

RELATIONSHIPS ON PAPER: Genuine Love (Rom. 12:9-10)
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INTRODUCTION

Something that drives me insane is what I call disingenuous relationships. Most of you probably already know what I'm talking about. Disingenuous relationships are those relationships where people have hidden agendas for that particular relationship. I can't stand them. You pour all of your energy into the relationship by calling them, checking on them and praying for them but the only time you get a phone call is when they need something. That is a disingenuous relationship.

There are a lot of disingenuous relationships among marriages these days. Couples who sleep together, eat together and spend time together discover that each person has a secret life that none are aware of. They say that they love each other but their actions speak otherwise. There are a lot of disingenuous relationships in how we treat our enemies, our neighbors, and more poignantly, how we treat our God. There are a lot of people who say they love God, and that they desire to be in a relationship with him but their actions, their lack of service, and their selfish desires keep them from having an authentic relationship with God.

This is our third installment from the Relationships on Paper series where Joe and I are taking a look at how we can improve our relationships using Romans 12 as our lens. Last week Joe talked about different diseases we suffer in our relationships like egotitis, worlditis and others. Tonight we seek to begin looking at Paul's exhortations to the Romans in his series of one-liners. This is where Paul, after setting the stage with the previous eight verses, instructs them on practical ways to have a relationship with those we love and those who have wronged God and us.

BODY

"LET LOVE BE GENUINE..."

The literal translation for this clause is: "Let love be anti-hypocritical." The ESV translates it "genuine"; the NIV says, "sincere"; the NCV says love must be "real." Eugene Peterson, in the Message, translates this as, "Love from the center of who you are: don't fake it." It's hard to find people who are genuine. There are some but they are hard to find. We live in a politically correct time where some things are hard to say to people. What if we constantly spoke our mind about people? What if we were inflicted with this disease that caused us to be completely honest about what was in our minds? On one hand it would be great in that you would know exactly how people feel but on the other hand it would be difficult because some people do not know how to handle the truth. For example, when a woman asks for a man's opinion and she says, "Does this dress make me look fat?" Another example: Someone wants to know about if they are ok spiritually. The problem is that they

never attend services and are not plugged-in to a community somewhere. Our tendency is to say that they are ok and that they should not worry about it because they have a good heart instead of saying, "You are about as far away from the kingdom as it gets."

Why are we so fake? Why do we say one thing yet do another? Why do we say that people have to act a certain way before they can come into this auditorium? Why do we say people have to dress a certain way before they get into this auditorium? Why are we so concerned about this auditorium anyways? So how do we have genuine relationships? Three things:

1. **Genuine relationships seek the interests of others.** However, genuine love seeks the welfare of others even (maybe even especially) if there are no benefits for you. A relationship that only exists to seek a return in the end is status quo in the corporate world but is unacceptable in a Christian's world. Churches can be this way in some of the most insidious of ways like churches that will only help people with food if it means they are going to get a return in the end. Unacceptable.
2. **Genuine relationships are honest.** Why do we hide our feelings from people? Why do we let anger burn inside our core from people? I tell people that they are entitled to their emotions and the quicker those emotions come out the quicker we can address them.
3. **It does not jump-ship in tough times.** Genuine love seeks to work in the very presence of pain instead of the absence of pain. We spend millions, if not billions, of dollars to find ways for people to ignore their pain through medication either prescribed or taken through alcohol. Painkillers work in this way in that it confuses our brains into believing that there is no pain. Pain is important because it allows us to see what is wrong with our bodies. It forces us to deal with the issue. Churches should not seek ways to mitigate our pain...it should seek ways to solve it, deep from within the trenches.

ABHOR WHAT IS EVIL, HOLD FAST TO WHAT IS GOOD...

This last section forms the foundation for the Christian's ethos. It is strikingly similar to what God instructed the Israelites to do by seeking what is good and avoiding what was bad. The opposite of this verse is found in the woe chapter of Isaiah where God declared through Isaiah: "***Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter***" (Isa. 5:20). Most of our sins are not in the public audience where people can see our struggles. Most of us do the insidious, secretive, slippery, slimy stuff behind closed doors. One of the most destructive things we do is gossip. Gossip is the undercutting of our credibility among those who are outside the kingdom of God. A remedy for this is to simply hate everything associated with evil. That means we hate things like gossip, lying, things that cause us to lust, horrible images, but it also means we hate power structures that prey on the unjust

either through sex trafficking, lack of food and water or those countries who force children to work. Hatred for evil is across the board.

Paul says, in 1 Thessalonians 5:22 that we are to **“avoid the very appearance of evil.”** Too often we think this means outward avoidance of evil like not going into bars, not listening to certain music and not watching certain movies as if bars, music and movies are evil in and of themselves. The problem is not with the outward entities but the inward workings of our hearts. Our outward appearance is always a reflection of what is going on inside in our hearts. An example of this is modesty. People wear immodest clothing because of something that is going on in their hearts like the need for approval, the desire to entice others and the desire to use immodesty as an outlet for their selfishness. If you want to help someone with modesty you don’t talk to them about clothes, you talk to them about their hearts. Eugene Peterson translates 1 Thessalonians 5:22 as, **“Throw out anything tainted with evil.”** We are told to hate evil and cling to that which is good. In Paul’s great love chapter he says, **“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth”** (1 Cor. 13:6). The simplest thing you can tell a person that sums up our ethos as Christians comes from Romans 12:9: “Love must be genuine. Hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good.”

BE DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER IN BROTHERLY LOVE. HONOR ONE ANOTHER ABOVE YOURSELVES....

This is how you do what is commanded in verse nine. To let your love be genuine you must seek opportunities to serve other people. Not just serve them because you feel like you have to but serve them because you want to find opportunities to do what Christ would do in your situation. How many of you in here tonight can say that you place other Christians above yourselves. Some of you can but most of us are as selfish and egotistical as they get.

SO WHAT?

There are many practical applications to this verse many of which cannot be mentioned because of time. The most important component of this lesson is that you work on your heart, which is necessary to have positive relationships. The Proverb writer said, **“Guard your heart for from it flow the issues of life”** (Prov. 4:23). So may you find the courage to be genuine in your love for God and love for others. May you hate the most evil components of this world but may you also rejoice in everything that is good and wholesome and wonderful. May you find the strength to not laugh when someone tells a racist joke, a sexist joke or any other inappropriate thing at your job. May you diligently seek out those people in the world who are living in unjust situations and may you bring good news to them. It’s time for us to be genuine. Let’s be real.