

Romans 12:9

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[0 : 00] Our text this morning is going to be one verse, verse 9 of chapter 12, which reads, let love be genuine, abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good.

Truth. It feels sometimes that Paul has what I'll call doctrinal Tourette's. He just starts popping truth out there to us. What do we do when he presents information to us in this way?

Certainly, we ought to meditate carefully on each of these phrases. And so let me encourage you with that this morning, that beyond today, take this home.

Think about the phrase, let love be genuine, abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good, work to find all of the activity of your life filtered through this reality.

I definitely believe that God has ordained the grace of preaching to unwrap it for you, to unpack it a bit, so to speak, to show you how it fits in the greater context of the book of Romans.

[1 : 26] And I hope to drive it a little more deeply into your heart so that you will, in fact, take the time to really see how these truths affect your living.

But let's back up a bit, right, to the beginning of chapter 12. So Paul has given us in the first 11 chapters this beautiful presentation systematically of the gospel of grace to us in Christ.

That salvation is by faith alone. All men condemned by their sin. And yet, Christ came and was the propitiation, the replacement for us.

He bore our wrath that if we'll believe, we will be justified in God's sight. He goes on to talk about how nothing can change that. Because our salvation is secure, because it's holy of God, we are secure.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. And the eternal purposes of God will stand. And we can take great comfort in that.

[2 : 25] And then in chapter 12, verse 1, is the turning point, the practical application now of everything that Paul has been saying.

And he says, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, which is how he summarizes the last 11 chapters. Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is your spiritual or your reasonable worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

So we're given this command now. In light of these great truths, we are to take ourselves, all of us, which is what he means when he talks about presenting our bodies. As priests, we're to lay our very being on the altar in service to him.

And he begins to show us how we do that. We do that by not being conformed to the world, but being transformed instead by the renewal of our mind so that we can know what God's perfect will is.

[3 : 31] And when we talked about this a couple of weeks ago, I said to you, I think generally we can apply this truth to our everyday living, the will of God. What is the will of God for my life?

I think we can say certainly by renewing our minds, understanding the truth of the scriptures, we can discern what I'll call the hidden will, the details. What job should I take?

Where should I live? Who should I marry? Those types of things. But more specifically, what Paul is referring to, I believe, is the rest of the book. If your mind is being transformed by the truth, you will be able to discern these good and acceptable things, the will of God, which I'm about to tell you about.

So we begin to talk about the gifts to the church, the graces, the way it is that we're working together as a body of believers to exalt him to the world. And then we get this list of exhortations, right?

They get rattled off at us. And what they are is an exhortation to godliness, the will of God that we will look like Christ. And he fires them off at us pretty quickly, right?

[4 : 40] These are the marks of the life offered to God. First Timothy 4, 7 through 9, Paul wrote, train yourself for godliness.

For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. So these things that he's going to begin telling us about have great value for us, both now as the right way to live and forever.

For the hope of eternal glory being stored up for us. These things are of supreme value and we ought to strive, we ought to strain to live in these ways.

And so he gives to us a first exhortation. And I'll say it's a primary exhortation. He says, let love be genuine.

[5 : 43] And then he expounds upon it. Seems like a random interjection there. Abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Right? Precious truth there. We're to hate the evil, we're to love the good.

But doesn't it seem a little bit strange interjected between let love be genuine and then love one another with brotherly affection? How do the two connect? I hope to show you that here momentarily.

I believe that when he talks about abhorring what is evil and holding fast to what is good, he's greater expressing what genuine or non-hypocritical love actually looks like.

So it's a first, it's a primary exhortation. It's a overarching exhortation. And he's going to go on to tell us how loving genuinely works out.

And you can see starting in verse 10, if you kind of scan that with me through verse 13, he's exhorting us to love genuinely the saints. And beyond that, beginning in verse 14 through the end of 16, that we should be loving genuinely all peoples.

[6 : 52] Beginning in 17 through the end of the chapter, we should be loving genuinely our enemies. You begin to see he's expanding the idea of what loving genuinely actually looks like.

In Matthew chapter 22, beginning in verse 36, a lawyer seeking to test Jesus said, teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?

And Jesus said to him, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. So, godliness then can be summarized in one word.

Love. It can all be pulled together. Is it that simple? No. And I fully recognize that. Paul wrote us a couple chapters on what that looks like. But if you had to pull it together, what is the one word that defines God?

[7 : 57] Love. But not as our culture understands it. Love in our culture has been vastly distorted. Right? You can ask the average person how many people they've loved in their life and they'll rattle off some family members.

They'll also give you a long line of boyfriends or girlfriends that they've said, I love you too. Right? Which really what they're saying is, I lost you. Right? Not the reality of the situation.

Right? The word used here for love is agape. Right? It's a merciful. It's a self-sacrificial love. It's not a love that seeks what it can gain, but what it can give.

It's a subservient love. In Greek literature, this word was very rarely used. Because culturally at this time, it was seen as weakness.

To love somebody or something in this way, you were viewed as weak. And this is the love that we're being called to. To do so genuinely.

[9 : 01] Right? It's stated in the positive in the ESV. To let love be genuine. In the negative, which some of your translations may say would be without hypocrisy, which is a more literal translation of the word.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Let's see. We can't trust many things these days, can we? On the way in, I listen to talk radio a lot.

And I heard a little assessment of Obama's first term. He made 503 promises in his campaign. Things he intended to accomplish in his first term.

And he kept 39% of those promises so far. Obama's not alone in that. We really can't trust politicians, can we? I think we've all learned that.

Especially as we get a little bit older. Right? This time of year, it becomes very hard to trust culture. Doesn't it? Culture says that Christmas is all about something different than it really is.

[10:10] Doesn't it? It says it's all about consumerism. It's all about a jolly fat guy in a red suit. Also on talk radio, I heard them talk about the way children's faces light up.

They interviewed a group of mall Santas. And they said, as they introduced the bit, they said, Santa is so exciting to children because he personifies Christmas.

To children, Santa is everything. The literal words that they said on the radio. And then they interviewed him. And it was really funny. Things the kids ask for.

Time machines. And a four-year-old asked for a grappling hook. That's all she wanted for Christmas. Quite funny. They went on to talk about how many people spill all kinds of details of their life to Santa as they wait in line for him.

And that to a lot of people, and the person talking at this time said, to a lot of people, Santa is a, and his words caught in his throat.

[11:18] And I think what his mind was saying was, Santa is a god. I think that's what went through his head. But instead he said, Santa is a catharsis.

That's about the pause that he gave. He couldn't think of the word that he ought to use instead of calling Santa God. Right? Parents, I will speak more to this at another time.

But please, let your yes be yes and your no be no. Your children should believe you when you tell them a fantastic story of God taking the form of man, being born in a manger to serve the world in death.

You want your children to believe such a nutty story, right? Let your yes be yes and your no be no. Let your children say, my parents wouldn't lie to me. And have that be a reality in your life.

It's hard to trust our culture. It's hard to trust that Wes is going to have the right lyrics up on the screen sometimes, isn't it? I love you, buddy. But what we're being exhorted to here is that our love be trustworthy, be genuine, be without hypocrisy.

[12:40] That's a high call in Christ, isn't it? Now, hypocrisy is manifested in two ways. And I'm not just making this up. I'm going to show you scripturally where I'm getting this from.

But hypocrisy is manifested in two ways. Number one, it seeks to make a person, one, look better on the outside than they actually are. We're familiar with that, right?

Hypocrisy seeks to make you look better on the outside than you actually are. In Matthew chapter 23, Jesus says, Our love should be genuine in the sense that it is the reality.

It is actually the way we feel. We don't put on airs. Psychologists talk about our front stage and our backstage. And in many degrees, that can be a healthy thing.

That's good that I comb my hair and brush my teeth. You would not want to see my waking up in the morning backstage. There's some things that are appropriate to do when we come together in public.

[14:07] But we ought not put on the air of love and have the reality be something entirely different. You may have seen that with some of the children this morning as they handed out candy canes.

I'm not really sure they wanted to give you the candy cane. They were kind of being coerced into doing so. And we often do this as Christians. We believe we should be doing something, so we go through the dutiful act of doing it.

We really don't mean it. You ever ask somebody how they're doing? Hey, good morning. How are you doing? And they actually unload the real answer on you.

And the first thought that goes through your mind is, I'm really sorry I asked. I really want to know how you were doing this morning. Right? That's hypocritical love. If you love somebody and you ask them how they're doing, the love you have for them should compel you to listen to the answer and minister to their need.

Not the opposite. That's a front stage. That's hypocritical love. Secondly, hypocrisy is manifested as it seeks to maximize the faults of others to minimize your own faults.

[15:23] Another form of hypocrisy. It points at the faults of others so that people don't look at your own. They're all guilty of this as well. Luke chapter 6, Jesus says, Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

How can you say to your brother, Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite. First, take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. That's the picture of proper encouragement, proper exhortation, the proper rebuke, rebuke. It's that we are pressing ourselves into holiness, and as we're doing that, we're calling others into it along with us.

And we are far too quick to notice the faults of others and ignore our very own. You will find that more than likely, the things about other people, their sin that bothers you the most, is probably the most glaring sin in your own life.

The condemnation is being heaped upon you, because it drives you crazy when people talk behind other people's backs. And what do you do in response to that? You go do the very same about them talking behind other people's backs.

[16:51] That is not genuine love. Genuine love, agape love, is seeking the best for the other person.

It's ignoring your own needs. Soon in verse 10, Paul says, Outdo one another in showing honor. Compete to honor people, to bestow favor on other people, over and above yourself. 1 John 3.18, John says to us, Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

Now John is not saying, we ought not love people with our words. That's not at all what he's saying. But what he is saying is that, it ought not just be something we say. It ought to be something that we do.

The deeds of our vocalization should match. 1 John, again, 4, chapter 7 and 8.

[18:00] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

And that's the great test of the book of 1 John. To ask, am I a Christian? Do I have true, genuine faith? Have I been born again?

Am I actually a new creation in Christ? May I ask you a simple question? Do you love? Do you love? Do you seek the good of others?

Or are you entirely self-serving? Which brings us to the next little phrase. When Paul says, seemingly randomly, abhor what is evil.

Hold fast to what is good. All that he's about to say in the book, beginning in verse 10, is the further explanation of the evil and the good.

[19:04] But let me stop first to say, isn't it a blessing that there is such a thing as objective evil and objective good? There is, in fact, clearly defined categories of evil and good.

In this world that we live in, might makes right. But praise God, he is the almighty. And therefore, his right is the standard by which we can live.

It's what empowered Christians in Nazi Germany to say of Hitler, what you're doing is wrong. You cannot systematically exterminate a race.

It's not the standard that's set for us, the objective good for us. It's what allows American Christians to say, abortion is evil.

Clearly. Because the standard is not the standard of our government. The standard is the standard of God Almighty. Praise him that there is an objective good and evil.

[20:13] How do we define those things? We start to think about good and evil. What is it in my life that fits into these varying categories? And I think simply, without exhaustively explaining all things good and all things evil, we can see in chapter 12, verse 2, the will of God.

And Paul has set us upon the task of renewing our minds so that we can test, we can discern all the things he's about to say, which are the will of God. So if we live then by the will of God, we are doing good.

And if we don't, we've set ourselves against him and we are doing evil. American Christians get really caught up, get really wrapped up in this idea of the will of God, particularly college students. As you're in a transitional time in your life and you're looking to what's ahead, kind of constantly, your major task right now is preparing yourself for the next step. And you always want to know, what is the will of God for my life?

What is the will of God for my life? What is the will of God? And the sad thing is, is that you ignore all of his revealed will. You want to live however you want to live, do whatever you want to do, and you want God to point you in a direction and send you off on his errands.

[21 : 27] He's already given you tasks. He's given you good things to be involved with and do. Set yourself to these things. The stuff that's been pinned down for you already and that hidden will, those things that are particular to your life, will reveal themselves in due time.

You will know what job to take and who to marry and where to live. It will be evident to you as you tarry with him. So the good and the evil is the will, the very will of God.

And we're to recognize this by the renewing of our minds. That's why the study of the scriptures and the hearing of the preaching of it, the sitting in Sunday school classes, the meeting for Bible study is all so incredibly valuable to us.

Paul said in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, test everything. Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. By our testing, how do we test?

Right? What is the chemistry set we've been given by which to test everything? The Almighty's written word to us. The standard for good and for evil.

[22 : 39] So we're told to hate what is evil. To abhor it is the word that he uses here. Psalm 97.10 says, Oh you who love the Lord, hate evil.

We have been set apart. That's what the term sanctified means. Good little example of this. Sam and I have a plate that she bought at some point. Red.

It's kind of cool. And it says around it, you are very special. Right? And we have decided this is going to be our special birthday plate. Many of you may do that same type of thing. So somebody in the family, something great happens.

Maybe Cade, when he scores the perfect score on the SAT, you are very special plate is going to come out for him. Right? And that plate has been set aside for a very specific purpose.

The celebration of special events. Right? It's been sanctified. Right? If I just pulled it out one day and made nachos on it, the microwave, Sam would not be happy with me.

[23 : 42] Right? That is not what that plate is designed for. Right? In the same way we've been sanctified. We've been set apart that we will be holy as God is holy. I recognize fully.

That's a process in our lives. Right? I am as feeble as you are. Right? I struggle to do all these things he's about to tell us. To truly have my love be genuine.

But yet, that is the high calling we have in Christ. Just the same. And so we're to hate sin. As we fail in walking out this Christian life, do you find yourself hating the sin that you do?

And people come to me fairly often and confess to me things that are going on in their lives and their own failings. And I always say to these people, it's an encouragement to me to see you hating your sins.

Because I know that you are a Christian. As you absolutely are broken over the things that you do that offend God, it encourages me because it means you're His.

[24 : 48] Right? Do we sin that grace may abound? May it never be. But when we do, right, and we have that inward feeling, have you ever just felt sick over your own sinfulness?

You hate evil so much because you've been set apart for something else. Evidence that you are God's.

If you don't, there's a very good chance that you're not. Repent and believe. Right? If you go about sinning and that's just the habit of your life, right, there's no brokenness over it, you don't care at all, rather than abhorring it, you're actually holding to it, there's a good chance that you're not regenerate.

God has not put in you a new heart. The Spirit of God doesn't abide in you. Repent and believe. Right? We're called to hate sin.

How does that then shape how we interact with the world around us? Right? We have to be in it, right? We have to be out there. We have to be involved. We need to be light in dark places. Right?

[25 : 59] We can't avoid all the dark places. We can't just go where light already is. If we're to be on the purpose of God, we see Jesus eating with the tax collectors. Right? Which in their mind was the highest form of possible sinner.

The oppressive forces of Rome carried out financially. Right? We're called to be doing the very same things. Let me read to you from the book of Jude, beginning in verse 20.

Beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

And have mercy on those who doubt. Save others by snatching them out of the fire. To others, show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

What is the exhortation here? It's to hate the activity. Right? But to see that these people are enslaved by their very nature to their sin.

[27 : 04] And to bring to them the light of the gospel. We certainly are not called to love what they do. But we are called to love them. Right?

Abhor, hate, loathe, be disgusted with evil because it is not the standard that God has called us to. Secondly, he says to hold fast to what is good.

To cling, to fasten, to glue. It's the same word, Greek word, used often in Greek literature to speak of the marriage bed and the union that a couple experiences.

Right? We're to wrap our arms around those things that are good. Which certainly is going to take some transforming of the mind.

Right? We're going to have to be about that. We're going to have to know what is good. The standards that God has laid out for us. Paul wrote in Philippians 4.8, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

[28 : 22] Paul's not talking about random things like puppies. Right? He's saying, that's lovely. The flowers are lovely. It's not what he's saying at all. He's talking about the very things of God.

His revelation to man. Think about these things. And if we're doing that properly, necessarily, we're going to act. Right? If we're clinging to good thoughts, good things in our mind, it's going to cause good things to happen in our actions.

1 Peter 2.11 and 12. Peter wrote, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

If we cling to what is good, the picture he's painting for us here is the world is not going to love us. We carry with us the truth of God. They hated Christ for it. They're going to hate us for it.

[29 : 28] But even in that, they're going to say, I'm glad these people are in our town. I'm glad they live in our community because they're doing good things for us.

I don't know that the Christian church in America has that kind of accolade given to them. Even as they say, those people are insane.

You believe they believe that God created this world, man rebelled against him, now he's in the process of redeeming souls for himself. He's calling people apart. He has eternal glory stored up for them.

The rest of us are going to be condemned forever. That's nuts. Even those who say there is no God have to say, but praise God there's Christians.

They hold fast to the things that are good and they're about his work in the world. The result of that is that they're going to glorify God on the day of visitation.

[30 : 28] They're going to see that God is good. So there's our setup for the rest of what's about to happen.

Our genuine love must hate evil and hold fast to what is good. He's going to be laying out for us all these other exhortations, loving one another for other affection, doing another and showing honor, blessing those who persecute us, repaying no one evil for evil.

So far as it depends on us, living peaceably with everyone. Lay that out before us. And what is the empowering factor to be able to do this?

As I said before, this is a high call in Christ. Let love be genuine without hypocrisy. What a great massive challenge that is. But we've been given a helper.

The spirit. We've been given the scriptures. These great truths which are this incredible motivation. You dwell on these things.

[31 : 38] You preach the gospel to yourself. Have others preach it to you as well. You're constantly thinking about what Christ has done for you. You're always aware of what your eternal state would have been apart from him.

Meaning you actually feel the weight of your sin. You know that you were an enemy of his. That you hated him. And yet he loved you anyway. Those truths running through your mind will work in you genuine love.

Thinking about Christ. Our supreme example. 1 John chapter 4 verses 9 through 12. John said in this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

That's what we're celebrating this time of year. I hope in the hubbub of everything going on and the craziness of running to every event and wrapping everything and pulling out old sweaters that you have to wear to these things and all of that stuff.

Right? I hope that we're stopping to recognize that in this the love of God was made manifest among us.

[32 : 50] It came and it dwelt in our very presence. Jesus Christ came to the world so that we might live through him. Verse 10. In this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

It's that big word that means replacement in its simplest idea. Beloved, if God so loved us we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. We are now the very essence of Christ love to the world.

How are you sanctified this Christmas season? Have you set yourself apart to purvey the love of God to the world?

Or are you being conformed to it? Are you doing all the other things that everyone else does? Is your love a lie?

[33 : 57] I pray that it's not.