Musing #69: Romans 12:9-21

Our culture has endeavored to diminish the concept of "love" to mere sentimental expressions, often devoid of substance, and, of course, to physical and sexual aspects. However, God possesses a more comprehensive definition of what constitutes the actual manifestation of love. The Apostle Paul, having emerged from his initial period of unkindness and violence as a leader, frequently emphasized his newfound understanding of love as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ. In his epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians, for instance, he elaborated on the significance of love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

2 Corinthians 6:6 We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love.

Galatians 5:22-25 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires. If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit.

It's also interesting that Paul was so clear with the Galatians, connecting love to those who share their faith in Christ. **Galatians 6:10 Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.**

Paul also intended for Timothy to comprehend that "the love of money… and greediness, was the root of all sorts of evil." I believe Paul was quite explicit in his desire for his listeners and readers to perceive the vastness of a believer's life, encompassing a multitude of ways to demonstrate love and conduct that transcend the conventional understanding of love in our society.

Romans 12:9-16 Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. And as for those who try to make your life a misery, bless them. Don't curse, bless. Share the happiness of those who are happy, the sorrow of those who are sad. Live in harmony with each other. Don't become snobbish but take a real interest in ordinary people. Don't become set in your own opinions.

Paul and Jesus always seemed to connect their teachings to common sense in a way that was easy to understand. It's important to get closer to people who are humble and caring. Phrases like "The meek will inherit the earth" and "we can't be conceited and

weep with those who weep" help us understand why we're called to "bless those who make our life miserable." Learning God's ways can really challenge us.

Luke 6:27-35 Select "But I say to all of you who will listen to me: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who treat you badly." —"As for the man who hits you on one cheek, offer him the other one as well! And if a man is taking away your coat, do not stop him from taking your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you, and when a man has taken what belongs to you, don't demand it back." — "Treat men exactly as you would like them to treat you." — "If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to get your money back, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners and expect to get their money back. No, you are to love your enemies and do good and lend without hope of return.

Romans 12:17-21 Don't pay back a bad turn by a bad turn, to anyone. Don't say "it doesn't matter what people think," but see that your public behavior is above criticism. As far as your responsibility goes, live at peace with everyone.

It's not always straightforward, as we learned, for instance, that Paul and Barnabas had different visions for their ministry and chose to go their separate ways.

19 Never take vengeance into your own hands, my dear friends: stand back and let God punish if he will. For it is written: 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay' —these are God's words: 'Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head'. Don't allow yourself to be overpowered with evil. Take the offensive—overpower evil by good!

Only God truly understands everything, including our hearts. He doesn't expect us to "win our enemy" or "become best friends forever with him." Instead, the real challenge is to triumph over our own thoughts and feelings. We can all experience hate and conflict, even nations. However, it's those who overcome these challenges who truly show God's grace and mercy in their everyday lives and relationships. These are the areas where we have the power to make a difference.

Philippians 4:8 (Phillips) Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

Our behavior should reflect who we are—righteous, holy, saints in God's family.