

Love Defined, All Loves Excelling

Romans 15:1-13

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Introduction: Love – How do you define it? Certainly there have been attempts through words to explain “LOVE”.

The American Heritage Dictionary (Second College Edition) p. 744, Love, 1.a “An intense affection for another person based on familial or personal ties.” It is not until the 8th meaning that God is brought into the definition.

Kittel has almost 100 pages on *φίλος* and *αγάπη*. Yet, all these definitions for LOVE fall short and seem empty without action associated with them.

The Bible is the best source of accounts of God’s love for man and man’s love for God. It gives us an historical look at examples and at how we ought to love. It shows us how our love for God enables us to love our fellow man.

Illus. In the OT, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son Isaac. Hosea was willing to obey God and marry a prostitute to show his love for God.

In the NT, we see God’s willingness to allow His Son to be a sacrifice for us – **AND UNTIL THAT STORY BECOMES MORE THAN HISTORY AND MERE WORDS ON A PAGE**, we will never feel obligated to give our lives to God completely.

There are some individuals in our assemblies who have never given their life to God – sadly enough and mistakenly even some may call themselves Christians.

God’s definition of love should be the first definition we use in our search for the meaning of love.

Our text today offers a definition of love for us to consider. [Romans 15:1-3 \(NIV\)](#)

¹We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ²Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

³For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”

The first aspect of love is:

I. Love Is Unselfish.

Our priority is not to please ourselves, but to please our neighbor. This is not some proof text for asceticism, monastic living, or self-deprivation, BUT LOVE DOES MEAN SELF-SACRIFICE.

In the O.T. Abraham and Lot had to decide who would get the lush green pasture land in the Jordan valley (this area included Sodom and Gomorrah) and the land of Canaan. Abraham said, you choose first! ([Genesis 13:1ff](#)).

But even the perfect Christ knew you could not please all the people all the time – in fact in some cases with the Pharisees it was virtually impossible.

Jesus said, “When John came neither eating nor drinking, you said of him, ‘He has a demon’. But when I came both eating and drinking, you called me a glutton and a drunkard. So how can I please you?”

READ p. 94 of *Life Together* – by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Ministry of Meekness) “He who would learn to serve must first learn to think little of himself. Let no man ‘think of himself more highly than he ought to think’ (Rom. 12:3).”

We need to take more opportunity to please our neighbors – to do things for their good – to build them up. I sometimes squander opportunities because I am too self-involved. How about you?

One of the best definitions I have read for love is: “By nature, love is not primarily ACT but BEING.” i.e., Christianity is not just acting right; it is being right with God and your neighbor.

[James 2:8-9 \(NIV\)](#) ⁸If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. ⁹But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

Cliques can keep a church small and ineffective better than the worst preaching. People must feel wanted, included and needed and a part of the family of God.

[Romans 15:7 \(NIV\)](#) ⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

A narrow concept of who one’s neighbor is will bring us under judgment. So love needs to be unselfish – seeking the best for our neighbor so he is built up and ultimately is an effective Kingdom worker.

II. Love is An Obligation.

Again we read: **Romans 15:1 (NIV)** ¹We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

This word *ought* is from the same word group that translates debt or moral obligation (as in the Lord's Prayer, *forgive us our debts.*).

The theme of last week's message is still heard in our text for today. We have an obligation to the weak(er) Christian. Also, Paul had said in Romans 13:8 for us to owe nothing but a continuing love to each other. We have an obligation to the weak(er) Christian: to teach, to encourage, and to involve them in ministry.

We are obligated to disciple, i.e., duplicate ourselves. We are obligated to the world – i.e., that larger scope of who one's neighbor is.

1. We must comfort them in their need (physical, emotional, and spiritual).
2. We must be a model.
3. We must share the gospel, because there is never wholeness/completeness without Jesus.

Again we read how our obligation is to others and to follow Christ's example. **Romans 15:3 (NIV)** ³For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

These are David's words, but they are attributed to and fulfilled in Christ – BUT there is a wide gulf between David and the "Son of David". David cursed his tormentors – Jesus prayed for his. There is a huge difference between man and the "Son of Man".

If we are going to be consistent in our witness, we will be insulted by others. AND as long as our persecution is for righteousness' sake – ours is the Kingdom of Heaven, and we are blessed.

Christ is obligated to us. **Romans 15:8-12 (NIV)** ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs ⁹so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." ¹⁰Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." ¹¹And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." ¹²And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."

Christ is obligated to us on behalf of God's truth, i.e, because he said so. And God keeps His Word.

It used to be a man's word was good – there was no need for attorneys. Harvests were sold with a handshake. People changed titles to property through simple verbal agreements.

Illus. Story of Billy and the Little League coach.

Every day Billy would call the coach to find out the time and place of the first practice. "I'll be there, coach, he would say." The day of the first practice it was cloudy and as the afternoon dragged on it started to rain. Billy got out the door before his mother could stop him and ran to the practice field across from the coaches' house. The coach happened to look out to see the rain coming down in sheets and noticed that a small boy was out on the ball field. He remarked to his wife. There is some fool kid who showed up and he's out there in the rain.

Some will keep their word no matter what. AND God is like that!

God has already shown us in the past how much He loved us. He has promised to save us eternally – to give us everlasting life WITH HIM if only we believe in Him and follow the instructions he has left for us through Jesus – faithfully written down in the Bible.

III. Love Is Purposeful.

God never does anything without reason. He is not a capricious God. There is a purpose for everything.

Romans 15:4 (NIV) For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

I thought this would be easy to outline:

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| a. Writings (Bible) teach us | God's Part |
| b. Through Endurance | Our Part |
| c. Encouragement of Scripture | God's Part |
| d. We might have hope | Our Part |

Then I read verse 5... **Romans 15:5 (NIV)** ⁵May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,
But really God gives us everything we need!

Illus. And the floor project at Deming, NM came back to mind. We had started working to replace the sanctuary floor on Monday morning. After having worked hard on Friday it was 7 p.m. and the floor was 1/3 done. At the same pace it would be 7 a.m. Saturday. The carpet was to be laid the next day so all the pews and furniture could be in place for Sunday. We finished by midnight. God had a tremendous part in that!

Then I read verse 13... **Romans 15:13 (NIV)** ¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

... and again I realized that everything we have is from God -- and the only thing that is for us to do: is accept Jesus Christ as Lord, who is the only true example of God's love for us.

The text says God also gives us a spirit of unity among Christians as we follow Jesus (**v. 5**).

The purpose of all these gifts is clearly stated in verse 6: **Romans 15:6 (NIV)** ⁶so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Glorify God!

Does the fragmentation and division within the Body of Christ glorify God? Absolutely NOT! It only goes to confuse an already confused modern world.

Conclusion: UNITY TAKES A SPECIAL KIND OF LOVE – GOD'S LOVE.

We have all seen churches divide. Church splits bring dishonor to God because it is His Body that is breaking.

As we look back today upon the faithfulness of those who have worked before us in the Kingdom,

Let us vow to confess Jesus as Lord with even more boldness than they.

Let our love be selfless.

Let our love be an obligation not taken lightly.

(and most of all) Let our love have only one purpose: to give glory to God!

My prayer for you this day is the same as Paul's for the Romans.

Romans 15:13 (NIV) ¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.