

If they had thrown a couple of bucks his way we might view them better. If that priest had dropped a couple of dollars on the stripped and beaten man's chest we could say he did something. If the Levite had pushed a couple of dollars into the man's bloodied and bruised hands we could say he tried. Of course history still might have viewed them unfavorably. A couple of dollars doesn't mean much to a man beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. Can that even be considered a genuine response of love?

Love has been redefined and re-imagined to be something else than originally designed by God. Many people would agree that giving some money to tornado relief is goodness in action. And I suppose it might be. But is it genuine love? Does it go as far as God wants genuine love to go? And most people would think that we should love those that love us. And I suppose they're right. But is it genuine love? Does that go as far as God wants genuine love to go?

Paul in his letter to the Romans gives us the defined characteristics of love. He shows us the surprising lengths genuine love will go. In the second lesson this morning Paul clarifies for us that...

**God wants genuine love
Showing goodness to all people
Responding with love towards wickedness**

With short bursts Paul explains what genuine love looks and sounds like. **"Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."** Sure, there's a lot there, but it doesn't sound so bad. It'll be challenging no doubt, but to do this for God's people will be okay. Loving like family, honoring, being zealous for serving the Lord, to the people here we know those are things you and I are already doing. We have joy; we're patient, and faithful. Love the way God wants sounds like it might be pretty easy.

If only we could say that. Look again at the requirements. Have you fallen short? God wants you to honor others above yourself. God wants you devoted to others showing them the same love as your family. God wants you always joyful but also patient when affliction happens. He wants you always helping others who are in need. And these are to be our attitudes all of the time, not just some of the time. Genuine love is showing goodness to God's people and we haven't even done that perfectly.

Now Paul adds a burden to showing goodness that might surprise us. I know I haven't kept this and maybe you haven't either. **"Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."** Paul looks beyond these seats here, to people we don't necessarily like, people who seek to do us harm even. And Paul is asking that we bless them and get along with them. That's out of my ability. God's asking too much. I've cursed others when I've given half effort to talk with people who I think have hurt me. I refused to be at harmony with others. I've proudly paraded myself as better. I've easily sinned against God and refused to show genuine love, refused to show goodness to all people.

That's a beating God's law gives us. It's a convincing argument that I don't deserve anything good from God and instead deserve hell. How will we ever pick ourselves up? Where can we find any good news? A little before our section where Paul started this chapter, in the very first verse Paul wrote, **"Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices..."** All this genuine love God demands, all this goodness to other people, all of it will only be in us because of God's mercy. God's mercy is most easily recognized in the person of Jesus. Jesus demonstrated God's mercy to you and me with a life full of goodness. Perfect goodness, genuine love that lived every minute knowing he was doing it for you. Genuine love that showed goodness to every person who has ever lived or ever will live including you and me. Jesus is our view of God's mercy and God's genuine love to us.

That love of Christ is your strength and motivation to show goodness to all people. You don't have a spark in you naturally to do these good things. But once the spark of Christ's love ignites your heart in faith you're like a fire that can't be contained. You spread God's love and God's mercy through acts of goodness everywhere and to everyone. Like showing brotherly love to people you get along with and others maybe you don't. Like serving the Lord and living in harmony with those deemed impossible to live with. God's love in Christ eliminates all conceit to think you're better than someone else. It's Christ that frees you to show genuine love by showing goodness to all people.

Hosting kids on our site for Vacation Bible School this coming week our volunteers will be watching for the not so loving response of "he started it". An accidental collision, a purposeful shove, a quick jab, a solid punch and before you know it kids are exchanging unloving actions. Paul addresses the response God expects, **"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."** Paul knew the natural reaction is retaliation. "He pushed me, so I get to push him back." That kind of revenge thinking is so natural.

It even feels good right? Revenge is even described as sweet. Being able to watch as someone gets what's coming to them, either inflicted by you or by someone else. We don't even have to work so hard to convince ourselves we're right. Society backs us up. Someone always has to pay when something happens. Juries put people in jail. Judges make criminals pay fines. The states lock people up for life if the crime is bad enough. Justice demands that someone pay, that things get set right, that what's fair is done. And if I don't have that right in my own personal life, if I can't get revenge or punish someone, then it doesn't seem fair.

When the enemy has done you wrong, sinned against you, or simply done something that must be answered with revenge or justice you are being overcome by evil. Paul has an answer. **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."** "Kill um with kindness?!" Well, not exactly. **"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."** Not to watch him burn. Not to take pleasure in someone else's pain, and not to gain satisfaction. Rather, to show genuine love. Showing genuine love from Christ to our enemies might lead to a change of heart in them. Genuine love might save them.

This we can't do alone. Who can be that nice? Who can look the other way and instead treat the enemy, the person we dislike, with love? It's impossible. Not so **"in view of God's mercy."** You have a Savior who was your enemy at one time. But instead of that enemy turning away from you because of your sins, Jesus turned towards you. He came after you with love and mercy. Goodness in Christ overcame evil and wickedness in your sinful nature. God's genuine love for you in the Savior won a victory over death and hell. It won a victory to guarantee you a place with God for life eternal in heaven.

So every day when people come after you and expect revenge, show them genuine love instead. Have confidence knowing all things will work out. Things may or may not be set right and fair here on earth. But God will set them right in the end. What's important isn't fairness here, but that your life is permanently set in the riches of heaven. Live at peace and show genuine love responding with love towards wickedness.

To be genuine, the real deal, love must be God's way. That's not throwing a few bucks at someone who might need it or even volunteering to give away huge chunks of money to some cause. It's not the actions that God looks at to determine genuine love. It's the heart. God wants yours and mine. Christ Jesus won that heart with one action of love on the cross. Christ's love is genuine love that sets us free from sins. Genuine love that sets us free to show goodness to all people and to respond with love when people are wicked. It's Christ's love that allows us to show genuine love for God and for all people.