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Romans Road to Recovery / Romans 12:9–13

Notes

6/21/2026 — Romans 12:9-13

Title: "Authentic Grace in Action"

Subtitle: Overcoming Superficial Christianity Through Genuine Devotion

Main Idea: True transformed living manifests within the local body through sincere love, diligent spiritual fervor, and active hospitality toward fellow believers.

Companion Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12,

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**Introduction:** The End of Play-Acting

### **The Actor Who Dropped the Mask**

- In the late 3rd century, under the reign of Emperor Diocletian, there was a famous Roman comedian and actor named Genesius. He was a master of the theatrical mask, famous for his ability to play any part.
- Knowing the Emperor hated the growing Christian movement, Genesius wrote and starred in a satirical play designed to mock Christian baptism. With his theatrical mask on, he stood on stage in front of the Emperor and the roaring Roman crowd, play-acting the role of a dying man asking for the waters of baptism.
- But right in the middle of the performance, something completely unexpected happened. As the water was poured over him in mockery, the reality of the Holy Spirit fell on him.
- Genesius stopped the play. He broke character, physically took off his theatrical mask, and turned to the Emperor.

- He declared, "I came here today to mock these mysteries... but I now believe they are true."
- Diocletian thought it was part of the joke and laughed, but Genesius refused to put the mask back on. He had stopped play-acting. He boldly confessed Christ, a decision that cost him his career and, ultimately, his life. According to historical and hagiographic traditions, Despite the severe physical torment, Genesius remained completely steadfast in his newfound faith.
- Because he refused to recant or offer pagan sacrifices, Plautian, the Roman Prefect who was ordered to torture him, reported his defiance back to the Emperor. Diocletian then handed down the final sentence, and Genesius was publicly executed around the year 303 AD. Genesius is buried in the Cemetery of St. Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina in Rome.
- For Genesius, dropping the mask was the moment he encountered Jesus. But as we look at these verses in our Bibles today, the Apostle Paul is going to tell us that dropping the mask isn't just how we enter the kingdom; it is how we are supposed to live together inside and outside the church.

## Context

- That call to drop the mask brings us into where we are today in Romans 12. If you've been with us, you know we are right in the middle of our journey through the book of Romans—a series we've titled "Romans Road to Recovery: Christlike Disciples."
- Up to this point, in Romans 1–11, Paul has been laying down the deep, breathtaking theology of our salvation. But now, as we turn the corner into chapter 12, the tone shifts. He is showing us what a "living sacrifice" actually looks like both inside and outside of the church.
- Some Christians are committed to loving their church families, but at times struggle to love those outside the church as they ought. Others are incredibly evangelistic outside the church, that fall short of loving God's people as they ought. Paul will end these verses by pointing to the responsibility believers have to be a "living sacrifice" equally to both.
- As the renowned New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce wrote about this exact chapter: "The Christian ethic is not a new law, but the outward manifestation of a new life."
- We are moving from right belief into the visible, unmasked manifestation of that belief.

## The Progression of Chapter 12

- Verses 1-2 (**The Surrender**): We offer our entire lives as a living sacrifice, allowing our minds to be renewed.

- Verses 3-8 (**The Tools**): God equips our surrendered lives with specific, diverse spiritual gifts—prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, contributing, leading, and showing mercy.
- Verses 9-13 (**The Application**): This is what it looks like to employ the tools God has already given us. If verses 3-8 are the equipment, verses 9-13 provide the environment which believers are to deploy in which those tools operate.

## The Problem

- Spiritual gifts exercised without genuine love become sterile, superficial, or arrogant Christianity.
- We can be incredibly gifted at teaching or serving, but if we fall into the trap of "play-acting" our affection—smiling while keeping people at arm's length—we miss the heart of the gospel and eventually burn out.
- **So, what is the Antidote?** But Paul doesn't leave us stuck in the exhaustion of performance. Here in Romans 12 Paul gives us the exact blueprint for breaking out of burnout and into genuine community, bringing us to our main idea for this morning:

## Main Idea:

# True transformed living manifests within the church through genuine love, focused service, and active hospitality.

- This is what keeps the church on track and focused, allowing us to meet God's calling as we serve Him, each other, and and reach out to our community.

**Transition:** So, if this is the blueprint for a transformed church, where does Paul begin? He begins right at the heart. Before he gives us any instructions on how to work or serve, he gives us instructions on how to love, which is the foundation upon which the entire spiritual life of the church rests.

We must first...

## I. Avoid the Mask Through Genuine Love (Romans 12:9-10)

Romans 12:9–10 *"9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;"*

- In verse 9, Paul fires off his very first rapid-fire command for church life: "*Let love be genuine.*" Paul knows that if we don't get this right, all of our impressive spiritual gifts mean absolutely nothing.
- But to understand what Paul means by "*genuine*," we have to look closely at the original language. And when we do, it brings us right back to the story of our Roman actor, Genesius.

**Note with me 4 distinct realities of Genuine love...**

## 1. Genuine Love Avoids the Mask of Performance (v. 9a)

- The Greek word for genuine is *anypokritos*—literally, "without a mask" or "unhypocritical." In the Greco-Roman theater, actors held large masks to play a part.
- Paul lovingly protects us from carrying this exhausting "play-acting" into the church—especially when serving or leading (vv. 3-8). **Sincere love** ensures that our serving doesn't become a sterile performance or a mask of religious competence.
- The word that Paul uses for "**Love**" in this verse is ***agape***. This is God-like love, "**to be so consumed with the needs of another that you begin to forget your own.**" It is interesting that Paul uses this term first in these verses. Although Paul is primarily talking about how we show our love to others, this word is typically understood as a love between God and His people. At the same time that Paul is encouraging us to love those around us in these verses, the way in which he uses this word also brings with it a sense of how we are exercising our love for God by loving others.

**Genuine love keeps our ministry, or serving authentic.**

You cannot effectively use the tool of exhortation if you do not deeply care for the person you are correcting. Unhypocritical love guarantees our serving is done for God's glory, rather than our own validation.

## 2. Genuine Love Protects Against Evil (v. 9b)

*"abhor what is evil, cling to that which is good"*

- Genuine love has a moral compass. It isn't just passive politeness; it actively protects the family.
- The Greek word Paul uses for evil here is *ponēros*, which doesn't just mean a bad habit—it means an active, spreading, harmful evil. The best modern equivalent is "malignant."
- You don't tolerate a malignant tumor in a body; you detest it because it consumes and destroys what is good.

- We avoid superficiality when we literally "abhor" the malignant things that destroy our brothers and sisters, and "glue ourselves" to the good that builds them up.

### 3. Genuine Love Bypasses the Honor System (v. 10)

- Philadelphia and Storgē. Paul stacks two family words here to level the stratified Roman social classes. He calls us blood relatives (*philadelphia*), but adds *philostorgos*, built on the root *storgē*—the fierce, protective love of a mother for her child. We aren't just polite acquaintances; genuine love means we fiercely and loyally protect one another.

When we look closely at the grammar of Romans 12:10, Paul intentionally stacks two distinct words that share the exact same root, creating a powerful, compounding effect.

**If we break down the grammar, you can see the matching prefixes:**

1. Philo-delphia: Philo (affection) + adelphos (brother).
  2. Philo-storgoi: Philo (affection) + storgē (family loyalty).
- Through a grammatico-historical lens, we know that in the first-century Roman world, social connections were highly transactional, based on patronage, status, and what someone could do for you. By stacking these two *philo-* compounds together, Paul is grammatically blowing up that transactional culture.
  - He is essentially saying: **"In brother-love, be family-loving to one another."**
  - Paul is taking the dial of Christian affection and turning it up to ten. He is commanding the church not just to have affection for one another, but to have an affection that is deeply rooted in the fierce, devoted love of a blood family. It is love layered on top of love! Do we love our brothers in Christ the way we love the church?
  - In the ancient Mediterranean world, honor was a ruthless, self-promoting competition. Roman soldiers swore oaths never to give preference in honor to anyone above Caesar, and philosophers taught that only the "inferior" should and is expected to give preference to the "superior."

In modern English, we usually use the word "prefer" to mean *liking* something better (e.g., "I prefer coffee over tea"). But in classical language—and particularly in older Bible translations of Romans 12:10—the word carries the weight of action and status.

When the philosophers taught that the "inferior" should prefer the "superior," it meant the inferior person was legally and culturally obligated to:

- Give up the best seat at a table.

- Yield the right-of-way on a street.
  - Speak only after the superior had spoken.
  - Publicly defer to the superior's desires and status.
- Paul completely frees the church from this exhausting cultural script. *Every* believer is commanded here to aggressively lead the way in treating each other like Roman royalty!
  - Because we fiercely protect one another, we don't have to climb over each other anymore. Instead, genuine love invites us to aggressively compete to push each other up the honor ladder.

#### 4. Genuine Love is Taught by God (1 Thess 4:9-10)

- As a companion connection, Paul tells the Thessalonians that concerning brotherly love, they "have been taught by God."
- Authentic love isn't a stressful management strategy we have to invent or a fake smile we have to paste on;

**Authentic love** is expected be the natural byproduct through the Holy Spirit living in us.

**Transition:** When we allow God to produce this genuine, unmasked love in us, it frees us from the exhaustion of play-acting. But let's be honest—loving people and pouring into the church still requires a massive amount of real-world energy.

- If we aren't careful, we can drop the mask, only to burn ourselves out trying to carry the weight of ministry on our own shoulders.
- Paul knows this, which is exactly why he moves straight **from genuine love to focused Service**.

So, to further refine the blueprint for a transformed church, we also must...

## II. Guard Against Burnout Through Focused Service (Romans 12:11-12)

Romans 12:11–12 *"11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,"*

As we walk through these 2 verses, let's notice **4 attributes of focused service**.

### 1. Focused Service Resists Apathy (v. 11a)

- "Do not be slothful in zeal." The Greek word for slothful (oknēros) means hesitating or shrinking back.
- The danger in church life isn't just moral failure; it's the quiet fade into exhaustion. Paul invites us out of apathy by showing us how to keep our devotion alive and focused.

## 2. Focused Service Relies on God's Power (v. 11b)

- The root word for fervent (zeō) literally means "to boil." We are to keep our inner zeal at a rolling boil.
- The beauty of this command is that God doesn't ask us to manufacture our own energy. As theologian John Stott notes, "We are to maintain a high spiritual temperature... but it is the Holy Spirit who sets us on fire and keeps us at boiling point." We don't have to try harder; He invites us to abide or rest more fully in His presence so He can sustain the fire for our service. In a sense, He asks us to keep the oxygen of walking in the Spirit (focused service, Gal. 5) flowing, so the fire of the Spirit can keep our love at a rolling boil.

## 3. Focused Service Sustains the Weight of Ministry

- The tools of serving or leading (v. 7-8) are heavy. Burnout happens when we try to operate God's tools on our own human strength.
- You cannot lead or serve effectively if the water has gone cold.
- Operating with focused service means letting God's power carry the weight of the ministry as you walk in the Spirit.

## 4. Focused Service Thrives on a Cadence of Resilience (v. 12)

- How do we stay focused and keep moving forward when ministry gets exhausting?
- Verse 12 gives us God's cadence for resilience—the steady rhythm that sustains our momentum:
- **Rejoice in hope:** Looking forward to God's glory as we love in the manner in which God asks us to, gives us energy for today.
- **Patient in tribulation:** The Greek word for tribulation (thlipsis) literally means a crushing pressure—like the heavy stone used to press olives into oil. To be patient (hypomenō) literally means "to remain under."

James 1:12 *"12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*

- When the crushing pressure of life and ministry hits, God gives us the strength to remain under the load, trusting that the press is actually producing the anointing, the strengthening and the blessing for our service.
- **Constant in prayer:** Tapping into the power source. We avoid burnout simply by refusing to take the pot off **the fire of prayer**.

**Transition:** We've seen that genuine love protects us from the exhausting mask of play-acting, and we've seen that focused service protects us from the crushing burnout of doing ministry in our own strength.

But God **doesn't** give us unmasked love and Holy Spirit fire just so we can keep it to ourselves in a comfortable, holy huddle.

- Right now, making its way across the country to be on display in Philadelphia for the Fourth of July, is the Union Pacific "Big Boy" No. 4014. It is the largest functioning steam locomotive in the world. This machine is an absolute leviathan—it is 132 feet long and weighs 1.2 million pounds.
- When they fire up that massive engine, the water inside the boiler reaches that exact rolling boil of the Holy Spirit within us that we just talked about (zeō), generating a staggering 300 pounds of steam pressure per square inch. But think about this: what happens if that 1.2-million-pound beast just sits idle on the tracks? If they endlessly stoke the fire and build up all that boiling pressure without ever opening the valves to turn those massive steel wheels, the boiler would literally explode. The engine wasn't designed just to contain boiling water nor is that our design for the boiling of the Holy Spirit; both the Big Boy and our spiritual lives were built to use that immense pressure to carry a heavy load forward.
- This transformed life that God has given us through faith in Christ and His placing the Holy Spirit within us is meant to move us outward. **Once we are loving each other fiercely and our service is at a rolling boil through the Holy Spirit's power**, Paul tells us we cannot just sit idle on the tracks. We have to open the valves. We have to throw open the doors and use that spiritual power to carry a load for others. That brings us to our third and final point.

This transformed life is meant to spill over. Once we are loving each other fiercely and serving from God's power, Paul tells us to throw open the doors and spread wide the invitation to...

### **III. Provide a Safe Haven Through Active Hospitality (Romans 12:13)**

Romans 12:13 *"13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."*

**Here are 4 benefits Paul gives us about active hospitality.**

## **1. Active Hospitality Deepens Spiritual Fellowship (v. 13a)**

- "Contribute to the needs of the saints." The word for contribute is *koinōneō* (fellowship).
- Fellowship is not just having a meal or spending time together. It is giving to a brother's need.
- Giving to a brother's need isn't a sterile transaction; it is a profound spiritual connection that bridges the gap between believers and rescues us from isolation.

## **2. Active Hospitality Resides in Every Believer**

- While those with the specific gift of contributing (v. 8) are uniquely wired for this mandate, Paul doesn't limit hospitality to one specific gift profile.
- Dr. Christine Pohl, a leading scholar on the historical church, writes: "Hospitality is not an optional extra... nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is a necessary expression of the gospel." A reasonable act of worship (Rom. 12:1)

**Hospitality isn't a specialized skill you have to go acquire; it is a shared capability that already resides within you.**

- Because Christ has welcomed you, you already possess the foundation to open your life to others. You don't need a perfect house or a massive budget; you already have everything you need to be a safe haven for others today.

## **3. Active Hospitality Hunts for Opportunities (v. 13b)**

- The word for hospitality is *philoxenia* (love of strangers).
- In the first-century Roman Empire, public inns were notoriously dangerous—often doubling as brothels and safe havens for thieves. Traveling believers relied entirely on the safety of strangers' homes instead of public inns.
- To practice hospitality was a radical act of provision and protection. By asking us to "seek" (*diōkō*—aggressively pursue) hospitality, God is inviting us to be a literal sanctuary in a dangerous world.
- We don't just wait for people to show up; we...

Aggressively hunt down opportunities to provide a safe haven.

## **4. Active Hospitality is Empowered by Intentional Living (1**

## Thess 4:11-12)

- This ties perfectly into Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians to "work with your hands... so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one."
- We work hard and live responsibly not to build our own kingdoms, but so that we have the margin to bless the saints and show the watching world the reality of our transformed lives.
- **Transition:** When we live with that kind of intentional margin, we finally achieve exactly what Paul set out to do at the beginning of Romans 12.

### **We take all that beautiful, high-level theology about salvation (Rom. 1-11), and we give it a heartbeat, hands, and feet in the local church.**

As we close this morning, I want us to look at how all of these pieces fit together, and more importantly, how we step into this reality this week.

### **Conclusion:** Stepping Into Authentic Grace

- We looked at **4 realities of Genuine love that protects us from the mask.**
- Then we saw **4 attributes of what Focused service looks like as it guards us from burnout.**
- Lastly, we discovered **4 benefits of Active hospitality that rescues us from isolation.**

These are the environments where our spiritual gifts truly thrive.

### **Application**

- Remember Genesius, the Roman actor we talked about at the beginning. He walked onto the stage to play a part, but when he encountered the reality of God, he took the mask off and refused to ever put it back on. He stopped performing and started living.
- Some of you walked in here today exhausted from carrying a heavy mask of religious performance. You are tired of play-acting your way through church, trying to manufacture your own spiritual energy. Jesus is inviting you to step off the stage today.

### **This week, step into the freedom of authentic grace with three specific choices:**

1. ++**The Foyer Challenge:** Drop the mask by refusing to give the automatic "I'm fine" this morning. Share a real struggle with a brother or sister and let them fiercely protect you in prayer.

2. ++**The Abiding Pause:** Before you serve or go to work this week, stop for 60 seconds. Don't try to manufacture your own heat; deliberately ask the Holy Spirit to supply the power.
3. ++**The Paper Plate Rule:** Aggressively hunt down an opportunity for hospitality. Don't wait for your house to be perfect. Invite someone over, pull out the paper plates, and just be a safe haven.

**Drop the mask. The performance is over. Live as genuine family**