, NH

[OPENING SLIDE]

**Love in Action**

*“Let love be genuine.”*

**Introduction**

I recently came across this gem on the Internet:

“You know you're unloved if...  
your folks threw a "going-into-the-Army" party when you were 3  
you play "hide & seek" with your parents and they hide in another town  
you had to share your sandbox with the cat  
you always got your allowance in Traveler's Checks  
you join the marching band in school and they give you a piano  
you take a girl to the Tunnel of Love & she makes you swim  
you were the only candidate for Class President & came in fifth  
your kids file a paternity suit against you  
the surgeon operating on you says, ‘I'll take all calls.’”  
[<http://www.jokebuddha.com/Unloved>]

[SLIDE # 2] Love ... a commodity in short supply. A weakness this pandemic has revealed ... esp. in relationships ... not what they should be. Strained. Without *and* within the Body of Christ.

Paul calls us back - *“by the mercies of God”* - poured out on us all.

**Main Thought:** Properly motivated, continuously transformed, cooperating with our Savior and each other, the Body of Christ is called to love ... to be a blessing to all, and a hindrance to none.

[SLIDE # 3]

GENUINE LOVE IS TRULY GENUINE WHEN TIED TO THE SAVIOR WHO LOVED AND STILL LOVES US GENUINELY.

Amen.

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*1 Corinthians 6:3 “We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup> but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities ... <sup>6</sup> by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love ... <sup>8</sup> through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise.”*

Our life as disciples is not an easy road, but one that is not without no small amount of God's grace, help and strength.

[SLIDE # 4] Wherein, again, only “*in view of God's mercy*” are we properly motivated to genuine service. [So that] when we are discouraged in the holy task of love, it's not the Law that motivates us, but again God's mercies: in Scripture, in the services of God's house, and in our day-to-day living.

Child of God, you are precious. Our gracious heavenly Father, “has given the life of His Son, Jesus, for your salvation. He continues to bless and sustain you each day. Even now, He prepares a place for you in his joyous presence. Therefore, serve willingly – in view of His mercies.” [*The Lutheran Study Bible, 1934*]

It's both the solid FOUNDATION, as well as all the MOTIVATION we need, even as God continues His gracious TRANSFORMATION in us by way of His Word and Sacraments.

Saved by Love, God in Christ now calls us to such love ... first:

[SLIDE # 5] Within the fellowship of the Body of Christ.

<sup>9</sup> **Let love** [*αγαπη*, sacrificial, unconditional, “all embracing”<sup>1</sup>] **be genuine** [i.e. w/o hypocrisy, sincere, “not counterfeit”<sup>2</sup>]. **Abhor** [utterly despise] **what is evil; hold fast to what is good.** <sup>10</sup> **Love** [*φιλαδελφια*] **one another** with brotherly affection. **Outdo** [“take the lead in, go before, precede”] **one another in showing honor.**

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<sup>1</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 630

<sup>2</sup> Shielded esp. from “self-deceit” [Cranfield, 631]

ORIGEN: “Any love without God is artificial and not genuine.”  
[*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*]

CHRYSOSTOM: “If you have love, you will not notice the loss of your money, the labor of your body, the toil of your words, your trouble or your ministering, but you will bear everything courageously.” [*Homilies on Romans*, 21]

As Paul writes in that other “love” chapter of the Bible, also written to address life within the Body of Christ. Where, here’s a little experiment I like to do ... insert your own name everywhere the word “love” occurs:

**[SLIDE # 6]**

*1 Corinthians 13:4 Love [INSERT NAME HERE] is patient and kind; love [INSERT NAME HERE] does not envy or boast; it [INSERT NAME HERE] is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It [INSERT NAME HERE] does not insist on its own way; it [INSERT NAME HERE] is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it [INSERT NAME HERE] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.*

Children of God, “where there is genuine love, there the church as the family of God is a reality.” [Franzmann, *Romans*, 224] “Born from the same spiritual womb.” [Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, 21]

“The emphasis is on the positive, on seeing the [one] beside you with the eyes of the God of all mercies, as [one] of infinite worth, [as one] for whom Christ died, worth your love and honor,” all because that one in the next pew is not simply *there*, but because they have been “placed there by God.” [Franzmann, 224]

**[SLIDE # 7]** “There are no *ordinary* people,” C.S. Lewis writes in his essay “The Weight of Glory.” “You have never talked to a mere mortal. ... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.” [46]

In light of this remarkable truth ...

**<sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in [“the Holy”<sup>3</sup>] spirit, serve the Lord** [by serving those within the body of Christ].

“In lives which are truly being transformed by the renewing of the mind there is no room ... for that attitude which seeks to get by with as little work and inconvenience as possible, which shrinks from dust and heat and resents the necessity for any exertion as a burden and imposition.” [Cranfield, *Romans*, 633]

[SLIDE # 8] Wherein, as we remain tied to the means of God’s grace, we find strength for the hour. To be able to ...

**<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient [endurance] in tribulation, be constant in prayer.**

Wherein, prayer is totally connected to *everything* that we do.

*<sup>1</sup> Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Indeed, in Christ, supported by His means, our very lives become a prayer ... as we ...

**<sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints** [“expressed in concrete [practical], and friendly help”<sup>4</sup>] **and seek to show hospitality.**

Such is life within the Body, a life formed and shaped as we live together. Where, it is in *here* that we grow and learn to live out *there* ... [SLIDE # 9] with those outside of the Body of Christ.

Wherein, it can be rough going, where faith takes a beating, but also is a place filled with incredible opportunity to be Jesus.

**<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.**

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<sup>3</sup> The “real proof” of which “would not be effervescent religious excitement but renewed energy and determination in the humble and obedient service of the Lord Jesus.” [Cranfield, 635]

<sup>4</sup> Cranfield, 638

How difficult it is to pass this portion of the exam for being a follower of Christ ... wherein, we not only refrain from retaliating and doing others harm, but where we actually desire good for them and show that this desire is no mere pretense by actually praying for God's blessings to come to bear in their life. [Adapted from Cranfield, 640]

**[SLIDE # 10]** It is what Jesus calls us to:

*Luke 6:27 "But I say to you ... Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."*

*"Love ... do good ... bless ... pray for."* All active words.

"Although there is hardly anyone who has made such advance in the law of the Lord that he fulfils this precept, no one can boast that he [she] is the child of God, or glory in the name of a Christian, who has not partially undertaken this course and does not struggle daily to resist the will to do the opposite." [Calvin]

*Lord, help us in this ... He who is the blessed Way!*

***<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.***

**[SLIDE # 11]** To stand *with* and *for* others in the critical times of their lives. Yes, as we have been borne of hope, we are uniquely able to enter into the joys and sorrows of others with clarity and sympathy. We become like our Lord in this, "who manifested His glory ... by supplying wedding wine at Cana (John 2:1-11) *and* by weeping at the grave of Lazarus. (John 11:35)" [Franzmann, 227]

Wherein, I can think of few times in our relationships with those *outside* the church that a better doorway is presented to welcome them in.

<sup>16</sup> **Live in harmony** [“be of the same mind”<sup>5</sup>] **with one another.** *Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

<sup>17</sup> *Repay no one evil for evil, but **give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.*** <sup>18</sup> **If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.** [SLIDE # 12] <sup>19</sup> **Beloved** [αγαπητοι – reflecting again, our true Gospel nature – borne of water and the Word, of life-giving Cross of Christ] ...

By so doing, we joyfully share in “the victory of the gospel over the world and setting up signs which point to the reality of God’s love for sinners.” In so doing, we “will be living as one who is being transformed by the renewing of the mind.” [Cranfield, 650]

### **Conclusion**

[SLIDE # 13] As to love, C.S. Lewis once wrote in *The Four Loves*: “There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken.”<sup>6</sup>

[SLIDE # 14] Wherein, thanks be to God through our Savior Jesus Christ that we have been saved by – not only as an act of grace, but by Love incarnate in Christ. So that, properly motivated and continuously transformed, the Body of Christ – this body of Christ – is now called to love.

### [SLIDE # 15]

GENUINE LOVE IS TRULY GENUINE WHEN TIED TO THE SAVIOR WHO LOVED AND STILL LOVES US GENUINELY.

His is *still* the “*most excellent way.*” *Amen.*

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<sup>5</sup> “Have equal regard for one another; care as much about each other as yourselves.” [NEB]

<sup>6</sup> Lewis continues: “If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.”