

Romans 12:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Analysis

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Paul transitions from spiritual gifts to practical ethics, beginning with love. The Greek phrase **love be without dissimulation** (ἢ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος, hē agapē anypokritos) literally means 'unhypocritical love' or 'sincere love'—anypokritos means 'without a mask,' contrasting genuine affection with theatrical pretense. Christian love isn't sentimental feeling but active, sacrificial commitment to another's good. It must be authentic, not performance. Two participles follow, describing what sincere love looks like: **abhor that which is evil** (ἀποστυγοῦντες τὸ πονηρόν, apostygountes to ponēron)—the verb means 'detest utterly, shrink from with horror.' True love hates sin.

The second command, **cleave to that which is good** (κολλώμενοι τῷ ἀγαθῷ, kollōmenoi tō agathō), uses a strong verb meaning 'glue oneself to, cling to'—the same word for marriage union (Genesis 2:24 LXX). Love isn't morally neutral; it requires moral discrimination. You can't love people well without hating the evil that destroys them and clinging to the good that blesses them. This verse introduces a cascade of practical exhortations (verses 9-21) on how transformed minds (verse 2) produce transformed relationships.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman friendship was often transactional—alliances based on mutual benefit, status, or political advantage. Hypocrisy was endemic in Roman social life,

where public honor concealed private vice. Jewish law emphasized holiness through separation from evil, but sometimes became pharisaical—external righteousness masking internal corruption. Paul calls Christians to a higher standard: genuine love that both rejects evil and embraces good, rooted not in law but in the renewed mind's discernment of God's will.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Where in your relationships might you be wearing a 'mask'—showing affection while harboring resentment, judgment, or selfish motives?
2. How can you better 'abhor evil' in a culture that celebrates moral ambiguity and calls intolerance the only sin?
3. What 'good' should you be 'clinging to' more intentionally—habits, relationships, truth—that bless others and glorify God?

Interlinear Text

‘Η ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος ἀποστυγοῦντες τὸ^{G3588}
Let love be without dissimulation ^{G26} ^{G505} ^{G3588}
Abhor ^{G655}

πονηρόν κολλώμενοι τῷ ἀγαθῷ^{G4190} ^{G2853} ^{G3588}
that which is evil cleave to that which is good ^{G18}

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 34:14 (Evil): Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

1 Peter 4:8 (Love): And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

1 Timothy 1:5 (Love): Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

1 Peter 1:22 (Love): Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Psalms 101:3 (Evil): I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.

Psalms 97:10 (Love): Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (Good): Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Amos 5:15 (Love): Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

Hebrews 12:14 (Parallel theme): Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

2 Corinthians 8:8 (Love): I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.