

Sometimes when we read the Bible, there's parts of it, where it's quite difficult to understand. And so far in Romans, it's been deep.

But I'm sort of suspecting that you didn't have too much trouble understanding the reading today, did you? It's pretty straight forward – there's nothing difficult to **understand** – the difficulty comes in **doing** it. (Getting it from 'words on a page'; into our 'head'; down into our 'heart'; and **then** (the hard part) is doing it)... And that's where the gift of exhortation 'kicks in' – When we **know** the right thing to do, but we just need to be encouraged to make sure that we're doing it...

When Jesus taught, He very often focused His teaching on, "The Kingdom of God". And that's pretty much where Paul's taken us today. He doesn't use the **phrase** "the Kingdom of God", but what He's describing, is very much 'the Kingdom' that **Jesus** taught us about...

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Your Kingdom come". And when we pray that prayer, yes we are praying for Jesus to return (in all of His glory; and power; and might; and righteous judgment), but we're **also** praying for something a bit more personal and immediate. We're praying:

"Lord, bring about Your Kingdom in **my** life.
Holy Spirit, fill me with Your presence; and power; and love. Make **my** heart to be like **Your** heart; make **my** ways to be like **Your** ways...
Lord, may I become not only a citizen of Your Kingdom, but a servant and an ambassador of

Your Kingdom – representing all that Your Kingdom is, being good and holy and true...”

And, we’re not just praying for this personally – we’re praying for this as a church. This is a corporate prayer “**Our** father in heaven”... And so we’re praying:

Lord, Your Kingdom come in this church. May **we**, as Your church, be an expression of Your glorious Kingdom, on this earth, as in heaven...

There’s a lot wrapped up in this prayer, “Your Kingdom come”

What we read today, is almost like Paul’s version of ‘The Sermon on the Mount’. It paints a wonderful picture of ‘Kingdom living’ It’s about relationships within the church, but it also extends to how we relate with others...

And I don’t know about you, but it all leaves me feeling “just a little bit inadequate”. It’s like “I don’t know if I’m up to this”. All of this, what he’s telling us to do – we **know** that it’s the right thing to do, but it almost seems **impossible**.... (Well, it might be possible for a few of you particularly godly people, but I know “I’m going to have trouble with it”...)

And if we set out to try and achieve this, as an ethic, and a moral code by which we get right with God, we’re doomed to failure before we start (because we just can’t be that good)... What Paul’s describing, is a miracle of God. It’s the transformation that God does in His children. He’s talking about ‘Living in the Spirit’. He’s describing, what it means for us to be a ‘living sacrifice’, which is our worship of God ...

In God's mercy, he saves us (despite all of our sin). And He doesn't save us, so that our corrupt minds can take us right back into a life of sin: God is determined, to do better than that with us. Did you know that? God is determined, to change you, to make you more like His Son. *And you'll be pleased to know, "He's also determined to change me, and to make me more like His Son."*

- *You've got an old, corrupt, sinful mind???* No problem. God **renews** the mind.
- *Your old life was full of violence or bitterness and envy or selfishness, and that certainly doesn't fit in with the Kingdom of God...* No problem. He transforms that too – He takes us through a metamorphosis from our old life, to a new life. (That's what we learned a few weeks ago in Romans 12)

And the **primary change** that God works in us – the **primary miracle**, is love... And all of the other commands (that we read today), that might seem so impossible, hinge on this one crucial transformation.

⁹ **Let love be genuine....**

That's the key to it all: Genuine love....

Whether our love is genuine or not, determines whether what we read today, is a difficult / almost impossible command, or whether it's a natural, expression of the love that we have, for one another.

Now, I just love the way this is phrased: ⁹ **Let love be genuine** . In the Greek, it says, “The love ἀνυπόκριτος.” (*anhypokritos*). Which literally means “not hypocritical” – The love non-hypocritical.... Do you know what that means??? - Pretty much exactly what it says. I told you it’s easy to understand...

What it’s getting at, is God has given **us** love – He’s **filled** us with love. And God’s love is real. There’s nothing hypocritical about God’s love. And so this love that God is pumping into us, is the **same** love that overflows **from** us. And it’s the love that we show to one another. It is that same un-hypocritical love. **Real** love.

So,,,, do we **allow** ourselves, to **really** love each other. Do we?

Or is it all pretend? Is our love a mask that we put on for a Sunday morning, so we can all **appear** Godly, and appear to be a big, happy church family??? Or is it real. And do we hold back? Do we **allow** ourselves, to love with the full extent of love that God has given us? Or would that be ‘unseemly’???

How do we know if our love is genuine, or if it’s hypocritical? I reckon 1 Corinthians 13 is a pretty good ‘litmus test’: ⁴ **Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant** ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ **Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all**

things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends..... That's what genuine love looks like.

Jesus said: ^{John 13:34} **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

There's our Christian witness...

Now Paul's telling us, "Let love be genuine...." Don't be false about it. Don't **pretend** to love one another... Don't hold it back. Let it be real. Let it be complete.

Did you know, "Those who have most trouble loving, are very often those who don't know what it's like to be loved." It's very hard to love someone, if you've never been loved yourself. And if you're having trouble loving others, that may be saying something about your relationship with God. The more we realise that God loves us, and the more we understand this love, the more we'll be able to love others.

⁹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

Righto, genuine love does not overlook evil.

If a parent loves their children, they will discipline their children, and teach them right from wrong - hey??? Alright, a

parent who genuinely loves their children, will not overlook their misbehaviour. And for love to be genuine in a church, means a church will not overlook evil either. To “**Abhor what is evil**”, means to be ‘repulsed’ by evil – to be ‘horrified’ by evil...

We live in a time, when good and evil are being re-interpreted.

- What once used to be called “Pride”, is now called “A healthy self-image”
- What once used to be called “infanticide”, is now called “a mother’s choice”
- What once used to be called “greed”, is now called “clever investment”
- What once used to be called “an abomination”, is now called “a loving relationship”
- What once used to be called “disrespect”, is now called “a free spirit”

There are a lot of things that were once unquestionably recognised as being “evil”, but the world now tells us that they’re good...

And despite any re-interpretation of what the world says is good and evil, genuine love holds fast to what **God** says is good, and genuine love abhors (it is repulsed), by what God says is evil.

^{v10} Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour.

In the Greek New Testament, there are 3 different types of love:

1. *Eros* – from which we get our word “erotic” – alright, it’s boy meets girl; boy falls in love with girl; boy has strange feelings for girl.... You get the picture.
2. *Phileo* – which is a family type of love, or a friendship type of love. The word which is used here for “brotherly affection” is φιλαδελφία (*philadelphia*)
3. *Agape* – which is the sort of love that God has for us. It’s not so much a feeling, as it is an act of the will. It’s a sacrificial, self-giving love – It’s a love that costs us dearly...

And so back in V9, where it says: ⁹ **Let love be genuine** it’s talking about *agape* love. Let this self-sacrificial love – this love that God has for us, be genuine.

But now in V10, we come to a different type of love – *Phileo* love. Within the church, our love for each other, shouldn’t **only** be an act of the will – it should be like the feeling of love that we have for our close family... Why? Because we **are** close family. We are blood brothers, and blood sisters – joined together by the blood of Jesus.... You are my family, and I love you as much as I love my family...

^{V10} **Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour.**

You know, international incidents escalate, exactly the same as child bickering escalates.

- *Johnny calls Freddy a name*
- *Freddy calls Johnny, a worse name*
- *Johnny calls Freddy, an even worse name*
- *Freddy shoves Johnny*

- *Johnny pushes Freddy over*
- *Freddy gets up and punches Johnny*
- *Johnny gets a stick and hits Freddy*
- *Freddy gets a bigger stick....*

You get the picture – violence escalates...

But in the church, we are to so love the other, that showing honour escalates. We are to outdo one another in showing honour.

v¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Genuine love, is a love that serves... You know, something that I've noticed is, for some people, when they first become a Christian, they're on **fire** for God... They are **so full of passion and enthusiasm, and their excitement for God...** But over time, they lose that zealousness. They still love God, but they've settled into a new, bland normality...

I've got a friend, who describes himself as "a stodgy Christian". He knows he's lost his zeal. And it perplexes me, that he's not doing anything to get it back... And maybe you've become a stodgy Christian... Lord, fill us with Your Holy Spirit, and make us zealous for You.

v¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in trouble, be constant in prayer.

No matter what's going on around us, we have this great hope – this certain hope, and so we can wait patiently for the Lord, in times of trouble and tribulation.

But this is not to be a period of inactivity. We are to be constant in prayer... A better translation may be to “**persist** in prayer”ⁱ. Don't give up on praying. Even if it seems that your prayers aren't being answered, in faith, we continue to pray – we persist.

V¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

In the early church, when one of their number were in need, the rest of the church would come to their aid... And we've got to remember, this was a society with no social security – no government handouts...

In 2002, when I badly broke my ankle. It dawned on me, (even while I was still in hospital), if this had happened to me in 1st century Jerusalem, there'd be no medical way of fixing it... I would have become a cripple – probably a beggar. I would've had no way of feeding my family... And we would be depending on our Christian brothers and sisters, to help us to live...

And there are plenty of Christians in the world today, who need our help, just to survive. And if our love is genuine, the natural thing to do, is to **Contribute to the needs of the saints**... You know the saying, “Charity begins at home” “Charity begins with your own family”... Well, the saints are our family.

and seek to show hospitality.

That means “pursue” it. “Go out of your way” to be hospitable... **Insist** on being hospitable. It literally means “demonstrate love to the stranger”. Hospitality, is not just having your friends over for a meal. When genuine, self-sacrificial love is involved, hospitality is giving a bed to a stranger, who has nowhere to stay... And why wouldn't we? If that stranger, is your brother or sister in Christ?

Go out of your way, to be hospitable – even to a stranger...

Wow!!! That's what genuine love is about... When our love is genuine, this radical picture of the church in action, is only natural... And that can be a picture of our church, if **our** love is genuine. But the question is, do you **want** that kind of radical Christianity??? I hope so, because that's what the Kingdom of God is about.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,

We thank you for the genuine love – the un-hypocritical love, that you've shown us.

Lord, help us to love like that.

Make our hearts like Yours.

That we would be repulsed by evil, like You are repulsed by evil.

But Lord, help us to love the sinner, as You love the sinner.

Give us wisdom to recognise what is good,
and give us strength, to hold fast to what is good.
Lord, help us to love our brothers in Christ.
As a church, give us a tangible, genuine affection for one
another.
that we would outdo one another in showing honour.

Lord, we repent of our slothfulness.
Fill us with Your Spirit, and give us a zeal to serve.

We rejoice Lord, in the hope that you've given us.
Help us to be patient in times of trouble,
and to never give up on praying.

And Lord, give us generous hearts.
That we would support the work of your church here, and
overseas.
and that we would be quick to support our fellow Christians in
their hour of need – even the stranger...

Lord, Your kingdom come in my life.
Your kingdom come in this church.
Lord, make our love genuine.

amen...

ⁱ Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.