



*9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

The Bible is filled with commands to love.

Love one another.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love your enemies.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

We are taught about love since as early as we can remember. When mom or dad holds one of their children in a tight embrace and whisper "I love you," they learn the meaning of love. Even if they are too young to define love, they know what it feels like.

But then we get all "grew up" and mature. The hard knocks of life have come our way--some quite severe in nature. Love is different now. It doesn't feel like it did when you were three years old on your daddy's lap. Love is not so clear cut. We change the definition and cheapen it little by little. But given the fact that it is the number one command in Scripture, shouldn't love be our primary language? But too often speaking love sounds like broken Russian. We think we are showing love but those around us don't have a clue what we are saying.

Even the first command in verse nine tells us this is true. Let love be genuine. I vastly prefer how the NASB has it. "Let love be without hypocrisy." In the original language there are only three words in this command-love no hypocrisy. There isn't even a verb, just "love no hypocrisy." So what is that telling us? It tells us how easy it is to fake love. He gives this warning because not only is it so easy to fake love---to show love that is hypocritical and false--but it is often so difficult to spot fake love. Blatant in your face hypocrisy is not difficult to see but the more subtle kind of knife wielding love is often missed. You don't see it coming until the knife is embedded deep in your chest.

In this passage we are given several short commands that at first seem like they have nothing to do with one another. But I believe they all relate to and define how to let our love be genuine. These commands will restore a right picture of love and remind us how to live it out.

### **1. Grip Goodness-** *Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*

The command is to hold fast to what is good. In one short sentence this command puts to rest all nonsense about love versus truth. After all, how do you determine what is good? All that is good and right flows directly from god and his word, correct? Therefore, if we are to love what is good, we also need to love and cling to God's truth. His truth and his truth alone determines what is good and informs us about what is good, and correspondingly, what is evil.

But this is not what the skeptics and naysayers want us to believe. I don't like to raise the topic too often but it appears that gay marriage will continue to be front and center in our society. it doesn't do any good to turn a blind eye to the battle that rages before us. So what do proponents of gay marriage say about those of us who disagree with them? They say that we are unloving, don't they? They are going to call you a hypocrite, aren't they? But no matter how nasty the rhetoric gets, no matter how many people cave into their demands and arguments, we stand on the side of truth. And by standing on the side of truth, we are demonstrating genuine love.

Do you see how clear this is? If you are to love without hypocrisy, then you must cling to the truth. The word that is translated as "hold fast" is also used for marriage. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and **hold fast** to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? (Matt 19.5) A husband and wife cling to one another. It's not just something that they do, it is something that they are. They are one flesh. So holding fast to goodness is like gripping goodness. It is like being glued to goodness and truth. Could that be said of you? Do you grip goodness? Are you holding fast to God's truth?

So the irony is that those who call you a hypocrite for holding to God's truth are actually the hypocrites. Warren Wiersbe has this marvelous and relevant quote: "Truth without love is brutality. Love without truth is hypocrisy." What your opponents call "love" is nothing of the sort because it is devoid of truth. We talk a lot about the balance between love and truth because we tend to fall to one side or the other. Go ahead and answer this for yourself-Do you tend to lean more toward the side truth or more toward the side of love? Are you aware of your imbalance and tendency?

Now it's a good thing to notice our tendencies but in a very real sense, we should not be talking about a balance between truth and love as if these were somehow exact opposites of one another.

Truth and love and not in competition with each other. Truth without love is not either? Can you see this? Paul said love without hypocrisy but then immediately adds that we are to hold fast to goodness and truth. Truth is inherently embedded in love and love is deeply embedded in truth. Here's a little science question for you. is it possible to separate out all of the water molecules from within your body? It most certainly is possible but what would you end up with? You'd be dead! Just as a person cannot be separated from water and live, so love and truth cannot be separated and still be said to exist. You are no hypocrite if you cling to God's goodness. Don't ever believe that when someone tries to put that label on you.

But the reverse must also be true-you must abhor evil. Whatever is not God's truth must be hated. Let me say that again. Whatever is not God's truth must be hated. Now understand that these are not my words but God has said this. Abhor what is evil. That word means to literally look on with horror. There was a video making the rounds on facebook that showed a van crossed the middle of the road and went in front of an 18 wheeler. The van literally exploded on impact. It wasn't crushed or pushed forward. It essentially disintegrated. That is horror. We should look upon such a tragedy with horror. This is what it means to abhor evil.

Herein lie much of our problem. We claim to love the truth yet we fail to hate falsehood and evil. Moreover, if we are to be gripped and glued to goodness, then where should we be in relation to evil? It should not be glued to us but it should be as far away as possible. But that's not how we tend to live our lives. We tend to live on the edges of evil. We would rather play with fire than extinguish it. We would rather say, "What's wrong with "fill in the blank" than choose to avoid whatever it is. Then still others are actually glued to evil. This is addiction. The evil is glued to you, it is attached to you and it needs to be pried free. I am not saying it is easy to beat an addiction or defeat a besetting sin, but I want you to ask yourself these questions.

- Do I hate that which controls me?
- Is there any part of the sin that I still love?
- Have I fallen in love with the polar opposite of this sin--God's goodness and righteousness?

Abhorring sin and loving goodness are always two necessary sides of the same coin. This is the first step toward having a love that is genuine. False love is easy. Genuine love is hard work.

## **2. Elevate Esteem-*Outdo one another in showing honor***

Competition can be a good thing. I think most of us enjoyed last Sunday's Packers game. It was an exciting game and the outcome was just and right. ;-) This past Thursday, I just missed seeing one of the great finishes to a basketball game. The JV girls were in the last seconds of double overtime. The opposing team made a basket with ten seconds left. They immediately began to celebrate their victory. But hold on. Here comes Kailey Beck dribbling down the court, throws up a bomb of a three pointer and it swishes through the hoop at the buzzer. Basketball players dream about such scenes their entire lives and almost no one gets to experience it.

Competition is just another form of incentive. Why do you get up every day and go off to work? If you were able, some of you would do your job for free because you love it so much, but most people are motivated, at least in part, by a paycheck. we are motivated by incentive and competition to do more and to do better.

This is the spirit of this command--outdo one another in showing honor. It's a competition, do you see? In general, men are more competitive than women. I think that's a fair generalization. So can I appeal for a moment to the competitive nature of the men and boys in our church? Husbands, can you outdo your wife in the next thirty days at showing honor? Can you decide right now that you will beat her in the competition of showing honor? And if you are willing to make this decision, you will need some kind of plan. Did the Packers beat the Patriots without a great plan? You don't enter a competition without a plan or commitment. It doesn't mean buying her an expensive Christmas gift, though she might not mind that. Here's a thought. What if you asked your wife how you could outdo her in honor over the next thirty days? I realize that you don't normally do this with your chief rival. Opponents don't share strategy with each other, but I think your wife would be glad to do so in this case.

Please remember that such a competition should not and cannot be undertaken in your own strength. You are not Mike McCarthy. You are not Aaron Rodgers. Men, you may be able to pick up your wife and carry her out of a burning building, but you don't have the strength to outdo anyone in honor, let alone your wife. This must be effort empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### **3. Hunt Down Hospitality-***Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*

A few years ago several men went to a conference in Minneapolis and Tim Seeley's parents graciously hosted all of us for two nights. What stood out to me other than their exceeding kindness was the trophy room built by Tim's dad. If you are a hunter, let me warn you to watch your jealousy. Entering this room is like walking into a museum of natural history. He has been all over the world hunting down exotic animals. He has exerted a lot of effort and resources to hunt down this menagerie of wildlife.

This is exactly the way you and I are to view hospitality. We are not to be *open* to hospitality or merely be *willing* to be hospitable. We are to hunt it down. That's what the word seek means here in the phrase "seek to show hospitality." Hunt down hospitality like you are pursuing a trophy buck. Hunt down hospitality with as much effort as a prize winning largemouth bass. Go after it. Seek it out. As a matter of fact, this is just what the Seeleys did for us because we didn't ask to stay at their house, they insisted that we do so. They sought out a way to serve us.

So does that mean that you need to have a bunch of people over to your house for dinner? Well maybe, but that is such a narrow understanding of hospitality. The word hospitality literally means a love of strangers. So first century hospitality was not about having a family over for dinner because you feel the need to reciprocate because they had you over the week before. Hospitality is not about impressing your guests with a five course meal and an immaculately decorated house. Though I have to add that some women are very gifted at this and love to honor their guests with these gifts. So such things are not certainly not wrong, but neither are they the essence of hospitality.

Hospitality is what Lot showed to the angels in Genesis 19.

*The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town*

*square.” 3 But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate (Genesis 19:1-4).*

This is what you did in this culture and it is still largely true in Arab cultures today. Hospitality is a love for strangers. Having your best friends over for a meal is a wonderful thing but this command is asking for more. Let me give you several ways to obey this command.

1. Contribute to our benevolence fund. Thanks to you, our benevolence fund has never been healthier. Over the years we have given many thousands of dollars away to those inside and outside the church toward practical things like electric bills and partial rent payments. This also fulfills the first part of verse 13-Contribute to the needs of the saints--benevolence fund.

2. Connect with people you don't know. I have said it many times, but you have no idea how valuable your genuine welcome can be for a new person or even old timer who you don't know very well. Our natural inclination is to make a beeline toward our best buddies in the church. We haven't seen them in a week and we want to catch up with them. Great! Do that, but can you also greet people whom you don't know? This is hunting down hospitality--seeking opportunities to love strangers. What if we all decided to sit next to someone we didn't know in the fellowship dinner after service today? I don't want to tell you that you have to do this, but please take it into consideration. Some people have the gift of hospitality but that doesn't excuse the rest of us. If it isn't your gift, it is still your responsibility.

Not to mention the fact that it's good for you to stretch yourself and trust the Lord. For many of you, walking up to a complete stranger after church is the very last thing you would ever want to do. It's just not your personality or your temperament. Can you see that this becomes a great opportunity for spiritual growth for you? It doesn't come naturally to you so that means you have to trust God for courage and boldness.

3. Attend the community dinner hosted by the Goekes. They meet every second and fourth Thursday at Good Shepherd. The Goekes could always use people to help them cook or wash dishes, but what they always need are people to sit down to eat with folks they don't know. talk with them, get to know them and pray for an opportunity to have a spiritual conversation. This is the hospitality of loving strangers. You get to express genuine love, you get to trust God and you have the opportunity for a redemptive relationship with them. And this is precisely what the Smith family does constantly in Marseille. Missionaries, especially missionaries to Muslims, understand the power and necessity of hunting down hospitality.

Rich Maurer  
December 7, 2014