

**Title: A Portrait of a Genuine Christian (Part 1)**

**Text: Romans 12:9-13**

**Introduction**

Forgive me if it seems that I am obsessing about the statistic that 80% of churches like ours (and churches from the evangelical community) are in decline and closing. It really bothers me, especially in light of the fact that we “serve a risen savior.” Why would the church in our age in the West (in particular) become so powerless?

I think this is because the church in the West has become more about the Trellis than the Vine.

What do I mean? Explain the book and what I mean. Colin Marshal and Tony Payne...

Paul, in Romans 12 gets super practical on how to be the vine and how to grow the vine. Trellises are helpful to maintain structure, but it is the business of vine cultivation that you are I are to be most concerned about.

[Romans 12:9-13](#) provides practical instructions for believers on how to live out their faith in the context of their relationships with others. This passage emphasizes the importance of genuine love, devotion, and hospitality, and encourages Christians to pursue righteousness, honor, and service towards others. By following these commands, believers can fulfill God's will and purpose for their lives, and contribute to the building up of the church and the spread of the gospel.

**Main Idea: A Genuine Christian Has a Transformational Effect on God's Church**

There are 10 characteristics of a genuine follower of Christ in these 5 verses. Each one of these characteristics is a sermon on its own. Today, however, I am going to go over each one in a more cursory fashion with the hope that you will engage them purposely on a deeper level at home. Why? So you can put them to work! And when you do, thus church will be genuine and explode with growth. Because healthy things grow .

So let's get started.

**1. A Genuine Christian Has a Genuine Love (vs. 9a)**

**Romans 12:9 ESV**

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

The word “Genuine” means without pretending

Love *agape* (ἀγάπη) means a self sacrificial love. This kind of love is the love that Jesus had for us.

**Romans 5:8 ESV**

*<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

**The Good Samaritan** - *The Good Samaritan is a parable told by Jesus in the New Testament. It is a story about a man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and was attacked by robbers, leaving him badly beaten and half dead. Several people passed by him, including a priest and a Levite, but they both avoided him and continued on their way. However, a Samaritan, who was traditionally despised by Jews, stopped and showed compassion to the injured man.*

*The Samaritan tended to the man's wounds and took him to an inn, where he paid for his care and promised to cover any additional expenses. The parable ends with Jesus asking his listeners which of the three men was the true neighbor to the injured man, to which they replied the Samaritan.*

*The emphasis on agape love in this story is that the Samaritan's actions were not motivated by duty or obligation but by genuine concern and selflessness. Agape love is often described as a selfless and sacrificial love, where one is willing to put the needs of others before their own. The Samaritan's actions exemplify this type of love as he did not consider the injured man's race or religion, but simply saw someone in need and acted to help him. The parable teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to show compassion and kindness to others, regardless of their background or circumstances.*

Christ loved us in this way, and now Paul is laying forth the expectation for the church at Rome to love one another in this genuine way.

Love others with a Christ-like love. What do I do if I “don’t feel the love?”

**First**, remember that love is not primarily a feeling, love is an action.

**Second**, pray for that person you don’t love and ask God to help you love them.

**Third**, take steps of loving action toward this person.

**Review** - A Genuine Christian Has a Good Effect on God’s Local Church

A Genuine Christian Has a Genuine Love...

## 2. A Genuine Christian Rejects Evil and Grabs after Good (9b)

**Romans 12:9 ESV**

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

The word “Abhor” means “to hate, to detest with horror.” - Vines

The word “genuine” means “without hypocrisy.”

**Psalms 97:10 ESV**

<sup>10</sup> *O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.*

**Psalms 101:3 ESV**

*<sup>3</sup> I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.*

God hates evil, it is an abomination to Him - It literally makes Him nauseous.

So, we, as Christ followers, we must look at sin and evil through the same lens.

But we easily celebrate evil through what we watch on TV or in movies, and we justify it because it's just a movie or it is part of the story.

Yet the word of God says we are to be innocent or naive regarding things that are evil.

And, Paul says Christians are to "hold fast to what is good." Literally, grab onto it.

We are to be grabbers of Good!

Is this statement true?

*"Good loses. Good always loses because good has to play by the rules. Evil doesn't."*  
— Henry Mills 'Once Upon a Time'

But is this true? Of course it is not!

**Romans 12:19 ESV**

*<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*

What is the greatest good you can grasp onto? **God** and His glorious **gospel**.

**Review** - A Genuine Christian Has a Good Effect on God's Local Church

A Genuine Christian Has a Genuine Love, Rejects Evil and Grabs after Good...

### **3. A Genuine Christian Gives Brotherly Affection (10a)**

**Romans 12:10 ESV**

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

This is such an interesting concept to me especially living in Stoic West Michigan where we take great pride in keeping to ourselves.

philostorgoi = Stoic dearly loving

allelous = members, one another.

philadelphia = sibling affection - sense of affection for a fellow-Christian -

*"With **brotherly love** have family affection for **one another**..."*

***My brother Steve and the pool of death!***

I would argue that the actions of my brother do not fairly represent "brotherly affection."

In stoic West Michigan, perhaps we should not be so closed off to fellow believers. Physical touch can be a bit unnerving for people, but did you know that a hug can actually decrease stress, anxiety, and depression?

*Like so many other unseen benefits, this all goes back to good ol' hormones. Some researchers believe that hugging and other interpersonal touch can boost a hormone called oxytocin and also affect our endogenous opioid system. Big words, right? But basically it boils down to this: Simply through the act of hugging, our brains can produce soothing chemicals that help us feel more safe and less threatened throughout the day. So when something stressful does come up, we don't have such an aggressive fight-or-flight response to it.*

*Hugs can also give our immune system a healthy boost.*

*Hugging helps lower our stress throughout the day.*

*Hugs might even lower heart rates and blood pressure.*

*A few good squeezes could lead to decreased depression.*

- <https://www.sclhealth.org/blog/2019/07/the-power-of-hugs-and-how-they-affect-our-daily-health/>

#### **2 Corinthians 13:12 ESV**

*<sup>12</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

A HOLY kiss is not a sensual or sexual kiss but one of familial affection.

Paul is saying show GODLY affection toward one another.

**Review** - A Genuine Christian Has a Good Effect on God's Local Church

A Genuine Christian Has a Genuine Love, Rejects Evil and Grabs after Good, Gives Brotherly Affection...

#### **4. A Genuine Christian Outdoes in Honor (vs. 10b)**

##### **Romans 12:10 ESV**

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

What is honor? Honor means "giving place" to another. Elevating another.

We tend to elevate ourselves in our own minds and hearts. We tend to think we are better or more likable than others. Like we tend to think that God likes us better than those people in our lives that drive us nuts! That's not true, and it is called pride.

This is why Paul admonishes the church at Philippi to...

##### **Philippians 2:3 ESV**

*<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

What an immense challenge for prideful people. Publicly singing the praises of others. Celebrating the wins of others. Not worrying about if we are recognized for the good things we have accomplished.

I'm going to say something that may be shocking to some of you.

You do not need to have high self-esteem from God's perspective.

In fact, I would submit to you that the Bible is against it.

The Bible does not encourage a focus on self. And the word esteem means to build up.

So, self-esteem means to build up self. Whereas the bible says we are to die to self...

**Galatians 2:20 ESV**

*<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

**Luke 9:23 ESV**

*<sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

And it is in dying to ourselves that we truly live!

I'm not suggesting you are worthless - not at all! You are precious to God and therefore have great value and worth. You should have healthy self-worth.

But your job isn't to promote yourself. You are to honor others above yourself!

And in a day where we are constantly pressured to elevate ourselves through the vehicle of social media, we should stop.

The idea of self-promotion is contrary to the message of the Scriptures where we are actually called to not promote ourselves but humble ourselves.

*Instead of posting selfies on Instagram, we should celebrate others, lifting them up and most importantly, post tributes to Jesus - promoting Him and His Word.*

Why do you suppose Paul challenged the church at Rome to honor one another? Because when a church is honoring one another, they are simultaneously humbling themselves.

Who should you show honor to today? Whom could you encourage by purposely elevating them above you? Be this kind of encourager. When you do, you not only elevate someone above yourself, but you walk in a way that is pleasing to Christ.

**1 Peter 5:5-7 ESV**

*<sup>5</sup> Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” <sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

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## 5. A Genuine Christian is Zealous in Serving the Lord (vs. 11)

**Romans 12:11 ESV**

*<sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

“Do not be slothful” - “not shrinking, not hesitating, not being lazy”

“Be fervent in zeal” = boiling over in your attitude toward your spiritual responsibilities

“serving the Lord” = δουλεύω - to be owned by another, *be a slave, be subjected*

*Who owns you? Food? Clothing? Alcohol/drugs? Job? Spouse? You are a slave to something or someone!*

*Who should own you?*

**1 Corinthians 6:19–20 ESV**

*<sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

Instead, we are to not be lazy about the things that are important to God (see the bible if in question). Don't be passive, instead, boil over areas that you know are important to the Lord.

Evangelism! The study of His Word. Prayer. Loving the church. loving your neighbor as yourself. Etc.

You should be fervent about these things.

**Football fervency**

Because of who God is. Because of what He has done for you (saved you from an eternity separated from Him and provided you a glorious place in His eternal Kingdom) you should be boiling over in appreciation to Him!

**Luke 7:39–47 ESV**

*<sup>39</sup> Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” <sup>40</sup> And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to*

*you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” <sup>41</sup> “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” <sup>43</sup> Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” <sup>44</sup> Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. <sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”*

When you realize how much you have been forgiven, and how you have been forgiven - namely the shed blood of Christ on the cross, you will love VERY much.

It is the person who gives little to no thought of these things that loves Christ very little.

How can I become fervent about these things?

- Meditate on what God has done for you.
- Pray that God would change your heart from one of apathy to one of zealous passion.
- Roll up your sleeves and get at it!

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## **6. A Genuine Christian Rejoices in Hope (12a)**

**Romans 12:12 ESV**

*<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

Hope is in short supply these days. We live in the richest country and time on this planet and yet depression and suicide rates are up astronomically. How can it be when we have access to more stuff than ever, we can be depressed more than ever? It doesn’t make sense.

Unless we realize that stuff doesn’t ever bring lasting happiness.

Listen to what Jim Carrey says about this...

*“I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer.” - Jim Carrey*

We have this ridiculous idea that if we could just have a bit more, it will bring relief to our lives.

A bit more will NEVER bring relief or give lasting hope.

True and lasting Hope is rooted in Christ and Christ alone.

Do you remember that classic literary piece called Dante's Inferno - The sign as one enters Hell reads, "[Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here!](#)"

Can you imagine?

But for those in Christ, we, of any people have the most hope at our disposal. Why?

We have hope because we have the promises of God

Here are just five...

- **Salvation:** God promises salvation to those who believe in Jesus Christ as their savior. [John 3:16](#) says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."
- **Provision:** In [Matthew 6:31-33](#), Jesus tells his followers not to worry about their basic needs, such as food and clothing, because God will provide for them: "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
- **Guidance:** In [Proverbs 3:5-6](#), the Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." This promises that God will guide us when we seek him with our whole heart.
- **Comfort:** In [Psalm 23](#), David writes about how God is like a shepherd who comforts and guides his sheep: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."
- **Peace:** In [John 14:27](#), Jesus promises his followers peace that is different from the peace the world offers: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Do you believe in the promises of God in His Word? If and when you do, your HOPE starts to climb! Ask God to give you a heart of faith in Him! It's amazing to be freed by faith and live in hope!

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## 7. A Genuine Christian is Patient in the Hard Times (12b)

**Romans 12:12 ESV**

<sup>12</sup> *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*



Because believers have HOPE, even difficult tribulations can be faced with great and profound patience.

*"Into every life, a little rain must fall."*

The fact is, after almost 25 years of pastoral ministry I have found that what the band R.E.M. wrote in 1993 is so true...

*When your day is long*

*And the night, the night is yours alone*

*When you're sure you've had enough*

*Of this life, well hang on*

*Don't let yourself go*

*'Cause everybody cries*

*Everybody hurts sometimes*

Everybody Hurts in one way or another. You have something in your life right now that is causing you pain.

*And as I was sitting with Lottie Hagen and her Daughter Deb Plett this past week planning her funeral because she is in Hospice care. We talked about this. We asked what it would be like to go through what Lottie is going through without the Lord. It would be awful. Life would seem so cruel and meaningless.*

But with Christ, well Jesus changes everything!

**James 1:2–4 ESV**

*<sup>2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Life will bring hard times. But, everything that you face first passes through the hands of your loving heavenly Father.

This fact alone should help you to remain patient in difficult seasons because He is your loving heavenly Father and He is purposed to work all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Nothing happens to you that God doesn't first permit. And He loves you.

So, are you going through some tough stuff right now? Purpose to praise God because he is using it to grow you into Christlikeness.

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## 8. A Genuine Christian is Constant in Prayer (12c)

### **Romans 12:12 ESV**

*<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

Life can be really hard sometimes. And it is the genuine Christian that is driven to their knees when hard times hit.

The challenge Paul gives here is that the genuine follower of Christ should be constant in prayer.

What does this mean?

It means that my life is characterized by prayer. I am in regular and constant dialog with my Father in Heaven.

Why would a Christian be in constant dialog with their Heavenly Father? Because of their desperate need for all that He has for them.

*My Daughter is in constant communication with her mom...*

*Prayer is never just an emergency flare or desperate anxious gamble. God's attention is not based on our performance but parental love. - Timothy Keller*

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 ESV**

*<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

It is God's will that you are regularly and systematically talking with Him.

What does this look like?

- Personal Worship Time
- Arrow Prayers

What does it say when we who name the name of Christ don't pray? It says we can handle this life without Christ.

The opposite is true as well. Prayer, regular and consistent prayer is a tremendous sign of humility.

What is your habit of prayer?

Promise yourself that you will develop a Personal Worship Time.

Remember to shoot up arrow prayers.

Do both of these and you will thrive in your faith.

Challenge the congregation to examine their own hearts and actions in light of these verses and ask God to help them grow in genuine love.

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## 9. A Genuine Christian is Generous with Resources (13a)

**Romans 12:13 ESV**

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

A genuine follower of Christ lives their life with an open hand.

What does this mean? It means that the genuine follower of Christ understands something very important. The resources they have are God's not theirs.

And because of this, they are merely managers of the resources that God has entrusted to them.

So, they look at life through this lens rather than the lens that everything I have is mine because I earn it. Therefore, I can spend it on me and if God is lucky, He will get a portion - maybe.

But this is not the way of a genuine follower of Jesus.

A genuine Christian understands that their role is to manage God's amazing stuff.

*"A steward manages assets for the owner's benefit. The steward carries no sense of entitlement to the assets he manages. It's his job to find out what the owner wants done with his assets, then carry out his will." — Randy Alcorn, The Treasure Principle, Revised and Updated: Unlocking the Secret of Joyful Giving*

We are actually call to send the resources that God has given on to heaven.

How does Paul suggest we do this?

By caring for the needs of the saints.

Unfortunately, the Church has abdicated her role of caregiver to the government.

Friends, we can do better! There is a mandate that Paul gives the church in Galatians.

**Galatians 6:10 ESV**

*<sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Are you setting aside 10% of your income for your local church?

Are you putting money in the benevolence fund so we can help those among us?

Are you helping to provide meals when our people are sick and hurting?

Are you giving to missions?

What about the new pastor? If we are going to be able to bring on a new pastor, it will depend on the stewardship of the money God has entrusted you. There are around 132 families in our church. If each family gave an extra **\$10 per week**, we would easily be able to provide a comfortable living for the next pastor.

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#### 10. A Genuine Christian is Hospitable Toward Others (13b)

**Romans 12:13 ESV**

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

Do you understand what Paul is saying here? The word hospitality means "love of strangers."

Imagine if Christians didn't love strangers. What would happen to the church?

Now, I don't mean to be rude, but sometimes church people can forget that they were once a stranger to the body of Christ. But someone had mercy and pity on you. They invited you into their life. They took a risk and opened themselves up to you. What a beautiful gift to the body of Christ...

*Trudy has this gift! And I am so proud of her for it. She opens her home to people she doesn't know. But she also opens her life up by offering to do bible study's with people who need Christ or need to grow in Christ.*

Now, I would tell you that she is gifted in this way, but this way isn't just for those gifted in this way. The command is for all genuine Christians.

Will you open your heart and your home to those who need it?

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#### Conclusion

Imagine the impact of a congregation of True and genuine Christians.

Explain how a true Christian could change the culture of a church! And change the reputation of the church in a community.

Here is my challenge to you as an individual Christian – Review this list from Paul and assess the areas you must grow in.

If each Christian at ABC were to do this, not only will we not become one of the 80% of churches in decline and closing, but this church would be a little heaven on earth.

### **Connection Group Reflection Questions**

1. Read through Romans 12:9-13.
2. What about this list stands out to you and why?
3. What are the steps you can take to grow in these areas?
4. How can this group help one another grow?