

## **Love in Action**

### **Based on Romans 12: 9 to 21**

*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. **Psalm 19 vs 14***

The theme of today's talk is Love in Action, based on Romans 12.

Love is wonderful. Real love is something to enjoy and to treasure, and to preserve; to share and to pass on. I am sure we will all remember with warmth the love we have had from those around us, family, friends, acquaintances, at home, at school at work and at church, and in many other unexpected places.

I was struck by what my 9 year old granddaughter, Harriet, wrote on the birthday card that she made for me in May. It said "I love you lots" and on another page "Remember, I love you lots". I think these words could summarise what God the Father is telling us throughout the Bible. "Remember, I love you lots!"

That is why the first thing that comes to my mind whenever I think of Love in Action, is Jesus on the Cross. There can be no more emphatic example of Love in Action.

This is God, the Almighty Creator, the immortal and Loving Father demonstrating to all mankind most forcibly that he loves us deeply. Here is God reaching out to us, and in Jesus, fulfilling the law of Moses. Jesus stands in our place, the perfect sacrifice for our sin and has done everything necessary; all we have to do is to have faith in him and accept his saving grace.

We know that when we accept Jesus' grace there is nothing we ourselves can do to be deserving of it, nor to advance our own cause. We just know that through God's love we are saved through faith alone.

The crucifixion, then, is the great example of God's love in action.

And perhaps the first thing to keep in mind when studying this passage from Romans 12 is this verse from 1 John 4:19: "We love because he first loved us".

All this can be summarised as: "We must love God because he first loved us, and our greatest example for how to love is Jesus".

This whole passage is a practical “how-to” guide on God-like love. Paul demonstrates that love is action, not merely emotion, and we can and must include in our actions of love those who are unlovely and unlovable.

Paul’s premise is simple: Love without action is not love.

In verse 9 he summarises what he is about to say. Our

### **9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.**

To love sincerely is to love as Jesus loved.

Paul tells us that love must be genuine, then explains Love in Action in four general but ever wider types of interaction. He tells us why and how to love within our immediate community, then how to love the wider saintly community, how to love all people, and finally how to extend that love even to our enemies.

In our **immediate community Paul** tells us:

### **10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.**

"Be devoted to one another, with mutual love" We must support each other in our actions, in our lives, in our hopes and dreams, and in our failures, illness and frailties. We must support each other through dangers and difficulties, even if there is trouble, inconvenience, and even when there may be pain to our selves.

### **11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.**

Every morning, indeed every moment, must become for each of us a time when we remember the love of God, and the grace extended by Jesus. That knowledge must give us joy, must give us energy, and must give us strength to serve him with all zeal and spiritual fervour. Let everyone around you see it and understand. Live God’s love.

### **12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.**

This is a full description of the Christian life: rejoicing in hope, patient in affliction, constant in prayer. In the wider context of Romans we know that this

joy is in Jesus, and this hope is for Jesus, and this patience is from Jesus, and this affliction is with Jesus, and this constant prayer is through Jesus.

With its references to hope, suffering, and prayer, this verse reflects Romans Chapter 8, where Paul speaks of both suffering and hope that characterise the Christian life and adds that the Spirit helps us to pray, even in the midst of these things and when we can not find the words.

In this section we may be reminded about Romans 5: 3cf More than that, we rejoice in our afflictions, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

In verse 13 Paul increases the range of those sharing our Love in Action to "**The Saints**" & **Those Needing Hospitality**. He says

**13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.**

Paul exhorts us to , "Contribute to the needs of the Lord's people (the saints); extend hospitality, and here he means not only to our friends and families, but also to strangers." Generosity extends beyond the immediate community to others, i.e. friends, saints and strangers, everyone with whom we interact.

God honours hospitality as something very holy. He uses it to accomplish His eternal agenda. It's one of the qualifying characteristics for those who would follow Him (Hebrews 13:2).

Hospitality in this sense is a measure of how reverently we use the resources which God has put at our disposal. We should be using everything we have in God's service; hospitality demonstrates how we are achieving this.

Hospitality was one of the most powerful witnesses the early Church possessed as it established a foothold in the world. It set the believers in Jesus apart. It was one of the primary channels through which God's love flowed into this world.

And it is important to remember this:

*Matthew 25: 34 'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a*

*stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*

The important message here for all of us is that God expects us to be hospitable! The circle of those to whom Christians relate in genuine love expands to include “**All People**” in verse 17b and 18.

**17b Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.**

As Christians we should be above reproach according to the world's standards. We should live at peace with one another and conduct our lives aiming for what is noble, honest and proper.

as far as it depends on us we must live at peace with everyone.

The challenge is in the phrase, “as far as it depends on you”! Do not translate this as where “it is possible”. We must let the love of Christ into all our relationships. Choose to live at peace with everyone, even our enemies and those who persecute us! It depends on us. Do it!

## **Enemies**

In verse 14, the loving circle expands again, this time to include enemies. **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”** You may remember that Jesus said something almost identical: *“Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:28; cf. Matthew 5:44).*

And this is followed by:

**17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil.**

We must take the initiative to make peace and keep peace. It is distinctly possible that you could turn an enemy into a good friend.

**19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. (Deut. 32:3)**

Paul exhorts us not even to think about revenge. That demonstrates that we are at peace with leaving the retaliation up to God. This behaviour, unfortunately, is often missing from our lives as Christians, and has often been missing in the church over the years. Love for our enemies is, in the essence of Christianity

and therefore love in action. Jesus told us : "*Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you*" (Matt. 5:44).

**20 On the contrary:**

**'If your enemy is hungry, feed him;**

**if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.**

**In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'**

**21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Prov. 25:21,22)**

Now, after telling us not to consider our own revenge, in verse 20 Paul tells us , "If your enemy is hungry, give him food" .

While the first part of Verse 20 is very clear, the second part, with its reference to heaping burning coals on the head of one's enemy, needs some explanation as at first sight it seems unloving. This line comes directly from Proverbs 25.

Scholars present many alternatives about what these words could mean in a loving context. I always prefer to think about this as being where the enemy, receiving good for ill, will be encouraged to think about his own actions and perhaps berate himself for his earlier hostile actions.

This idea seems to be borne out in the words from verse 21 where we should realise that returning evil for evil, has the effect of escalating conflict and reinforcing the sense of righteous indignation on both sides, while the alternative of showing hospitality to enemies is at least confusing to them and may disarm them altogether.

It is, after all, the enemy's benefit which is of importance here. When an enemy is treated as a friend, when good is returned for evil, then evil may well be overcome. Your enemy, your antagonist, may be overcome not by your words, but by your good deeds. Their mind set may be transformed, changed from darkness to light, as our loving actions speak louder than our words.

I am reminded of some things here.

Jesus prayed from the cross '*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*' (Luke 23:34)

And this scene was echoed in Acts 7 where we read "9 *As Stephen was being stoned to death, he called out, "Lord Jesus, please welcome me!"* 60 *He knelt down and shouted, "Lord, don't blame them for what they have done."* Then he died."

And, closer to home, I have been recently humbled by the way in which the members of the Coptic Church in Egypt have maintained a calm and forgiving Christian composure in the face of numerous beatings, church and house burnings, and even killings by Muslim mobs over recent years.

It is a good saying:

**21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Prov. 25:21,22)**

Christianity is founded in Love and we are bound to it by forgiveness.

The whole Bible tells us always of God's love.

*John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

It is a book of invitations from God to mankind, inviting us to become His partners in redeeming the world.

*"Jesus said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men'"*  
*(Mark 1:17).*

We are continually reminded of God's patience with sinful man,

*Psalm 86:15 But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness and truth.*

and of his faithfulness

*Psalms 119:90 Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.*

And our response must be to love the Lord our God  
with all our hearts, with all our souls,  
with all our minds, and with all our strength.'  
And to 'Love our neighbour as ourselves.'

To love as outlined in Romans 12, when practised constantly, results in relationships marked by humble, generous Christian love with all, and a growing closeness to God.

Remember, God loves you lots!