

Living Like a Christian in Our Relationships with Other People (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] Have you ever thought about the variety of ways that we all use the word love? I'm gonna guess, hopefully I'm right, you have told your spouse very recently that you love her or you love him.

But you may have also said, or at least you've heard somebody say, I love my dog. I love the weather we're having right now.

I love that movie that I saw last week. I love ice cream. Now, think.

Do you love ice cream, movies, the weather, and your dog the same way that you love your spouse? Now, I hope nobody would say yes.

But I'm just trying to show this word love. We have a hard time nailing down a definition.

[1 : 08] We have a hard way of describing what we mean. But most people, if you do pin them down, in some way they will use the word feeling to describe what they mean by love.

That's the most popular way to describe it today. You hear it all the time. Somebody can fall in or out of love. Some people have a burning love one day, but later on it burns out.

We just have a difficult time describing what the word love means, but the Apostle Paul didn't have that problem. I want you to turn with me to Romans chapter 12 and see how he described the love that God intends for his children, us, to demonstrate toward one another.

And as we go through this, we're going to see, as Paul describes love, it's an attitude. It is a mindset, not really an emotion.

What we're going to see is that God commands us to love one another. And you think about it. If God commands us to do this, to love one another, it cannot be a feeling because you cannot make someone.

[2 : 31] You cannot command someone to feel a certain way. Can you? No, love is something that we do. Love is a choice. Love is a commitment.

It may or may not be something we feel in every situation. This kind of love is described in Romans chapter 12, verses 9 through 13.

But before we read this, I want you to keep something in mind because what we're going to read, in some ways you're going to think, well, this just is impossible.

And it's impossible to love a certain person like this. Keep in mind, Paul is writing to Christians.

The other long description or comments on love is in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

[3 : 31] Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13 about what love is and all these kind of things, how superior love is above everything else, the greatest Christian virtue.

Paul writes in Romans, he writes in Corinthians to Christians. When God saved us, He put His Spirit in us.

We have the ability, not because of our strength, not because we're something special, we have the ability because the Spirit of God lives within us, to love people just like we're going to read about in this chapter.

You can love some hard-to-love people in your life. And there are people who are hard to love. There are people that it's just everything within you as a Christian to love.

But we can. The key is we've got to cooperate with the Spirit of God when He prompts us to keep our mouth closed, when He prompts us to act a certain way towards some of these hard-to-love people.

[4 : 58] We've got to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and we've got to learn to develop this loving attitude that will translate into loving actions like we read about in these verses.

Romans 12. Let's read it. Verses 9 through 13. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil.

Strongly hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful and zeal.

Be fervent and spirit. That's a little s in most translations. It is what I'm reading today in ESV. He's talking about our spirit here, not the Holy Spirit.

Although that's not, it's possible He's talking about the Holy Spirit. But we're going to take it as do not be slothful and zeal.

[5 : 56] Be fervent in your spirit as you serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. We're in a series from Romans 12. We're talking overall about how God wants us to live like a Christian wherever we are.

We've talked about living like a Christian in our relationship with Him and really focused on that requires wholehearted commitment. We've talked about how to live like a Christian in the way that we think about ourselves. It means, as we saw in verses 3 through 8, don't think too highly of yourselves.

Don't be prideful. But the opposite of that, humility, is not don't think I can't do anything that I know anything. The opposite is be objective about yourself.

Be realistic. You have talents and gifts and abilities that God has given you and if you'll be faithful to Him, you can use your talents, gifts, and abilities in some great ways in people's lives as well as in serving God.

[7 : 06] Now, in this section, we're talking about living like a Christian in our relationships specifically with other Christians.

That means we're talking about how we should love one another in this church as brothers and sisters in Christ. We're talking about how you should love, we should love other Christians in our lives and a lot of you work with other Christians.

A lot of you go to school with people who are truly Christians. Some of you do things on the weekends, just interact with people in this area, other places who are Christians.

We're talking about the love that exists among believers wherever and get this, in your home, if your spouse is a Christian, if your children are, this is how it's supposed to be in the way you relate, act, speak to one another at home.

Now, when we read these verses, I don't know if it really stood out to you this is all describing genuine love.

[8 : 26] Verse 9, the first part, let love be genuine, that's sort of like the statement and the rest of this is a description of what genuine or sincere love is.

It makes sense if you think this is the Apostle Paul writing and in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 he gave this long list of instructions about spiritual gifts gifts.

And then he followed it up in 1 Corinthians 13 by talking about what love is. Here in Romans 12 we have a condensed version, verses 3-8 of him talking about spiritual gifts and now in verses 9-13 a condensed version of what he says in 1 Corinthians 13 about love.

Let's look at it. If we're serious about pleasing God by living like a Christian then we've got to love each other genuinely. Look at verse 9, that's the statement.

Let love be genuine. The word genuine here means without hypocrisy. The word was often used in that day to describe an actor on a stage, somebody who was playing a role, somebody who would hide behind a mask that they held up.

[9 : 40] Well Christian love is the opposite of that. Christian love is supposed to be sincere. It's supposed to be real. It's not supposed to be phony. How much of our lives are truly real?

Think about it. We are good at playing a part when it comes to projecting the image we want people to see in us.

You think about it. There's people in this room, you play one part at work. You play another part that's different at home.

And you may even play a third part here at church. Or if you're younger, you may do it that way at school at home at church.

church. Most of us in this room we're southerners. Most of us in this room we are southern born and southern bred.

[10 : 45] When we die we'll be southern dead. We know that. That's just who we are. Now everybody here didn't have the advantage of being born in the south. But I'm going to guess you got here as quick as you could.

So you're here now. You know some of the things I'm about to say. We who are southerners we know how.

We know how to fake things. You know as southerners we pride ourselves on a lot of things. We think at least about all the many positive qualities that we have.

But being genuine is not really a strong suit. We've learned how to be nice from an early age. How many of you have ever said this or done this or had it said to you?

You talk to someone on the telephone or you talk to them in person and as you get ready to end the conversation before you say goodbye before they say goodbye one of the last things they'll say is come to see us.

[11 : 57] How many of you have heard that all your life? Come to see us. They don't really mean that. No. If I have a conversation with, I'm not going to pick on my, if I have a conversation with, who could I pick on in here this morning?

I'm not going to pick on Rick this morning. Go ahead, I'll Rick, okay? If I have a conversation with Rick and we get ready to wind it down, he says, come to see us, hang up.

Well, just out of the blue, out of the blue, I show up ready just to come in and sit down and visit for a while. He's going to be mad.

He's not going to appreciate that. In this day and time, everybody's busy. Everybody has something to do. Nobody's sitting at home waiting for somebody to come by just out of the blue, knock on the door and say, I want to come in and visit with you a little while.

that's just not how life is today. But we say things trying to be nice that we don't really mean.

[13 : 08] You know, one of the worst things that we do as Southerners, one of our worst sayings, what is it? Bless your heart. That's Southern license to gossip and slander, just say anything you want about someone.

I'll bet we've got teachers in this room that you have said this, bless his little heart. He's the dumbest child I've ever had in my classes. Some of you may have said, or some of you may have had one friend say to another friend, she's got the ugliest baby I have ever seen.

Bless her heart. We do that now. You know, I'm going over the top with this. But we have a way, most of us, we have a way of projecting an image that is not real.

We have a way of saying things that we really and truly do not mean, and we have a way of saying things that we do mean, that is mean, literally.

We try to camouflage it in some way. Most of us have had a lot of practice play acting about a lot of things, including expressing love.

[14 : 35] What Paul is saying here is, be real, be genuine in your love for the people around about you that you should be the closest to.

be sincere. And as I said earlier, because the Spirit of God lives within us, we can. We can be real people and what we say is what we mean.

We need to learn to do that. It's something that we're commanded to do. Let love be genuine. But what will that look like? Let's look now. Let's look at what the rest of these verses describe. We must demonstrate genuine love verses 9b through 13.

First of all, sincere love is discerning. He says, abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good, or hate what is evil, cling to what's good. Christian love is not a sentimental love.

Christian love, it's not the warm fuzzies. It requires, in this case, looking at what he's saying here, it requires a violent hatred of evil, and a strong attachment to what's good.

[15 : 51] Some Christians think that love means you're just always nice. Everything's always okay. You never respond negatively to any behavior.

Some people have the idea, if you're a Christian and you love people, hate won't even be a part of your vocabulary. Well, that's not true. We're supposed to hate evil and cling fast to, hold strongly to that which is good.

Our problem is, a lot of people, including Christians, define right and wrong by their own standard of what's right and wrong, or by their own standard of what's loving.

Think of it this way. A lot of people think sex outside of marriage cannot possibly be wrong. We rationalize. if it takes place in the context of a loving relationship.

That's how many people justify premarital sex. We love one another, or even adultery, or homosexuality.

[16 : 58] It just seems like, and it is in today's world, today's culture, the idea is you do what feels good to you. You define all your terms.

You define truth, you define love, and you do what you think is the loving thing to do. Here's the problems. Christians don't get to do that. God does that for us, and He's done that in His Word.

God defines for us what is right and wrong, what is evil and what is good. He defines for us what love is as we're reading here and also in 1 Corinthians 13.

That's just a more lengthy example. God has established real standards, objective standards of what evil and good behavior is in His Word.

So whatever God calls evil, whatever God calls sin, it is evil. It is sin. And we should hate it. we should hate strongly that which is truly evil.

[18 : 09] Do you? But whatever God says is right, whatever God says is good, that is what's right and good. And that's what we should cling to, hold close fast to.

Do you? Let me make a clarification here. This is not teaching that we are to hate evil people. We'll see later on in our studies on down past verse 14, we're called to love our enemies.

But we're to hate evil. As the old saying goes, we love the sinner but hate the sin. Sincere love is discerning. Sincere love is also devoted to others.

Look at verse 10. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. The first command in this verse 10 is love one another with brotherly love.

our relationships with other Christians is supposed to be as close as relationships with our biological brothers and sisters on our good days.

[19 : 25] You know, brothers and sisters are known to fight like cats and dogs. Brothers and sisters are known to hurt one another. But on their best days, brothers and sisters will defend one another and hurt the person that tries to hurt their brother and sister.

Paul is saying that as Christians, we're a part of God's family. There is a spiritual family that we're a part of that should be as close as brothers and sisters under the ideal brother-sister relationship.

The second command here is that we should outdo one another in showing honor. The idea is that you respect others first. You're not going to do this if you don't respect them and put them first. The idea is sincere love seeks the best for the one you love, not yourself.

The best example I've ever heard of just people living and doing came from children. Lisa teaches music at an elementary school. One year, several years ago now, a brother and sister both tried out for honors choir.

The sister made it. The brother did not. When Lisa explained to the brother, your sister made honors choir and you didn't, you know what he said?

[20 : 50] He said, well, if only one of us could make it, I'm glad it was my sister. And he meant it. He loved his sister.

And he was happy for her to get that honor above himself. And he was genuine. It was the real deal.

Sincere love is devoted to others. Sincere love provides us with positive energy. In verses 11 and 12, look at it. Do not be slothful in zeal, but fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Let's look at this quickly here. Love is enthusiastic. Another way that can be translated is love is not lazy or indifferent when it comes to service.

Serving God and serving other people is what it's talking about here. Sincere love will cause us to want to do our best in fulfilling our responsibilities to other people.

[21 : 52] We won't be lazy or half-hearted about it. And you know what I'm talking about. There are things that you do in life that you love, you thoroughly enjoy, but it's hard. It's a labor of love.

It may be your job, it may be a hobby, it may be something fun you just do with your friends or your children or someone. You work at it, you sweat at it, you get worn out, but you love it.

It's a labor of love, you're not lazy in it. And what Paul is saying here is we have the right kind of love for one another when we've got to get in there and roll up our sleeves and do some things to meet one another's needs, we'll do it enthusiastically.

We won't do it begrudgingly, that's not love. We won't be lazy in doing it. Love is patient. It enables us to persevere and not give up in hard times.

Everybody has hard times. Life is not simple for anyone. Most people thankfully, it sort of comes and goes. There's people in this room right now, right now life is great for you.

[23 : 00] You couldn't ask for things to be better. There's people in this room that life is very hard right now. It's the hardest you've ever gone through. Love is patient in that it will help us sometimes just to take one more step.

It'll help us to continue on. And let's think especially in difficulties with certain people. Love will help us to be patient, to work with them, to build bridges, not to burn them.

Love motivates us to pray. If we truly believe that God answers prayer and we love people, doesn't it make sense that we ought to want to pray for them? Let's just be real honest.

There's people in your life, you just love to tell them what you really think. There's people in your life that you don't like, you don't like what they're doing, they irritate you, and if you could just get by with it, if it could be Groundhog Day, remember the movie?

You could just do whatever you wanted to do, say whatever you wanted to say, and tomorrow they wouldn't remember. You just love to explode on them, just tell them what you think. We can't do that.

[24 : 27] Groundhog Day in the movie was fiction. We have to love some people that God has in our life that's hard to love, and everybody has them.

You know, as the saying goes, if you don't know who they are, you're probably in your family or your circle. And so what we've got to learn to do is love these people, and one of the best ways to learn to do that is to pray for them.

Pray for yourself. God, help me to be patient. Help me to actually meet this person's need in a genuine, sincere, kind way.

And then pray for that person. Pray that God would work in the situation to meet the need, even to use you. That goes on to verse 13. Sincere love meets people's needs.

He says, contribute to the needs of the saints, and show hospitality. We're supposed to share with people as they have need. What do we share? Whatever it is that they need that you can meet the need with.

[25 : 33] I want you to look at a passage of scripture quickly from 1 John 3. It's on the screen. This is written to Christians. This applies to all of us. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

Dear children, let us love not with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth. Sometimes love is going to compel us to take out our billfold, checkbook, debit card, and meet a person's need.

Sometimes love is going to compel us to be inconvenienced to even sacrifice to meet a brother or sister in Christ. Not just a physical brother or sister, but a brother or sister in Christ's need.

Showing hospitalities. The next one, that was of great importance in the early church. It was not always possible that there was a place like a hotel. There weren't that many inns. And a lot of times if there were, there were shady, sleazy places that you wouldn't want someone coming in.

And so, in the early church, Christians who travel like, for example, the Apostle Paul, if he came to the church at Rome, if he came to Pickens, he would expect for a Christian family to open their home to him.

[26 : 55] Him being a stranger to them on one hand, but he, they would have heard about him. It wasn't just a total stranger, they would have heard about him. They, he may even have some letters of recommendation from another church or some other Christians that they knew of.

And so they would take him in. How that might apply today is sometimes we have had some youth conferences here. And we've brought in some, maybe college students from North Greenville or Liberty University or somewhere like that.

And they're coming in for a weekend and we need families in our church to house these people. That is the kind of Christian hospitality we're talking about. You don't know them, but you do know of them.

We're not talking about total stranger. They're Christians. And so you open your home to these kinds of strangers. We talked about several years ago as a church family, partnering with a church that on the coast of South Carolina, that if they had a hurricane and they had to evacuate, we talked about enlisting church members to open our homes to a couple or a family from a church, say in the Charleston area, that had to leave because of the hurricane.

That would be Christian hospitality as an example. Paul makes it clear, sincere love is a whole lot more than a feeling.

[28 : 14] It's an attitude that we display in our actions. So I just want to ask you, in light of what we've seen here, are you demonstrating sincere love to your brothers and sisters in Christ in particular?

The next question is, do you want to? Is there something within you, the Spirit of God, that causes you to see this is what's right and this is what I want to do?

Some of you may say, certainly I don't do it perfectly, but this is my goal. So you might need to ask God this morning to help you to continue on to grow in some of these areas.

Whatever it is that God's shown you, your response, what it needs to be, ask God to help you right now to desire and demonstrate this kind of sincere love every day in all these relationships we're talking about, even the hard ones.

And ask God to help you right now to do whatever it is to make the commitment to start now. Let's pray. Dear God, help us to see that love is not an option if we are your children.

[29 : 37] And help us to see, dear God, that we cannot be selective about how we love and who we love. So show us right now, dear God, what we need to do about maybe a changed attitude, changed priorities, what we need to do about confession of sin, that would enable us to leave here ready to start demonstrating sincere love.

Father, if there's anyone in this room who is not your child, help them to understand this morning how much you love them. You love them so much you sent your son into this world, the Lord Jesus, to die and pay the penalty for their sins.

Help them, dear God, right now to see their need, give them the desire to turn from their sin and to trust in Jesus and call upon Him to save them right now.

You just listen to the Lord with the heads bowed and eyes closed and respond to Him. If I could help you during this time, I'll be here in front to pray with you. also a you B .

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