

# On the Altar (3): Sincere Love

---

(Romans 12:9-16)

## I. Introduction

- A. Luther's nailing his 95 theses to Wittenberg door began the Reformation
1. Two years later, Luther sat in his Wittenberg study overwhelmed by doubt.
    - a. He felt no peace; he was inadequate to meet God's expectations and law.  
*I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners... Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.*
    - b. The harder that he tried to obey, the more distant and remote God seemed
  2. Then one night in Wittenberg study, Luther read **Rom 1: 17** as for 1<sup>st</sup> time
    - a. It swept away the impossible demands of law with the gift of God's grace
    - b. He saw righteousness, not as perfection, but the gift of God thru faith  
*I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. All at once I felt that I had been born again... Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light.*
    - c. Luther called Romans "The chief part of the NT, and very purest gospel."
    - d. In fact, he believed every Christian should memorize the whole book!
  3. Much of power of Reformation came from Luther's re-reading of Romans
- B. Aren't you glad Luther read Romans that night in Wittenberg and not Leviticus!
1. Romans is indeed the NT's fullest treatment of the doctrine of grace
    - a. Paul argues for "a righteousness from God, apart from law" (**Rom 3:21**)
    - b. And Paul knows he will be misunderstood! (**Rom 3:8, 6:1, 6:15**)
      - 1) Some will see grace as license, "God's likes to forgive; I like to sin!"
      - 2) Paul condemns that reasoning, but he doesn't back away from grace.
  2. But while grace is the central argument of Romans; it's not really the point!
    - a. The reason that Paul wrote was to call the church to unity and love.
      - 1) Jew and Gentile believer were united by a common need for grace.
      - 2) And they needed to live graciously with each other because of grace.
    - b. Grace is Paul's theological underpinning for his call to unity and love.
    - c. Grace is not an excuse to live as we choose—it is rather a call to LOVE
  3. If that is true, then our text today is heart of Romans! (**Read Rom 12:9-16**)

## II. Sincere Love (Romans 12:9-16)

A. Paul says that “*love must be sincere.*” (“*Love must be genuine*” – ESV)

1. Literally, this says “*Love must be without hypocrisy*” (NASB, NET)
  - a. This is a form of the word “*hypocrite.*” Love isn’t to be *hypocritical.*
  - b. The word “*hypocrite*” originally was “*one who wears a mask*” or “*actor*”
    - 1) Actors in Greek dramas wore masks, different mask for different part
    - 2) We re love each other without a mask, not playing a part— *sincerely*
  - c. English word “*sincere*” comes from a Latin word meaning “*without wax*”
  - d. Unscrupulous artisans hid flaws with wax; “*sincere*” = real or genuine
2. Our love for each other must be sincere; real thing, not cheap wax imitation
3. That is implication of grace; to know God’s grace is to reflect it to others
  - a. To offer ourselves on the altar of discipleship is to love other disciples
  - b. So living out God’s grace means a sincere, real love for other believers
    - 1) **Joke:** Sincerity is the key, once you lean how to fake sincerity...
    - 2) You can’t fake it. The key to discipleship is to real, true love
4. I’ve had people say they **once** didn’t get it. Didn’t get love or fellowship
  - a. They saw going church and other people like going to a movie,
    - 1) It’s good other people are there; a full theater makes the show better
    - 2) The last thing you want is them getting familiar (*sharing popcorn*)
  - b. So you sit beside people at church, but getting involved in their lives?
  - c. Paul says that knowing grace drives into each other’s lives—sincere love

B. What does that mean? What follows explains some specifics of sincere love

1. **First**, Paul says that “*hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*”
  - a. If we are going to love like God loves, then we must love what God loves
    - 1) Part of Paul’s definition of love is this affinity for truth (1 Cor 13:6)
    - 2) Later he says, “*Do not repay evil for evil...do what is right*” (12:17)
  - b. Loving others like God does not mean that we accept all behavior as right
  - c. Wade Hodges suggests the modern church suffers from two problems—
    - 1) We’re not good at accepting outsiders (*sinner who don’t follow Jesus*)
    - 2) We’re too accepting of sinful behavior in insiders (*have it backward*)

2. **Second**, we are to “*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.*”
  - a. Paul uses two words here that emphasize our devotion to each other
    - 1) The first is the familiar *philadelphia* (as in “*city of brotherly love*”)
    - 2) Second is *philostorgos*, from *philos* (friend) and *storge* (family love)
      - a) This word refers to the “*reciprocal tenderness of parents and children.*”
      - b) We’re to love each other like family (*and this is sincere, not forced*)
  - b. I’m not talking about MY family here, but family love takes two forms
    - 1) There is tender affection, warm-fuzzy unabashed pride you have ‘em
    - 2) There is grinding-teeth, pull-out-your-hair exasperation with them
  - c. Healthy families have both, but **never** apathetically ignore each other
  - d. In order to be devoted to God, then we’ll have to be devoted to each other
3. **Third**, Paul tells us that we must “*Honor one another above yourselves.*”
  - a. That sounds a lot like what Paul tells the Philippians (**Phil 2:3-4**)
 

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*
  - b. You know what causes most arguments at home? *Them being wrong?*
    - 1) It’s when we want our own way... or validate our own perspective.
    - 2) Generally, we don’t have fights when we’re sacrificial and patient
  - c. Paul wants us to practice putting others, honoring others above ourselves
    - 1) Note in NASB offers this—“*Outdo one another in showing honor.*”
    - 2) We need more arguments over, “*No you first*” “*No, I insist, you first*”
4. **Fourth**, “*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord*”
  - a. The word “*lacking in zeal*” is “*lazy.*” (The 1 talent man in **Matt 25:26**)
    - 1) Phrase “*spiritual fervor*” may mean “*heart full of devotion*” (GNT)
    - 2) It also may mean “*ferveat in the Spirit*” as in Holy Spirit (ESV note)
  - b. He says in the next verse what our spiritual fervor is about (**12:12, NLT**)
 

*Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.*
  - c. Church is social (“*devoted to one another*”), but it is not merely social
    - 1) We are a spiritual family focused on spiritual things—hope, prayer
    - 2) What makes us one is the this spiritual focus, this Holy Spirit fervor
    - 3) The church is a **social** focus on **spiritual** things like prayer and hope

5. **Fifth**, “*share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality*”
  - a. Sincere love is not just theoretical, it is a concrete way of meeting needs
  - b. Hospitality can be about meeting the needs of brothers and sisters
    - 1) 1<sup>st</sup> church had “*favor with all the people*” thru sharing ([Acts 2:44-45](#))
    - 2) Remember James example of faith without works? ([James 2:15-16](#))
    - 3) It sees a needy brother/sister and just says, “*Be warmed and filled.*”
  - c. Hospitality can also mean sharing our table as a way of sharing lives
    - 1) There is sharing around a table that seems happen nowhere else
    - 2) I’m not that same sharing takes place at Chili’s or Shoney’s
  - d. Peter raises stakes with offer hospitality “*without grumbling*” ([1 Pt 4:9](#))

### III. Conclusion

- A. Notice how Paul concludes our text on sincere love ([Rom 12:14-16](#))
  1. How does sincere love **treat its enemies**? *It asks God to bless them*
    - a. Jesus, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” ([Mt 5:44](#))
    - b. Paul see Jesus literally, “*Ask God to bless those who persecute you*” (GNT)
  2. How does sincere love **treat friends**? *It laughs and cries along with them.*
    - a. Family lives are wrapped up together so that one life affects each other
    - b. Different between marbles and grapes—grapes bleed all over each other
  3. How does love treat people of **different life stations**? *Not with pride!*
    - a. The church is a family that does not accept different stations and status
    - b. In church, differences in ones money-education-class make no difference
- B. Gerald Flury tells of difficulty teaching native people in Philippines croquet
  1. They laid out wickets and showed basic skills—until one hit the other
    - a. Missionary showed how to “send” the opponent—knock him off field
      - 1) His Negrito friend was completely confused, “*Why would I do that?*”
      - 2) Competition was unknown in this hunt-gather culture—cooperation
    - b. Game continued only as a cooperative effort—all made it thru wickets
  2. The missionaries learned from the natives—church is a cooperative effort
    - a. None of us wins until all of us wins... that is what sincere love really is
    - b. When we accepted Jesus, along with the deal came brothers and sisters.