

Sermon 162: Romans 12:10: Love one another

OUTLINE

Family love
Family respect

INTRODUCTION

There are four words in the ancient Greek language for love. These words are agape; storge; philos and eros. Agape is usually used of God's love, a love we are called to imitate in 12:9. Storge usually has to do with family affection. Philos is often used of the love of friendship. Eros over time came to be associated with lust. The bible only uses agape, storge and philos, but avoids eros, probably because of the associations it collected. In fact in Romans 12:9-10 all three of the Greek words used in the NT are used. 'Let agape be genuine...; philos one another with storge.' We return then in Romans 12:10 to the notion of loving one another. As you look at v10-13 it gives a long list of Christian duties. V10 has 2 exhortations to love one another. V11 has exhortations with regard to our service. V12 has 3 exhortations with regard to suffering. And v13 has 2 exhortations about meeting one another's physical needs.

So today we want to focus on loving each other, but the text directs us to a particular flavour of love—family love. As we do this we want to look at the nature of family love and then at the honour we are to have for each other.

Family love

The two words for love in v10 are compound words, they have two words together in one, the first use of love is 'philadelphia' this is the word philos/love fused with adelphos/brother. This has a very specialised use in the NT which is restricted to other believers. The second word is 'philastorgoi' this is made up of the two words philos and storge which together mean 'very loving, warmly devoted to, very affectionate,' (Louw and Nida:25:41). This is the only time it occurs in the NT. The ESV has translated it well as 'brotherly affection.' The opposite of this word is heartless (astorgos), this is what Paul says characterises those in the last days, (2 Tim. 3:3), and is the opposite of the Christian who is deeply feeling towards the brethren. A more literal translation would go something like 'have brotherly love towards each other with family affection.' You can hear the double emphasis on family. Paul is not content to merely stress that we should love genuinely, but that the flavour of our love for each other should have this family feel about it.

Surprisingly as I went around looking at all my systematic theology tomes looking for a discussion on the church as the family of God, none of them had anything to say on the matter. They had much to say about the Church as the new Israel of God, the church as the body of Christ and the church as the temple of God, but nothing on the church as the family of God. Yet we can see by Paul use of words here that his conception of the church is indeed as a family sharing family love. When we speak about the church as the family of God, we must not confuse this with The Family a communal church that arose in America that believed in evangelism by encouraging women to become 'hookers for Jesus.'

Let me outline the churches identity as the family of God and then show how that identity points us to this family love Paul is encouraging us to. Salvation is spoken in terms of being a child of God and having God as our Father. We are either legally children of God or

children of the devil, and being conformed to their likeness. In salvation the Trinity is at work to make this family, we have God as our Father, the Son in His humanity as an older brother, and the Spirit indwelling us to help us cry out with the Son, 'Abba, Father.' Legally we are adopted and are no longer slaves but children. But the miracle of salvation is spoken of as a new birth, and upon getting saved we then undergo a transformation so that not only are we legally sons but the Spirit seeks to conform us into the image of the perfect Son. In prayer we have access as sons, in suffering God treats us like sons (please note that I say sons and not sons and daughters on purpose because it is theologically significant, for sons were prepared to take over the father's estate and gained a larger portion of the inheritance.) Our obedience is to be that of children, and done in love and not as slaves, Eph. 5:1. And one day we will receive the inheritance of children. The notion of being children of God is not merely descriptive but reality.

Can you see this? Think of it in terms of the picture of the church as a body, it is more than an illustration and carries implications. Likewise when we realise that we are the family of God. It changes the way we relate to God and each other.

Paul expands this notion further especially in the letter of 1 Timothy. Here he views the church as the 'household of God.' 1 Tim. 3:15, 'if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.' When we dig a little deeper we see that the notion of a family is more than mere description but is constitutive of the church. We see that the church is the macrocosm of the family. We see that just as men have the leading role in the home, they are also to have the leading role in being elders in the church. 1 Tim. 3:2, 'Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife....' v4-5, 'He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?' The idea of being a family more than a picture to help feel bonded but it also helps us sort out how we relate to each other and the order and structure of the church.

1 Tim. 5:1-3, 'Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. Honor widows who are truly widows.' Once again Paul pulls in the family language to help us see how we are to negotiate our relationships with each other. When we are speaking to older men, because they are family treat them as fathers, when speaking to younger men, do not disrespect them and make them feel like children but treat them as brothers. When speaking to older women treat them as mothers, and when dealing with younger woman, treat them with purity, as a sister, do not let their be any sexual innuendo in your interactions. And notice in v3-16 that if there are widows who have no family to fulfil their family responsibilities, then the church becomes the family of that widow and does what a family would do.

We are already in foreign territory when we talk about family norms. Marriage in our culture is being redefined, the family is being redefined, these verses smack of traditionalism. But no, God has a norm for family relations, and this is the norming norm for our church relations. The younger are to respect the older, husbands are to lead their families, men are to lead the church. The church is the place where these creation norms are to be preserved and fleshed out. The call to have family love for each other extends to more than mere affection, it includes the authority structures as well. Paul is not treating these authority structures as cultural artefacts that are like wax noses that can be changed to suit. We would not change them if we went into a traditionally matriarchal setting, but would insist on the bible's norm. We would not change them in a culture where the son

upon becoming an adult is allowed to order his mother around, we would insist on the biblical norm. And in an age where girls and women are being objectified and are the constant victims of sexting, innuendo, upskirting, and other vile advances we insist on treating them with purity as sisters. One of the side effects of porn in our age is that young men cannot seem to engage in any conversation with the opposite sex or about them without sexual overtones. It would be sinful, a breach of loyalty and disrespectful to speak of your sister this way, and Paul is insisting we extend that respect to Christian sisters. Church should be a safe place where we are free from such activities as we honour one another according to the biblical norm.

Matt. 12:46-50, 'While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'" Here again we have our unity as children of God emphasized. Now some have thought that this means we can neglect our physical families, but this is wrong. Grace does not destroy nature, if you have two unbelievers who are married and one gets saved, their marriage is still real, grace does not destroy nature. Likewise when you are part of a physical family, if you become a Christian that family still exists, grace does not destroy nature. There are some who have thought that becoming a Christian means you have to stop loving your family to love the church, this is wrong. It is true that if your family forces you to choose between them and Christ, then you follow Christ, but otherwise the 5th commandment which calls us to honour our parents still applies. The call to love like family in the church would make no sense and would lose its grounding if we had to stop loving them to be a Christian was necessary.

1 Peter 3:8, 'Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.' Peter also uses this word Philadelphia in relation to Christians. We all love many things, we love our fellow citizens, we love our favourite sports team, we love our friends, but we reserve our best love for our families. Peter is saying 'love as family', think about your families for a moment. Think about that person that really gets on your nerves, that will never change, but who you would gladly die for. There are people in the Church who get on your nerves who might not change, show them the same tolerance as your family. How do you feel when someone criticizes your father or mother, or sisters and brothers? You get defensive, you refuse to let their reputations be brought down in your company, you will defend them. This is how we must view our fellow Christians, we must refuse to hear gossip and slander, and be the defender of their characters when they are not around. Think about how a family would pull together and sacrifice in order to help one of the other members. If someone is in a financial crisis, the brothers and sisters will pull together. So it should be in a Church. Think about how generous you have been with your family, have you given them houses, cars, money, valuables? Yes you have, and you might want to say to me, but they are my children, my husband, my blood! Exactly, now love Christians in the same way. The bond that we have with Christians is an eternal bond. In heaven there is no marriage, but we will still be a Church. There will be no children, but we will still be a Church.

Think of the Roman situation for a moment. This is a church that is racially divided between Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, slave and free. Yet Paul calls for us to let love cover this multitude of differences and to treat each one as family. Paul is calling not merely for actions of love but the deepest and warmest of our affections and emotions. Shallow, low-commitment levels of engagement are unworthy of the description brotherly love, yet this is what we are called to. How do we get our hearts to warm to each other? We consider how

God has loved us in Christ. We contemplate the fact that we are loved by God in our unworthiness and made worthy by His grace. We think on the fact that God did not deal with us according to prejudice, and not even justice by giving us what our sins deserve. Instead He chose to have mercy on us and bestow His choicest love on us. Because He loves us we can gratefully love others, because He gives us His Spirit who enables us we can love others, because we can remind ourselves of how unworthy we are and yet loved, we can do the same for others.

Family respect

V10 has a second one another command, 'Outdo one another in showing honour.' The KJV puts it, 'in honour preferring one another.' This little phrase has given translators a bit of hassle. You see under that word 'outdo' is a Greek word that appears only once in the NT what we call a hapax legomena. The word is *proegumenoj*, and it is made up of two words before and lead/bring. So following the etymology of the word a literal translation would be 'to the honouring of one another, going before.' This would give you the sense of lead when it comes to honouring one another. In other words, don't wait for someone to honour you, you set the example, you honour them first. The ESV grasps this sense of competition in the word 'outdo' one another in showing honour. However, we do have another word similar to it which Paul uses in Phil. 2:3, 'Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.' The word 'count' others better than yourselves is a similar though not exactly the same word. This has led many translators to choose 'preferring one another.' This translation choice seeks to keep with a Pauline use of a similar word resorting to a familiar Pauline concept of counting others better than ourselves/preferring one another. For those studying hermeneutics with me we have a choice between the synchronic and diachronic use of the word; the dictionary use and the conceptual use. Both are good and possible translations, outdoing one another in honouring puts stress on each one taking the lead and not waiting for others to serve them first; preferring one another puts stress on our general outlook and humility. By choosing one we are not eliminating the other, for the one will imply the other.

Think of what this would look like in the Roman setting. There were those who were Roman citizens and those who were not. Those who were Jews and Gentiles. There would have been free men, freed men and those who were still slaves. There were various classes of society, rich and poor, male and female. There would have been those of disreputable backgrounds and those who had excelled at everything they had done. In any situation the natural pecking order of things would have shaped the way this group would have functioned. You would have the landed gentry at the top with a sense of entitlement to honours, being fussed over and the indulged service of others. And at the bottom you would have the slave as the regular dogs body doing all the hard work with the expectation that they should expect nothing because they were less. Paul is saying, no more. There is a new social order, it is called the family of God. There is a new universal application of honour to all, and given by all. There is no longer the servant and the served, but we are all both as we give and receive from one another. There is no longer the honoured and the despised but all are honoured and honouring. Does this sound too idealistic? Isn't it true that every single one of us looks down our noses at everyone else? In our self-deceit we think ourselves better than others. Even those who have a poor self-image do not honour others. If someone with a poor self-image comes to you with the words, 'Oh, I am worthless,' and you said, 'Yes, I have been thinking that you are worthless for a while now.' Trust me, it will not be long before they are insulting you and revealing their low opinion of you and rubbing your nose in it. To have a poor self-image does not mean you are humble or that you are not proud, you still think poorly of others. It merely means you are believing

lies about yourself and have not yet seen yourself as God sees you. You are worse than you could ever conceive because you have underestimated your sins, but when you trust in Christ, He restores you, He makes something of you and you are more loved than you could ever imagine.

Phil. 2:3-5, 'Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.' Look at that last verse, 'Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.' What does Paul mean we have this mind, this mind of humility in Christ Jesus? How do we get to the place where we are not condescendingly bending over to help those we don't actually think are honourable?

Paul says we have this mind in Christ. Paul spells it out for us. He tells us in v6 that Jesus who was equal with God, who had the right to grasp equality with God, did not grasp it. In v7 we see that Jesus who is God became fully man, this is a station truly below the Creator. And not just any man He became a servant not a ruler amongst us. And in v8 we see that God, who became and man, who became a servant, became a criminal and died our death on the cross for our sins. Think on it. You are a sinner who deserves to die, compared with God you deserve nothing. We compare ourselves with one another and think ourselves better for what we have, or what we can do, or how we look, or where we were born, but these are merely infinitesimal differences compared to the difference between us and God. Paul points out that God became our servant when He did not have to, and more than that He died our death. We are not better than others, we are only deserving of death but God serves and dies for the unworthy, He goes the second mile and does the unimaginable for the unworthy. If you know your unworthiness and think that God cannot save you because you are such a sinner. Wrong, God proves His willingness to save you by becoming man and dying for you. If you have not come to Him yet, come to Him now. Ask Him for mercy, He is willing to forgive and to restore.

Among my family I can remember several times as I have heard the men of the family talking about being a Clevely. When someone got really angry and punched someone's light out, or did a daring deed, it was all because he was a Clevely. We have all heard pep talks given to children where parents will tell their children, 'You are a' This is an appeal to pride to get them to perform. This appeal to pride insinuates that you are to do better because you are better because you are not like everyone else you are a How very different the family of God is, and how very differently are we being encouraged to act. We don't serve each other because we know we are superior and better than others. The Nazi army was loyal and willing because they were fed the lie that to be German was to be better. None of us is any better than any other, but God has loved us, God has made us His children, God has taken a bunch of equally damnable people and made them a family. Our loyalty and love and honour to one another is not based on some self-deceiving notion of our superiority. God's grace has saved us, God's grace is the way we now serve everyone else. All notions of grandeur evaporate under the light of the gospel. We are not great, God is great because of His gracious love towards the unworthy, and it is our pleasure and duty to reflect that greatness through family love and honouring one another. So then, 'Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.'

