

Tommy Clayton  
 CCC 4-28-24  
 Romans 12:9-13

## Compelling Evidence

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. —Romans 12:9–13

The kind of love Paul is talking about here in Rom. 12 is powerful. It's attractive. It's head-turning relational beauty. It's Compelling evidence. Here's why that's important. Right now.

This is an interesting time to be alive as a Christian. The world has never been more *confused* about Christianity—or *curious*. This is a unique cultural moment. Well known secular thinkers and intellectuals are re-exploring the claims of Christianity.

They're doing their research and finding the teachings of Jesus and the claims of the Bible compelling.

Unbelievers are seeing that new atheism gave them no resources to cope with pain, suffering, and loss. No hope to face death. It gave them no foundation for meaning, purpose, or identity—nor morality or ethics. Happiness without transcendent truth is a pipe dream. That worldview is too thin. Intellectually lacking. Bankrupt.

And everyone knows it! Joe Rogan has sampled every worldview and lifestyle on his podcast. Marijuana. Psychedelic drugs. Self-help gurus. Now he's considering Christianity, saying Jesus is the answer. Jordan Peterson has been flirting with the Bible and Christianity for years. Russell Brand professed to be a Christian.

Tom Holland, an agnostic historian, authored the book "Dominion" where he argues that Christianity remade the world as we know it.

Richard Dawkins has now classified himself as a cultural Christian. All through intellectual arguments. Xianty is rational/reasonable.

That excites me! I'm grateful. But...Jesus said what will *really* attract the world is not our impressive apologetic arguments. We have them. We must! **Always be prepared to make a defense!** Jesus said: **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**"

How will the world know we belong to Jesus. And further, how will we know? The answer, is our love. For one another.

Those same people who investigated the doctrine of Jesus will now turn and investigate his disciples. What will they see? Will they find us compelling too, when they come to our churches or when they peer into our gatherings throughout the week? There is nothing more beautiful than relational love in action.

You can be doctrinally right while relationally wrong. When the doctrine is clear and the culture is beautiful...powerful witness.

Romans 1-11 is Gospel Doctrine. 12-16 is Gospel Culture. It's relational beauty. How we treat one another because of Jesus.

In Acts 2, there's a beautiful description of the gathered church after Pentecost. It uses the word "devoted" that means to give away. The church gave themselves away to God and to one another. And the effect was felt in the entire community. The world leaned in to watch and listen to these early Christians. What did they hear? What did they see? Political rancor? Social outrage? Polarization? Petty squabbles? No, they saw love. They sensed a power at work. And it got their attention. Although the message offended them, the lifestyle attracted them. Compelling evidence.

The world knows very little of the intense, personal, unbroken unity that we can demonstrate as the body of Christ. The world is divisive, angry, tense, and trigger-happy. All they have ever known is dog-eat-dog. That's why this is both powerful and beautiful.

God is love. It makes sense that his children are marked by it. Are we? How should we love? How does the Gospel shape our relationships and form our culture in here?

**SLIDE: Outline:** Genuine. Truthful. Affectionate. Honorable. Hopeful. Practical. But before we pick-up with Hopeful...

**Pt. #1. Love Genuinely:** “Let love be genuine.” unfeigned, unhypocritical, true. Sincere. Not pretend. Not hypocritically. Not the kiss of Judas. Not rot under a layer of niceness and politeness.

I was born in the Bible Belt and the deep south has a reputation for warmness, friendliness, even hospitality. And it's true. Some of the nicest people you'll ever meet. But I can say this honestly: In the south, church folk can be the meanest and the cruelest. But not to your face. I'm not throwing shade on the south, BTW. Them's my people. You'll find cruelty everywhere. But where it's covered up with niceness and pretense on the surface, that's the issue. It's called Hypocrisy. Jesus hated it. We should too. Let love be genuine.

It's not a thin veneer of politeness and niceness. Pleasantries. But hate on the inside.

It there is rot at the core. Like scented kitty litter. There's a problem. You have something putrid buried in there. Eventually, the scented litter will be overpowered by the reality.

We live in a culture of cons. Experience has made us cynical. We can't escape this airbrushed world. But we can live countercultural!

**SLIDE:** (2X) Mr. Rogers. His set was a neighborhood. Community. All his staff stayed with him for life. Nobody wanted to leave.

Tom Junod, a self-described “bad-boy journalist” who had cultivated a reputation for controversy, was assigned writing a profile about Fred Rogers. He was cynical but in the end he wrote the most positive profile he'd ever written about anyone—one of the most positive Esquire ever published...

The cynic says, “What's your racket here? What's the real scoop? Let's peek behind the curtain.” You peek behind the curtain of Fred Rogers and you get love. Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister. And that faith guided him through his daily behavior and his creative output.

I remember a rumor floating around when I was a kid that Mr. Rogers was a Navy Seal with hundreds of kills and that he had skull tattoos all over his arms, thus the Cardigan sweater. No.

Lisa Dormire, who worked on Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, said: “Fred had very Christlike qualities, and that is part of what drew children. Children know a fraud more than anyone. . . . I truly believe he was one of the most authentic and Christlike people that I have ever known in my life. Just his manner. His ability to listen. . . . Everyone you talk to that had any encounter with him: It was a real moment in their lives.”-**The Good Neighbor**

“The greatest gift you will ever give is your honest self.” — **Fred Rogers.** Pee-wee Herman isn't genuine. Mr. Rogers is... 31 years. Nearly 900 episodes. No scandal...Why? Love.

When Fred Rogers was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award and went onstage to accept the award, he bowed and said into the microphone, “All of us have special ones who have loved us into being. Would you just take, along with me, ten seconds to think of the people who have helped you become who you are? . . . First, giggles, but then the mascara ran, and the tears fell, and Mister Rogers finally looked up from his watch and said, ‘May God be with you.’”

“Love from the center of who you are. Don't fake it!” —**MSG**

**Pt. #2 Love Truthfully:** Love does not lead us to accept any and every lifestyle, belief, practice, hang-up, sin, habit, worldview. No. Not at all. Love is not accepting of everything.

Love has to be anchored to something or it's just a loose ship going wherever the cultural tides and changing winds steer it. If you throw your anchor into the water around you in flux? It has to be grounded. But to what? What can steer our love?

Anchored in God's Word. Anchored in God's Truth. His Will.

“Abhor what is evil.” Hate it. Despise it. Detest it. This is one of the strongest words for hate anywhere in the Bible. With a prefix that means to separate. The ides is to stand against in opposition and maybe disgust. To hate evil intensely. Loathe!

Paul is saying more here than don't do things that are wrong and evil. But to detest those things. To find them revolting. HATE! My mother did not allow me to say I hate anyone EXCEPT for the devil. So I said that a lot. Someone probably told the devil, "Some random kid in Arkansas really hates your guts." Hate it!

Genuine love never leads us into temptation or vice, or compromise. The boyfriend or girlfriend that pressures you into sexual compromise. Not love!

The friend or spouse who stands by while you adopt a destructive lifestyle or embrace a lie...that's self-love.

**Christians hold one another accountable to the truth, or they are not loving.** We don't love somebody by letting them do things that are wrong, unethical, dangerous...sinful.

When we love someone, it often distorts our view of good and evil. IOW, if you love someone, your heart is bound up with their heart. You can be tempted you to love insincerely.

This problem happens in parenting. Parents don't discipline children consistently because they cannot bear their tears or anger. But the result of a childhood without discipline is almost always disaster. And it's definitely an unloving thing to do. That's why Heb 12:6 "**The Lord disciplines the one he loves.**"

We cannot love rightly without hating rightly!

Think of how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by destructive habits, unwise actions or reckless relationships. Real love stands against the deception, lie, the destructive sin.

Jesus loved us enough to tell us the truth even when it made us so mad we killed him for it. Love like that.

Not only do we hate intensely what is evil. We cling to (cement ourselves) or glue ourselves to what is good. Philippians says whatever is noble, praiseworthy, excellent, commendable, true, pure, just, and lovely...think on them...practice them...let them shape the way you love those in the body of Christ.

**Pt. #3 Love Affectionately.** Philos was commonly used with reference to friendships or family relationships. A related word, storgē, means "family devotion." In Romans 12:10, those two are combined and can be translated "devoted" or "brotherly affection" (ESV). Love like a family—in community.

This is a warm, fervent love for one another that feels like a family. We're devoted. God gave us a family and a body: the church. Maybe you came from a messed up family and never saw love in action. Maybe you suffer from a sick, broken body and have never enjoyed bodily health. But listen...God has given us a family and a body that has been redeemed. The church. It's not perfect. We have flaws. But we have a Father and a Head who is perfect. We follow him. We're a family...

**This is radical and this is offensive.**

Lucian of Samosata, a Greek writer who saw Christianity growing and didn't like it, said, "**Their founder, that's Jesus, persuades them they should be like brothers to one another and therefore they despise their own privacy and view all their possessions as common property.**" To him, that was unthinkable. Despicable. Offensive. Maybe we struggle too.

Last week Sarah and I were driving around with our boys. She had to run into Publix and I was driving through the parking lot looking for a spot to pull in and eat a Jersey Mike's Salad while she got some stuff to get us through the week. Someone was walking right in the one-way drive of the parking lot, right in front of me, toward my truck, carrying an infant. I said something unkind under my breath, something about the lack of intelligence of such a thing, the danger of it, how inconvenient it was. How wrong it was. And my wife lovingly looked at me and said, "Honey I hope you don't drive around DeLand when you're by yourself as a servant of the Lord angry at people and scowling." I defended myself as she got out of the truck and went into Publix. The next 10 minutes as I waited on her and ate my salad were searching. She had invaded my privacy in a sense. Because we're family. You couldn't get away with that in a club. You'd hear "Mind your own business." But in a family...we love fiercely!

**Pt. #4 Love Honorably:** That is, to recognize & acknowledge the value someone has. Their dignity as an image-bearing human being. And beyond, their being remade into Christ's image.

You recognize the inherent worth in people. Esteem them. Respect them. Revere them.

Treat everyone like royalty. Sarah and I saw Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner at Disneyland in CA. People were clamoring to get to them. Competing with each other to honor these complete strangers whom they knew nothing about. They had no relational context for it. We do with one another. Honor!

Strikingly, the command of Romans 12:10 is not merely to honor one another but to **outdo one another in showing honor**. It's competitive, and everyone wins!

It's when we begin affirming, and recognizing one another in true and significant ways. Not for false and shallow things. Like being a celebrity. Being famous. Being important because the culture says you are important. Or because social media says you are.

**As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.** (Ps. 16:3)

I never knew what that passage meant until I planted a church. They are my people. My family. My friends. My partners in the gospel. There is nobody I'd rather walk through life with (suffering and prosperity) than with you. We should hold an unashamed enthusiasm for the community Jesus has created in here.

We perceive one another with a sense of *awe*. "**they are the excellent ones**" Every single believer in Jesus is *fascinating*. It typically takes only seconds in a conversation for the excellencies to begin to appear. Have you noticed this at CCC?

David is saying, "I *admire* God's people. They are the true royalty in this world. Whoever they are, whatever their race or class or position, however ordinary they may appear for now, God has lifted them up. With all their flaws, at a deeper level.

God has destined them for eternal greatness, and it's appearing in them even in this life.

C. S. Lewis pointed out that if we could see now how even the humblest saint will be glorified in heaven, then we'd be tempted to fall down in worship. Truly, "they are the excellent ones." David is being attentive here. He is not aloof or detached from God's people. He loves them. They are his favorite people in the world. And this is in the Old Testament for crying out loud, where the glory of Christ was only hinted at. Now we see in 4K no?

Churches sometimes live on a starvation diet of encouragement and honor. Let's stop the starving. We've plenty of food to go around! Let's lavish one another with honor!

One of the distinctive features of the early church was that **honor was shown to ALL people.**

The church was the only place where the poor, immigrants, people of different rank and nationality, were all treated with the honor that comes from being a child of God. The slave and master were equal. And it was attractive—because it pointed to a new, different humanity, kingdom. They loved those no one else did. Our churches should be a place where groups that get overlooked or marginalized by society are shown great honor because they are made in the image of God.

Racism. Abortion. Inequality. Discrimination. Partiality. All are sins that stem from a failure to love like this.

**Pt. 5. Love Hopefully:** "**Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.**" (vv. 11–12). 6 commands boiled down into one attitude or posture. Hope. Optimism. Remember this is us giving away the love God gave to us in Jesus relationally to one another. This is how we serve and love one another.

**We are never taking to a believer who is too far gone** spiritually. We should be brimming with optimism. That's one of the first and most important rules in counseling. We give people hope because we have a ton of it to give away.

**We're never working in a circumstance too difficult.**

Challenging, yes. Complex? Absolutely. Sin brings with it a relationally tangled mess, doesn't it? It's hard to unravel. We can't do it on our own. But nothing is impossible with God.

I've seen marriages restored in our church. I've seen reconciliation take place that is breathtaking. You've seen it too

How can we be so optimistic and hopeful? Because we know and have experienced the power of the Gospel. We have felt the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus breaks the power of canceled sin. He sets the prisoner free. He breaks the chains of bondage. A mighty fortress is our God. He is mighty to save.

We can be hopeful that none of our efforts to love this way are wasted. 1 Cor. 15. "in the Lord, your labor is not in vain."

We can endure patiently, because we know God is working all things together for good for us who love Jesus. No wasted trials. No throwaway, meaningless pain. We can endure.

We can be constant in prayer. Why? Because we know that God hears every single prayer we offer. All of them. He is a prayer hearing God. And he invites to pray through our heart-sickness.

We don't love safely. Love conveniently. No. All the way. Someone told me and Sarah years ago that we couldn't have close friends in the church because we'd get hurt. I reject that.

**SLIDE:** "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable." -Lewis

The New Testament concept of hope has to do with absolute certainty that the promises of God for the future will come to pass. It's not wishful thinking or whistling in the dark. It's assurance.

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! —Ps. 27:13. As William Carey said, "The future is as bright as the promises of God!"

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. —1 Cor 13:7. Love is optimistic and resilient!

**Pt. #6. Love Practically:** Love has tangible expressions. We take care of our own family and body. That's the idea. Paul uses the verbal form of the very familiar NT *koinōnia*, "fellowship." That word in its simplest form means to share. But Paul is not urging us to just share fellowship with the saints here, but to share, to participate, **to enter into the "needs" of the saints**. These "needs" are material ones: food, clothing, and shelter. There seems to be an order here. Family first...

Taking care of each other comes first. There should be no needy here. We should be committed to each other in such a way that we bear each other's burdens together--whether that is a financial burden, a health burden, or a problem with the marriage or the kids. When that happens, others in the church come alongside to help bear that burden. And that love and commitment to each other should then spill out into the streets. Hospitality.

Paul did not urge the Romans to 'practice' hospitality, but rather to 'pursue' it. Hasten. Run. Chase hospitality. Look for it.

**SLIDE:** Roman Emperor Julian, one of the fiercest persecutors of the Christian church, said in disgust: "[The Christian cause] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers... It is a scandal that there is not a single (one) who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans [i.e. Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them."

The Church was a better welfare; took better care of poor; visited those in prison; provided for widows & orphans; fed the hungry.

**SLIDE:** In *Les Misérables*, the bishop's name is Monseigneur Bienvenu—*welcome* in English. He welcomed Jean Valjean into



his home. Nobody else in the town would give him shelter because he was a convict. The Bishop in the movie/play says this.

Come in, Sir, for you are weary.  
And the night is cold out there.  
Though our lives are very humble,  
What we have, we have to share.  
There is wine here to revive you.  
There is bread to make you strong.  
There's a bed to rest 'til morning.  
Rest from pain, and rest from wrong.

Here's that moving section from the novel:

The Bishop turned to the man. "Sit down, sir, and warm yourself. We are going to dine in a few moments, and your bed will be prepared while you are eating." At this point the man suddenly comprehended. The expression of his face, up to that time sombre and harsh, bore the imprint of shock, of doubt, of joy, and became extraordinary. He began stammering like a crazy man:—"Really? What! You will keep me? You do not drive me forth? A convict! You call me sir! 'Get out of here, you dog!' is what people always say to me. I felt sure that you would expel me, so I told you at once who I am. Oh, what a good woman that was who directed me here! I am going to feast! A bed with a mattress and sheets, like the rest of the world! a bed! It is nineteen years since I have slept in a bed! You actually do not want me to go!..." "Monsieur," said the man, "you are good; you do not despise me. You receive me into your house. You light your candles for me. Yet I have not concealed from you my identity." The Bishop, who was sitting close to him, gently touched his hand. "You could not help telling me who you were. This is not my house; it is the house of Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion:** How do we love like this? People are hard to love. They have flaws. Quirks. Blindspots. Body Odor. Bad breath! How can we love people with annoying flaws? "We stop pretending and start repenting." We stop faking it.

Jesus can't help the fake you. A real Jesus died on a real cross for the real you, and it's only when you expose the real you to him—that he can help you. And he will! He wants to empower, fill, equip, and enable you to love. His name is at stake!

J.D. Greear wrote, "I'll never be asked to be more patient with someone than God has been with me; never be asked to forgive anyone of more than God has forgiven me."

The gospel reminds us we are loved because Jesus died for us when we were unattractive in order to make us attractive.

"THE FIRE TO DO in the Christian life comes from being soaked in the fuel of what has been done."

On our farm growing up, my father would soak large piles of cut brush and logs with diesel fuel. Then he'd step back and throw a match on them. It wasn't a gasoline fire. Those are more dangerous. Diesel doesn't blow-up or explode. It slowly ignites and burns long. I wonder if our lack of resilient love in the church today might be traced to our failure to soak in the love of God for us. Are we just throwing matches on water-logged sticks and wet logs?

Rooting yourself, soaking yourself in the love of God for you is how love for God and others grows in you, and the only way to grow in your love for others is to grow in your awareness of the love of God for you in Christ.

**John wrote: "We love, because He first loved us."** In Greek, *our* love does not have a direct object there, meaning, we can only love so much as we are powered by remembering God's love for us. God's love gives us energy horizontally toward others.

Therefore, in order to grow in our love for one another, we need to bask in God's love toward us. While we were weak. While we were sinners. While we were enemies. He loved us at our worst. When the glory of what he had done lands on us, love will flow.

I love Larry Kirk's music/dance metaphor for indicatives/imperatives. Truth/Obedience....

I suppose a pastor's fear is that we'll assume that Romans 12 isn't preceded by 11 chapters full of deep, rich gospel truths. That's the music. Chapters 12-16 is the dance. May the relational dance of our love for one another make outsiders hunger to know what music we're listening to!  
Let's pray...