

Loving Ministry

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[0 : 00] We are in a nine week series on Romans 12 and this is week number nine so we'll finish up today.

In the past four weeks including this week we are looking specifically at what Anne read for us verses nine to twenty one. And we've been talking about love every single week so we've been looking at the way that Paul calls us to love and all its different forms here and really if you were to summarize the whole thing you could just read 1 John 4 verse 19, we love because he first loved us.

So in Jesus Christ God knew you to the very bottom in the midst of all your unloveliness and he loved you all the way to the sky no matter what despite who you are he loved you and so you go and do likewise.

That's how Jesus puts it in John chapter 13. So if you've experienced the gospel in your life Paul says go and love and Paul's giving us the ways to do that what that looks like.

So we've looked at loving God, loving one another within the church family, loving the city, loving Edinburgh and everybody all the people within it and then lastly this week we're going to think about loving ministry, loving the ministry that he's given us.

[1 : 21] So that's the next thing that he talks about here. You can see it right there in verse 11 at the very end he says serve the Lord. That's his capstone commands. Serve the Lord, love ministry.

So let's think about that. First there is a call here in this passage to love the ministry that you've been given. Even though the word loves not there we're going to see that it is there and then secondly we have a problem Paul calls it out ministry laziness.

He says don't be lazy in ministry we have that problem and then third and finally how to change how to grow how to do ministry in the light of that. So let's think about those three things.

First the call we have here to love ministry. All right we've said every single week that love is never mere feelings. It's never mere desire.

It's never mere emotion or affection. Instead to really have love, love always takes shape in some visible way. And so when you look across the Bible love is not just that moment where you see her or him across the room for the first time you know in the heart flutters a little bit.

[2 : 30] That's not love. It is love, a type of love but love is much more than that. Love is patience. That's what Paul says. Love is kindness. Love is joy.

Love is bearing with other people's faults. Love is forgiveness. Love is all the different forms that it takes expressed in virtue. So Galatians 5 love is the beginning.

Joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control are all the forms that love takes. So love always takes shape. It always takes form. And here in verses 11 and 12 love takes the form.

You can see it in verse 11 of a quote, boiling heart for ministry. So that's the metaphor Paul uses. It's not as obvious right here in the ESV.

But you'll see in the ESV it says in verse 11, be fervent in spirit. That's the second little clause, be fervent in spirit. The word fervent there is a metaphor and it's literally the word boiling.

[3 : 35] And so one commentator says it could be very literally translated something like, when it comes to the things of the spirit or the spiritual, be boiling.

So he's talking about metaphorically here about a pot on your stovetop, today at lunch, a kettle, and you put water in it and you set the flame and it, what happens, it boils.

And then eventually you leave it, you forget it and it boils over. That's the metaphor he chooses. He says, be boiling over in love and in ministry, for ministry was for spiritual things.

When it comes to the things of the spirit, your heart should boil over the top like water over a kettle. All right. And that means another commentator says he's saying something like be inflamed for ministry.

One said, have heartburn for ministry. Have indigestion for the ministry. Your heart should be hurting because you're boiling over with pain.

[4 : 33] You have chest pain for the sake of wanting to serve the Lord. Verse 11c. All right. So you say, well, okay, I see that he's giving that command, but you're trying to frame this as a focus on love, love, love, love every week.

Where's the word love here? Now you see in verse nine, remember he has said, love everybody, agape is the Greek word he uses, which is gift giving love for anybody in the world.

And then in verse 10 he uses this particular word, store gay, which is the word for family affection. Love the church like you love your family. You're so bound to them in Jesus Christ.

And then you come to verse 11 and he doesn't use the word love in verse 11, not at all, but he moves from loving everybody to loving the church to verse 11, loving the ministry you've been given without saying the word love.

And that's obvious because he says, don't be lazy with ministry. Be boiling over for it. Don't be without zeal. Instead your heart should be pouring over, boiling for the sake of ministry.

[5 : 33] In other words, he's talking about a heart that has such affection for the spirit, the spirit of God, for God himself, that the way that boiling over takes form is hell, ministry.

So in other words, he's saying when you are loving, loving, loving God deeply in your daily life, how do you see that? And what ways does that take shape? And he says it takes shape in having a real zeal and a fervor, a boiling, a pot pouring over for the sake of the ministry, whatever ministry God has given you.

That's the way that love of God, in other words, takes form, takes shape. That's what love of God looks like to the outward world. It looks like ministry. It looks like being active in ministry for God. Now the question's obvious. Do you have that? Do you boil over in fervor for ministry because you have a deep, deep love for God that keeps growing and growing and growing?

That's what Paul's saying. And you say today, I can remember times in my life where I did have that, but I don't really feel that way today.

[6 : 43] Sometimes I have that. Rarely I have that. And of course he's talking to Christians here, where I'm not sure that I've ever really felt like I was boiling for the sake of ministry, that the love of God was that serious in my heart.

Or you might say, what exactly does it mean to serve the Lord, to be on ministry? So I'm not even sure exactly what that means because I think of ministry as the minister, somebody like me ordained and I think of me as a recipient.

So what exactly does this mean? So we have to just take two minutes to say, well, what ministry is Paul talking about? He says, be zealous, be fervent, be boiling over.

But exactly for what? In what way? What is this ministry that he's talking about? All of you know the word minister or ministry. You know it because you're here.

We have a minister, two ministers. The Free Church of Scotland has many ministers. These are ordained positions that we title minister. Not every country, nation, church community uses that word very often.

[7 : 53] So the church I come from in the past rarely uses the word minister a lot less than just says pastor. Different traditions do it differently. The UK knows this word better than most other places because this word minister or ministry has been adopted into the political order.

So we call certain politicians and certain positions ministers here. JK Rowling made this word world famous when she labeled it the ministry of magic.

And so everybody sees this word all across the world and says most people look at a place like the UK or the Commonwealth and say, well, why use the word minister for a politician? And all of you know that answer better than I know it.

But the reason is actually quite obvious and that's because it comes from the Bible. And in the Bible, the word translated ministry or minister is almost every single time the Greek word deacon. So anytime you see the word ministry or minister in the Bible, it's actually just the word deacon. Be on ministry means go deaconing. It's made into a verbal form.

[8 : 59] Do deaconing, be a minister. Do ministry, go and be a deacon. That's what it means. The word deacon is the word for service in the New Testament, the word for service.

And so a minister is a servant. Ministry is service. And so Paul says, verse 11, see served the Lord ministry, true ministry is just being a deacon, a servant for the sake of the Lord, because of your love for God.

All right, simple enough. Where is that word here? Is Paul really talking about ministry in that way here? And you see it right there in verse 11, don't you?

At the very end he says, capstone, serve the Lord. And you say, there's ministry, deacon for the Lord. Be a deacon, be a servant for the Lord.

That's what he's talking about. But he takes it up to level 11 here. He turns it up a notch because he replaces the normal word for be a minister to the Lord, be a deacon for the Lord with another word.

[10 : 03] And the word here at the end of verse 11 is the word slave. So he doesn't use the word deacon here like he usually does. Instead, right here he says, serve the Lord, it actually is be a slave to the Lord.

Now the reason that the ESV and lots of modern translations choose not to translate it that way is well known to all of you. It's because it's very difficult for us modern people after African shadow slavery and the many other forms of horrific slavery that we've seen from the 17th, 18th, 19th century in particular to look at the word, the phrase be a slave into the Lord and read that without bringing in all the connotations of the late modern period and the horrors of slavery in the late modern period.

And we don't have time today to unpack that and all the things that the Bible actually means when it talks about the concept of slavery. But let me just give you one because this is what Paul's referring to when he says be a slave, so boiling over for ministry that the presupposition is that you are a slave to the Lord.

The Lord is your master. What does he mean? Jesus and Paul both use the same word in multiple locations. Jesus uses it a lot in his parables where he talks about being a slave unto the Lord through this image of the first century steward.

So you may have come across this in some of the parables. Paul calls himself the steward of God, the steward of the ministry. And the steward is a special word that refers to a type of slave.

[11 : 42] It's the word for a slave to God in ministry. And the reason it's unique is because the steward in the first century, Greco-Roman context, was a person that was on the one hand a slave in a household.

They were a slave. They of them was required unconditional obedience to their master. And yet the steward was a position where the master had said, and yet at the same time, you are free.

So it's a person who had given themselves unconditionally to the master. And so the master had turned around and said, therefore, you are free to the point where the master would say, you take my household business, my economy, and I give you all the resources to go and do with this what you want to do with it.

So the steward would be highly educated. The steward would be given all the resources of the master to grow the family business. And so the steward actually would become the CEO, if you will, of the master's household.

And so on the one hand, the steward was unconditionally obedient to the master. On the other hand, he was given this great freedom, all these resources. And typically the steward would eventually be adopted as a son or a daughter into the household of the master.

[12 : 58] Now this is the word that Paul chooses to use over and over and over again in his letters to talk about being enslaved to the true master. He's saying that God has made you, if you've given yourself to God in the gospel, he's made you into a steward where God says you are unconditionally, you are to be unconditionally obedient, a true servant, and at the same time, you've been completely freed.

You've been given the resources of the master. You've become a CEO of the master's ministry to go and steward the resources he's given you in the world wherever God has put you.

Now if you are a son or daughter of the king today, if you believe the gospel, if you've been made a steward, God says, Paul says here, you are a minister.

You're a minister. You've been called to the ministry. And Charles Spurgeon, that great 19th century prince of preachers, he comes in and asks us a really important question, a penetrating

question about whether or not your life is committed to this.

And this is what he said. He asked, is God really your master in all of your acts of serving?

[14:17] So if you're here today and many of you I see and I know and you are constantly serving, you're serving on AV and music and door duty and hospitality and in Crashing kids church and Sunday school and you're going on the caravan and you're doing sparkle sisters ministry and the list goes on and on and on.

You're loving people in your neighborhood. You're bringing meals to people. You're seeking to be salt and light in the midst of your workplace. And we could talk forever about all the forms that those ministries take in your own life.

And here's what Spurgeon says. He says true love begins remember with subjective motivation that is fundamentally selfless, that is fundamentally God oriented, not self oriented.

And so he asked this, is your deepest, if your deepest motive in ministry is to be active, to appear to be diligent and to win commendation for taking your share in the church's work.

You have not served God. Instead, you have sacrificed for the sake of others in order to secure a reputation, to feel good about yourself, to be religious.

[15:33] You have done it for you. Oh, beloved, this is a point, the very simple to speak of that is very searching. We find here that much of that which glitters will be found not to be gold.

And he said, here's how you know, here's how you know if your ministry life, your service is unto the master or to the self. He says, when you serve, when you share the gospel, when you give your time, when you give your money and your resources, he asks, whose smile is it that gladdens you? Whose frown would truly depress you? Whose honor do you seek in all that you are doing? Do you seek in all that you're doing and all the serving?

Are you burnout? Maybe ask the question, do I seek the Lord's smile? Is that why I serve? Now this is exactly what was happening in Job chapter one.

In Job chapter one, Satan comes to God and says to God, Job is your servant.

[16:45] You say he's blameless. He's committed. He's a great minister. He lives blamelessly. He serves you from top to bottom. He raises his children in the right way.

He does all these things so well. And Satan says, but if you take away the good things from Job's life, what you're going to find out is that he has served you for one reason and one reason alone. And that's because he wanted blessings. He wanted a great life. He wanted you to bless him. And you did. But you take that away and you will see that deep down in Job's heart, every single act of ministry Job ever did was about him, not about you, God.

Satan came and said, can you really say, Lord, that Job really serves you? Because I don't think so. And what happened? God struck Job. He allowed Satan to strike Job in many, many ways.

And if you read the book of Job very carefully, what you find out is that Satan was sort of right. That Job comes out on the other side with faith. And God says you're forgiven for everything you ever did because of your faith.

[17:51] And he approves Job. But at the same time, many, many, many, many of Job's motivations were proven to be false. His friends were even worse.

And you see, that means that Satan was pointing out something that is at least partially true in every single one of our lives. You know, if you're a Christian today and you look deep, deep, deep, deep down, you have to be willing.

You have to be honest with me to say, I know that deep down, even in the way that you say I serve, even in ministry, even in every act I try to give to other people, I exist to some degree for my own glory.

I want to be known for this. I want a reputation. I want to be honored. I want the church to honor me. I want people to honor me. How about this? When I pray, my prayer life is weak until I need something.

You know, when I really need something, then I come to the Lord and pour myself out. And that act alone proves, it shows, that ultimately, fundamentally, at the bottom of my heart, I struggle.

[18:57] We struggle with the fact that the glory of God, service of the Master and His glory alone, is not our ultimate and final motivation quite often. Here's the fix.

The fix is to say, I know that's me. And then to say, if I want to boil over, if I want the water to pour over the sides for ministry in the right way, for the right reasons, the question is, are you growing in loving God Himself above everything else in your life?

You see, the love of true ministry, real service, is proportional to the degree in which the love of God, for God, is growing in your heart.

When you say, God, teach me to love you more than stuff, to love you more than reputation, to love you more than anything else, the blessings of this life, love for God grows and so true ministry grows at the very same time.

You see, they work together in proportion to one another. Here's the question, have you drawn, have you been drawing near to the beauty of the love of God for you in the gospel lately?

[20 : 16] Every day. Is there a time every day where you draw near to the love of God for you in the beauty of the gospel every day? And see, we're either always moving in greater depths of the love for God or we're moving away from that.

And the decision there is how close, how near, how often are you drawing near to the Lord in seeing the beauty of the love of God for you in the gospel day after day after day.

Jesus Christ, we're told, boiled over. Jesus Christ had heartburn on the cross. He loved you so much that he had serious chest pains for you as he died on the cross.

He wanted to save you and to have you as part of his family so bad that his heart was beating and bursting out from within himself for you as he became a slave to your sin.

The great master of all the universe became completely enslaved to you when he went to the cross. He became the servant of your sin because of your sin so that you could be a steward of the household of God, truly free.

[21 : 27] And so the question is, do you draw near to that gospel beauty to be able to say more and more, I love, I love, because he first loved me?

Now that's the long point. We have two short ones. Second, we have a problem. The problem is no matter how near we draw near to the beauty of gospel love, Paul is giving us these commands because in this life we are not yet who we will be.

And that means we will always struggle to some degree with mixed motives and gospel laziness, ministry laziness. So that's what he says here in verse 11 at the very beginning, do not be slothful, lazy, and zeal for ministry.

So he points out our problem. He says we are always going to struggle with laziness for ministry because of mixed motivation in our hearts.

And you can maybe say with me today that when you became a Christian, if you have a conversion experience in your life where there was a real distinction, you might say, you know, I remember the days when I was, as they put it, on fire for Jesus.

[22 : 41] There was years in my life where I was on fire for Jesus. And like everything else in life, the shine seems to wear off. And I don't feel that way all the time anymore.

And Paul is saying fundamentally, if you're struggling with ministry zeal, you've got to encounter gospel beauty every single day, the love of God for you. But then there's one more thing, and I'll just point this out briefly.

The Bible warns us here also about what the culture can take away from you when it comes to ministry. So every single one of us is tempted also by the culture to pull away from ministry zeal because of one particular thing, I think, in the modern world.

And the Bible points this out for us. And that's the diagnosis, the diagnosis, is that we've been told over and over again in our lives that faith, ministry, being zealous for ministry is something that should only happen in your private life, not your public life.

So the heartbeat of post-enlightenment modernity is faith. It's for the private realm, never the public realm. And Paul is saying, have ministry fervor and zeal everywhere.

[23 : 52] Be public about your faith. And our great problem that we face in the modern world is that we're taught to never be public about our faith, that it's a personal private matter. Now, the Bible deals with this very directly.

The problem of ministry laziness in Revelation 3, it nails the modern issue. Revelation 3, the seven letters to the seven churches. One of those was Laodicea.

And in Laodicea, the Spirit said, I'm upset with you. I'm angry at you because you are, quote, lukewarm. Remember that he says, you're not hot. You're not cold.

You're lukewarm. Now, many people have interpreted this in a particular way, something like this.

You're not hot, meaning you're not on fire for Jesus anymore on the one hand. And I wish you were.

On the other hand, you're not cold either, which many people have thought means. You're also not against Jesus. You're not hot. You're not on fire for Christ, but you're not against Him either. [24 : 47] You're in this lukewarm, fuzzy place where you're religious but indifferent. You're lukewarm. And he says, I hate that. Now close, but that's not exactly what it means.

Laodicea set between two towns, very near two towns. And on the one town to the right of Laodicea, there was a hot spring. You would go there to bathe to wash your clothes.

In the other town to the left of Laodicea, there was a cold running river, a water of life sort of river where the Laodiceans would have to go to drink. So in Laodicea itself, we know now because of historical scholarship that the river in Laodicea was rancid.

It was still water most of the time. It was muddy. You couldn't drink from it. You couldn't use it. And so the Laodiceans are being told, you know, there's hot springs to your right. There's cold water to your left that you can drink from.

And you are just like this rancid water in your own town that's undrinkable. Now that means that hot and cold are both good. They go to the cold water to drink.

[25 : 50] They go to the hot water to bathe. They're both good. And so that means something like this, I think, that he's saying, I wish you were hot, warm, full of love for people, for ministry, for the other Laodiceans that don't know Christ.

And I wish you were cold. And cold water means committed to the refreshment of the truth, that you loved people and you also are truth people at the same time, theology people and warm affection for people simultaneously.

And he says, and you aren't either. Your lukewarm lukewarmness, what is it lukewarmness is private faith. He's saying you're neither hot nor cold.

You're not for people. You're not for the truth. You come to church, but you keep it all to the inside. The issue of lukewarmness is an issue of private faith. It's laziness.

It's no, it's no visible faith. It's completely hidden faith. And that means Paul is saying, have zeal for the ministry, and zeal for the ministry is just to ask the simple question, do you have a public faith?

[27 : 02] Do people around you know that you're a Christian? Are you the aroma of Christ for others that don't yet know Him?

That's the issue of ministry laziness. And it's not hyperemotionalism. It's not camp-like, mountaintop experiences. That's not what's being referenced at all. Instead, it's just saying, are you the aroma of Christ in the world?

Do you smell like Christ? Do you show joy and forgiveness and peace and patience and gentleness and trust and repentance and humility? Do you serve your enemies even when they're mean to you?

That's the aroma of Christ, it's public faith. The diagnosis, and we'll move to the final point. To what degree is my faith hidden?

To what degree do I know that I hide my faith from the world? Do I live in such a way that I hide who I am in Christ Jesus, that I'm not public about who I am?

[28 : 03] The solution is the same. He says, are you struggling with ministry laziness, with lukewarmness? We all are. He says, you will only love, you will only boil over in public faith to the degree that you every single day draw near to the love of God for you and the beauty of the gospel.

Draw near every day to break through ministry laziness and lukewarmness, to become a public servant for the Lord. Now lastly, and we'll close with this.

You say, okay, I know that's me, I know that's me. I'm ready to do it, I'm ready to grow as a Christian in this area. How does it look? Now we could extend, I have a few minutes left, we could extend this series by at least 13 more weeks by my account.

You say, please, no. But we could because we could go through every single form that this ministry could then take shape. How do you do it?

Well, just think, we've been looking at Romans 12 for nine weeks. Let me just give you a list from just this chapter of the forms that ministry can take. Verse 13 to 21, hospitality, praying blessings upon those who persecute you and hurt you, looking for good in harmony with one another.

[29 : 26] Live peaceably with all. Do not seek revenge. Forgive, clothe and feed even your enemies. Back up a paragraph. Verses three to eight, prophesy, that's teach people about the gospel, share the gospel.

Serve the word deacon as used here. Literally clear tables, wash dishes, use your time for people. Exhortations, speak the truth to people who need to hear it. Encouragement, generosity, contribute to the needs of the saints financially, acts of mercy, caring for the hurting and the poor.

Verse 12, three more. He says, rejoice and hope, be patient and suffering, be constant in prayer. Now by my account, that is 14 different forms that ministry takes in life.

And that's just one chapter. So there's lots of ways you can go and be boiling over in ministry. Lots and lots and lots. And we have to actually come back to the Bible and say, God, what exactly is the ministry that you've told me to do?

Well, there's 14 of them, right? And within that, we have to look and say, what exactly in my life, where exactly do I find my life written in the commands of a place like Romans chapter 12?

[30 : 36] So let me pick one of the 14, and we could do 13 more weeks, but let me just do one and we'll move on back to Mark next week. And that's the one he gives us here in Romans 12, 11, at the very, sorry, 12, 12, he says, be constant in prayer.

Now the reason I want to choose this one as we close is because it's immediate. You can walk away today, you can even right now, as we talk about it, grow and engage in a form of ministry in a way that's more and better and greater than ever before by being constant in prayer.

You can apply it to your life at this moment, at this very moment. And just a minute we're going to pray, you can do it right then. And here's what it means. He's telling us here that being constant in prayer is the ministry.

It is ministry. What is being constant in prayer mean? Luke 11, Jesus gives a little parable and he says, imagine that you have a friend who comes to your door at midnight.

Now midnight in the first century, it was more like 4 AMR time because people went to bed when the lights went out, when the sun went down. And he bangs on your door and says, I'm here, open up, I need three loaves of bread to feed my friends.

[31 : 55] And what do you say? You say the man in the parable says, I'm in bed with my family. This is a time where everybody lived in one-room households. I'm in bed with my children. Go away.

But Jesus says he keeps going and he bangs and he bangs and he bangs and then eventually what do you do? You get up and you give him bread. And he says, the reason that you get up out of the bed and give this man bread is because he's relentless.

And he says, now ask, seek, knock and the door will be open to you. You see what it's saying? Paul is saying it in a command. Jesus said it in a parable.

You can be constant in prayer as if you are bothering God. Be like a five-year-old that yells at night and says, bring me something to drink, bring me something to drink, wakes mom and dad up every single night.

He's saying your prayer life can be and should be as if you're bothering God but you're not.

Relentless, constant, never stopping on behalf of yourself and other people and that is ministry.

[32 : 58] That is one of the forms that ministry takes. Truly the last word. We said that the word ministry comes from the word deacon.

That's the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the word for ministry comes from a Hebrew phrase that is in longer form the service of the priest.

The service of the priest, translated ministry. The word ministry in the Old Testament is used to talk about the priestly ministry. And when a priest turns 30 years old, they are allowed to sacrifice on behalf of other people, sacrifice animals.

Now remember how Romans 12 began. Let's give Romans 12 one the last word. Give your life away. If you've experienced the mercy of Christ, give your life away as a spiritual sacrifice in all these different forms.

And Paul is saying, what is ministry? Ministry is being a priest. You are a priest. You are a priest. You're a New Testament, New Covenant priest. You offer yourself your life as a spiritual sacrifice in the same way that the priest in the Old Testament offered animals as a physical sacrifice in all these 14 forms and many, many more.

[34 : 13] And in Luke 3, 23, when Jesus Christ came on the scene, Luke comments, he was 30 years of age when he began his ministry.

And the priest in the Old Testament would begin their ministry, their service at 30 years of age. And Luke is shouting, Jesus Christ came to priest for you.

He came to give himself not only spiritually but also physically. And if you know that Jesus Christ gave himself physically and spiritually all the way to the bottom for you, Romans 12 one says, turn around and become a priest for him.

You don't have to give yourself physically, not necessarily, but spiritually. Give yourself away spiritually because he gave himself as a priest for you in every way. We love because he first loved us.

Let's pray. Lord, we ask that you would make us people who have so experienced the beauty of the gospel and draw near that we would love more and more.

[35 : 18] Not because we need it to be saved, but because we have been saved. And so forgive us for our failures and love, we know we come today with mixed motivations in every way.

We serve for ourselves at least to a degree. We seek our own glory at least to a degree in every act that we do. And so we repent and we long to change.

Make us people who love the ministry because we love you, because we want to respond to your love with love. And so give us deep, deep, deep love for you today, Lord, and grow us up in that. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.