

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Love Applied In Body Life: Let It Be Genuine

By Dan Trygg

“Let *agapē* be without pretense: hating-and-avoiding the evil, firmly-fastening to the good; in the brotherly-love toward one another being warmly-devoted-and-affectionate-like-family; in esteem, giving-forethought-and-leading one another ahead; in earnestness, not dull ones; in the Spirit, boiling-with-enthusiasm; to the Lord, serving-as-a-slave; in hope, rejoicing; in affliction, remaining-steadfast-under; in prayer, continuing-unremittingly; in the needs of the saints, making-oneself-a-partner; in hospitality, running-swiftly-after.”

Romans 12:9-13

Like the passage in I Corinthians 13, this section on *agapē* is set in the context of Body-life, specifically concerning the use of spiritual gifts (vss. 3-8). It is important to see that the subject of **love is not an academic, ethereal concept. It is active, applied in the warp and woof of our interaction with one another**, both when we “officially gather”, but also rapidly spilling over into relationships which move beyond the confines of a traditional Sunday morning gathering. Obviously, the early church knew no such compartmentalization of lives. They were family together, and they took that seriously. The job of “building one another up” is not just a once or twice a week proposition. It is a responsibility that this passage clearly portrays as being ongoing and for *every* day.

It is a calling that will require initiative on our part. We must choose to *agapē*. We must *choose* to interact, to encourage and share with one another. We must take up the challenge to be our “brother's keeper”, in a sense, ...not to be controlling or invasive, but to challenge and exhort, to hold one another accountable, ...**to get involved with one another enough to have a sense of what is going on with each other, so that we can help one another.** When we do this, it forces us to grow up because it requires us be active, servant-leaders with each other. It also multiplies the available support system from one or two counselor/pastor types to a network of people who can lift us up and offer practical help.

Let us get down to some practical comments on this passage. First of all, verses 9-13 all are meant to go together as one long sentence. The primary command is stated up front, followed by a series of phrases meant to clarify and expand on what is meant. The main point is that we are to be real and genuine in our *agapē* with each other. **“Let *agapē* be unhypocritical.” What is hypocrisy? Making a *claim* to be something you are *not*.** The word was used in the theater of the time to describe actors. They took on a role, or impersonated some character, in the telling of whatever story they were performing. Their impersonation had nothing to do with who they really were offstage. In a similar vein, **hypocritical love would be to masquerade or pretend that you love someone, when there is no reality or substance to that claim.** It would be to pretend to be sweet and caring to project an image, but the sad reality is that once the performance is over, the real heart has no intent to follow through with the image portrayed “on-stage”. The image and actuality are not the same. **Paul exhorts us to love without pretending.**

So, what are some marks of genuine *agapē*?

The first clarifying phrase, “hating-and-avoiding the evil, firmly-fastening to the good”, could have two basic applications. Paul could be talking about behavior (i.e., how we treat one another), or he could be referring to our perception of one another (i.e., hating and avoiding the unsavory aspects of one another's character, and putting them aside, so that we can hold fast to those things that are good about that person). The important point is that **love neither condones evil, nor joins with it. Love will focus on and express what is morally good and beneficial.**

The next phrase, “in the brotherly-love toward one another being warmly-devoted-and-affectionate-like-family” is an interesting word picture. In the four Greek words for love, *phileos* refers to tender affection, delight, and mutual enjoyment, while the word *storgē* indicates the love-bond of family. Paul uses a combination of these two words here. It is significant to notice, first, that unhypocritical *agapē* will include a “love for the brethren” (*philadelphia*). Beyond this tender affection for our siblings in Christ, however, **Paul advocates that we be ones who are devoted with tender affection toward each other (*phileostorgē*), combining the relational bond of family with the enjoyment of friendship.** This family-bond aspect will weather the storms of relational errors, wounds, and skirmishes. We are like family, and must learn to see each other in this regard, so we will “stick it out” with each other when things are difficult.

This commitment-love is followed by an eagerness to esteem one another, “in esteem, giving-forethought-and-leading one another ahead”. The word translated as “esteem” means “value, worth, price, or preciousness”. **To value someone refers to our inner perception of them, to esteem someone brings that evaluation to expression toward them.** The next word is an interesting compound word meaning to “think, regard, consider, plan, or lead”

along with a prefix meaning “before” (either “in front of” or “ahead of time”). The verb form also indicates ongoing action that *intensely* involves us. We are affected or limited by this action. So, **the idea is that we either are giving forethought and consideration-ahead-of-time as to how to esteem of each other, ...or it describes each of us taking the initiative to lead “in front of” the others in expressing honor and value to each other. Probably both are implied.**

Next, “in earnestness, not dull ones”. The word translated as “earnestness”, means that *agapē* includes “**an eagerness to get involved in helping one another, with the readiness to expend energy and effort**”. It means to **act quickly, and to give it your best effort**. When we begin to see this in the context of Body-life, with a variety of personalities, needs and struggles, suddenly this becomes very real and practical. There is a call to get involved, to offer help and support. The need is there. **The opposite of this would be what Paul warns of, an attitude of dullness, laziness, complaining or irksomeness. The word implies a hesitation, or lack of willingness to help**, even an irritation or a grudging attitude at having someone’s need come up AGAIN. **The enemy of Body-life is an unwillingness to interact or serve**, or a poisonous grudging attitude that embitters what help is offered. *Agapē* will not be self-restrained in such a way. It is the commitment of the will to prefer the other person, which implies taking a back seat to their needs or preferences at times. Genuine-love is OK with this. Pretend-love will hold back, or be grudging in its attitude.

The next two phrases also deal with drive and motivation. The clause, “in the Spirit, boiling-with-enthusiasm” could be referring to either the Holy Spirit or one’s own human spirit. In either case, the word “boiling” strongly communicates that **genuine love has fervency, intensity and zeal**. It is full of heat, action, energy. The opposite would be something quiet, cold, or still. *Agapē* is not without emotion or energy. Even though it is primarily centered in the will, it is by no means “coldly rational” or “without feeling”. This intensity comes from the Holy Spirit. The energy, zeal and passion are His. In addition to this emphasis on inner intensity is **the focus and motivation of love’s devotion, which is “to the Lord, serving-as-a-slave”**. Our activity of serving, and our sense of responsibility to get involved, comes ultimately from the choice we have made to follow Jesus as our King and Lord. There were various forms of service, from the hired worker, to the house servant, to the table-waiter in the culture of the day. Paul chose none of these, but rather employed the word picture of service as a slave. **A slave had no other business but the service of his or her master. He or she was fully committed and devoted only to the master’s interests. So here, our business is the Master’s business.** It matters not if it is *convenient*, or *easy*. We will respond to His call with eagerness, because of *agapē* love.

Three clauses now express the idea of perseverance. (1.) The phrase, “in hope, rejoicing” indicates that **love has a positive attitude of faith that can focus on the expectation of what is promised, but yet unseen**. This could be “the” hope, the ultimate joy, and the vindication of all our kingdom efforts, which will be experienced at Christ’s return, or it could be referring to **having joy in the hope of seeing one another move forward in growth**. This would seem to be more to the point of the context. Genuine love “hopes all things” (I Cor. 13:7), and will find inner joy in that hope, which will speak hope, faith, and encouragement to those who have opportunity to share in it. “Hope that is seen is not hope” (Rom. 8:24), so the joy will enable those who trust in the unseen to endure until its expectation turns to reality. (2.) The next phrase, “in affliction, remaining-steadfast-under” is quite clearly the declaration that **genuine-love will remain steadfast in the face of difficulty**. This is consistent with Paul’s declaration that *agapē* “bears all things” and “endures all things”, cited in I Cor. 13:7. (3.) Next, “in prayer, continuing-unremittingly” also emphasizes the persevering nature of *agapē*. **To continually, persistently bring the needs and interests of another to the throne of God in prayer is the action of genuine-love**, especially since in the secret inner room (Matt. 6:6) there is no one to impress, except God alone. There is no human being to perform for.

The next sentence fragment, “in the needs of the saints, making-oneself-a-partner”, expresses what all of this passage communicates about love. Here, however, the focus is more on physical needs and, like the church in Acts (2:42-47; 4:32-37), **genuine-love is willing to share even a financial burden, or to give generously to meet a need**. This will not happen without our free-will commitment to care for one another.

Finally, “in hospitality, running-swiftly-after” indicates that **love is eager to make people feel welcome**. Such things as friendly, comfortable table fellowship, with all the thoughtful considerations involved give expression to *agapē*. Certainly, if we want what is best for another, we will desire to remove any unnecessary discomfort. *Agapē* is quick to accommodate the preferences and needs of others. Even more than that, however, is the fact that ***agapē* reaches out to new people**. The word for “hospitality” literally means “delight in strangers”. The word for “running-swiftly-after” means to “pursue”. Thus, genuine love will eagerly and quickly reach out to new people to make them feel welcome. It is not limited to those who are friends, or familiar. **It overcomes barriers of comfort, convention, race or class to entertain those who are not part of the lover’s familiar, or conventional, group. Such love would be noticeable**, as Jesus had predicted (Jn. 13:34,35).