

Love For The Church

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[0 : 0 0] We are on a mini series within our series on Romans 12, and that mini series is all about love. So we're looking at four weeks on the idea of love in this section, verses nine to 21.

And at the beginning of chapter 12, Paul said, the Christian life is all about living as a spiritual sacrifice to God. So he says that if you've experienced the mercy of God through the gospel, then you turn around and you're changed.

So you don't live as a spiritual sacrifice in order to get the mercy of God, but because you've gotten the mercy of God, you go forward and live as a spiritual sacrifice. And he says really the main way to do that is to love and to love in lots of different dimensions.

And we've been looking at those every week. He says, give yourself away to human beings in love because God loved you in Jesus. And so Paul says this a bunch of times over his letters.

This text looks a lot like the fruit of the spirit text, Galatians five, where he says, the fruit of the spirit is love. And everything else after that joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness are all just aspects of how to love.

[1 : 1 4] Or first Corinthians 13, he says, love, love is the most important thing and love, what does love look like? He says, love is being patient. Love is being kind. Love is being humble, not boasting.

And so he tells us in lots of different texts to cross his letters, the form, the shape that love takes. And so in week one, we talked about the definition of love.

We said, love is, what is love? Love is selfless giving for the good of another person for God's sake. And then week two, we said, and God says, go out and love everybody like that, Christian and non-Christian.

Love the city with that same agape type love, gift giving love, never demonizing anybody because Jesus Christ came and never demonized us.

And this week we turn to the third dimension of love that he focuses on, which is love for the church, love between Christians, Christian to Christian, the type of love that that takes up.

[2 : 1 4] So we're gonna look at that this morning. It's right there in verse 10, really particularly. So let's think together about the nature of love first and then just two ways to take on the nature of love as it regards loving Christians, loving people within the church family.

So the nature of love within the church body and then two ways to do that. So very simple. First, the nature of love within the church family. All right, verse 10.

Verse 10 he says, love one another with brotherly affection. All right, there are two very important Greek words there in that sentence, love one another with brotherly affection and almost that entire command is just two Greek words.

And the first one is Philadelphia. Philadelphia, you know this one, Pennsylvania. That's where it comes from right here, verse 10. And it's the word that's being translated with brotherly affection. So it's actually the first word in the sentence, but it appears as the back half of the sentence with brotherly affection. That's Philadelphia. And then he says, with Philadelphia, have philostorge, which is a special word for love that also uses the word brother.

[3 : 2 8] So he says, you need Philadelphia and philostorge. So that's love one another, storge with Philadelphia, brotherly affection. Now, it's very important, these are very important because remember what we've been saying the last two weeks in verse nine, he said agape.

That's the Greek word he uses, go in love with a gift giving love, the love of God to give gifts to people, selfless giving. And he's talking about everybody, giving yourself away to everybody.

Then you come to verse 10 and he says, now love with a different type of love, storge or Philadelphia, brotherly and sisterly love, affection, it's often translated just by this little word

affection.

God gives agape to you, you give agape to others, gift giving love. God gives now storge to you, you give storge to others.

And what is that special type of love? It's when we say, God is my father and I'm his son. God is my father, I'm his daughter.

[4 : 34] Jesus Christ is my brother. So he's saying, God not only gives you agape, God gives you storge that both of these types of love come from God and he's saying now you, the first lesson, very simple, he's saying that if you've experienced the power of the gospel in your life, you actually do have the possibility, the capability to go into the world and love the way that God loves in both these dimensions.

That it is possible to be so changed by the gospel that you can go forward and truly love in a similar way that God loves. Both in agape, gift giving love, but also deep familial affection.

And here he's saying the second type, this affection is what you give to people within the church family, the church body. So he's talking about what goes on inside the church. And so storge is a word for the type of love experience between brothers and sisters, between dads and children, moms and children, and even between spouses.

That it's a more fundamental love than eros, romantic love. Storgue is more fundamental in marriage than even romantic love. He's saying it's fundamental, but it's also, he's saying, for the life of the church, for us to give towards one another.

Now, that means that we're called to gift giving love and deep abiding family affection within the body of Christ. What is that?

[6 : 03] Let's make it more concrete. We've been trying to make it more concrete every week a little bit. Let's go back again to C.S. Lewis. You say every single week C.S. Lewis on love, but he wrote a book about love called The Four Loves.

And so you can't help but reference it because he helps so much. And he talks about this very particular type of love, Storgue, affection as he translates it. And here's one way to understand it. Most importantly, what is this brotherly love, sisterly love, family affection? And he says above all, it's this, Storgue love is a love that never discriminates, never discriminates.

Now, what does that mean? I used to do a lot of premarital counseling. Back when I was pastoring in the States, I was doing 10, 15 weddings a year.

And so that meant a lot of time in premarital counseling with people. Day one of premarital counseling. I don't know how other pastors do it, but when I go on day one and I meet with a couple, one of the first things to break the ice is you say to them, why do you like your fiance?

[7 : 12] What is something you like about this person? What first attracted you to this person? Why are you here? Why are we doing this? And people say things like, well, first, I loved her kindness.

I saw how kind she was. I saw how kind he was, how gentle. I loved how quick he is to forgive, slow to anger. I love, I saw the person's beauty.

I was attracted to that person, physically, spiritually, emotionally, all these different things, all these different lists, all these different attributes. Sometimes in premarital counseling, you can be surprised how hard it is for people to answer that question.

Maybe you wouldn't be surprised, but they say kindness, beauty, quick to forgive, all sorts of things, right? Now, what kind of a love is that? Fundamentally, in the Greek word, that's what we call eros. Eros is anytime you have a love for somebody based in your attraction to them, based on their traits, romantically. You say, I got interested in them because of this, this, this, X, Y, Z, I like this about them.

[8 : 17] It even happens in friendship. You may be drawn to be friends with somebody because you say, I really liked this about them. They're great conversation partners.

That might be the trait that drew you in your life. That drew you in and began a friendship. Storgue is entirely different than that. Storgue is more like if you were to peel back the layers of a teenager's heart in the hardest moments of the teenage life, 16, 17, when a teenage boy is very hard to break through emotionally and you were to say to that teenage boy, do you love your mom?

And they would say, yeah, I love my mom. If you're gonna make me say it, I'll say it, I love my mom. And you say, well, why do you love your mom? I don't know, it's my mom.

I just love my mom. What else could I do but love my mom? You see, that's Storgue. Storgue says, I don't know why I love you.

I don't, I love you because I love you because I love you. In other words, Storgue is family affection that is not based on traits or attributes or accomplishments.

[9 : 35] You don't say I was attracted because in Storgue, you say I love you because I love you because I love you. In other words, I love you simply because we're completely bound together.

I don't have a choice. I didn't choose what family to be born in, what mom to have. And the same thing goes, he's saying in the church, when you become a Christian, you don't get to choose who you're bound to, you're just bound.

You're just bound in family affection. And so Storgue fundamentally is affection that does not discriminate, it's the love of family. It's when the Christian says like the teenager, the Christian, you know, you say to the Christian, you say about somebody else in the room, do you love that person? And you say, yeah, why? Are they good conversation partners? Yeah, not really. Are they incredibly intelligent? Well, maybe not.

Why do you love them? I don't know. I'm bound to them. I am bound to them in Christ Jesus. And so I love them. I love them as my brother, as my sister, no matter what, not because of any traits, not because of any attributes.

[10 : 45] The application's simple. Do you have love, Storgue affection, for God's people, by nature of being bound to them in Christ Jesus?

Do you have that kind of love for the people of the church? If you're a Christian today, you are going to end up spending eternity with all of these people, so you better start liking them now.

Whether you like it or not, you're bound to them, so you've got to start liking them. And liking them is actually built on the foundation of first saying, I love them, with Storgue-like affection, familial affection.

Now, when Paul writes this to the Romans in the first century, the Jews had been expelled in the previous decade from the city of Rome.

And the Jews had now been allowed back into the city of Rome after the emperor Claudius had died. And Paul, if you read through Romans very carefully, one of the undercurrents you might notice is that Paul is trying to continually deal with the problem that the Jews and the Gentiles, and the Gentiles were of all sorts of ethnicities and pagan backgrounds, none of them really liked each other, and they didn't love each other.

[12 : 03] And back in Romans chapter two, he's dealing with that. He's saying to a Jewish man who was struggling, perhaps, to worship alongside Gentiles, and then later to Gentiles, who were struggling to worship alongside Jews, he's saying, you are not understanding the nature of the family of God, and you are discriminating based on race.

And so one of the reasons the book of Romans was written is to say that no matter what social class race, socioeconomic background, nationality, preferences, political persuasions, when a person becomes a Christian, they are deeply bound forever by Christ in union with Christ to the family of God alongside you.

That means that if you go to the deepest, darkest prison in all of the world, wherever that may be, and find the person that's got the most vile, difficult, hardened record, when that man or that woman becomes a Christian, if they do and when they do, you say, that's my brother, that's my sister. And you look around the room and say, who is the most culturally other person from me in this room right now, the person that I'm probably least likely by nature of attributes to be friends with in normal circumstances, you look at that person and you say, I love you, you're my brother and you're my sister.

Let me move on, but let me say this, why is that? How can this be, the first real step in moving towards love like this within the church is to actually just remember the theological fact of this love.

[13 : 46] In John chapter 19 verses 26 and 27, Jesus Christ was dying, hanging on the cross actually in the moment, about to be forsaken by the Lord, about to enter into hell itself for us.

And he looks up and he looks at his mother, Mary, and he says, mother, woman, this man, John, my beloved disciple, is now your son.

And then he looks at John and he says, John, this woman, my biological mother, Mary, is now your mother. And you see, in that moment, Jesus Christ was saying, the moment that I go to the grave, the moment that I'm forsaken, the new eternal family will finally and forever emerge into world history.

That now true family and forever family transcends biology in a way that never before has happened, that Mary and John, that is mother and son. And now because of Jesus Christ, because of Jesus Christ's cross, we have spiritual mothers here and spiritual sons.

We have spiritual fathers here and spiritual daughters and sons. We have spiritual children coming into new faith, the spiritually mature, the moms and the dads. And we have everybody, no matter what that relationship looks like, brothers and sisters.

[15:08] And it's all because of the moment that Jesus Christ was forsaken at the cross. The gospel creates new family. And it's precisely because the gospel is the proclamation that Christ Jesus died for you, not because of your traits, not because of your attributes, not because of eros or friendship even, not because he could look at you and say, wow, I was really attracted to you because of this or that.

No, he came and died for us in the midst of our unloveliness. And so he founds a family that's built on love despite our unloveliness. That's how the gospel creates a new family.

Enrollment 16, at the very end of this letter, he sends this letter with a group of people to deliver it to the people of Rome. And one of the people that he sends very clearly, we see in Romans 16, verse one, is a woman named Phoebe.

And Phoebe must be carrying this letter to the Romans because Paul sends instructions to say, when Phoebe gets there, this is what you say to her, this is how you greet her.

And Phoebe is a name from the Greco-Roman world of a pagan goddess. So this woman, whoever she was, she's from Kinkria. And she was named after a pagan goddess, meaning that very likely she was brought up and raised in a devout paganism of some sort.

[16:31] She's from Kinkria, she knows nobody in Rome. She has nothing to do with the Romans. And what does Paul say? When Phoebe shows up at your doorstep, you greet her as your sister.

He says, this is your sister. And greet her in a way that is worthy of the saints. What makes somebody worthy to be greeted as a sister or brother and as a saint?

Nothing but the fact that Jesus died for them. Because Jesus died for Phoebe and the Romans, Paul says, when she gets there, you say, that's my sister. And you take her in and you love her in the same way that you love the people in your own local church.

When Christ looked up and said, Mary, that's your son, John, that's your mother, it means that Jesus Christ was going to hell on the cross so that you could have a forever family.

Do you want that? Do you want a forever family? Do you want a true father? No matter what kind of father, even if you've had a great father, or a terrible father in this life, do you want a true eternal father, a forever family?

[17:41] Do you want the greatest brother that you could possibly imagine? An eternal brother. Jesus Christ, you don't have to leave Romans. Romans 8.29, Paul tells us, God predestined the church so that Jesus would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

You see, God is so serious about the forever family that Jesus Christ founded that he says, I determined this family from before the foundation of the world.

I predestined the family of God forever, from forever ago into forever, so that you would be able forever to say, I have a true eternal brother in Jesus Christ.

Megan Hill says it like this, like the members of our biological family, we have not chosen them for ourselves, they've been chosen for us, and so we are inseparably bound to them whether we like it or not.

Now, the question then, secondly and finally, is do we act like it? We've seen the theological fact. The theological fact is we are by union with Christ a forever family, Christians, St. C's Christians, Edinburgh Christians, Scottish Christians, global Christians, a forever family.

[19:09] No matter what tradition we're a part of, you believe the gospel, you're part of the family forever, but do we act like it? Do we live like it? Now, what Paul's really doing in Romans 12, 9 to 21, is dealing with that part.

He's saying, do you really live like that? He's giving commands about love and asking whether or not we're following after this reality that is the theological family.

He's already told us, we don't. We know by nature that we do not love in the way we ought to. He's talked to us already in verse nine about hypocritical love, that our love is fundamentally hypocritical, prideful, competitive, that we're not living all the time as the forever family.

And so he's saying, very simple. One, first thing, we just need to have a renewed theological grip on the fact that we are a family of God, even when we don't act like it, even when we don't care. First, he's just saying, you just are. You can't get out from under it. You've got to wrestle with that fact. But then secondly, he gives us just two little commands to say, here's a way you can grow into the brotherly love, the affection for each other.

[20 : 18] Let me just highlight two, there are more than that, and we'll be finished. The first is, he says in verse 10, the very end of it, he says, out do one another in showing honor. Paul is playing with words here.

He says in verse nine, go forth in love and never let your love be hypocritical. What is hypocritical love from week one? It's competitive love, prideful love.

It's not love at all. It's the type of action where you go to somebody, remember, and you praise them. But really, it's an order that you might receive praise from them in return.

You go and do something outwardly loving, but internally, you really just want to be praised. You want to be flattered. And so fundamentally, love like that, expressed love like that, is competition. It's actually an attempt to lift yourself up, not truly love somebody else. Now, Paul comes in verse 10 and says, now out do one another in showing honor. And this verb out do is a competition verb.

[21 : 18] It's a verb that you would use in a race. So he's referring here to somebody that's about to run the 100 meter dash. And he's saying, you better be first off the block.

You know, when the gun sounds, you better be racing as hard as you can, as competitive as possible, to out do your neighbor in this church with showing honor to somebody else. So he says, never let your love be competitive and let your love be competitive.

You see, never let your love be competitive in the sense that you're interested in lifting yourself up above others, and then let your love be desperately competitive. Be first off the block, how in showing honor before anybody else, showing others honor before anybody else shows you honor. Now, another way one of the commentators puts it, is it means something like race to find the good in the people around you in the local church.

Be the first, be the most competitive at looking for good in people around you. Here's one way to think about that. I heard this week from, I was listening to Tim Keller right after his memorial service, his memorial service for the passing of Tim Keller, the New York pastor, was this past Tuesday.

[22 : 32] And I was listening to a sermon of his that day, and he highlighted one of the ways we could think about this. He said, one of the ways that you love the people in the church, you love people in general, but you honor people is by always looking for the good in them first, and then never treating them flatly.

How do you treat somebody flatly? How do you fail to treat somebody in less than three dimensions? And he said something like this, you know, you're in the church family, and you know that somebody has lied about you.

You know that somebody has maybe gossiped about you. You know that somebody is not telling you the whole story. You know that somebody did this or that, or you know somebody's past.

You know something they've struggled with. You know something they're addicted to. You know the shame that's in their lives. And he says, you know, treating them flatly would be like this. You say, I know that this person has lied to me on several occasions, and that means that they're a liar.

They're a liar. And then you think and you say, you know what? I also know that I lied to other people on several occasions, but when I did it, it was really complicated.

[23 : 49] You know, it's not so easy to parse. It was a mistake. You know, I'm not a liar, though I have lied many times. You see the difference three dimensions in one dimension.

We treat people in one dimension when we say, that person lied to me, they're a liar. But when I lie, it was just a mistake. And he says, we can never treat each other flatly, always multi-dimensional, always knowing the complexities, the backstories, the pains, the struggles, the addictions, the sins that we continue to run back to.

He says, you are gonna get sinned against and you're gonna sin against others in the church.

Always look for the good, race, be the fastest person to try to find the good in the person around you, even when it might be difficult.

He says, race, be competitive in doing that, compete to look for the good. He's saying, in other words, he's saying, everybody around you, the forever family, is definitively not a finished product.

They are being sanctified, they are growing, you are growing. And so your sins, they will be many in the life of the local body, but God's mercy is more.

[25 : 00] And so your mercy has to be more. You have to outdo one another in showing good. Now, secondly and lastly, verse 16 builds on top of that. He says to the church, okay, outdo one another in trying to show good, look for good in other people.

Secondly, verse 16, live in harmony with one another. The word harmony is not exactly there.

That's actually an interpretation of several words that are given.

It reads something more like, live in such a way that you have understanding with other people. The verb is to have understanding. And the commentators think that it probably means something like always trying to give the benefit of the doubt.

So he says it's something like, if you're racing to look for the good in other people, then verse 16, that means live in a way that you have a lot of understanding, a lot of time, a lot of compassion, even for wrongdoing.

And so you put those commands together and you get this picture. Verse nine, he says, put away your hypocritical love because you are a hypocritical lover.

[26 : 11] Verse 10, he says, try to race to see the good in other people because that's not always going to be easy. Verse 16, he says, you've got to give people the benefit of the doubt.

Live in harmony with one another. You see what he's saying? He's saying, we're not doing great at this. That's what he's saying. Every single verse he has to give a negative saying, you're gonna have to really fight to be in harmony.

You're gonna have to really fight to look for good because it's going to be difficult to see. So he's acknowledging first, he's saying, you are part of the forever family, theological fact, and right now that is not a perfect family.

And you have to be very upfront about expecting that. That this is not a perfect family. It's not always going to be great. There are things to complain about. The minister's the first thing and there's many more.

There's lots to complain about. It's not hard to find, Paul's acknowledging that because he's saying, yes, there's sin. And so we ought to expect that we could easily and will hurt one another.

[27 : 13] We'll fail one another. We'll not be what we're meant to be towards and for one another. We will be lonely when we're not supposed to be lonely in the church. We will lack friendship in the church.

When we know what body should lack friendship. We will struggle in the church when we shouldn't have to. And he's saying, but that's because you're not a finished product. You have not yet become what you shall be in the forever family.

And he's saying, first you've got to expect that and then you've got to go forward. And this is the close. He's saying, you've got to go forward and understand that within the body of faith and the relationships, the hardest spiritual battles you may fight in all of life will probably be contained amongst those.

The most difficult spiritual battles, the most difficult of processing relationship might very well be in your life through the relationships you have within the local body.

The local body has the ability to lift you up and give you such joy like no other community, but it also has the ability to give you a lot of pain too. And he's saying, so you've got to know that the spiritual battles you're really got to be engaged in and awake to are those relationally within the church.

[28 : 26] We think about the hardest spiritual battles in our lives as those big sins that we struggle with. You know, you might say, I've been struggling with this addiction for 30 years.

It's the biggest spiritual battle of my life. And there's truth there. I've been struggling with this for 30, 40, 50 years, 20 years, 10 years, whatever it may be. But if you only think like that, you might miss that actually the greatest sanctifying work that God may do in your life is when you are completely awake to the smallest spiritual battles, like the tiny little moments of having to be patient with somebody in this room, the tiniest little moments of having decided between grumbling about somebody else around here or not.

See, these are the little spiritual battles that really count. Thousands and thousands and thousands of interactions where you have to decide patience over impatience, forbearance over grumbling, where you have to decide forgiveness over revenge.

And Paul is saying, you've got to, he's saying step one, expect that. Expect that that's gonna happen a thousand times in the local church and choose the way of Christ. And the way of Christ is this, I will swallow the pain of the offense.

Jesus Christ, sin always costs. And when Jesus Christ went to the cross, he swallowed the pain of every offense in the world. And Paul's saying the way of Christ, the way of love, store gay affection begins, like your biological family saying, oh boy, I've had to swallow a lot of offenses that have been a card against me.

[30 : 09] And I know that my brothers and my sisters, my mom, my dad, my aunts, my uncles, they have had to swallow a lot of offenses that I've given to them. And he's saying the fundamental thing is to expect that and to be quick to forgive.

The fundamental posture, humility, again, in the midst of the church. Last word, there are two kinds of people here today. Maybe you're here today and you're not a Christian.

You maybe have been listening and you wonder, you wonder, is the church, the Christian church, really a family?

Is there really any meaning in all of this? Because you say, I've read the headlines. I've read about what the church has done. I've read about what this pastor did, that pastor, what this person, what this leader.

You've read the headlines and you say, could it really be true that the church really is a family of love? Or you're a Christian today and you say, I believe theologically that the church is a family by way of union with Christ, but I don't know that I feel that all the time.

[31 : 21] I feel distant, I feel lonely, I feel separated from Christians all around me. I feel the same way my colleagues feel, that they lack friendship, perhaps.

And I just want to close with one verse, Romans 16:20. Romans 16:20, Paul closes this letter out and he gives this long list of names.

He says, greet this person, greet that person. Welcome Phoebe, your sister. Then he turns from the greetings to the brothers and sisters and he says, and watch out for this person because they're really divisive.

He says, within the family of God, you need to watch out because this person has been really divisive. And then at the very end of that, after saying brother, sister, brother, sister, watch out for division, in Romans 16:20, he says this, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Now why does he say that? He says, greet all these people that you've never met before as brothers and sisters, part of the family and know that some of them will actually do such significant sin that they might split the church in half.

[32 : 36] And then he says, but know this, very soon God will crush Satan under your feet. Now he's referencing Genesis chapter three, 3:15, where there was a prophecy about a son, a son of Eve that would one day come and crush the serpent under his feet.

And Jesus Christ came into the world and he crushed the serpent under his feet. He crushed the head of sin and death and destruction and grumbling and impatient and schismatic behavior within the church and every type of offense that can happen, he crushed it.

And you see what Paul's doing, he's saying, if you believe on the gospel, one day you too will actually crush the serpent's head under your feet.

Meaning that if you're united to Jesus one day, very literally, you will kill sin and death and impatience and grumbling and offense and schism and every sin that's been committed against you and you commit towards others, you too will find a place eventually where you will be as victorious as Jesus was, but not yet.

And that means that if you're not a Christian today, you know this, the church really is a forever family, but it's not yet what it will be. And so you can expect the things you've seen, that's exactly the message we preach.

[34 : 09] We are not what we're supposed to be, but Jesus has crushed the serpent for us and one day we will too. And if you're a Christian today, you can say, I know that we are not yet what we should be as a family, but one day we will be and for now, I'll give Megan Hill the last word and her great reflections on this.

She says, what would it look like for the church to lean in to the idea that we can act in such a way now that we can crush these things?

And truly love one another. This is what it looks like, she says, because God's people are our family, we now can hold our preferences and our priorities loosely.

We will open our hearts and we'll open our doors. We will pull up a chair to the dinner table and add another name to our prayer list. We will give them our groceries, we will give them our furniture, we will give the people and God's family our smiles, we will share their grief, their trials, their disappointments.

We will look for ways to show love and as a result, we will have less money than we would have had. We will have less free time than we would have had.

[35 : 21] We will expect to have a lot more sorrow than we would have had, but we will also expect to have a lot more joy. Let's pray together. Lord, we know Jesus that you say in Hebrews two that you are not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.

And so help us today to look around and say, I am not ashamed to call that person brother and sister. We give thanks, Lord, that you were not ashamed to be our sibling, our forever sibling. So teach us, Lord, what it means to love in a way that mirrors the foreverness of the family of God even today so that the world might see a unique type of love. And we pray this now in Christ's name. Amen.