

# Members of a Family

## Romans 12:9-13

**INTRODUCTION:** On December 27th of last year, I received a call I will never forget. Julie and I had traveled to Alabama to visit family for the holidays. The landlord of the complex where we lease space for the Code Red Studio called me and said, “Mr. Terry, I have some difficult news to tell you. Do you remember the young man who lived upstairs in the unit above you?” I did remember him. I had tried to introduce myself to him multiple times. Each time he would put his head down and make his way upstairs. I would pray for him. At times, I even played Billy Graham sermons loud enough for him to hear, hoping I could somehow get the Gospel to the young man. She continued, “Apparently, he overdosed and passed away.” Which was sad in and of itself, but what she told me next was heartbreaking. The young man’s body had lain there in his apartment for days. No one was aware that he had passed. Eventually, his brother had the authorities do a wellness check and found his body.

### STATS:

- In 1950, fewer than 1 in 10 American households was a single person living alone. Today it is more than one in four.
- In 1990, 3% of Americans said they had no close friends at all. By 2021, the Survey Center on American Life put that number at 12%, a fourfold jump in one generation.
- In May 2023, the Surgeon General of the United States issued a formal advisory titled Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. He reported that about 1/2 of American adults report experiencing loneliness, and that the health risk of social disconnection is comparable to smoking up to fifteen cigarettes a day.

You know, our world has never been more connected than it is now, but also, many have never been more lonely.

Our church here on Amelia Island and the Central Nassau campus are planted in a lonely world - and the fact is, only the church has the answer for the deep sense of loneliness that gnaws at the heart of this world. The epidemic of loneliness presents an amazing open door for the Gospel, if we are ready to respond.

**CONTEXT:** So far in chapter 12, we have seen our church's mission spelled out explicitly.

- In verses 1 and 2, we were reminded that we are called to be living sacrifices by renewing our minds by the word of God. Here, we call that **COACHING** - systematically preaching through books of the Bible and attuning our minds to the mind of Christ.
- In verses 3-8, we were reminded that each one of us has a Spiritual Gift that we are to identify and leverage in service to Christ. We call that **COMMISSION**.
- Today in verses 9-13 we are called to connect with one another as a Spiritual Family. What we call **COMMUNITY**.

**TEXT: Romans 12:9–13 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> 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.

That is a prescription to solve the epidemic of loneliness in our world. Not a pill, not an app, but a church family.

Verse 9 is the primary command; the verses that follow unpack what that looks like. Notice what it says: <sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine.

GREEK NOTE: Verse 9 has no verb in Greek. Paul simply writes *hē agapē anypokritos*, literally, “the love, unhypocritical.”

You remember that Christ said of the Pharisees in the Gospels that they were Hypocrites? The word means an actor. The hypocrite would wear a mask to convey an emotion in a theater production. The emotion in their soul may be completely different from the mask they wore. Jesus says we do that spiritually as well. We pretend to love God when our hearts are far from Him. That will destroy a church, because people can sense when Love is not genuine.

Well, what does genuine love look like?

**1. The Face of Genuine Love -**

<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

Notice there is a positive and a negative aspect to genuine love.

**a. Abhor Evil -**

Genuine love has the courage to have difficult conversations.

**ILLUSTRATION: Tim Keller put it this way:** Suppose you joined a bird-watching club. One Saturday, while everybody has their binoculars up, a member leans over and says, “Can I ask you something? Why are you dating that guy? He’s not good for you.” You would look at him and say, “Excuse me? Let’s talk about the birds.”

In a club, your private life is none of their business. But in a family, who you date, how you spend your money, and what you are doing to your marriage are family business.

In a family, you love someone as they are, but you love them too much to leave them as they are.

Now notice, love comes first in the sentence - we don't need you going around and policing the body. The conversation he's referring to is when you love someone first, then when you are aware that they are involved in something unbiblical or dangerous, you love them enough to address it.

*Abhor Evil... letter b...*

## **b. Cling to Good -**

Genuine love fosters what is wholesome and healthy in a person's life. The primary aim is to walk with God together.

*The face of Genuine Love... Secondly...*

## **2. The Feeling of Genuine Love**

<sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

**GREEK NOTE:** In this one verse, Paul uses two family words. The first is **philadelphia**, the love of brothers and sisters. The second is **philostorgoi**, built on *storgē*, the natural affection of a mother for her baby, the instinctive bond of kin. That word appears nowhere else in the New Testament.

**Lloyd-Jones quoted a paraphrase he liked:** "Love the brethren in the faith as though they were brethren in blood."

What does that mean? It means you love people that you didn't hand-select. How many of you have been to churches where it seemed like everybody was a carbon copy of someone, typically the lead Pastor? They dress the same, act the same, even have the same tats. Well, that is not what Paul is describing. What he is describing is more like a real extended family.

What is a real family like? Well, some are really odd.

**ILLUSTRATION:** C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Four Loves* that the special glory of this affection is that it can unite people who, if they had not been put down by fate in the same household, would have had nothing to do with each other. Then Lewis quotes someone who said, "Dogs and cats should always be brought up together; it broadens their minds so."

Some of you are dogs. Some of you are cats. God put you in the same house on purpose.

**Keller says** what happens when the gospel gets hold of a church is this: "We stop auditioning people." We stop evaluating people by whether they are our type, our income bracket, our politics, our age, our music. We look across the room at somebody we never would have chosen and say, "Brother."

**ILLUSTRATION:** I went fishing on Friday - two of the men on the boat were over 80. None of them grew up in the same state as me. They didn't pull for the same football team as me. But they all called upon the same Savior as me, and there is a bond in that.

You see, in a Church family - sometimes, like in a real family, odd people can even be loved. We all have that crazy aunt, or that uncle who acts like Carl on Sling Blade. In the same way, a church family has odd members as well. Look around, don't point... if you aren't sure who the odd bird is... it may be you. But that's ok! We love you because we are family.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A young minister in the 1600s named Philip Henry fell in love with a woman named Katherine Matthews. She was an heiress from a family far above his station. Her family was horrified. They said to her, "*We don't even know where this man comes from.*" Katherine answered, "I do not know where he comes from, but I know where he is going." She married him in 1660, and their son was Matthew Henry, whose Bible commentary is probably on some of your shelves.

**ILLUSTRATION:** In my previous church we supported a ministry in India. One of the things that the followers of Christ would do in India was pray that God would bring them a spouse who was in a different CASTE than themselves - as a way of declaring to the culture that the ground really is level at the cross.

Love reaches across caste, class, style, and preferences; it says, I love you because you love my Lord.

Then Paul adds, "Outdo one another in showing honor."

- "Outdo" is *pro-ēgou-menoi*, to go first, to lead the way.
- "Honor" is *timē*, the price you set on an object after you have taken the time to evaluate it.

Paul is saying: look closely at your brother, set a high value on what God has put in him, and then beat him to it. Be the first to show it. Everyone around you was made in the very image of God, knit together in their mother's womb, bearing the fingerprints of the Almighty. Beyond that, if they are a believer, the same Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead indwells them. What do you suppose that is worth? I'll tell you - It is worth the very life of God's only begotten Son. If that is the case, you should make every effort to honor them.

*The face of Genuine Love... The Feeling of Genuine Love...*

### 3. The Fervency of Genuine Love

<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.

At first glance, verses 11 and 12 look like they wandered in from another sermon. What do zeal and hope and prayer have to do with loving your church family?

Look where these two verses sit. On one side is **brotherly love** (v. 10). On the other side is **hospitality and sharing**. Verses 11 and 12 about not being slothful in zeal are sandwiched in the middle. Why? Because if you take what the Bible says about love seriously, you will find yourself, at times, exhausted.

Thus Paul says,

Watch after your zeal - that's your spiritual passion, the gas in the tank of your heart.

I have found that the only person who can consistently ensure that I'm zealous for the Church family is me.

Sure, stirring music helps. Passionate sermons help. But consistently, I have to make sure my heart and mind are set on the Lord. No one else can do that for me.

Did you know that before I walk into this Church or preach a sermon, I think about you; I remind myself how much the Lord loves you, how valuable you are to Him, and the fact that you have tremendous potential for Him. When I do that, I preach to you differently; I feel different when I see you in the hallway. Perhaps we all should do that sort of thing.

<sup>2</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

That means that we rejoice with those who rejoice, and we weep with those who weep.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I sat down with a young couple in this church last week who are about to get married. I rejoice that God has brought them together. I want to help them to start their life together well. I also spoke recently to a sister in Christ who decided not to endure Chemotherapy because she would not be able to hold her adoptive grandchildren. We must let ourselves feel that - weep with her.

*The face of Genuine Love...The Feeling of Genuine Love...The Fervency....*

#### **4. The Fellowship of Genuine Love**

<sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

You see, Genuine Love asks much of you - it will cost you something financially; it declares that your home is not just your home. That's right, it's not just about what you do in the Church House; it's about what you do with your house.

I preached a sermon once entitled, "*Loving God with all your Home*". When was the last time you brought someone into your home just to enjoy a meal and get to know each other? You see, all of the other parts of this passage are best done in a home. It is hard to be a hypocrite in your home - if you do, your kids will call you out. It is in the home that love becomes truly genuine.

What would happen if, over the next 3 months, you opened your home up to someone in your church family whom you don't know? Then what if everyone else did the same thing? I'm convinced we would not only be one of the fastest-growing congregations in the United States, but we would also quickly become the fastest in the World.

Because, as you do, you will become aware of real needs that people have. You will be able to meet those needs.

**ILLUSTRATION:** The Roman Empire converted to Christianity under Constantine, but a few decades later another Emperor arose called Julian the Apostate - he wanted to revive the old religions of Rome and finish Christianity once and for all. He wrote to the Pagan priests and said, "These impious Galilaeans frustrate me. They support not only their own poor but ours as well."

*The early church did not only out-argue the pagans of Rome. It out-loved them.*

The Romans had a practice called exposure. If a baby was born that was unwanted, they would leave the child in the field for the wild animals; it was post-birth abortion. The Christians took these children, adopted them, loved them, and guess what happened - they grew up to love the Christ of Christianity. In a couple of generations, they had changed the world.

**Jesus said it this way: John 13:34–35 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

- God Himself "is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:16).
- A lawyer asked Jesus, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus didn't say - well dummy, they are all the same. NO - he said one tops the list. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–39). In fact, He went on to say, "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (v. 40).
- Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that **Love** is more important to a Christian than any spiritual gift he may have. "But now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13; 12:31).
- It is therefore not surprising that the first "fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22)
- Genuine love is so integral to supernatural living that John declares, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14).

**TURN** - This is a very important day as we open our Central Nassau campus. Let me speak very clearly to you and put it in secular terms that anyone can understand:

- **What are we selling? What is our product?**

Potential - we want to see everyone of you reach maturity in Christ. To reach your personal spiritual potential. We are building a community where, if you give us 3 hours a week (1 in Coaching, 1 in Community, 1 in Commission) for 5 years, we believe that you will be mature enough to replicate yourself. We measure our success not by seating capacity or budget, but by how quickly you replicate your faith in another person.

- **What do we value the most?**

Replicators - those who are willing to take a couple of guys, or a couple of gals, or a few couples and help them know Christ and His Word.

- **What does this require of you?** Two things: love of God and love of people.

Do you see how this flies in the face of :

- A consumeristic Christianity where a person comes and says What can I get out of this?
- A modernistic Christianity that says you must be cool enough to be a part of our team?

All we need is people who love Jesus and love each other - and the plan will take care of itself.

**CONCLUSION/INVITATION:** I will never forget the young man who died alone, in the unit above me. That should never happen in Nassau County. Jesus died alone on the cross, forsaken by God and by man. Because of that, no one ever has to die alone again. We have room in our church for you... And we have room in our heart for you. Will you come?