

April 12, 2015

The Gospel of Jesus

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves..."

Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God..."

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters...For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone...So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord...Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another..."

"Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God..."
Romans 12:9-15:7

If we are living as sacrifices, if we are being transformed by God's Holy Spirit, then our lives will certainly be very different from the lives of those who are still living in the world. The Apostle will, I think, use several key words and phrases as he closes out this letter to describe for us in exactly what these transformations will look like.

Sincere Love

First, he says that, ***"Love must be sincere..."*** Sincere love is much different in practice than the love that we hear about so often in this world. Sincere love shows in how we view ourselves in comparison to others and so Paul will say that we should ***"Honor one another above (ourselves)..."***

Sincere love is certainly demonstrated in how we treat those we are close too, but it is also very much practiced with those who despise us. Sincere love demands that we bless even those who would persecute us. Sincere love would demand that we seek to live in peace with every one, certainly a difficult task under any circumstances.

Submission to Authority

Submission is always a difficult action for us to master. We do not like to submit and we have a long cultural history of rebellion against those who would demand our submission. The transformed, Paul would say, submit to all authority. We do this because we have already surrendered our entire existence to the Father.

In our choice to submit to him we also accept the necessity of submitting to all authority. The Apostle will make the connection between our willingness to submit to God and our willingness to submit to the authority he has established. For a people who pride themselves on their unwillingness to surrender, surrendering to the Father can be a huge obstacle to mature faith.

Accepting One Another

Accepting those who are different from us, who have beliefs and live lives that differ from ours, is also difficult and yet those who are being transformed by the Spirit will also be accepting. Part of our struggle with this spiritual change is that we connect the belief with the person. There are certainly behaviors that are against God's will and which, because they are, I cannot accept or condone.

While I can and should be able to look at what some practice and determine that those actions are wrong, I can never dismiss those who believe or do these "wrong" things as useless. My task as one who follows the Lord and who is being transformed by his Spirit is to love those who sin,

even as God has loved me. That does not translate into the acceptance of evil practices, but it does translate into sincere love.

So often as we read discussions like Paul's here at the close of his letter to Rome we turn what is read into a series of rules by which we seek to live. The Apostle is certainly directing us to do specific things and to behave in specific ways, but within the context I am convinced he is describing lives that are being transformed. As a transforming believer I can learn to love sincerely, to submit willingly and to accept openly. The Holy Spirit working in my surrendered heart will create these attributes in me.