

Love is the most excellent way.

Previous review: Romans 12:3-8. God gave us gifts by the measure of our faith. These gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to us to support and serve the church together. Through these, saved Christians grow up into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Today's words: It is about the act of love that believers are to do. **Verse 9: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."** There are various gifts of God in the Bible. **1 Corinthians 12:7-11.** Spiritual gifts include "a message of wisdom, a message of knowledge, faith, healing the sick, miraculous powers, prophesying, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues." **Rom. 12:7-8.** There are also practical gifts that serve the church, such as "to serve, to teach, to encourage, to give, to lead and to show mercy." Let us believe that these gifts God given are practical and pray that God will give them to us too so that we can receive them if we need them for church formation or growth in our own faith.

Love is the best of the various gifts of God. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. "And yet I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." Love is the most excellent way. Even if you have great gifts of Holy Spirit, if there is no love in them, they are worthless. On the other hand, if you have love, it does not matter if you are not good at something. Love covers everything.

Human love is limited and not sincere in many ways. For example, people are disappointed because of politicians' pledges that are only words without accomplishment. The scandals at the Johnny's entertainment office and Ippei Mizuhara who is the suspect of Otani's interpreter have been very shocking to the public. At the very least, we hope to parents' love. But it is also limited by abuse and other problems.

God's love is sincere. Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The love of Jesus on the cross is sincere and unfailing. If Jesus had only performed in staring the wall for years to realize God's will, He would not have forgiven our sins. Jesus could have given us eternal life through His action of dying in our place. The love of Jesus Christ transcends religion and is his love that surpasses anything or anyone else in this world.

As children of God, we should accomplish the love of Jesus Christ. Verses 10-16: “Be devoted one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves (10). Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord (11). Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer (12). Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality (13). Bless those who persecute you: bless and do not curse (14). Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn (15). Live in harmony with one another. Do not be conceited (16).” Just to give you a quick count, there are 18 acts of love. What are you best at? And what are your weakest at? I think you probably couldn't answer immediately about ‘blessing and not cursing those who persecute you’. It is really difficult to forgive others.

Do good against evil as children of God. Verse 17: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.” If you are driving and a car behind you starts to taunt you, many people may think for a moment, ‘I'm going to taunt them back.’ We tend to respond to evil with evil. However, God tells us not to repay evil for evil and to do good what is right.

Example: ①A car accident involving an American missionary who had come to Korea. The accident led to the establishment of an emergency medical system in Korea by his own son who was bereaved. The missionary had taught this God’s word to his children always before facing the miserable accident. And thankfully, one of his children dreamed that he would become a doctor in the future and that dream came true to expand emergency medical care in Korea. He really prayed that God would make the good for the evil of his father's miserable death. ②We can see another case. Ms. Megumi Yokota’s parents who are an abductees' families of North Korea in Japan have been rescuing abductees continually over for 40 years by informing the world about the North Korean abduction issue.

However, it is really difficult to forgive people. If we are hurt, we may struggle from the desire for revenge. Especially when we are victims of crimes, we experience unimaginable suffering. But God still teaches us not to take revenge.

Revenge is God's business. Verses 18-19, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (18). Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge.; I will repay,” say the Lord (19).” God says that revenge is His job. Deuteronomy 32:35: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.” There are actually a lot of unreasonable things happening in our lives. Is it really possible not to take revenge on our enemies?

King David is a good example. He did not take revenge. King David's life was threatened because of his father-in-law, King Saul. 1 Samuel 26:17-25. David did not kill Saul when he

was in a situation to kill King Saul (1 Samuel 26:9). David's man found the security on King Saul's side lax and advised David that he could kill King Saul now, but David did not take revenge to his enemy. David says in 1 Samuel 26:10. "As surely as the Lord lives", he said, "the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish." King David knew very well that vengeance was God's doing. This attitude of David was an act of repaying evil with good.

If your enemies are hungry, feed them. Look at verse 20. 'On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you heap burning coals on his head.'" The phrase "heap burning coals on his head" has two meanings. It means "to heap up God's judgment and wrath." And it also means, "His face will turn red because of his shame like burning coals,"

Let's go back to the earlier story of David and King Saul. King Saul, whose life was saved from David at the critical moment, says 1 Samuel 26:21 "Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not to harm you again. Surely, I have acted like a fool and have been terrible wrong." King Saul repented of his sins through David, who let him go without killing him. David's forgiveness would have made Saul's face as red as coals fire on his head and made him feel ashamed. David responds to the repentant Saul. 1 Samuel 26:23-24: "The Lord rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed (23). As surely as I valued your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all trouble (24)". Moved by this wonderful mercy of David, Saul replies. 1 Samuel 26:25 "Then Saul said to David, "May you be blessed, David my son; you will do great things and surely triumph. So, David went on his way, and Saul returned home (25)." David forgave his enemy Saul and conversely was blessed by Saul, his enemy. And the interesting thing is that their lives were headed in different directions. David went David's way and Saul went back to Saul's place. We can realize from this; God leads each person's life path in a different direction. The offender goes the way of the offender, and the victim lives the way of the victim. In the end, King Saul was attacked by his enemies and committed suicide. And King David became King of the Jews.

Also, King David fed his enemies' families. David did not take revenge on the descendants of Saul's family when he took the kingdom. Instead, he took care of Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul. Mephibosheth had fallen when he was five years old while escaping from the war and was crippled and disabled (2 Samuel 4:4). When David became king of Judah, he took care of Mephibosheth, a descendant of Saul, and restored King Saul's honor. 2 Samuel 9:7: "Do not be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged

to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.” This attitude of David was like the words of today's verse: he fed his enemies when they were hungry and gave them something to drink when they were thirsty.

David and God have a good relationship. Later David confesses this. 2 Samuel 22:20-21: “He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me (20). The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.” God rewards David's righteousness and restores his honor and God is really pleased with David's very existence. To such David, God praises David in this way when He blesses David's son Solomon. In 1 Kings 9:4-5a, “As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I commanded and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever(5a).” God praised King David for his righteousness and obedience to God with an innocent heart. God is pleased with and blesses those who, like David, forgive even their enemies from the heart.

We should learn to forgive like David. God also says to us now in verse 21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. 1 John 4:16 “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” The God of love has realized His love for us by sending Jesus Christ. And He wants us to have the love that loves even our enemies. Those who know God's love are able to forgive those who have hurt them.

Many Christians have been able to forgive. So, we can forgive, too. Joseph in Genesis forgave his brothers. King David forgave his father-in-law, Saul. The Apostle Paul and the first Christians also forgave the Roman soldiers and Jews who persecuted them. This Christian love has been passed down from generation to generation.

Corrie Ten boom was imprisoned for helping Jews and lost her family in the concentration camps. She testified like this: “I was in a Nazi camp with my sister Beth. And she was tortured by a Nazi soldier and died in prison. But I saw this German soldier at a testimony meeting, and I forgave him. I was able to do it, and so can you. There is no body had experienced in the concentration camp, aren't you?” I heard her strong message from YouTube. And I thought that the Holy Spirit urged me to forgive my enemies. “Yoko, you can also forgive those who tormented you, can't you? You can do it.” After that, I prayed with you in MJCF and was able to forgive my father and ex-husband. However, I am also a human being, and problems will arise again as I deal with them. But I know that God is pleased with my attitude and heart to forgive.

Forgiveness deepens our fellowship with God. I have received many blessings from God through this process of forgiveness. Above all, I no longer have the fatigue and heavy wall-like

hang-ups about hating others. And I truly believe that my intimate fellowship with God has deepened. When I reunited with my father or sent Kenta and Taishi to my ex-husband's place, I experienced that this wall came crashing down in one fell swoop. An indescribable sense of freedom and openness were given to me by God. I soon realized that.

However, it is a strange thing about human beings; I could forgive even my abusive father for decades, or my ex-husband who had done terrible things to me, but sometimes I face that I could not forgive those who spoke rudely to me on a daily life and so on. But I try that I remember the biblical teaching to return evil with good at this time and pray for the strength to forgive. The Holy Spirit will then lead me to be able to forgive.

If you also have someone you cannot forgive, please pray, "I want to forgive that person." I believe that the Holy Spirit will be pleased with your heart and attitude and will work from today.

Let's pray together. Loving Heavenly Father! Thank you that God is love. I pray that we too, as His children, will be people of love. And if there is someone we have not yet forgiven, please lead us, Holy Spirit, to be able to forgive that person willingly. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.