

“SHOW REAL LOVE”  
Psalm 105:1-6, Matthew 16:24-28, Romans 12:9-21  
August 30, 2020

“**It wasn’t easy for Corrie Ten Boom to forgive** the Nazi captors who had tormented her at Ravensbruck [concentration camp in northern Germany]. They had caused her to suffer horribly. Even worse, they had caused the death of her sister, Betsy.

“Ten years after her release, Corrie ran into a lady who wouldn’t look her in the eyes. Asking about her, Corrie was told the woman had been a nurse at a concentration camp. Suddenly the memories flashed back. Corrie recalled taking Betsy to the infirmary to see this woman. Betsy’s feet were paralyzed, and she was dying. The nurse had been cruel and sharp-tongued.

“Corrie’s hatred now returned with a vengeance. Her rage so boiled that she knew of but one thing to do. ‘**Forgive me,**’ she cried out to the Lord, ‘Forgive my hatred, O Lord. Teach me to love my enemies.’

“The blood of Jesus Christ seemed to suddenly cool her embittered heart, and Corrie felt the rage being displaced with a divine love she couldn’t explain. She began praying for the woman, and one day shortly afterward she called the hospital where the nurse worked and invited the woman to a meeting at which she was speaking. ‘What!’ replied the nurse? ‘Do you want me to come?’

“Yes, that is why I called you.’ “Then I’ll come.’

“That evening the nurse listened carefully to Corrie’s talk, and afterward Corrie sat down with her, opened her Bible, and explained 1 John 4:9: ‘*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*’ The woman seemed to thirst for Corrie’s quiet, confident words about God’s love for us, His enemies. And that night, **a former captive led her former captor to ‘a decision that made the angels sing.’**

“God had taken Corrie’s subconscious feelings of hatred, she later explained, and transformed them, using them as a window through which His light could shine into a darkened heart.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 266-267)

Hatred is very popular in our world today. **Our world cries out to for us to hate** those who do us wrong, to hate those who treat us disrespectfully, to hate those who overlook our needs, to hate those who even disagree with us, and to hate those who are different than us. And it is so easy to get caught up in the ways of hatred that many times we don't even realize that we are there. We just go along with what we see on the TV, or hear on the radio, or read in the newspaper, and we end up hardening our hearts toward one another without even considering an alternative.

There are those in our world today who are calling out of hatred to bring **reparations for the wrongs done** to people groups hundreds of years ago. Monuments are being destroyed, demands are being made and people are accusing one another of atrocities that took place generations ago. This spurs on greater hatred as the uneducated and naïve get stirred up to blindly follow this person's leadership or that person's words. Movements are taking place that thrive on hatred and division, pitting one person against another because of racial, economic, or political differences. Hatred stirs up hatred, and unless it is corrected, hatred drives us to destruction from within as well as from without.

Hatred also calls out for **revenge** against those who have done something disagreeable. Something happens to one person, and before you know it cities are on fire because others take revenge. Hatred drives us to do things against completely innocent people because revenge has to be taken, and **THOSE** people have to pay for what they have done, even if the revenge has nothing to do with what happened in the first place. When our lives are filled with hatred, we look to get revenge as the first option, even if we don't know all the facts or know what the conditions were leading up to the initial actions. But revenge always, **ALWAYS**, influences the lives of those who were never involved.

Hatred never brings about anything good, but decimates whatever culture it is allowed to prosper in. When we use the mindset, "**I don't just get even, I get ahead,**" we end up in a freefall spiral out of control headed quickly for destruction and death. Whenever we focus on one-upmanship, there is never a quick recovery from the hatred that ensues, and there is never any positive result that takes place because there is never an end to the cycle of revenge and hatred.

But while the world calls us to hate, **the Word of God calls us to love.** The Old Testament lesson of Psalm 105 calls us to remember the GOOD things that the Lord our God has done. The writer calls us to focus on the positive things of life and look for the good that has happened to us as we have sought out the Lord our God to rule in our lives. When we focus on the good things of this world, we begin to see that evil is there, but that evil is the enemy of anything good. If we keep our minds on the good things that the Lord has done for us, we can easily let go of evil and find love rather than hatred working in our lives.

In our Gospel lesson of Matthew 16:24-28, Jesus invites us to let go of the things of this world and to follow Him so that we might experience real life. Rather than looking at getting revenge for the wrongs that have been done to us, or others, Jesus invites us to take up our cross of burdens and trials and to follow His' example. We may not always get what we want, but when we seek to obey and follow the Lord's way, we find real life.

A staggering verse in these words of Jesus ring loudly for us today. *“Will a person gain anything if he wins the whole world but loses his life? Of course not! There is nothing he can give to regain his life”* (16:26). All the reparations and all the revenge and all the hatred in the world will not bring us life, even if we find great treasure in looting stores and homes during the riots focused on bringing justice. Our life is not in the acquisition of things, or the gaining of power, or even the attainment of justice. Our life comes in following the example of Jesus Christ, who loved us even when we were His enemies, and died for us so that we could be part of His family. Jesus demonstrated the power of love as we let the Lord God guide us through Him.

And that is exactly what the Apostle Paul calls us to do. Let's look at his letter to the Romans, the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, and listen to how God desires us to live even in our world today. This is Romans 12:9-21. (READ Romans 12:9-21)

Here we see that God desires that we have love in our lives rather than hatred. While we can easily see the results of hatred in our society today, let's look at the results of love. Paul lays them out

nically in this section of Scripture, so let's go deeper in understanding the results of love for our lives. Let's see what the benefits of love in our life are, not only for us, but for others, too.

First, we are told that **love must be sincere** (12:9). What this means is that love is long lasting, genuine and honest. This is not a quick word, "I love you and I care about you" but a genuine demonstration of love through our actions. We can easily say we love someone, but then in the next minute, say or do something that offends or hurts them. This is not sincere love. Sincere love is one that has actions adequately following the words that are spoken. It is looking at the person and seeing not an enemy, but a brother or sister who is human, just as you are, yet with some distinctive differences. Sincere love is following through on promises and living in a way that puts the other person as more valuable than yourself. It is looking out for their best interests.

Paul tells us, "*Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good.*" This means that we are to open ourselves up to one another in honest ways that portrays truthful caring for the other. It's not flippant, or disingenuous, but rather heartfelt care and understanding of that person. It's treating others the way we would like to be treated. It's respecting the other and giving them value through what we say and do. We are only to hate that which is evil, but to hold on tightly to what is good and wholesome and beneficial. Wouldn't it be nice to be loved like this? We are- in Jesus!

Then Paul tells us that **love shows respect** (12:10) to each other; "*love one another warmly as Christian brothers and sisters....*" That means we are to treat one another as if they are a part of our own family. Now, I know that within families there can be squabbles and arguments and misunderstandings, but in a family that loves each other, all of these trials and struggles are dealt with in respectful ways, lifting up the other as being valuable and important to the integrity of the whole family.

Growing up, my brothers and I didn't always see eye to eye on things, and we fought over stuff. But when one of us was attacked or bullied by someone else, that attacker or bully had three of us to contend with, because despite our differences in opinion, we were all in the same family and we stuck together, protecting and helping each other. We stood up for each other out of respect for the family,

and each other. So no matter what our differences are between us, respect and dignity need to be shown to one another because we belong to the same family of Jesus Christ. That's what love does. Despite the differences between us, love treats others as if they are a part of our own family.

Love is also shown in the way that we work with each other. Paul tells us that **love works hard**, giving our best in what we do as if we were working for the Lord, Himself. Now, this can be hard to do, especially if we are in jobs that we don't particularly like. It can become easy to do just enough to get by, just to get the paycheck at the end of the week, yet we are invited to demonstrate sincere Christian love even in the way that we work. No matter what the rest of the employees are doing, we are to devote ourselves to our employers with our best efforts showing respect to them until we find something else that we want to do. It may even go against union policies, but whatever we do, we are to "*serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion*" (12:11). Employees of a company are a team, and when everyone on that team is working hard for the benefit of that company, then everyone benefits. But when the team begins to take shortcuts and expect others to do more work than they should be doing, then everything begins to fall apart, and everyone is affected.

You see it is **love that keeps you alive and well** (12:12). The hope we have through love enables us to remain joyful even in the most difficult places. There may be times when we feel trapped in situations in our lives, but hope, in love, livens our hearts to remain joyful despite the hardships or difficulties we face. Then, with that joy in our hearts, life doesn't seem to be so overpowering and oppressive and we can be patient to endure whatever comes our way. That hope and patience that comes through love gives us joyful life, and without it we become miserable, contemptible people, which leads us to anger and hatred. Love makes the difference in our lives, giving us real life.

And when we have love in our lives, our bodies respond positively, too. It is interesting to me that those without love in their life are the ones that, more often than not, struggle with great health concerns. They seem to be plagued with trouble after trouble and sickness after sickness. The attitude in their minds are influenced by the lack of love in their hearts, and the lack of love within them affects

their bodies, keeping health and wellness illusive and out of reach. Yet it seems that those with love actively in their life enjoy better health because love affects their attitudes and their attitudes affect the whole wellbeing of their bodies.

Another feature of love that Paul talks about is **love shares with others who are in need** (12:13). Generosity and hospitality are key to sincere love because love opens our eyes to those who are in need and gives us the opportunity to share the blessings that God has given to us with them. Hatred focuses on the self, calling only for what we want and keeping everything for ourselves, even destroying those things that we cannot have so that others can't have them either. But love looks outwardly, seeing the generous blessings that the Lord has given to us, and enables us to share even what we do have with those who have less. If we remember that God first blessed us in love with all that we have, it is easier to share a portion of that blessing with those who are in need of our love for them, too.

An interesting part of love that we often miss, is **love seeks to bless**, even those who persecute us and seek our harm. Love gives us the ability to see beyond the surface of a person to look into their hearts to see the hurts and disappointments and frustrations they are dealing with. Then, as we come to know what they are going through, love invites us to ask God to bless them (12:14) so that they might move from being one against us to being one with us in love.

You see, it is easy to ask God to curse someone, especially when we have hatred within us. But when love lives in us, we are able to ask God to bless those who are actively out to get us or misuse us, so that they might be changed by God's blessings. This is difficult to do, since we generally want to show hatred and revenge to those who hurt us. But love within us gives us the ability to step over hatred to seek God's blessings even for the evil person. Then it is possible for the enemy to become a friend. Or, as in Corrie Ten Boom's example, to lead the very one persecuting us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sincere **love touches others** in very personal ways, too. We are invited as Christians to "*be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep*" (12:15). Sincere love lifts up others as more important than the self, rejoicing with the victories of life, and grieving with the disappointments

and losses. It's like the great words of Oscar Hammerstein II, "A bell is not a bell till you ring it. A song is not a song till you sing it. Love in your heart isn't put there to stay. Love isn't love till you give it away." If the love in your life doesn't touch the life of another, then it isn't really sincere love that you have. Unless you share the love you have in your life, it becomes selfish and egotistical sentiment. Sincere love touches the lives of those around you in ways that they need to see it at just that moment.

Paul goes on to tell us that **love shows humility** (12:16). This is important for us, especially today. Love is not making ourselves look better than anyone else, nor is it treating others differently based upon their situation in life. Love realizes that God has blessed us with all that we have and all that we are, and that it could have been us to be poor, or homeless, or abused, or persecuted. Love reminds us that we are servants of the Lord our God put where we are for His purpose so that His work might be completed through us even to the least of these around us. If we become proud and think only of ourselves, we lose the chance to show sincere love to those around us, because that pride puts a barrier between us. And as soon as barriers come between us, we begin to resent one another and then the cycle of hatred begins. Humility and servanthood helps us to stay on a level playing field with those around us so that we might all work together. As soon as we start lifting ourselves up as being more valuable than another, we begin separating ourselves into "better than" and "less than" groups, and the cycle begins.

The last few verses of Romans 12 help us to make sincere love an active part of our life. Paul tells us that **love forgives** when others hurt us (12:17). Rather than resorting to our human instinct to repay the wrong done to us, we are to respond with love. Think for a moment how that would change things in our world today – forgive rather than hold the grudge and get even.

**Love brings peace** as we respect each other and treat each other with care and dignity (12:18). The famous proverb states it well, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). Peace begins with us showing sincere love with one another.

Paul then tells us that **love releases us from revenge** (12:18). It is not for us to seek revenge for

the wrongs that have been done to us. God sees what takes place to us, so He is the only one who is to repay evil for evil. We are commanded to love our enemies, for God tells us, *“I will take revenge, I will pay back...”* Trust me, God does a much better job of punishing the evil person. We need not engage ourselves in revenge, but let God do it, for His glory. Instead, we are to show love rather than hate.

Right along with that, Paul tells us how then we are to respond to the enemy. He says, sincere **love reaches out to the enemy** (12:20). We are told in no uncertain terms, *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by doing this you will make him burn with shame,”* or, as the New American Standard Bible says, *“...FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”* As I was growing up, I got a strange delight in “heaping burning coals” on the head of my enemies. What great revenge – pour burning coals on their heads! But as I grew deeper in my faith, I came to understand that the burning coals was life for that family because it meant they could have fire for heat and cooking and protection. That is sincere love, giving provision and protection even to the enemy who has wronged you, for they will see God through you as you provide for them rather than hate them.

It is in this way that **love defeats evil** (12:21). If we give in to evil, it will destroy us through hatred, revenge and recompense. But if we show love, even in the very face of evil, love defeats evil and transformation of the enemy begins.

**As followers of Jesus Christ, show love** to those around you. Even the ones actively throwing rocks, or bottles, or explosives at you need to be shown the love of Jesus Christ, and we do that by loving them rather than hating them. Ask God’s forgiveness for responding to evil in hatred. Let the blood of Jesus bring peace and refreshment to your own life so you can share it with those around you.

**Our world today desperately needs sincere love.** Will you be the one to demonstrate love to those who have not seen it before? So let me close today with the great prayer of Saint Francis.

Let’s pray. Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; Where there is hatred, **let me sow love**; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; And where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may Not so much seek to be consoled as to console, To be understood, as to understand, To be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned, And it's in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. This we pray in Jesus’ precious and holy Name. Amen.