

**ISH**  
**Defining Love**  
**Romans 12:9-13**

This morning we are continuing our series titled "ISH." This is a series about being more than mediocre in our Christian lives; about being **fully devoted followers** of Christ rather than just weekend warriors. If you are a Christ-follower, then your life ought to be a daily discovery and a daily demonstration of the remarkable change that Christ has made in your life. This is extremely practical! We began this series by looking Romans 12:1-2 which instructs us to give our bodies to God, to stop acting like the rest of the world, and to be transformed by renewing the way we think so that we can know and live and love the will of God! In these last two weeks, we focused on how each of us has been equipped with gifts and talents that allow us to function with purpose in the body of Christ. Today, we are going to focus on another aspect of our behavior in the Body of Christ: Our LOVE for each other.

You have to love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Does that sound funny to you? Can you simply CHOOSE to love someone that is not related to you and that may have little in common with you outside of your mutual faith? **Jesus thought so.** He brought together fishermen and religious leaders and rebels and tax collectors and taught them all to love one another, and then he made it clear that **their faith in God could not be separated from their love for each other.** In fact, he said that their love for each other would be the DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC of their faith! It would be the highest demonstration of the reality of the change that Christ brings about in his followers. Jesus said precisely this in **John 13:34-35 NLT.**

**34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."**

We cannot be "ISHY" when it comes to our love for one another. We have to display the kind of love that is DEFINED by God and that DEFINES LOVE for those who do not know God. Outsiders to the faith need to see that our faith is real, and the best way to demonstrate that is by choosing to show God's love to one another even when we experience the normal frustrations that relationships bring. Love is not just a warm fuzzy feeling that we have for those who make us happy or who fulfill our wishes. Furthermore, love is not just something that is reserved for those who happen to have the same last name. **LOVE IS A CHOICE AND A CONDUCT. Love DOES, and the kind of love that God calls us to display is something that can only exist between those who have been changed by the LOVE OF GOD.** This is why it PROVES to the world that Christians are truly followers of Christ! In Romans, Paul (who also penned the remarkable description of love in 1 Corinthians 13) reminds us of our great responsibility to love one another. The first thing that he tells us about our defining love is that . . .

**Our love must be genuine.**

We see this in the first part of **Romans 12:9 NLT**

**9 Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.**

I love the way that the NLT translates the word that Paul uses here. “Don’t just pretend to love others” comes from Paul’s use of the word “hypocrite.” Don’t be a hypocrite about the way that you love your faith family. Don’t be a FAKE! Your love for each other must be the genuine article. It must be the kind of love that only God could forge in your heart for another individual through his love and forgiveness. Simon Peter said it this way: **1 Peter 1:22 NLT**

**22 You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.**

This cannot be faked, but it can be learned. Love becomes genuine when we take off our MASKS and get REAL with one another. We are not to play the game of just trying to LOOK like we love one another; we are to REALLY love one another deeply. This can only happen when we choose not to HIDE from others, but we let them KNOW who and where we really are in our life and faith. This means that we must be TRANSPARENT with one another. You have to get CLOSE to others in order to get REAL with them like this. Let them see your strengths and your weaknesses! God’s love for us gives us the freedom to have this kind of love. It is also a fact that genuine love can only happen to people who spend TIME with one another. You will not deeply love people that you do not really KNOW! This means that deep, godly relationships will be developed over the years as we DO LIFE TOGETHER in every respect. It is true that the INCONVENIENCE of COMMUNITY is the very thing that gives it value and meaning. I will inconvenience myself for the sake of my brother. I have seen this so often in my years here at CHC. It goes beyond obligation. My friend Dean Bryant once gave up one of his days off to help me put black iron pipes in my house for a new stove; and this is what Dean does for a living. He took a day off to do work that he does every day. That’s love! I see people at CHC making all kinds of sacrifices for one another and for the sake of making time for one another in their lives, and it is precious. When was the last time you were motivated by love to do something for a Christian friend?

But we must make sure that love is the thing that motivates us, and not some lesser motive. Did you know that you can do good things for others – even GREAT things for others – without really being motivated by love? Paul described this in his amazing words about love in **1 Corinthians 13:3 NIV:**

**3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.**

This is how the Pharisees conducted themselves. They did good - even sacrificial - religious deeds, but it was all for show! It was all done to make THEM look good or to get something for themselves, not to bring glory to God. In fact, we do the same thing when we act loving just to GET something from the people around us. The kind of love that God leads us to experience is not a self-centered love; it is an others-centered love. Think about it. Even the SPIRITUAL GIFTS that Paul wrote about are not gifts that are meant to bring benefits to YOU, they are meant to benefit the Body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are not given so that you can boast about your superiority and great spirituality; they are given so that you can SERVE the rest of the body. Let's choose to develop a GENUINE love for one another! [The second thing that Paul tells us about our defining love is . . .](#)

### **Our love must be guarded.**

We see this in the second part of **Romans 12:9 NLT**

### **Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.**

This is such an important key to healthy relationships. We must hate what is evil and cling to what is good in our own lives and in our friendships. The failure to do this results in deep loss and pain. Are you learning to HATE evil? The word that Paul uses here for hate is a word that means "to despise, to be disgusted or revolted by a thing." It is the kind of response you have when you open a freezer that has been unplugged for two weeks to find that it is filled with rotten meat! Oh, that we would be disgusted by the sin that brings pain and hardship and division into our lives. YOUR ACTIONS AFFECT OTHERS! **If there is anything that I want you to remember about the love that God brings into our lives, it is this one fact: LOVE DOES NO HARM!** Love does not act in a way that robs and destroys others. Paul reinforces this truth just a few verses later in **Romans 13:8-10 NLT**

[8 Owe nothing to anyone--except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. 9 For the commandments say, "You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet." These--and other such commandments--are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law.](#)

If love is described as DOING NO WRONG to others, then certainly this should be characteristic of how we treat each other as brothers and sisters in Christ! But is that so? Sadly, it is often just the opposite; and this is such a blow against the testimony of the church in our day and age! I have watched with great sadness in my years in the church as a number of brothers and sisters do everything to one another that people without faith do to one another. [Adultery, lying, gossip, cheating; all of these happen in the church! How can this be? It boils down to a lack of love.](#) I

wonder: Are you doing harm to your Christian brothers and sisters by your behavior toward them? (Gossip, Lying, Immorality, etc.) I have been grieved by how common it has become for people in the church to freely engage in sexual immorality with one another. Do you not CARE how devastating that is to the one that you are “sleeping with?” When you cheat one another in business or when you gossip about a brother or sister, do you not realize how destructive that is not only to them but to the testimony of Christ as well? We should also pay attention to the impact that our “freedom in Christ” has on other believers when we abuse that freedom by failing to consider how our actions affect them! Ladies, do you really care about the fact that the way you dress might cause a brother to stumble, or are you just focused on the fact that you ought to be free to dress any way that makes YOU look fashionable and sexy? The world is great at that; you ought to be great at looking good without drawing attention to your sexuality. Men, are you willing to avoid a sexually impure relationship with a woman by first refusing to develop an inappropriate friendship with any woman besides your wife? **We must think not only in terms of our BEHAVIOR, but also in terms of the DIRECTION that our behavior is leading us.** I don’t want to lead my brother or my sister into a ditch by my self-centered ways. I want to HATE what is evil!

This also means that I must hate the sin that might creep into my brother’s life to destroy him. However, before I go and tell all of my Christian friends what THEY must avoid in their life, I must avoid it first in my own life. Christian purity is not something that we are called to regulate in the lives of others; we must focus on getting clean first in our own life. I am not called to CONTROL your behavior, but to influence it with my own. **Matthew 7:3-5 NLT**

3 "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? 4 How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

Paul says that we should not only hate what is evil, but we should CLING TO what is good. He uses the word “Cleave” here, which means, “to stick to like glue, to hold on to, or to pursue diligently.” That is a great word! It is a reminder that righteousness in relationships must be constantly pursued and diligently guarded. Godly love is WORK. It is a hard truth that the good things in life are free for the taking, but they are costly to retain. You have to HOLD ON to what is good through discipline and devotion. Your relationships will not simply stay strong and godly; they must be continually braided together like a strong three-fold cord. [Sammi’s Wedding]

The final thing that Paul says about the DEFINING LOVE of a Christian is that . . .  
**Our love must be generous.**

We see this in **Romans 12:10 NLT**

**10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.**

These words speak of a committed devotion to those that are in your faith family. Paul says that our relationship with them should be as rich and free as it is with our blood relatives. Even dysfunctional families know that you should take care of family! Family love is generous because of the permanent nature of the relationship. You are stuck with family! You do not cease to become family when there is a difference or a problem. This is why I plead with you to stay close and work out your differences with believers in your church. Be generous in FORGIVENESS. Don't turn your backs on one another in times of disagreement. A healthy FAMILY love is also generous in protective support. When you come for one of us, you come for all of us! It is like my favorite t-shirt quote: "Mess with me; you mess with the WHOLE trailer park!" I know a dad who once talked with a young man about his intentions with his daughter. He said, "This is my daughter. If there is a problem, YOU LOSE!" I love that. Family trumps all, right? **Jesus taught that there is a love that should be even greater than the love between family members; the love that covenant brothers share with one another. The blood of Christ eternally unites us.** This is why Paul exhorts us to be "devoted to one another." How devoted are you to your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you generous with them in their times of great need? Just a couple of verses later, Paul says this about Christian love: **Romans 12:13 NLT**

**13 When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.**

Do you see the eager generosity in that verse? When God's people are in need, we ought to jump at the chance to help meet their needs in an appropriate manner. Our benevolence ministry here at CHC is guided by this principle: We take care of our own FIRST. This is what we are instructed to do! When Paul wrote Romans, there were many believers who had lost their jobs because of their faith, and the churches rallied together to help provide for them in their time of need. This may come again in our time here in the U.S. I just got a letter from one of our teachers who received a veiled threat from a student about getting fired because he mentioned his faith in class. Will we rally around those who lose their jobs in our day because of the godly way that they stand up for Christ? I hope so.

We should also be generous in HONOR. Honor is the act of "placing a high value on a person or a thing." Christian love is honorable. I say this to people all of the time. I plead with husbands and wives to honor one another by the way that they talk TO and ABOUT one another. Do you love to build your faith family up by the way that you talk about them when they are NOT around? How you talk about the people in your faith family shows how much you REALLY love them! Romans 12:10 actually says that we are to "take delight in honoring one another." The words used here

means that we love to be the LEADER in going LAST! When we honor one another in these ways, then we make the bond of love between us even sweeter and tighter. That always brings glory to God.

I want us to bow our heads right now and think about these things together.

Love should be **genuine**. Love should be **guarded**. Love should be **generous**. Is this a description of the love that you have for your faith family at CHC?

This week, I want you to ask the Holy Spirit to SHOW you the kind of love that you REALLY have with your brothers and sisters at CHC. This is your primary circle of faith. How we love each other will determine how well we love other believers beyond that.

Furthermore, I want each of you to ask God to help you to be genuine with others in your Life Group this week. Be transparent and vulnerable with them. Get close.

Ask him to help you see how DANGEROUS or SAFE you are when it comes to what YOU bring to your Christian relationships! Become a GUARDIAN of good against evil in our midst.

Finally, ask God to help you become GENEROUS with your brothers and sisters in Christ when it comes to the way you are committed to showing grace, forgiveness, honor, and practical help to them.

Let's pray.

## OUTLINE OF MESSAGE

\*"Let love be . . ." - Love is a **choice** and a **conduct**; not an emotion or a condition!  
 -Christian love is not only DEFINED BY God; it is the DEFINING FACTOR of Christianity! **John 13:34-35 NLT**

**\*How does secular culture define love?**

**\*WE get to re-educate them about what REAL LOVE is.**

\*In Rome, Jewish and Gentile Christians were learning to LOVE each other. This love was the RESULT of the love that they had been SHOWN by God in grace. Romans 5:8

-They were learning the truth about what Christ had accomplished IN them, and also what Christ had created WITH them as his new BODY.

\*These Roman believers had probably come to Christ at Pentecost!

-They were scattered to Rome during the first wave of persecution.

WHAT DOES CHRISTIAN LOVE LOOK LIKE?

\*Do you have a defining love?

**Love must be genuine.** [Vs. 9 "Don't just pretend to love others; really love them!"]

-Not a "knock off" with cheap parts and false labels. [Thailand]

[This kind of love can only happen "in Christ." Imitations look fake.]

[Even unbelievers can tell if our love for each other is real!]

\*Discard your MASKS. (Vs. 9) See also **1 Peter 1:22 NLT**

-Don't be a HYPOCRITICAL BROTHER. Good deeds can exist without love.

**\*Ezekiel 33:31 NIV ; 1 Corinthians 13:3 NLT**

**\*Contrast with Pharisees – Matthew 23:5-7 NLT**

-WHY would I be hypocritical in showing love? Pride, Greed, lust  
 (Movie Clip from GROUNDHOG DAY – "This IS love!")

-Be TRANSPARENT. Vulnerability creates "safe zones" in relationships.

\*Don't try to live "on a stage." Be REAL; Get CLOSE!

**Love must be guarded.** (Vs. 9b – Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.)

\*HATE what is evil.

[Hate=to abhor, despise, be revolted by a thing]

[Evil=that which brings hardship, pain, peril; malignant]

\*My hatred for evil must FIRST be in my own life, then in my Christian brothers.

See **Matthew 7:3-5 NLT**

-This is NEVER about CONTROL!

\*LOVE DOES NO HARM! **Romans 13:8-10 NLT**

DIRECTION: Am I setting my brother up for failure or pain by my actions?

[Immodesty, Manipulation, Envy, etc.]

DETERMINATION: Am I refusing to do anything that will bring hurt to my brother?



[Gossip, Stealing, Sexual Immorality]

\*See **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8**

\*CLING TO what is good. [Cling to=cleave: stick to like glue; pursue after]

-Genuine love must CONSTANTLY be cultivated and improved.

[The THREE-FOLD CORD: Sammi/Josh's wedding braid]

**Love must be generous.** (Vs. 10, 13)

["Devote yourself to brotherly love. Take delight in honoring one another!"]

\*Devote yourself to one another (Vs. 10a)

-This speaks of a COMMITMENT that cannot be altered. God chooses family!

-Treat your brother like FAMILY. [Note: Not dysfunctional family!]

\*What does this look like in your life?

-STAY WITH them even when it is not pleasant! (Church hopping!)

-This requires FACE-TIME with one another.

\*You cannot grow in love with someone you do not KNOW.

\*This must happen in SMALL GROUPS doing LIFE together!

\*We are NATURALLY PROTECTIVE of family!

-What is BEST for them? How can I help them?

[Mark Scuggs – This is my daughter. If there is a problem; you lose!]

\*Take DELIGHT in HONORING one another!

[Honor=to place a high value on]

\*Honor: In WORD and DEED!

\*How do you TALK ABOUT your faith family?

\*How RESPECTFUL are you of your faith family?

-Take delight = Be the LEADER in going LAST!

\*These actions will RESULT in greater love! (Beautiful cycle!)

\*Share with God's people that are in need! (Vs. 13)

\*"Share with"=Koinonia – To have a share in one's need; become a partner with.

-Everyone likes to yoke up with the rich. Will you yoke up with a poor brother?

\*"Practice hospitality." (See NLT translation!)

Practice=Run after, eagerly pursue

-This is for ALL Christians: Sackett Brand

[Mess with me, mess with the whole trailer park!]

-Remember those who are suffering for their faith. (Letter I got from Greg A.)

-Let your resources be for more than just your SELF!