

Two weeks ago we launched into the New Year w/ the resolution to go higher, farther, and deeper w/ God in 2015. Our inspiration to elevate our lives comes from Paul's executive summary of the Christian found in Romans 12.

*To elevate means to lift something to a higher position; or to raise something to a more important and impressive level.*

In **week 1** we learned – **if you want to GO up w/ God you have to GIVE up to God.** Meaning the key to elevating your life w/ God begins w/ your complete surrender to Him. In **week 2** we discovered – **if you want to GO up w/ God you have GET right in who you are.** Meaning we each need a correct understanding of who we are in light of who God is – not thinking too little or too much of ourselves.

Let's continue today in Romans 12 to see the supernatural result of when surrender to God meets w/ humility of self.

*<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share w/ the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

*Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. Do not burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Do not quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality. The Message*

In light of offering your body as a living sacrifice as a result of experiencing God's mercy and grace, and having been gifted by God to contribute to something greater than yourself – the mission of Christ through the body of Christ – Paul now reminds us that above all, it's not our ability or even His gifting in us that matters – but His love in us shining through us that is the greatest need. For w/out His love compelling us – all else is useless.

Consider Jesus words to His disciples in the Upper Room:

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will all men know you are My disciples, if you love one another. Jn. 13:34*

Notice that Jesus commands them how to treat one another. He isn't suggesting a strategy, or doctrine, or even an idea – He commending a necessity – **love everyone in the same manner that I have loved you.** How?

Jesus loved His disciples unconditionally, sacrificially, openly, authentically, vulnerably – even when it wasn't convenient. He met them where they were and loved them as they were; believing in them even when they didn't believe in themselves. **Why?** So that everyone might see and know that God so love the world He sent Jesus to save and forgive them of their lostness.

The greatest and most powerful apologetic in the entire world is not an argument out of a book, the love Christians have for one another. *Chip Ingram*

**Now we're getting somewhere.** When surrender to God collides w/ a correct assessment of self b/c of God's mercy and grace, the result equals an unmistakable, supernatural love that testifies to His love for all of creation.

When I read this passage in light of the previous few verses that includes spiritual gifts, I'm reminded of Paul's words to the believers in Corinth (see *1 Cr. 13*). Paul says – it is wonderful and amazing that God has given every believer a spiritual gift to accompany His Divine calling, but if our primary motivation is not God's love, then we've missed the point (for Christ's love compels us – *2 Cr. 5:14*). This means it is Christ in us living through us as evidence by the agape love of God which supersedes everything. If we're not genuinely moved by God's love, then we're a just a clanging cowbell that the world is either annoyed by or never hears.

It is His love in us shining through us that matters most. This doesn't mean our gifting and calling are not important – they are. Instead, it means there's a higher calling of surrender and intimacy w/ God that manifests itself in the expression of His love through our lives that ultimately defines the vitality of our faith and His grace.

Let me say it in another way. While our gifting and calling might have influence on another person's life; it is His love in me living through me that has the greater impact on others for the cause of Christ. It is His love in me and not my gift that makes the real difference.

What kind of love? **Agape**. **Can a person agape love apart from Christ? NO.** Which takes us back to Romans 12:1-2. It all begins w/ our surrender to God's love for us. **John tells us we agape love only b/c God has first loved us.**

*If anyone acknowledges Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them... We love b/c he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, can't love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. 1 John 4:14-21*

# I Love must be SINCERE

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

In other words, phony love doesn't cut it w/ God – but only a sincere love capable of differentiating good from evil.

sincere (*a huprokritos*) not hypocritical

Paul uses the term *a huprokritos* w/ an emphasis on the “a” which negates the idea. Meaning... our love should never be hypocritical but always sincere and authentic flowing out of our surrendered life to Christ.

Hypocrite comes from ancient theater when an actor would choose not to use a full costume to play a part, but hold up a mask in front of his face and play different parts. Thus, a hypocrite is one who pretends or plays a role.

Why translate – sincere – sincere is derived from the Latin word – *sine cere* – meaning no wax.

Back in the time when Latin was used, potters would often take wax and fill in the gaps and holes in cracked pottery. Then they'd paint over the wax and sell it. The only problem is, once you some hot liquid in the repaired pot w/ wax – it'd leak and fall apart. So upstanding potters began selling their pottery w/ the claim – *sine cere* – no wax (wax free).

So the concept of a believer's love – if it is genuine – is that there will be no cracks – that is, it will not be hypocritical.

In particular – this love will not be divided or confused as it pertains to good and evil. **God's love in you clings to the good of God and never compromises to evil.** Yet at the same time, it is capable of hating the sin and loving the sinner. This is huge as it testifies to God's love. God loves in us – while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And yet He never compromised truth/righteousness. Meaning we can stand for truth and good in this evil world w/out condemning the sinner – but it'll only happen through God's love.

## II Love must be SELFLESS

*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

devoted (*philostorgos*) *philos* – friendship love and *storge* natural family love and love one another (*phileo*) to have tender affection for a brother (or brotherly love) – carry a synonymous idea.

Meaning we are to have a tender and compassionate affection for each other absent of attraction yet intimate for each other's spiritual and earthly well-being. **We're to have a genuine care and concern for each other.**

Such love is evidenced by our willingness to put each other and our needs before our own.

**honor one another** (*proegeomai*) to give preference; or to regard someone else as more important than yourself. It is to show genuine respect to another in God's family by setting aside your own preferences to meet their need.

### III Love must be **STEADFAST**

*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

**fervor** (*zeo*) to boil. Like a pot of water reaching the point of boiling and bubbling over – not able to be contained.

The idea is that faith in God and love for people in God's name can't be contained. The joy and energy of the Lord is constantly spilling over and impacting others.

*For Christ's love compels us, b/c we are convinced One died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 2 Corinthians 5:14*

It also contains an element of remaining steadfast or resolute in the wake of adversity.



Have you ever faced adversity in life? In your marriage, in your family, in the church? Of course you have. We all have. In such an instance did you ask God – WHY? Did you ever consider throwing in the towel of faith?

I'm reminded the Baptist preacher sitting at a table working furiously on something when his wife walks in and says, "What are you doing?" He says, "I'm putting together a jigsaw puzzle. It's supposed to be a picture of a rooster, but I can't get it to work." His wife looked at him and then at the box and said, "Put the cornflakes back in the box."

A lot of people are this way. They're trying to put together a puzzle of life and they don't have the right pieces. They're trying to figure out God in light of their challenges.

James assures us that trials are coming – and they will either turn you to God or away from God. God wants to use them for our good and our growth – but we've got to hang tough.

Paul challenged the Corinthians to such a resolve: *Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that your labor is not in vain.* 1 Cr. 15:52

Trials and trouble are coming into your life. You have no control over that. But b/c of God's love to you, you do have control is how are you going to react to times of difficulty.



This verse says there are three things you do when you're in tribulation or affliction.

A JOYFUL in Hope

B PATIENT in Affliction

C FAITHFUL in Prayer

IV Love must be SHARING

*Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

share – is a reference to the generosity of God's people to one another for the sake of building each other up in the faith. It is about meeting each other at the point of our need to point us to Christ.

need (*chreia*) necessities or essentials

We do this by practicing hospitality w/ one another – which is basically treating each other the way that we would want to be treated if we were in similar circumstances.

It is giving a hand when a hand is needed and giving a hug when a hug is needed. It is caring when care is needed.

During WWII when the Nazis were bombing London, there was an Anglican Church that had a statue of Jesus on their lawn w/ his arms outstretched. The caption below the statue read, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden." As the bombs fell, the Anglican Church was destroyed and the statue was blown up. When the members started to rebuild the church and replace the statue, they discovered the arms and hands were so pulverized from the bombing they couldn't be salvaged. They could've chosen to manufacture new hands and arms for the statue, but instead they chose a different route. Today, the statue of Jesus stands outside the London church w/ no arms, and the caption has been changed to read, "Christ has no hands but your hands. And Christ has no arms but our arms." The message is simple. We are the body of Christ, and if the body of Christ is going to move, it is going to be by our feet. If the body of Christ is going to hug, it is going to be by our arms. If the body of Christ is going to speak, it is going to be through our mouth. We are the body of Christ.