

One Another, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Be Devoted to One Another in Brotherly Love

Romans 12:9-13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson sits at the hinge of Romans. For eleven chapters Paul has unfolded the gospel, the righteousness of God revealed apart from law, justification by faith in Christ, the believer's union with him in baptism into his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4), and the sweeping mercy of God toward Jew and Gentile. Then in Romans 12:1 he says "therefore," and turns the whole weight of that gospel toward transformed living. Your students need to see that the "one another" commands of verses 9 through 13 are not free-floating moral advice. They are the gospel taking shape in a community. The love commanded here is possible only because of the mercy described in chapters one through eleven.

The doctrinal heart of this passage is the family nature of the church. Paul calls for devotion "in brotherly love," and the word he uses belongs to the household. Help students grasp that this is not a sentimental metaphor. We are genuinely made one family, born again through obedience to the gospel, baptized into the one body (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26-27), adopted as sons and daughters of the same Father. From that reality flows a love that is sincere rather than masked, devoted rather than casual, honoring rather than self-seeking, fervent rather than cold, generous rather than closed. The aim is to let students feel the strength and warmth of that family bond.

At the same time, keep the lesson pointed at the heart and the hands. Paul is relentlessly concrete here: serve, share, open your home, persevere in prayer. Do not let the class rest in admiring the ideas. Press each truth toward an actual person and an actual step. Your goal is not merely that students would understand brotherly love but that they would walk out the door and practice it toward the real, imperfect, beloved family God has placed them in. Hold the doctrine and the heart together: the mercy of God in Christ is exactly what fuels the devoted love of his people.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul begins, "Love must be sincere" (Romans 12:9), literally love without hypocrisy, without a mask. Why does Paul guard brotherly love against pretense first, and what does this tell us about the kind of love the gospel produces in those who are in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start by drawing out the image hidden in the word. The term Paul uses, often rendered “without hypocrisy,” comes from the world of the theater, where an actor would hold a mask over his face and speak through it. Sincere love, then, is love with no mask, love that is what it appears to be. Before Paul says anything about the activities of love, he insists on its reality. He is guarding against a church full of warm faces and cold hearts.

Ask why Paul puts this first. The danger in any congregation is not usually open hatred but a polite counterfeit, a love that performs on Sunday and forgets on Monday, that smiles to the face and criticizes behind the back. Paul knows the human heart, and he knows that religion can become a stage. So he begins by demanding the genuine article. Everything that follows, devotion, honor, zeal, sharing, hospitality, must grow from a heart that actually loves.

Connect this to the gospel that fills the first eleven chapters. The love God has shown us in Christ is the opposite of pretense. He did not love us at a safe distance or with empty words; he gave his Son for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). A people who have received love that real cannot be content to give love that is fake. Sincere love among believers is the natural overflow of having been sincerely and sacrificially loved by God.

Bring it home with hope. Sincerity is not something we manufacture by trying harder to feel things. It grows as our hearts are purified by obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22) and as we keep returning to the mercy of God. Encourage students that the cure for masked love is not better acting but a deeper grip on the real love of Christ, which then makes our love real toward one another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sincere, mask-free love as the foundation of all the “one another” commands (Romans 12:9; 1 Peter 1:22)
- The gospel of God’s genuine, self-giving love in Christ as the pattern and source of our sincerity (Romans 5:8)
- The danger of religious pretense, a love that performs rather than truly loves (Matthew 23:27–28)
- Love purified by obedience to the truth, not produced by mere effort (1 Peter 1:22; Galatians 5:22)
- The connection between sincere love and the rest of Romans 12, every command growing from a true heart

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between love that performs and love that is genuine, and where do you see each in church life?
- Why would Paul guard against masked love before he commands any specific act of love?
- How does dwelling on God’s sincere love for us in Christ help cure the pretense in our own love?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think honestly about the past month in the life of your congregation. Where has your love worn a mask, looking warm on the surface while something colder ran underneath? Name one specific relationship where your love has been more for show than from the heart.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the goal is honesty without despair. Most of us can recall a handshake that hid an offense, a kind word spoken to someone we were quietly avoiding, a smile that covered resentment. Help students look at the past month not to wallow in guilt but to let the light of God's sincere love expose what is unreal in their own.

Draw out the gap between appearance and reality. Masked love is comfortable because it keeps the peace and protects our reputation. It costs nothing and asks nothing. But it also gives nothing. Paul will not let us settle there. Encourage students to picture a particular face, a particular relationship where the outside and the inside do not match, rather than confessing in vague generalities.

Move the conversation toward grace and a step forward. The point of naming a masked relationship is not to feel ashamed but to bring it honestly to Christ, who already knows it and loves us still. Often the first step toward sincere love is simply to stop pretending, to admit before God where our hearts are cold, and to ask him to warm them. From that honesty, real love can begin to grow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-examination as a healthy and normal part of the Christian walk (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- The difference between a love that keeps up appearances and a love that is genuine (Romans 12:9)
- Honest confession before God as the doorway to renewed, sincere love (1 John 1:7-9)
- The mercy of Christ as the remedy for our cold and divided hearts, not our resolve alone

Discussion Prompts

- Why is masked love so comfortable, and what does it ultimately cost the church family?
- What does it look like to stop pretending and bring a cold relationship honestly before God?
- What is one specific relationship where you sense your love has been more show than substance?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love” (Romans 12:10), using a word drawn from the bonds of family. Why does the New Testament so consistently speak of the church as a family, and what does our shared entrance into the one body of Christ have to do with this devotion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the word itself. Paul combines two family terms here, one describing the natural affection within a household and one describing brotherly love between siblings. He could have chosen the language of friendship or fellowship or partnership. Instead he reaches for the strongest, most intimate bond he knew, the love of a family, and lays it on the church. The choice is deliberate and rich.

Explain why the family image is not merely a nice comparison but a stated reality. In Christ, God is our Father (Romans 8:15–16), Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11), and we are fellow members of one body. We did not choose one another the way we choose friends; God placed us in this household. That is why the love commanded is devotion, a loyal, settled, family-strength love that holds on through difficulty rather than drifting away when relationships become inconvenient.

Tie this to how we enter the family, consistent with the gospel itself. Paul has already taught that we are baptized into Christ Jesus and into his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4), and elsewhere that through faith we are all children of God, for all who were baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ (Galatians 3:26–27). Through that obedient response to the gospel we are born into one body and one family. The devotion of verse 10 is simply the love appropriate to people who now share the same Father and the same new life.

Apply it concretely. Family devotion changes how we treat one another. We do not abandon a brother because he is difficult, any more than we disown a sibling for being difficult. We bear with the awkward, the wounded, and the slow, because they are ours and we are theirs. Ask students where they have been treating fellow Christians like acquaintances to be enjoyed rather than family to be cherished and held onto.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as the family and household of God, with God as Father (Romans 8:15–16; Ephesians 2:19)
- Christ as our elder brother, unashamed to call us his brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11–12)
- Entrance into the one family and body through faith and baptism into Christ (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; 1 Corinthians 12:13)
- Devotion as loyal, family-strength love that holds on rather than drifting away (Romans 12:10)
- The difference between the chosen bonds of friendship and the God-given bonds of the family of faith

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul reach for family language rather than the language of friendship to describe the church?
- How does remembering that God placed you in this family change how you treat a difficult brother or sister?
- Where have you been treating fellow Christians as acquaintances rather than as family to hold onto?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul commands us to “honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10). Where in your week does your instinct run the opposite direction, quietly seeking to be noticed, preferred, or thanked first? Name one concrete moment where you could have honored a brother or sister above yourself and did not.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the command to honor into a mirror. Paul is not asking us merely to be polite but to take active delight in lifting others ahead of ourselves, outdoing one another in showing honor. That cuts directly across the grain of a heart that naturally wants to be seen, thanked, and preferred. Help students feel the gap between Paul’s command and their instinct.

Make the self-seeking concrete. It shows up in small, ordinary moments: wanting credit for the work we did, feeling overlooked when someone else is praised, steering conversations toward our own news, keeping a quiet tally of who has thanked us and who has not. Honor that puts others first means deliberately noticing and praising the good in a brother or sister, especially when no one is doing the same for us.

Anchor this in the mind of Christ. Paul will say elsewhere that we are to do nothing from selfish ambition but in humility count others more significant than ourselves, looking to their interests, having the mind of Christ who emptied himself (Philippians 2:3–8). The Lord of glory honored us by taking the lowest place. A people who have been honored at that cost can afford to spend their lives honoring others.

Press for a real moment and a real change. Ask students to name a specific instance in the past week where they grasped for honor instead of giving it, and then to imagine what honoring the other person above themselves would have looked like. The aim is not abstract humility but a concrete, repeatable habit of lifting others up.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honoring others above self as active, glad humility, not mere courtesy (Romans 12:10)

- The mind of Christ, who counted others more significant and took the lowest place (Philippians 2:3-8)
- Self-seeking and the hunger for recognition as enemies of brotherly love
- Humility as the soil in which honor and unity grow in the body (1 Peter 5:5)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it look like, in ordinary church life, to honor someone above yourself?
- Where do you find yourself quietly keeping score of who has noticed or thanked you?
- Name one moment this week when you could have lifted a brother or sister up and chose yourself instead.

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul writes, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). How does Paul tie our energy for one another to the One we are ultimately serving, and what does this reveal about where the fire for Christian love comes from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice how Paul moves in this verse. He calls for zeal and fervor, literally to be boiling in spirit, and then immediately tells us what that energy is for: “serving the Lord.” Our love and labor for one another are never merely horizontal. When we serve the saints, we are serving Christ. Help students see that the fire for brotherly love is fueled from above, not whipped up from within.

Explain the danger Paul is guarding against. The word for “lacking” suggests slothfulness, a love that grows lazy and lukewarm. Every congregation knows the slow cooling, the way fervent care for one another can settle into routine and obligation. Paul will not allow it. He calls us to keep the pot boiling, to refuse to coast, to stay ardent in our service.

Show where the fuel comes from. We cannot manufacture lasting fervor by sheer willpower; it burns out. But when we remember that the person we are serving in our brother or sister is in fact the Lord himself (Matthew 25:40), and when we keep returning to the mercy of God in Christ, the fire is rekindled from a source that does not run dry. Zeal that is rooted in serving the Lord outlasts zeal that is rooted in our own enthusiasm.

Apply it pastorally. Ask students to consider whether their service has become joyless and mechanical, and to reconnect it to Christ. Folding the bulletins, visiting the sick, teaching the children, preparing a meal, all of it is service rendered to the Lord. When the menial is seen as ministry to Jesus, the fervor returns.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Service to the saints as service rendered to Christ himself (Matthew 25:40; Colossians 3:23–24)
- Spiritual fervor as the normal temperature of the Christian, not occasional zeal (Romans 12:11)
- The danger of laziness and lukewarmness in love and service (Revelation 3:15–16)
- The mercy of God in Christ as the inexhaustible fuel for ardent service
- Whole-life service to the Lord, in which even ordinary tasks become ministry (Colossians 3:17)

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change a menial act of service to remember you are serving the Lord through it?
- What tends to cool your fervor for serving the church family over time?
- Where does lasting fire for Christian love actually come from, and how do we keep returning to it?

Question 6

Student Question:

Be honest about your own spiritual temperature. Where has your fervor for serving the Lord and his people cooled into routine, going through the motions on Sundays while your heart drifts? What has quietly drained the fire, and what is one thing that could rekindle it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites honest self-examination about spiritual coolness. Lukewarmness rarely arrives as a dramatic fall; it creeps in. We keep attending, keep serving, keep saying the right words, while inside the warmth slowly fades. Help students name the drift without condemnation, recognizing that the Lord calls cooled hearts back rather than casting them off.

Help them trace what drains the fire. Often it is unconfessed sin, or busyness that crowds out prayer and the Word, or a wound that was never healed, or simply the slow erosion of taking grace for granted. Encourage students to look honestly for the specific thing that has lowered their temperature, rather than settling for a vague sense of dryness.

Turn the conversation toward rekindling. Fervor is not recovered by self-condemnation but by returning. Returning to the cross and the empty tomb, returning to faithful prayer, returning to the assembly and the Lord's Supper where we remember his body and blood, returning to active service of a brother or sister in need. Ask students to name one concrete thing that could fan the embers back into flame this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality that Christians can grow lukewarm and must guard their hearts (Revelation 3:15–19; Hebrews 3:12–14)
- The call to remain faithful and not drift, lest we fall away (Hebrews 2:1; 3:12–14)
- The means God gives to rekindle fervor: the Word, prayer, the assembly, the Lord’s Supper, and service
- Repentance and return as the path back from coldness, not despair (Revelation 2:4–5)

Discussion Prompts

- How does spiritual coolness usually creep in, rather than arrive all at once?
- What specific thing has quietly drained the fire from your love and service?
- What is one concrete step you could take this week to fan the embers back into flame?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul gathers together “joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12). How do these three, hope, patience, and prayer, sustain a Christian who is trying to love a difficult or wounded church family over the long haul?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by noticing that Paul tucks these three graces right in the middle of his commands about loving one another. Loving a real congregation over many years is hard, sustained work, and Paul knows it. So he gives us the inner resources that keep love alive when relationships grow weary: a joy anchored in hope, a patience that endures trouble, and a prayer life that never gives up.

Take them one at a time. Joy in hope lifts our eyes above the present friction to the certain future God has promised, so we love people not for what they are giving us now but in light of what we will all become in glory. Patience in affliction keeps us from quitting when loving others becomes painful, for love within a fallen family will sometimes wound us. And faithfulness in prayer keeps us from trying to love in our own strength, bringing the people who try us back to God again and again.

Show how the three work together. Hope without patience becomes naive; patience without prayer becomes mere gritting of teeth; prayer without hope becomes hollow ritual. Held together, they form the spiritual stamina that long-term brotherly love requires. Help students see that Paul is not piling on more duties but handing us the very tools that make the duty of love sustainable.

Apply it to a particular relationship. Ask students to think of one person in the body who is hard to love, and to consider how hope, patience, and persistent prayer might change the way they

carry that relationship. Often the prayer comes first: it is very difficult to keep resenting someone you are faithfully praying for.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hope in the certain future God has promised as fuel for present love (Romans 5:2–5; 8:24–25)
- Patient endurance in affliction as a mark of mature Christian love (Romans 5:3–4; James 1:2–4)
- Persistent, faithful prayer as the lifeline of love within the body (Ephesians 6:18; Luke 18:1)
- The interdependence of hope, patience, and prayer in sustaining long-term love
- Love that endures because it draws continually on God rather than on our own reserves

Discussion Prompts

- How does a firm hope in the future change the way you love difficult people now?
- Why does loving a real church family require patience, and where have you been tempted to quit?
- How might faithfully praying for a hard person reshape your heart toward them?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says to “share with the Lord’s people who are in need” (Romans 12:13). Where has your awareness of real needs in your congregation, financial, physical, or emotional, stayed at the level of sympathy without ever becoming sharing? Name one need you know of right now that you could meet.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses brotherly love into the practical world of needs and resources. Paul does not say feel sorry for the Lord’s people in need; he says share with them. Christian love that stops at sympathy has not yet become what the New Testament calls love. Help students examine the distance between what they notice and what they actually do.

Use the witness of the early church. In Acts the believers shared their possessions and met one another’s needs so that there was no one in want among them (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35). And John warns that if anyone has the world’s goods and sees a brother in need yet closes his heart against him, the love of God does not abide in him (1 John 3:17–18). Sharing is not an advanced level of Christian love reserved for the especially generous; it is basic to love itself.

Be honest and gentle about the obstacles. We hesitate because of our own fears about money, our busyness, our comfort, or simply because we assume someone else will step in. Encourage students not to be overwhelmed by every need in the world but to focus on the Lord’s people

right in front of them, the actual brothers and sisters in their own congregation whose needs they already know.

Press for one concrete need and one concrete response. Ask students to name a specific need they are already aware of, a struggling family, a lonely widow, a member out of work, a young couple drowning under a new baby, and to take a single, doable step toward meeting it this week. Sympathy becomes love at the moment it acts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love that shares material and practical resources with believers in need (Romans 12:13; 1 John 3:17–18)
- The early church's pattern of meeting one another's needs so none was in want (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35)
- The difference between sympathy that feels and love that acts (James 2:15–16)
- Generosity within the body as an expression of the mercy we have received in Christ
- Stewardship of our resources for the good of God's family

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between feeling sympathy for a need and actually sharing to meet it?
- Why does the New Testament treat practical generosity as basic to love rather than optional?
- What is one specific need in your congregation that you could take a step to meet this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul ends with "practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13), literally to pursue the love of strangers, opening your home and life to others. How does Christian hospitality flow out of the gospel itself, given that God in Christ welcomed us when we were strangers and enemies, and why is this more than mere entertaining?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a doctrinally rich question, so give it room. Begin with the word Paul uses. Translated "hospitality," it literally means love of strangers, and the verb he attaches to it means to pursue or chase after. Christian hospitality is not a passive willingness to host if someone happens to ask; it is an active pursuit of welcoming others into our homes and lives, especially those on the outside.

Ground this in the gospel itself. We were the strangers. Paul has already taught the Romans that we were ungodly, sinners, even enemies of God, and yet Christ died for us and reconciled us

(Romans 5:6–10). And to the Ephesians he wrote that we who were once foreigners and strangers have been brought near and made members of God's household (Ephesians 2:12–19). God welcomed us at infinite cost when we had no claim on him. Christian hospitality is simply that divine welcome flowing through us to others.

Distinguish hospitality from entertaining. Entertaining is about impressing; it keeps the focus on the host, the tidy house, the fine meal, the good image. Hospitality is about welcoming; it keeps the focus on the guest, the lonely, the new, the overlooked, the one with nothing to offer in return. The gospel produces the second, because that is the kind of welcome we ourselves received from God, who welcomed us when we could not impress him or repay him.

Make it practical. Hospitality may mean an open home, a shared meal, a seat saved for the newcomer, a guest room for the traveler, a place at the table for the widow or the visitor who knows no one. Hebrews reminds us that some who showed hospitality entertained angels unaware (Hebrews 13:2). Ask students whether their homes and lives are genuinely open, and to whom, and to name one person they could deliberately welcome.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hospitality as the active pursuit of welcoming others, especially strangers (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2)
- The gospel as God's welcome of us when we were strangers and enemies (Romans 5:6–10; Ephesians 2:12–19)
- The difference between gospel hospitality and self-displaying entertainment
- Hospitality as a qualification valued in the church, including its leaders (1 Timothy 3:2; 1 Peter 4:9)
- The open home and shared table as ordinary means of building up the family of God (Acts 2:46)

Discussion Prompts

- How does remembering that God welcomed you as a stranger reshape the way you welcome others?
- What is the difference between entertaining to impress and hospitality that genuinely welcomes?
- Who is one person, perhaps lonely, new, or overlooked, that you could deliberately welcome this week?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Romans 12:9–13 as a whole: sincere love, family devotion, honor, zeal, hope, patience, prayer, sharing, and hospitality. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to grow in brotherly love through this passage, and what concrete step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole lesson into one concrete commitment. Resist the urge to let it stay general. “I want to love the church more” is a wish, not a step. Help students name a specific quality from the passage, a specific person, and a specific action they will take.

Encourage them to connect their answer to whatever pressed on their heart most. For one student it may be the word “sincere” and a call to drop a mask. For another it may be “honor one another above yourselves” and a call to stop keeping score. For another it may be “share with the Lord’s people in need” or “practice hospitality” and a call to open hand or home. Let the text itself drive the application.

Close by lifting their eyes back to Christ. The goal of this study is not behavior modification but becoming like Jesus, who loved his own to the end. Remind students that the same gospel that fills the first eleven chapters of Romans, the mercy of God poured out in Christ, is the power that produces this devoted love in us. Send them out not with a heavy burden but with a clear next step and a confident hope that Christ is forming them into the family he died to gather.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel of God’s mercy in Christ as the source and power of brotherly love (Romans 12:1; 5:8)
- Growing conformity to Christ, who loved his own to the end, as the goal of the Christian life (Romans 8:29)
- Personal, specific obedience as the proper response to God’s Word (James 1:22)
- Christ as both the pattern and the power of the devoted love he commands

Discussion Prompts

- Which quality in Romans 12:9–13 pressed on your heart most, and why?
- What is the one specific step of brotherly love you will take this week, and toward whom?
- How will you rely on the mercy of God in Christ, rather than your own willpower, as you take it?