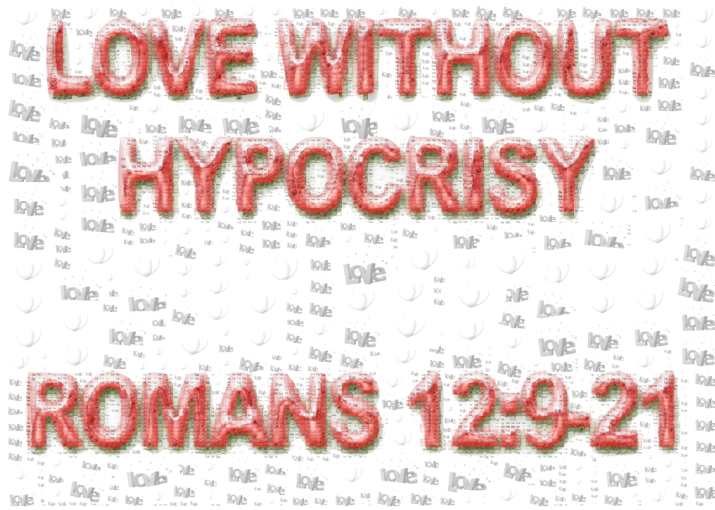


LOVING WITHOUT HYPOCRISY

(Romans 12:9-21 December 4, 2011)



I want you to decide if this is an act of love?

Suzie needs a regular lift to church. Sally says – no problem I'll bring her.

On the surface it seems an act of love – but the question our passage asks this morning is this – is it an act of love that is without hypocrisy?

Love can be hypocritical if the motive is selfish.

Did Suzie just want to look good in the eyes of others? Did she want to impress Sally's hunk of a brother or did she just want to embarrass Margaret who lives closer but didn't offer?

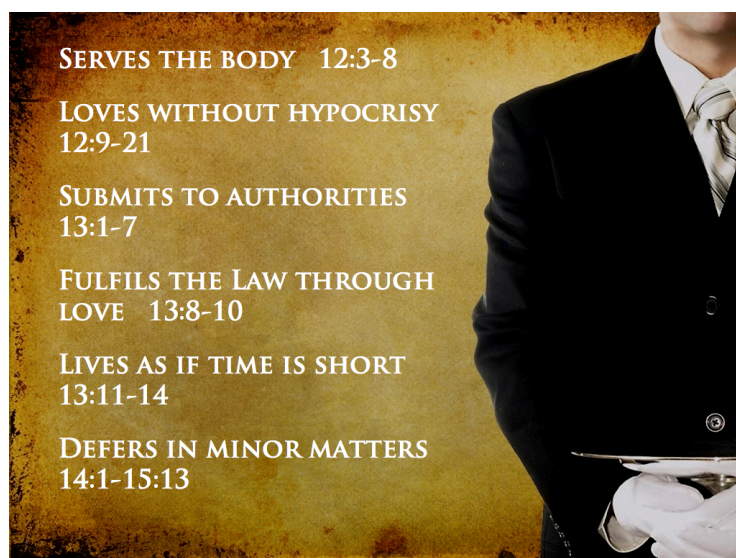
The passage that asks whether our love is without hypocrisy is in a long section beginning in Romans 12 verse 1. In verses 1 and 2 we learned about living in Christ.



Power	By the mercies of God
What	Present your bodies as a living sacrifice
How	Resist conformity to the world Practice transforming mind renewal

Then from verse 3 of Romans 12 to verse 13 of Romans 15 – Paul gives us some very practical examples of what it means to be a living sacrifice – resisting the world with a transformed, renewed mind.

Here are the pictures he paints. One who presents their bodies as a living sacrifice:



Serves the body	12:3-8
Loves without hypocrisy	12:9-21
Submits to authorities	13:1-7
Fulfils the Law through Love	13:8-10
Lives as if time is short	13:11-14
Defers in minor matters	14:1-15:13

We also looked at *why* it is so crucial to have transformed lives. Because it is this that declares the glory of God – the power of God to the world.

1 Peter 2:9:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When we say no to the world. When we have our minds transformed so we serve the church, love our enemies, submit to brutal governments, minister to our neighbours, live for eternity and defer to weaker brethren – the world sees the power of the gospel.

But if we call ourselves Christians – but we love the same things as them – sex and money and pleasure. If we only love our family and trample on others. If all our time is for us. Basically – if we live just like them – then the power of the gospel is obscured in us – we are hiding the light of Christ under a bushel.

So – that is the context.

Last week, we are looked at the first mark of a transformed life. A Christian who lays down their life as a living sacrifice – **Serves the body**.

In His wisdom, the Lord designed the church like this:



One body – but with many members.

Each with gifts that together empower the body.



The result is each local congregation is made up of many parts – and a healthy church needs each and every part.

We now come to the second picture. A Christian who presents their body as a living sacrifice:

Loves without hypocrisy.

Verse 9 begins with what is really a summary for this whole section:

Let love be genuine.

The word here is actually – *Anhupocritos*. Literally – without hypocrisy.

I like the NASB translation:

Let love be without hypocrisy.

If one of the main goals of a transformed life is to be a testimony to the world of the power of Christ and the love of Christ – then our love has to be without hypocrisy – because the world sees right through hypocritical love.

You and I both know that we can smell hypocritical love. Someone who does something for selfish motives.

The love of Christ is a selfless love. A love that gives without ulterior motive.

The world loves – but theirs is a different love. They love their own. They love those who love them. They love themselves.

Consider this worldly prayer by a 20-year-old girl as she climbs into bed: “Dear God, I don’t ask anything for myself, but I do pray for my mother. Please give mother a

A passage that contains so many snippets is hard to preach on. They can tend to blend together.

So here is what I suggest. I suspect most of you are doing great at some of these statements. But I guarantee there are several – maybe many – of these statements where you aren't so good.

And I can tell you – the world cares more about your failures than your successes. If you want to see the lost saved – one way is to work on those areas of your life that are hypocritical love. The world can smell it – and they hate it.

Paul begins in verse 9 with the first picture:

Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

One of the greatest curses of the fall is that we love evil. It tantalises and titillates us. The new secretary at work is a doll. We can roll a fantasy with her around our minds and savour it for a while without feeling too guilty let alone abhorring it.

The truth is that even when we are saved, some evils still have a deadly fascination for us. And couple this with the fact that we are so proud that we think we can resist.

King David went up on his roof. And there he saw this most beautiful of women bathing. To look upon another man's wife in this way was the height of sin. David knew that. It was evil. He should have abhorred it. He should have known his weakness. He should have run downstairs.

Instead he looked again. He could handle it. He was a man after God's own heart.

And he looked again. And he was lost. He *had* to have that woman. We have all been there. Savouring sin. Thinking we have it mastered – and bang – it has us in a full Nelson.

And there is only one solution. We have to train our minds to abhor evil at the first touch. To be so sensitive to evil and the harm it does that we abhor it. We don't go for the second look because we know what it does to us and the shame it brings our God.

If not, we get desensitised to sin. The threshold lowers. We tolerate evil.

And related to this is the fact that we have to hold fast to what is good. It is not enough to turn from evil. We have to turn to good. We have to cling ferociously to good.

The best way to abhor evil is to fill our minds with what is good. It trains the senses.

In Philippians 4:8, Paul cried:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

We have to fill our minds and hearts with what is good.

Turn off the smut on TV and read the Word.

Meditate on Christ – His life, His sacrifice, His cross, Eternity with Him.

If we don't fight to turn from evil and cling to good – the fight is already lost.

The story is told of old Jack McAllister. He owned two huge dogs, a white one and a black one. Jack lived in Brady, a little town in Alaska.

Although it was illegal, everyone knew that the best entertainment in Brady came on Friday nights. The boys would gather in the local hotel and when they were good and drunk they moved out the back where there was a huge iron cage. There they had dog fights. And plenty of money changed hands over the outcome of the fights.

Jack's two dogs were regulars in the fights. They were the same size and equally ferocious and it was always a good fight. Sometimes the black one would win, other times the white.

One summer, old Jack's nephew Andrew was visiting and came with him to the fights. And Jack used the lad to lay some heavy wagers on the fight. Sometimes on the black dog, sometimes on the white dog.

But every time old Jack picked which dog would win. Finally, Andrew cornered him and asked, "OK. How do you do it? Do you drug one? Do you beat one before the fight? How do you do it?"

And old Jack looked pleased with himself. "Nah. They would spot that a mile off. It is a lot simpler. I don't feed one of the dogs for two days before the fight. He doesn't lose muscle mass in that time. He looks the same. But he will always lose. My secret is simple – the dog I feed wins."

The dog I feed wins.

You are no different. If you feed the evil, even passively by not fighting to turn from it – the evil will triumph.

But if you feed the good – the Word, prayer, spiritual disciplines – it will triumph. It is pretty simple. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

Two natures are upon my breast,
One is foul, one is blessed,
The one I love, the one I hate,
The one I feed will dominate.

Verse 10:

Love one another with brotherly affection.

Brotherly affection. This speaks of our love for the saints, the Christians. It is not enough to simply love a brother in Christ. The word here means to be *devoted* in your love.

By this all men will know that you are Christ's disciples *if* you have love for one another.

It should be one of the easiest things to love a brother in the Lord. It is not. Chapters 14 and 15 of Romans elaborates on this.

Some Christian men and women are easy to love. They reek of the love of Christ. You are drawn to them. You want to be like them. You love them.

But other saints aren't easy to love. Unfortunately some saints are downright prickly and difficult. Others are always disagreeing with us. They have an agenda. They see the world differently. Some of them don't like us.

But, of all men, the saints are the very ones we have to love in a special way. In Galatians 6:10, Paul says:

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and **especially** to those who are of the household of faith.

Devote yourself to loving one another. Love them in spite of their flaws. Seek their good.

When the world sees the church united in love – men and women, black and white, rich and poor – natural enemies – converted Jews and Muslims, Irish and British, Bosnian and Serb. Those with nothing in common – the CEO and the cleaner, the housewife and the unmarried single, the 90 year old and the teen.

And all united in true, genuine love.

This makes the world sit up and take notice. This type of brotherly love just doesn't happen in the world.

Then Paul takes this whole concept a step further:

Outdo one another in showing honour.

Christians should vie to outdo each other in bestowing honour. How often do you actually strive to outdo another Christian in honouring a brother or sister?

One thing I find very hard is the fact that when members of the church come to me to talk about someone in the church – very rarely is it to praise them. It is usually to complain about them.

If you want to talk about Sunny, tell me what a great job she is doing in the music.

If you want to speak about Peter Campbell, tell me about how much you appreciate what he is doing with our grounds.

One man I knew once told me that it was his goal to only speak words of praise. If he could not praise, then he would keep silent.

May his tribe increase.

Paul knows that one of the keys to a healthy body is praise. And this is especially true because we are naturally prone to receive criticism harshly. It has been estimated that fifteen encouraging comments or letters have the same emotional impact as one critical comment or letter. Criticism devastates us. While praise takes a long time to worm its way into our hearts, negative comments strike home immediately.

Have you ever noticed that if someone says something negative about a brother – you wonder – is it true? – and even if it is totally false – it taints the way you view them.

On the flip side – if you say something positive about someone – it is often forgotten before the conversation is over.

Remember this! Praise liberally. Criticise sparingly. I couldn't tell you how that would revolutionise the body of Christ.

Paul continues in verse 11:

Do not be slothful in zeal.

Loving the saints. Ministering in the body. It can take its toll. And we can start to fizzle. Our zeal can leach away. Our desire to do the work of the ministry can fade.

Church can grow stale. Homegroups. Ministry. The people can start to get on our nerves. We can take a little break from ministry that becomes a long break.

Our prayers can become routine and mundane. The sermons roll off our backs. We can start going through the motions.

It is easy to become jaded. I do more than my share of work. I am unappreciated. I need a break.

Remember – it is not men you are serving but Christ – that thought alone will supercharge your zeal.

Instead we must be:

Fervent in spirit.

Fervent – literally this is set on fire by the Spirit. We can't drum up enthusiasm for the Lord's work from within. That is part of the task of the Spirit of God.

All of these things that Paul describes in these verses are unnatural. They don't spring up from within us. Instead they are placed there by the Spirit of God.

In my time I have met a handful of men and women who possess love for the saints in abounding fashion. They suffer insults with grace. They always seem to praise with grace. The fruit of the Spirit drips from them. You want to be around them.

This is not natural. This is spiritual.

The Holy Spirit desires to set each of us alight with such zeal for the Lord. But as Paul told the Thessalonians, we can quench the Spirit. We can stifle this work of God in our hearts.

Practice the spiritual disciplines. Know the will of God. Follow the will of God. Be conformed to Christ. Let the Spirit of God transform your mind.

Paul continues:

Serve the Lord.

‘Serve’ is the word for a bond-slave. Paul wants us as bond-slaves to Christ. Dedicated to one master. All our zeal and fire channelled to serve Him.

Brothers and sisters – I am somewhat ashamed to say that some saints I struggle to serve. Some days I struggle to serve. Some tasks I struggle to do.

Usually I find my mindset is wrong. I am thinking – I am serving this family and that person.

No – I am serving Christ.

The story is told of a visitor to a leprosarium – who saw a nurse washing the leprous sores of a patient. He mumbled – I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars.

The nurse heard the comment and spoke up – a million dollars! – neither would I. But I do it for Christ.

Serve the Lord.

Verse 12:

Rejoice in hope.

How does a believer continue diligently and fervently serve the Lord?

He does it by rejoicing in hope. Our hope is in Christ and His kingdom and appearing. Our hope is in the Lord.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (Romans 8:35).

And because we rejoice in hope, we can:

Be patient in tribulation.

Nothing can stop us. Neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

Despite the tribulation, our hope is in Christ. It is His strength, it is the hope of His kingdom that allows us to persevere.

When tough times come – remember – our hope is in Christ, our reward is in heaven – and nothing can stop us from receiving our reward.

Be constant in prayer.

Wow – four words – but they deserve a sermon or two on their own.

How difficult is it to be constant in prayer? Yet – this is the source of our power to have transformed minds and lives.

Prayer is the umbilical cord through which God feeds His saints. The power to live godly in Christ, to love, abhor evil, to persevere – it does not come from within. It comes from Christ. It comes through prayer. The effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.

Humanly, prayer seems so useless. Prayer seems so weak. But this is an illusion. Mightier things are wrought by prayer than heaven and earth have ever dreamed.

Be constant in prayer.

Verse 13:

Contribute to the needs of the saints.

Paul is one of the most practical of men. He knows that it is one thing to say – I love you brother. It is quite another thing to see a brother in need and to pull out your wallet or open your home.

So Paul gets practical. Show your love for the saints.

This verse is referring to helping brothers and sisters in the Lord in a material sense.

At times we all need help. Encouragement. Prayer. A laugh. But at times some of us need very practical help. You have lost your job, the bills keep coming in and little mouths need food.

Your husband dies and things get out of hand financially.

Paul lets us know that love extends to practical help. If the saints need help – we should step in. In Paul's day, there was no social security or dole or Salvation Army. Those who fell on hard times perished.

We do have all of these government safety nets. But there are still times when a brother or a sister needs help. And God graciously allows us to be a channel of grace and mercy.

Similarly, we must:

Seek to show hospitality.

This refers to a specific situation in the days of Paul. The inns were not places Christians could stay.

So the brothers opened their homes. They sacrificed for the saints.

Times are much better today. But there is still ample opportunity to open our homes to missionaries, to those who visit from abroad, to those who need our help.

Verse 14:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

We might initially think that the church in Rome is undergoing some form of persecution. The images of Christians in the Colosseum or Christians dipped in tar and set alight come to mind.

But these persecutions began years after this letter to the Romans.

It seems that Paul has in mind the general persecutions that we all face.

Scorned for believing God created the world.

Pitied for believing marriage is between a man and a woman.

Hated for saying the wages of sin is death.

And there is a form of persecution that we should all be undergoing. In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul notes that:

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

The world hates Christ. So if we are salt and light in the world – we *will* be persecuted for Christ's sake.

But whether the persecution is for godly reasons or not, what is our natural reaction to persecution? To curse these who torment us.

Cursing means to call down the wrath of God on someone. To call for the vengeance of God to fall on them. To curse our persecutors before our neighbours, friends, family and workmates.

But Paul says that we are to bless them. To ask for the favour of God to fall on them.

Just imagine. Your boss has walked in and blasted you for no reason. He is a miserable little weed who hates everyone. Then he walks out of the room and all of your co-workers look at you. They expect a spray about the weed. But you tell them, "I am going to be praying for that man. Praying that God blesses him and his family."

That is salt and light.

Spurgeon said this:

Prayer is the forerunner of mercy. Loving enemies is not natural. Prayer paves the way for the power of God to enable us to love our enemies.

The first step to loving our enemies is to bless them. To pray for them. To start seeing them as needing the divine favour of God. To see them as those for whom Christ died.

Verse 15:

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Paul leaves the theme of loving your enemy for a moment to focus again on life in the fellowship of the saints.

We are united together. And as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26:

If one member suffers, all the members suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.

We are so united by the bonds of Christ that we should raise the roof with delight at the joy of other believers. When a child is born. When a prayer is answered. When a relative is saved. Rejoice with your brethren!

And when the sovereign hand of God allows a tragedy to strike – weep with them.

Their joy is ours. Their sorrow ours.

But all too often we are so self-centred that we rejoice and weep alone or worse we delight in the pain of others and envy their success.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Verse 16:

Live in harmony with one another.

Put up with each other's quirks and foibles. We all have them.

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.

In every social institution – there is a pecking order.

Schools have the cool cliques. And even in the cool clique – there is the queen bee or top jock.

But even if you are not in the cool clique – you can always look around and find a group lower than you – the losers – the outcasts.

It comes so naturally to find someone we can put down to pump ourselves up.

Jesus associated with the lowly – the prostitutes, the Gentiles, the tax gatherers – the scum of society.

Luther put it this way:

God made the world out of nothing, it is only when we become nothing that He makes something out of us.

The church has always reached out to those who find themselves marginalised. It is one of the greatest testimonies we have to the lost. We reach out to those no one else will.

But if the church does not show this genuine love – it blunts our gospel. And tragically – this haughtiness is even seen in the church. In 1 Corinthians – the rich would not gather around the Lord's Table with the poor.

We see it today – cliques. Man – they have their theology wrong, their practise wrong. They only like old hymns. Their kids are out of control – they won't come to my home.

Inside the church – outside the church – we reach out to those who are marginalised. As Christ loved us so we love them.

The world sees this and takes note.

Then at the end of verse 16, Paul says:

Never be wise in your own sight.

Do not think yourself too wise. Don't have a higher opinion of yourself than you ought.

The story is told of a time when Muhammad Ali was in his prime. He was about to take off on a commercial flight when the stewardess noticed he hadn't fastened his seat belt. She asked him to please do so. He looked at her and said, "Superman don't need no seat belt honey."

She quickly shot back, "Yeah, well Superman don't need no aeroplane either buddy. Do up your seatbelt!"

Christians can be guilty of this thinking. Thinking of ourselves too highly. The world sees this and hates it.

Without Christ – we can do nothing. Nothing! That little fact gives us perspective.

Verse 17:

Repay no one evil for evil.

Thirty years ago, there were a few parts of the Old Testament that most men and women in Australia knew. Psalm 23 and the ten commandments were at the top of the list.

Today, even most Christians couldn't tell you what the ten commandments are.

But, Christian and non-Christian – everyone knows that the Old Testament says – *an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*.

As Jesus pointed out, this is a totally misunderstood verse. It does not sanction individual vengeance. It is a guideline for the civil rulers of society not individuals.

But how is this misunderstood verse used today.

Basically it goes like this. Lady, if you cut me off in traffic, I have every right to pull out my semi-automatic pistol and blow you away.

Boss, if you have to downsize and fire me, I am justified in putting a virus on your hard disk that will permanently erase every file in minutes.

You touch me and I feel justified in paying you back 100 fold.

If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.

That is **not** the way of Christ.

Don't repay evil with evil. Instead:

But give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

Do what everyone – even non-Christians will see as honourable.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

You cannot force a man to not be your enemy. Some people just hate.

But you can do everything in your power to make him a friend. It is difficult. But love them and live at peace with them anyway.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Time and time again I have heard the refrain – but I didn't deserve to be treated that way.

Very true – you deserve to be treated far worse. God used Nebuchadnezzar as his human agent to bestow vengeance on Israel.

If God used our oppressors to give us what we deserved, then they would torture us with the most horrific instruments night and day for eternity. Teasing, belittling, hazing – these are nothing.

Even the torture and imprisonment many face in the name of Christ is nothing compared to what we deserve.

The world wants to conform us into its image. The world cries out to us to take our vengeance on others.

But these are hurting, lost, pitiful creatures. They need the love of Christ that was shed in our hearts. But that love can *only* come through Christ. It is not natural to love our enemies.

When Stephen was stoned for his faith. He cried out, "Lord do not hold this sin against them."

He loved his enemies – including Saul, the persecutor of the church. And God used this as one step in the process of turning Saul into the Apostle Paul.

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand spent fourteen years in prison under the communists of Romania. He tells this story of supernatural love. One of the pastors imprisoned with him was Dmitri. During one of their regular beatings Dmitri was hit on his neck with a hammer and became a quadriplegic. There was no hospital care, no medical help. Not even running water or linen to change him. Each day the prisoners were taken out as slave labour. Dmitri was left on the floor. He could not even raise his arms for a drink. He was helpless till the others returned.

He survived in this hellish state for years until December, 1989. The Ceausescu dictatorship was overthrown and the prisoners were released.

Some time after his release, a knock came at the door. It was the communist who had crippled him. He said, "Sir, don't believe that I have come to ask forgiveness from you. For what I have done, there is no forgiveness, neither on earth nor in heaven. You are not the only one I have tortured like this. You cannot forgive me and nobody can forgive me. Not even God. My crime is much too big. I have only come to tell you that I am sorry about what I have done. From you I go to hang myself. That is all."

The paralysed brother, Dmitri, said to him, "Sir, in all these years I have not been so sorry as I am now, that I cannot move my arms. I would like to stretch them out and

embrace you. I have prayed for you every day. I love you with all my heart. You are forgiven.”¹

How does a man pray every day for the man who crippled him and left him to die? Only by the love of Christ.

The love of Christ enabled Dmitri to lead this man to the Lord. And in so doing he found a joy that was beyond the pain of quadriplegia.

Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

Anyone who persecutes you has two fates.

Fate 1. They can die without Christ. That fate is beyond any punishment humanity could devise.

Leave their vengeance to God.

But there is a second fate. Some of those who persecute us will be like the guard who beat Dmitri. The love of Christ in us will overwhelm them. They will be broken over their sin and repent. And we will rejoice with the angels on high as another soul bows the knee before Christ.

To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

A well known custom of the day, especially in Egypt was this. If a man had sinned and wanted to express publicly how sorry he was for his sins, he would put a pan of burning coals on his head and carry it through the streets.

Having burning coals heaped on your head is painful. But even more painful is having good returned for evil. It pierces the soul of the one who did the evil. It shows how pitiful our spite was.

An officer in the army struck a young soldier without due cause. The officer was hot-tempered and prone to outbursts of anger. The soldier whom he struck was a young man and noted for his courage. He felt the insult deeply, but military discipline forbade that he should return the blow; he could only use words, “I will make you repent of it.”

A year later the army was involved in a furious engagement. The young soldier saw an officer, who was wounded and separated from his company, gallantly striving to force his way through the enemies who surrounded him.

He recognized his tormentor but rushed to his assistance anyway. Supporting the wounded man with his arm, together they fought their way through to their own lines.

¹ Cited in *The Voice of the Martyrs Newsletter*, December 1998, p. 4.

Trembling with emotion the officer grasped the hand of the soldier and stammered out his gratitude. "Noble man! What a return for a torment so carelessly given!" The young man pressed his hand in turn and with a smile said gently, "I told you I would make you repent it."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The Christian with a renewed mind knows that evil cannot overcome evil. Evil can only beget evil.

If we respond with evil – it destroys us. We ignore the Christ who died to forgive us for our evil sins. We ignore the Christ who told us to forgive our enemies and pray for them. We ignore the Christ who sees our enemy as a lost sheep in need of salvation.

If we respond with evil – it destroys our enemy. He does not see the love of Christ. He only sees the world.

Paul could have given another twenty, thirty, one hundred pictures of love that is without hypocrisy.

But this is enough to show us the type of life that will impact the world.

The world is watching you. Smelling you. Tasting you. Testing you.

Are you different? Are you what you say you are?

The boys on the work site. The girls in the office. The neighbour over the back fence.

Does Christ transform hearts and minds – or is it all for show?

We can argue about creation and the veracity of the Bible and fulfilled prophecy – and they can debate us all day. But – if we love without hypocrisy – they have no answer. No argument. No comeback.

They can't see God creating or see inerrancy. But in **you** they can see Christlike love.

And this will empower your gospel.

Read over these traits of genuine love. They are so unnatural. They do not come from within. They come from the power of the Holy Spirit transforming us from within. They come as we set ourselves to meditate on the mercies of God.

Ask God to transform you. And then – by this will all men know that you are His disciples – if you have love one for another.