



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Transformed Love

Romans 12.9-10

David Anguish

Introduction

Forgive my use of old songs; they are the ones branded onto my brain: “All You Need Is Love,” “What the world needs now is love, sweet love. . .,” “Put a little love in your heart. . .” The phrasing changes; the theme does not. People know our world would be better if we loved better. Paul would agree.

1. He spoke of love often, using ἀγάπη (*agapē*) alone 75 times.
2. He called us to be “living sacrifices,” resisting the age, yielding to transformation in humility, and sublimating ourselves into a body where each uses his/her gifts (Rom. 12.1-8). Turning to specific body behavior, he begins with love.

But, what is love like? What does it mean to practice it? Here, Paul and our world differ

A Refresher on ἀγάπη (agapē)

There was some use by other writers, but it seems to be more a word of “revealed religion.”¹ Christians made it their word for love.²

1. The word was not devoid of emotional content, but does not match what is commonly thought about “love” in contemporary use.³
2. It was more about esteem, treating someone as valuable. The KJV’s periodic use of “charity” helps (1 Cor. 13.1-4, 8, 13; 14.1; 16.14; Col. 3.14; 1 Thess. 3.6; etc.).

A Closer Look at Paul, and Romans

Up to this point, he has spoken of ἀγάπη (*agapē*) in terms of God’s love (5.5, 8; 8.35, 39). That’s his working model for what love should be (see esp. 5.5, 8).

1. “... the fact that talk of human *agape* appears only now after the earlier strong talk of God’s love and Christ’s love is probably sufficient indication that Paul took it for granted that human *agape* was possible only as an expression of divine *agape* (cf. 5:5; ...).”⁴
2. Later references show that he saw love at the heart of the Christian life (13.10) and the key to solving problems in body life (14.15).

In light of these things, and his practice elsewhere (1 Cor. 12-14, esp. 13.1-14.1), it should not surprise us that love heads the section immediately after gifts. Gifts determine the body's functions; love determines the character of that function.

Verses 9-10 flesh out the practical aspect of love.

Let love be without duplicity, abhorring the evil and clinging to the good. Show brotherly love to one another with brotherly devotion, outdoing one another in showing honor (my translation).

Love Defined (12.9)

First, there are to be no hidden agendas in love: "without hypocrisy" (NASB).

1. The word is ἀνυπόκριτος (*anypokritos*), "the 'playactor' who projects an image and hides his true identity behind a mask" (Dunn, 740).
2. It will be used again with regard to love (2 Cor 6.6; 1 Pet 1.22), with faith (1 Tim 1.5; 2 Tim 1.5) and with the "wisdom from above" (Jas 3.17).
3. The best commentary on it are the words of Jesus (Matt 6.2, 5, 16; 7.5; 15.7; 23.13, 15, 23, 25, 27; 29; etc. cf. also Matt 5.8).

Second, it never participates in evil, whether or not it "feels" right.

1. "Evil" πονηρός (*ponēros*) "pert[ains] to being morally or socially worthless, *wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, degenerate*" and is considered a stronger word than κακός (*kakos*), which will be used in vv. 17, 21.⁵
2. "Abhor" (here a participle) is ἀποστύγέω (*apostygeō*), "to have a vehement dislike for someth., *hate strongly, abhor*" (BDAG).

Third, it goes out of its way to seek the good, clinging to it like glue.

1. "Cling" (NASB) is κολλάω (*kallaō*), "to join closely together, *bind closely, unite... someone with or to someone*; fig. extension of the lit. mng. 'to glue' or 'join' substances" (BDAG).
 - Matthew 19.5 – "... Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and *hold fast* to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."
 - Luke 10.11 – "...the dust of your town that *clings* to our feet we wipe off against you...."
 - Acts 8.29 – "And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and *join* this chariot.'"
 - 1 Corinthians 6.16-17 – Or do you not know that he who is *joined* to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who is *joined* to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."⁶

The thought, in conjunction with vv. 3-8: gifts are vital, but must be checked and monitored with respect to love; and even that is to be checked and monitored with respect to good and evil in harmony with the revelation (see 1 Cor 2.12-15; 12.10; 14.29; 1 Thess 5.19-22; also Rom 12.11c).

Love Expressed (12.10)

Verse 10 intensifies the idea, transitioning from a body analogy to a family figure.

The words are φιλαδελφία, *philadelphia* (brotherly love) and φιλόστοργος, *philostorgos* (a word associated with natural family love, the love of a parent for a child).

1. Paul identifies life in the new-covenant community, not with externals (as in Judaism with its identity markers of circumcision, diet, and Sabbath-keeping), but concern for others.
2. See John 13.34-35; Ephesians 2.11-22.

The next phrase shows the extent: “giving preference to one another in honor” (NASB).

1. “Giving preference” (προηγέομαι, *proegomai*) has the sense of “going before, leading the way,” thus the idea is “show the way to one another in giving respect.”
2. “What is required is a genuine recognition and acceptance each of the other and of the part of each in the life and worship of the congregation (cf. 1 Thess. 5:13)” (Dunn, 741).

Talk about a different society! Paul calls for natural family love among people who are not naturally family, a course that clearly requires a different set of priorities.

Paul will mean the kind of love which recognizes and can speak about (in the intimacy of the family) weaknesses and failings, but which has a quality of loyalty that outlasts repeated disappointments (Dunn, 753).

Conclusion

We can approach our study of what follows 12.1-8 as a checklist of traits to see how we’re doing with the “living sacrifice” lifestyle. Are we:

1. Loving without duplicity?
2. Seeing our love guided by the standard of good and evil?
3. Committed to Christ’s body as to a family and yielding our interests to fellow body members?

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www.davidanguish.com

Notes

¹ “Though it would be going too far to say that this important Biblical word was ‘born within the bosom of revealed religion,’ it is remarkable that there have been only three supposed instances of its use in ‘profane’ Greek, two of which are now read otherwise and the third is doubtful.” (J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930], BibleWorks, v.10.)

² The noun and verb, along with the related word ἀγαπητός (*agapētos*), “occur in nearly all the writings of the NT and a total of 320 times in the NT” (see Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], BibleWorks, v.10). [EDNT].

³ Relative to its LXX use, EDNT notes that “the translators probably preferred the words of the ἀγαπάω group [over ἐράω/ἔρωσ and φιλέω/φιλία] which convey less affective emphasis since they designate ‘a sober kind of love — love in the sense of placing a high value upon some person or thing, or of receiving them with favour’ (Warnach, *SacVb* 518; in this connection see also Joly).”

⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 739.

⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), BibleWorks. v.10. [BDAG]

⁶ See also Luke 15.15; Acts 5.13; 9.26; 10.28; 17.34; Rev 18.5.