

## "AUTHENTIC LOVE AND THE BODY OF CHRIST"

(Romans 12:9-16)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Paul continued his appeal for grace in the horizontal dimension by calling for "unhypocritical" love. Whereas hypocritical love is nothing more than impulsive urges and idle feelings, genuine love takes action to do what is in the best interest of the other person. However, genuine love is also discerning, not gullible (12:9). Call me unromantic, but I don't believe in unbounded love or love without limits. Genuine love never spills over the boundaries of truth on one side and discernment on the other. For example, a child may say to his or her parent, "If you love me, you'll give me what I want." A wise parent will respond, "Because I love you, I'll give you what is best for you."

Paul went on to describe love as affectionate, honoring, enthusiastic, patient, generous, gracious, sympathetic, and ultimately fueled by humility, seeking the highest, greatest good of another before its own (12:10-16). Interestingly, Paul's exhortation on authentic love immediately follows his description of spiritual gifts and the body of Christ (12:3-8). He did the same in his letter to the Corinthians. His famous "love chapter" (1 Cor. 13) follows his lengthy description of body-life (1 Cor. 12).

Most of us have little trouble understanding how these truths apply to love within a household or among members of our extended family. While we frequently fail to apply what we know, we nevertheless know what we should do. But how does one demonstrate "love without hypocrisy" within a local church body, especially one serving hundreds of believers we cannot possibly know personally?

The answer is by serving. God has given you a supernatural ability to function within the body of Christ as a vital member. You have within you a gift that may or may not be influenced by your personality type or your training or your vocation. It is supernaturally provided by the Holy Spirit because He loves you and—just as importantly—He loves your church. He has specifically arranged for you and the body to need one another. In other words, your church is incomplete without you, like a body missing a vital organ, and when you fail to supply what God has placed within you, the whole church suffers.

Let me offer a few practical suggestions for those who may not have served in church and perhaps don't know where to begin.

1. *Know yourself.* I am not a big fan of spiritual gift inventories. The only way to discover one's spiritual gift is to get busy serving! However, a well-designed spiritual gift



test or a church-specific personality profile can be a good place to start if you don't already know how you would like to help. Your church staff may have a survey they favor, or you can find them online. Don't ignore the results. At the same time, pay close attention to the desires of your heart. Both are important. Do you find yourself drawn to a particular ministry or role?

2. *Ask for help.* Call your church office and ask who would be the appropriate person to help you find a place to serve, then set an appointment. At the meeting, explain your desire to serve and ask for help finding the best match between your desire and the church's need. Be prepared to revive the poor soul! This will be a delightful shock. I can count on both hands (with fingers left over) the times I've had parishioners follow through in that manner.

3. *Faithfully serve!* Most churches will ask you to commit to a minimum term of service. You will undoubtedly face challenges from the demands of the role, and you will be tempted to shy away. . . or to quit. But stick with it. Share your struggles with your leader, ask for help, and faithfully serve to the best of your ability. Then, at the end of your term, use your experience to find a more suitable role. Eventually—and sooner than you think—you will have found your place. One reminder: It will call for sacrifice. But as the years pass, the words of the great preacher John Henry Jowett continue to ring true: "Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing."

4. *Discover your gift.* As you faithfully and sacrificially offer unhypocritical love within your congregation, you will discover where and how you best serve. When the work becomes a labor of love, when you feel energized by the tiredness, you will have discovered your place in the body. That's when the joy really begins! Strange as it may seem, the ministry is run by tired people!

Like most things in life, authentic love is neither quick nor easy. But when you make serving the body of Christ a priority, you won't be able to imagine life without it. Furthermore, the rewards that come your way will be remarkable.