

Sincere Love

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[0:00] Romans, we're going to read the entire 12th chapter. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

[1:26] If it is serving, let him serve. If it is teaching, let him teach. If it is encouraging, let him encourage.

If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously. If it is leadership, let him govern diligently.

If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil.

Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need.

[2:29] Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

Mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but willing to associate with people of low position.

Do not be conceited. Do not repay one another evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath.

For it is written, It is mine to avenge. I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

[3:36] If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good. The sad part about being a preacher's kid, which I'm not, but my kids are, is that sometimes when a few words would do, instead they get three-point sermons.

And it's almost like a never-ending, flowing fountain of verbiage comes across them. And what I have to say is so important and so true.

It just can't be stopped. I'm realizing that sometimes sermons are not what is needed. Sometimes long arguments are not what is needed.

Paul, a lot of times, writes in long, flowing sentences and builds argument upon argument, idea upon idea.

[4:48] That's why, basically, in Romans chapter 1, starting in verse 8 or so, all the way to Romans chapter 12, is this one long argument with interlocking parts building on top of each other until you get to Romans chapter 12 and you get the big therefore.

In light of all of that, now this is how you need to live. And he slowly transitions from big arguments. Now, in Romans chapter 12, beginning in verse 9, he goes to something different.

He goes to these short sentences that they don't take very long to say, but they do take a lot of time to think about and apply, that there's a lot of meaning, a lot of truth, pushed into just very brief sentences.

In the Greek, they're even shorter and more compact than they are in English. He's just driving this home. So, if Romans 1 through 11 is a big tapestry of interweaving ideas, Romans 12, 9 to the end of the chapter, it is more like Paul just taking a bunch of jewels and then dumping them out, and we get to pick them up.

They're only loosely connected with each other. There's some ideas that, obviously, interlap. Love is the biggest one, but they're only loosely connected. They're each the self-contained little jewel.

[6:22] And we already know most of them. We've heard them. They keep in our minds. The key is to really think about them and meditate upon them. So, this morning, we're just going to look at five of those, beginning in verse 9, and we're going to get all the way to verse 11, of just five little jewels.

And my goal this morning is very modest. I want you to go away thinking about just one of these.

I'm not sure which one it's going to be for you, but I want you to go away thinking about one of these and saying, this is what I need to work on.

This is the truth that I need to remember. This is the truth I need to believe and put into practice.

And so, would you agree to do that? Just one of these truths, to take them away, to say, this is God's word, especially for me, for today.

I'm going to think hard about it, and I'm going to do something about it. Would you agree to do that? I hope you would. So, let's get started. We saw last week that Paul has been talking about gifts in the body.

That was Romans 12, 1 through 8. Talking about gifts and what it looks like to act like the body.

Now, he's done this in other places. In 1 Corinthians, he goes into this long discussion about what gifts are and how to use them and all that and what they're for.

[7:44] And he goes on a long time about it. And then, at the end of chapter 12, in 1 Corinthians 12, he says, now let me show you the most excellent way. And then, he says this.

And he wants to put all these gifts in the right perspective and in the right context. And he says this. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have the gift of prophecy, and I can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, but have not love, I am nothing.

Now, that's something of what Paul is doing here. He's talked about gifts, but now he says, we need to put that into context. We need to see how we should really think about these things.

And that's when he says in verse 9, love must be sincere. Love must be sincere. And the point is clear. Gifts without love, all that giving and serving and leading and all the rest that he just talked about, all those gifts without love are useless.

[8:56] Because we can use our gifts as a mask, as a way to cover a heart that's really not for the other people. Instead, it's looking and using them as a way to get instead of give.

So pastors can use their gifts of teaching and leading to get followers, to get praise, to get you to say something about me, to feel whole and healthy on the inside, to feel okay.

Pastors can seek in their gifts and exercising their preaching and their teaching and their leading. They could seek a righteousness that will hold up, that people will say, and where I can say, I'm a pretty good person.

Look at what I've done. A status, an identity that holds up. And so pastors are just the most easy to see. Because we're the most blatantly obvious, but Sunday school teachers and deacons and people who build ramps and nursery workers, we can all do the same thing.

Where we use our gifts, whatever they might be, without real, sincere love. We can just do it for ourselves instead of for others.

[10:15] And so Paul says in verse 9, and this is our first rule, love must be sincere. Sincere. Love must be sincere. Without hypocrisy, not superficial, not affected, not put on.

Sometimes preachers, certain preachers, don't preach with their natural voices. They preach with an affected voice. They have like their regular voice, and then they have their preaching voice, their put on voice.

Or we can look at it some other way. Sometimes when the big bosses, the people from corporate, come down to your office, suddenly your whole attitude about your job changes.

And now you're not grumbling and complaining when you're talking to them. You're enthusiastic, and you love it, and you're all aboard. It's affected enthusiasm, isn't it? Put on enthusiasm.

Now Paul says, love for the saints, love for God, must be real. Not put on, not hypocritical, not, but sincere. Now why does he say that?

[11:14] Because we can pretend to have love that we don't, and, or we can have love that is pretty superficial. Just the surface.

It doesn't go very deep. It doesn't go very far. We can settle on a love that won't go all the way.

Moms, you can do that with your kids. Dads, you can do that with your kids.

Husbands, wives, you can do that with them. You can do that towards each other. We can do that towards God. To have a sort of a love that will not go all the way. We can settle for a love without a cross.

Without a cross. Without any time saying no to myself and laying down my life and going farther than I really can go. Where I say no to my desires, and I say no to my wishes, and I say no to the things that I think will make me happy and bring me life.

James talks about that kind of love. That superficial love, that just talk love. He says, suppose a brother is without clothes or without food, and one of you says, go, I wish you well.

[12:21] Stay warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs. What good is that? Talk is cheap. Talk is easy. I'm praying for you, or I will pray for you.

I love you, I will pray for you. That talk doesn't cost two calories. It's the appearance of love, but love must be sincere.

1 John 3:18 says, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth. So genuine love is God-like love.

love. It's not just a feeling resting in your heart. It's not just an idea that we say to someone. It's loving action. It's costly.

It does something. It gives up something. It costs something to do it. It's faithful. It's stick with you love. It's the mother with the sick child kind of love that stays by them all the way to the end.

[13:25] If we sincerely love them, we sincerely love our brothers and sisters, we will love them through thick and thin. We will love them through rejoicing and mourning, verse 15 says.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. We're not fair-weather friends.

Sincere love. We love them when they're poor. We love them when they are rich. And we love them when they're being very pretty.

And we love them when they're being pretty ugly. Sincere love for your brothers means that when your brother is in the foxhole and the enemy has him pinned down and the guns, the bullets are flying overhead and you look over at your brother and you see in his face the sin-crazed look. He's thinking about joining the other side. He's thinking about going over the top and losing his way. Sincere love doesn't say, I'm out of here. This guy is crazy. I'm going to get shot up.

I need to keep myself safe. Sincere love says I'm right here with him. I'm sticking with him. Even despite that sin-crazed look in their face. Because that's how God loves us. Because when we were in the foxhole and when we were pinned down and the bullets were flying over us, he didn't say, I'm out of here.

[14:45] Did God say that to you? I'm out of here. I'm leaving you. No, sincere love is how Christ loved us. Because when we were shot full of bullets and we were bleeding out, he stuck with us.

And when we were mad with sin, he stayed there. He saved us. He laid his life down to heal us.

See, his love was sincere. It was genuine. It was good from the top all the way to the bottom.

Sincere love says, I'm going to do whatever it takes to rescue this person.

Sincere love says, I'm going to do whatever it takes to help this person. And the world says, you have to love yourself. You can only do what you can do. You have to watch out for yourself.

You have to love yourself. Keep yourself safe. And you can only give what you can give. And that's why the world knows so little of real love. Because the world knows so little of a real cross.

[15:45] I'm not asking those questions. I'm saying, what do I have to do? And I'm going to do it because I love that person. So love must be sincere.

Next, Paul says, this is our second rule, hate what is evil, cling, cleave to what is good. Be united to what is good. Be, one person said, married to what is good.

Hate what is evil, cling to what is good. And this is another aspect of sincere, real love. If there's any sort of thing that binds these commands together, it's the aspect of love.

So love hates what is evil and it clings to what is good. You can't love people and love evil. You can't love people and love sin.

Because sin is bad for people. Sin is bad for people wherever it's found. And whoever it's found in. Sin is bad for me when it's on my record.

[16:50] In heaven. When God is taking the record and there's my life and there's my sin. It's bad for me there because when I get to the judgment, my sins will come calling and God will call me to account.

Sin is bad for me on my record. Sin is bad for me on my heart. In my heart. Because it destroys others and it destroys me.

It destroys all the things that are most precious and valuable to me. How many families are torn apart. And mothers' hearts, fathers' hearts, kids' hearts, ripped apart because of sin.

Sin is bad for me in my mind. Because it deceives. We looked at this last week. It lures me to destruction. In England, there's myths about myths, mythical things called willow lights or willow wisps, ghost lights.

And the idea is that you're walking through a dangerous swamp and there's only so much dry ground. There's only so many safe steps. But these things shine a light and lure heedless travelers off the narrow little way and down into the bog.

[18:11] That's sin. It deceives. It lures. But it lures us to our destruction. So sin is bad on my record. It's bad in my heart. It's bad in my mind.

It's bad in my world. Sin is the reason for every war. Sin is the reason for every terrorist attack.

For every bomb that you see going off all around the world. And every crazed gunman. It's behind every cop killed and every black man shot. It's behind ISIS.

It's behind every child exploited and starved. Sincere love hates evil. Because evil destroys people.

Sin is not for your good. And if you think that sin is for your good. If you think I can have this desire and even though God says no to it I can have it and be safe.

[19:08] You're only falling for that little tricky light that takes you off the path and leads you right into the bog. Sincere love is not just tolerance.

It wants to redeem and to restore people that have fallen. To bring God's grace to people who need it. And it clings to what is good. It's united to what is good.

It's married to what is good. You can't love God and you can't love people without loving what is good. Without loving God's commands. You can't love people and not and hate God's law.

Because God's law summed up is love your neighbor as yourself. 2 John 6 says this is love that we walk in obedience to his commands. What does love functionally reality look like?

It looks like walking and obeying God's commands. He says as you have heard from the beginning his command is that you walk in love. So he wants us to walk in obedience to his commands and he wants us to walk in love because they're the same thing.

[20:15] So God's command is to love and all of God's commands are the way that we love people. And so what is Paul calling us to? He's calling us to this real authentic down and dirty hatred for sin and a real violent vehement and loving of God's commands where it's God's commands are here and I am here where sin is over here and I'm running as far away and I hate it.

So let me ask you is there anything that in your life that you need to start hating with more vehemence? On the other side is there some good thing that you need to grasp onto?

That you need to cling to? That you've got such a loose hold on that you're hardly ever touching it and it's time to hold on to it. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good.

Third he says be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. He's talking about family love here. Family love.

Family affection. Home affection. He's saying you know that kind of love that the best families have? The best kinds of families have for each other?

[21:35] That kind of love is the love you should have for each other. Maybe you say my family's a mess. People don't like each other and we aren't genuinely close.

So I don't really know about this. And maybe you've never had it. Maybe your family was not a place where that ever happened. But let me say you do know what it's supposed to look like don't you?

You know what you have missed and what should have been. You've seen it in some families and Paul is saying have it here. If you don't have it out there have it here.

If it's not real out there make it real here. Here's a chance to have what you don't have outside. So your natural family isn't close.

They don't love each other affectionately. Well here's another family. Here's a real family. So who is my sister, my father, my mother? Who is my brother?

[22:38] Jesus said here they are. My disciples who do the will of my father. It's these my disciples. Well I would ask you and I would put that same question to you.

Who is your father and your mother? Who are your brothers and your sisters? Here they are. Here they are. And you have more in common with any Christian here than you do with any person out there.

love them affectionately. Affectionately. That's not just sort of duty, heartless, going through the motions.

Affectionately. Warmly. Friendly. Kindly. But maybe you say I'm different. I'm not like so many of them.

They're here. I'm over here. We're so different from each other. I don't know how we can love each other affectionately. Well my question is you have YouTube, don't you?

[23:45] Haven't you ever seen the cat and the dog playing together? Have you ever seen the lion and the gazelle? Something going wrong and now they're being friends with each other?

You don't need to be the same to be devoted. That's my point. You don't need to be the same to be devoted. You don't need to be the same to have brotherly affection and love.

You are different. It doesn't mean you can't love. You are different. It doesn't mean that they can't love you. Now maybe some of you are missing out here. Maybe some of you have your circle of brotherly affectionate love too small.

Let me say let's broaden those out. Let's include more. get those people who are different from you. Get them into your brotherly love circle.

You don't know what you're missing because it's not the things where we're the same that bring beauty and glory. It's the way that we're different. Being the same is good but being different.

[24:50] That's how the world is going to know that we're Jesus' disciples. Because here we are loving people that are so different from us. So maybe you need to broaden out your circle. Maybe your circle is too small.

Next Paul says honor one another above yourselves. Honor one another above yourselves. Sincere love isn't thinking high of myself. It's thinking best of other people.

It isn't thinking highly of myself. It's thinking the best of other people. And if I can only say one thing to you about this, and this is the pastor's heart for you, and I know I'm echoing pastor John's heart to you, I would say brothers and sisters, think the best of each other.

Think the best of each other. See, the old way of thinking, the world's way of thinking, is suspicion. It's thinking the worst of people. It's putting the worst possible interpretation on people's actions.

And Satan loves to stir that up in our hearts. He does. Where they do something, and all of a sudden, we put all this meaning into what they've done, and what they've said, and it's all negative.

[26:02] But the Lord's heart is, honor them. Think highly of them. Say to yourself, no, they're better than that. They're better than what I'm thinking about them.

They probably didn't mean it like that. And when they fail you, and they will fail you, because here we are sinners, when they fail you, think.

Think about what they're going through. Think about what they've been through. Think about how easy it is for you to slip. Think things must be hard for them at this time.

They don't need my condemnation. My brothers and sisters need my compassion. The number one characteristic in the Gospels that describe Jesus' attitude towards people was compassion.

More times it says he looked and had compassion. He had compassion. I have compassion on them. That's how we honor one another above ourselves.

[27:07] We put them higher than us. We think better of them than we do of ourselves. We think of ourselves with more suspicion than we think of them. We put them on a step higher than us. Now, pretty soon, in a month or so, the Olympics are going to come on.

We're going to see all sorts of people winning medals. Well, if Jesus Christ is going to be put on the gold medal, let my brother or sister be on the silver medal. On that next step down, and let me take

the bronze.

Let me take the lower part. Let's put them up there. And so where we're quick to praise them, thank them, notice their contributions, and encourage them, and slow to praise ourselves, and so shouldn't we be quick to see their contribution, what they're doing, their gifts, their graces, but as for us, don't let the left hand know what the right hand is doing, but as for them, let's be seeing what we can honor them for.

And finally, Paul says, never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. Now, literally, it says, in zeal, not lazy.

In zeal, not lazy. In spirit, burning. The picture is like a cauldron, like a pot. That's what your heart should look like.

[28:30] The pot on the fire bubbling over. That's what your spirit should look like. So what does sincere love look like? What does family love, what does affectionate love, what does this love that we're talking about look like?

Well, it's not lazy, it's zealous. It's zealous. It's not easily distracted. It doesn't easily lose heart. No, when it gets hard, that's when it fires up and gets into action.

Isn't that what we saw last week? How we should use our gifts zealously. And can I say that? Using your gifts is one of the greatest ways that you can love your brothers or sisters.

If you can teach, then teach. Make every opportunity, take every opportunity to teach. If it's to give, then give. If it's encouraging, then be out there and have on your list, I'm going to encourage these people today.

If you notice that when people talk to you, they go away encouraged, that's how you know you have the gift of encouragement. And so that should click into your head and you should say, okay, from now on, I'm going to encourage.

[29:46] And if it's giving, then give. If it's serving, then serve. You each have a unique gift. You have each a unique space. We talked about that this last week because of your history, because of your upbringing, because of just how God has made you, your personality.

So you have this unique way to serve that's unlike everyone else. You have a unique flavor to add to the pot. We don't all taste the same. We need all of our flavors mixing together.

And so we have this unique way to serve. And so serve, teach, encourage, give, lead, show mercy.

And I said it last week. I'll say it again this week. Grace Fellowship needs your contribution.

If you have a gift, if you have a flavor, if you have something to add, then you need to add it. Grace Fellowship is going to grow up in faith and in unity.

We're going to become the church that Jesus died for, the church that Jesus deserves and has earned when we are using each one of us, our gifts uniquely.

[30:52] me doing this and you doing that is not what the church is. It's you doing your gift and me doing my gift and doing it zealously, doing it with our whole heart, not as if the church is something moderately important.

Can I ask you, is the church moderately important in your life? is Christ moderately important in your life? C.S.

Lewis said, Christianity, if false, is of no importance. It doesn't mean anything. It doesn't demand anything.

Don't even pay it any attention. But if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.

important. Moderately important. Jesus Christ can't be just moderately sort of the big deal in my life.

[31:56] And his bride can't be moderately important either. He's worth nothing, or he's worth everything. And she is worth nothing.

She is worth everything. J.C. Ryle said this about zeal. This is a long quote, but it's so good. J.C.

Ryle, the English pastor in the last century, or two centuries ago, the 1800s, said this about zeal.

A zealous person in Christianity is preeminently a person of one thing. He has that undivided heart of Psalm 86:11. Give me an undivided heart that I might fear you.

He has this undivided heart. It's not enough to say they are earnest or strong or uncompromising or meticulous or wholehearted and fervent in spirit.

They only see one thing. They care for one thing. They live for one thing. They are swallowed up in one thing. And that one thing is to please God.

[32:58] Whether they live or whether they die. Whether they are healthy or whether they are sick. Let me just pause there. Let's say you're sick.

You're not doing well physically. That doesn't mean you can't be zealous. Zealous is something of the heart. Whether they are rich or whether they are poor.

Whether they please men or whether they give offense. Whether they are thought wise or whether they are thought foolish. Whether they are accused or whether they are praised. Whether they get honor or whether they get shame. For all this, the zealous person cares nothing at all.

They have a passion for one thing. And that one thing is to please God and to advance God's glory.

If they are consumed and here's the cross that we talked about, that cross that real love has.

If they are consumed in the very burning of their passion for God, they don't care. They're content. They feel like a candle.

[34:01] They are made to burn. And if they are consumed in the burning, then they have only done the work for which God has appointed them. Such a person will always find a sphere for their zeal.

If they cannot work or give money or a man cannot preach, then they will cry out and sigh and pray. Yes, if they are extremely poor, on a perpetual bed of sickness, they will make the activity of sin around slow to a stand still, by continually praying against it.

If they cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, they will do the work of Moses, Aaron, and Hur on the hill. Remember? If they are cut off from working themselves, they will give the Lord no rest until help is raised up from another quarter and the work is done.

And that is what I mean when I speak of zeal and Christianity. And Paul says, in zeal, brothers, don't be lazy, but keep your spirit burning.

So are you not burning, not zealous? Remember the heights from which you have fallen. Remember your first love.

[35:20] We are always in danger of losing that first love, of losing the heat, getting lazy, but God has called us to live. He's called us to live.

Not just sort of make it, not just sort of be here, but live and to love. He's called us into a new family and he's called us to use all that we have for each other.

He's done this. He's brought us together. So to love, not in words, but with our lives, with our hearts, with warm affection for each other, to follow Jesus who took up his cross for them.

I'll say this, Grace Fellowship, you are a loving church. You are an affectionate church. And I know you are devoted to each other. And I know many of you are serving with everything you have.

And I'll say this, your labor in the Lord is not in vain. remember he said, even a cup of water given in my name will not lose its reward.

[36:32] Some of you are given a lot more than a cup of water. So look forward to your reward. But perhaps some of you need to turn, to turn in your heart, to do differently, to start again.

And if you're a Christian, I'm going to say your Savior loves you. And he can help you. He's that tree of life. He's that tree of life in Revelation 22 that gives its fruit every month.

It crops all the time with Jesus. He's the fruitful vine. You're in him and he's in you. You're the branch, he's the vine. Some of you need to take up your cross. Where are you going to learn to take up your cross?

Who can help you to do that? Who can get you over that hump, that feeling of, I don't want to do it? Jesus can because he knows what it's like to be afraid of a cross and to not want to do a cross.

And yet he did it. And he can help you. And that's where you can find that grace. And so he knows the pain and the fear and he knows, he also knows the joy of going through the cross.

[37:41] Because that's the secret. That's the wonderful thing. Because on the other side of every cross, starting with Jesus' cross, is joy. as a family brought together, is redemption.

And so there's joy on the other side of your cross. And Jesus can help you get there. Jesus can get you started, he can see you through it, and he can see you to the other side where it's joy.

So the call as we end is a familiar one. It's repent. If you need to repent, it's repent. love must be sincere. It must be real.

Affectionate, not superficial, not hypocritical. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Never be lacking in zeal. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord. That's what repentance looks like when you turn around and you do those things.

[38 : 51] And what does faith look like? Well, it looks to Jesus and says, Jesus, I don't have what it takes, but thank you that you do. It sees him as this overflowing tree full of grace.

He's like a maple tree bursting with maple syrup for us, and all we need to do is get real close and drink it up, and so lean hard on him, put yourself in his hands, seek him, and say, Lord, change me, renew my mind, help me to go to the next step, help me to offer my body as a living sacrifice for you.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you are this God.

We thank you that you are full of instruction and wisdom. Thank you for these very brief, succinct words, that stick in our minds. I pray that these words would stick in our minds and that we would take one thing and begin to work upon it and meditate on it and repent and begin to look to Jesus for grace to change.

Look to Jesus for grace to become what we are not now. Pray for those who are lost. Lord, put your love in their hearts.

[40 : 13] open their eyes that they might see you. Convict them of their sin. If any of us here is wavering, if anyone here is dallying with sin, or if anyone here is thinking that they can have sin and they can have Jesus and that everything is okay, pray that you would stop them up short, bring them to their senses and rescue them.

Lord, please help these words to stick with us. Holy Spirit, work them into our hearts and help us to obey them. We love you. We thank you for the worship we've had this morning.

I pray that you would bless our fellowship as we close. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.