

One Another

Lesson 2: Be Devoted to One Another in Brotherly Love -- Romans 12:9-13

Picture a household at the end of a long day. The work is done, the table is cleared, and the family is gathered close in the warm circle of the lamplight. There is an ease here that exists nowhere else, a kind of belonging that does not have to be earned each morning. When one of them is sick, the others lose sleep. When one of them rejoices, the whole room rejoices. No one keeps a ledger. No one asks whether the love is deserved. They are family, and family means you are bound to one another at a depth that the world outside the door rarely understands.

That is the picture the apostle Paul reaches for when he writes to the Christians in Rome. After eleven chapters tracing the towering heights of the gospel, the righteousness of God, the cross of Christ, the mercy poured out on Jew and Gentile alike, he turns in chapter twelve to say, in effect, "Now here is what that gospel looks like when it walks into a room." And one of the very first things he says is this: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." He is not describing a club or a committee. He is describing a family.

The word Paul chooses for "devoted" is a tender one. In the Greek world it described the fierce, tender affection of a mother for her child, of a brother for his sister, of those bound together by blood and shared life. Paul takes that family word and presses it onto the church. We who were strangers, who were not a people, have been brought into one household through the blood of Christ. So the love we owe one another is not the thin courtesy of acquaintances. It is the strong, loyal, glad-hearted love of a family that God himself has gathered around one table.

And notice how concrete Paul makes it. He does not leave brotherly love hanging in the air as a beautiful feeling. He nails it down to the floorboards of ordinary life: love that is sincere and not a mask; zeal that does not grow lazy; spiritual fervor that keeps the fire burning; joy in hope and patience in affliction; sharing with God's people who are in need; opening the door and practicing hospitality. This is the texture of a family that belongs to Jesus. As we study these verses, we are really asking one question: what would it look like for this congregation, your congregation, to love one another like the family of God we have been made to be?

Group Discussion: When you hear the word "family," what comes to mind, and in what ways should a congregation of God's people actually feel and behave like a family rather than like a polite gathering of strangers who happen to meet on Sundays?

Personal Reflection: Where is your own love for the church family more polished than sincere, more performance than affection? As you begin this lesson, what would it mean to let God expose and warm the cold places in your heart toward his people?

Read Romans 12:9-13

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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.
5. 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?

6. 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?

7. 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?

8. 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.

9. 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?

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Peter 1:22, where having purified ourselves by obeying the truth we are to love one another deeply from a pure heart; Hebrews 13:1-2, where brotherly love is to continue and hospitality is urged, for some have entertained angels without knowing it; 1 John 3:16-18, where love is shown not in word only but in laying down our lives and sharing our goods with a brother in need; Acts 2:44-46, where the first Christians shared their possessions and broke bread from house to house with glad and sincere hearts.