



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 12:9-13

Romans

"True Love"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is in Romans chapter 12. We're going to look at verses 9 through 13.

"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our time of study together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, it is a blessing to be able to come together with the saints on a Sunday morning and to open your Word and to read it and then to consider it in some depth, and this is a magnificent text of Scripture as is every text of the Bible. Some differing in their aspects in regard to doctrine and some differing in aspects in terms of the application of that doctrine, and we are in that application section of the book of Romans where Paul is exhorting us to live according to our calling. We have been made your children, and as your children, we've been declared righteous, we've been justified, and yet we are to live as righteous in the midst of the world. And one significant aspect of that righteous standing and righteous life is a life of love, and that's what we are to exhibit to one another and to the world.

So Father, as we consider that this morning – in fact, consider it in the weeks to come since this dominates so much of what Paul has to say in the latter chapters of the book, we pray that you'd teach us, help us to understand what the apostle has written. To do more than that, help us to do it, to live it, to be a congregation of people who are known as individuals who love one another in the various ways in which Paul explains it. And so we look to you to bless us, Father, and our understanding of the things that we will be taught and in the implementation of them in our lives.

May we not be like a man who looks at himself in a mirror and then walks away and forgets what he has seen but may we come away from our time of study together chastened, convicted, and encouraged to live the kind of lives that we as your children are supposed to live. So teach us and enable us this morning, Father, to do that which the apostle instructs us to do.

Bless us spiritually, and we pray for ourselves materially in regard to the physical things of life. In particular we think of those who are sick and the names that have been listed on our prayer requests and pray that you'd bless and that you'd give healing and that you'd give encouragement and comfort, that you would remind us in our times of affliction that our hope is not in this world and that we will certainly be afflicted in this world but that hope is ahead. You have great promises and they are true, and we will enter into them. In the meantime, we are to persevere and we are to do so joyfully.

So Father, I pray for those who are suffering at this time, that you'd bless them in whatever way is best for them, and you know that. And we pray for ourselves, we who are experiencing light affliction or no affliction at all but are enjoying the comforts of life. That comes from you as well, Father, but times such as this, times in which we are enjoying peace, are times to be redeemed, opportunities to prepare our hearts through study and prayer for the times of affliction to come, and so we pray that our time together of study would do that, it would

further us all in the faith and make us more devoted to you and prepared for whatever comes in the future.

We pray for our nation, that you'd bless it, bless our leaders with wisdom, bless our armed forces abroad. Keep them safe, make them successful. And we pray, Lord, that your church would be established. Make it increasingly strong that it might have a clear witness in the world. We are in a world full of hostility, political turmoil, social turmoil, and yet the fundamental problem, the root problem is sin and the fall, and we as children of God, as the church of Jesus Christ, have the answer, have the solution in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Make us strong and effective in the presentation of that. May we live it before the world, may we speak it clearly when the opportunities are given.

To that end, we pray that you'd bless us this morning. Bless us this evening when we return to this place to celebrate the Lord's supper. Prepare our hearts for that time and prepare our hearts now for our time of study together through our final hymn. Minister to us in this way, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] This week I went to the dentist, which is always a pleasant experience. They try to make it that or help at least the patients relax by playing background music, at least they do where I go, and at one point during a break in the action, a song was playing and all I could make out was the refrain, which was, "Love, love, love, love, love, love, love." That got me thinking. That's usually what music is about. When I was much younger, oh, 35 years ago, and driving around listening to AM radio, I imagine 90 percent of the songs were about love and romance. The other 10 percent were about surfing and car wrecks. And I suppose it's always been that way.

Love has been the great theme of music and literature. Last week I quoted the 16th century English poet, John Dunn. Many of his poems were about love. One line that he wrote was, "Dull sublunary lovers love." It's about romantic love under the moon. Shakespeare wrote love sonnets, the ancient Egyptians wrote love songs. The

world, it seems, is in love with love, but what is it? Frank Sinatra even asked the question in one of his songs, "What is this thing called love?" That's really not a bad question. Paul answers it. He answers it in 1 Corinthians 13. He answers it here in Romans 12:9-13.

What he writes about is not what popular music celebrates, but he describes true love. The description began much earlier in the book of Romans where Paul described God's love for us. In fact, almost all of his earlier references were to God's love for His people. In Romans 5:8, he wrote, "God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In Romans 8:35 and 39, he wrote of the unending nature of God's love. Nothing can separate us from it. It won't let us go. Paul did mention our love for God in Romans 8:28, but only now, after he has given the standard of true love, God's love as seen in the cross of Christ, only now does he describe the essence of Christian love, of our love for one another.

And that really is the major theme from chapters 12 through 15. Love is to shape all our relationships, those in the church and those outside the church. In our text in verses 9 through 13, Paul deals with love within the church, our love for Christians, and he begins with the exhortation, "Let love be without hypocrisy," which means that love is to be sincere. It is to be true. It is to be genuine. The word "hypocrite" is a transliteration of the Greek word. It was taken from the stage and was a word for a play actor. Perhaps with that analogy in mind, Paul was saying the church is not a stage. The church is not a place for play acting. It is the real world and we are to be living the truth and not living a lie.

But counterfeit love is very common. Men are ingenious in their ability to fake love, to say the things and to give the right expression on the face that give an impression that they have a love that they really don't possess at all. That's really no different from what Judas did when he betrayed the Lord with a kiss. At best, hypocritical love is a contradiction. At its worst, it is satanic. Because it's a lie. Paul forbids it. Love is to be genuine, and this is how he begins this

section, with a statement that should cause us all to reflect and ask ourselves questions about our own inner life and our motives because love is the motive for all that we do as Christians.

We see the prominence and importance of love throughout the Bible. We see it in the gospels in various places. In Mark 12, for example, the Lord said that the whole of the Old Testament law is fulfilled by love. By loving the Lord with all our heart and by loving one's neighbor as oneself. And then in John 13:31-35, after Judas had left the upper room and the Lord was finally alone with the true disciples, He gave them a new commandment, and that is that they love one another as He loved them.

That's a new commandment, not in that love was not given before as a standard, it was, but the standard of love is now raised. It's not as we love ourselves but as Christ loves us. And He loved us, He loved His disciples, while they were still sinners. While they were ungodly and in rebellion against Him. That is the kind of people that Christ died for and that's the measure of His love. That's the nature of Christian love. It is unconditional love and it is sacrificial. Love is the main requirement of the new covenant, of our relationship as Christians with God. It is the mainspring of Christian ethics and behavior.

So love is to be sincere. Love is to be genuine. And love is to be discerning. Paul indicates that in his next two exhortations. Abhor what is evil and cling to what is good. Genuine love does that. Both of those words, "abhor" and "cling," are very strong. "Abhor" could be translated "hate exceedingly." Now, that may seem strange that the exhortation to love is followed immediately by a command to hate, but it's not surprising when we realize that true love is not blind to evil. It is not mere sentimentality. Love is discerning. It fervently hates evil.

God Himself is the great example of that. We read in 1 John 4:8 that God is love. But then we read also in Proverbs 6 that there are seven things that God hates and among those seven things are a lying

tongue and a heart that devises wicked schemes. He hates what is deceptive and He hates what is harmful. In Amos 5:21, God said to Israel, "I hate, I despise your religious feasts." Now, He didn't despise religious feasts, He gave them to the nation and He required them to observe those religious feasts, but what He hated was the way they carried them out, the way they participated in them, because the way they did that was a sham.

They did it formally but their heart was in a different place. They had no interest in it. It was all hypocrisy, and God hates dishonesty. So if we are to love as God loves, with pure love, then we will hate sin just as we love righteousness. We will be grieved by poverty, by racial prejudice, by corporate greed and theft, by evil of every kind. It will grieve us and we will hate it. So love is not some ill-defined emotion. It is not sentimentality or mere romantic feeling. Love is not blind, though a false understanding, a false idea of love, can blind a person.

Not long ago I heard an interview with a Navy fighter pilot who talked about the hazards of landing a jet plane on an aircraft carrier in a storm when visibility is low, and he said they call that being "in the goo." Well, that's what infatuation is or sentimentality is. It doesn't see clearly, and people who mistake that for being in love are often in the goo and they're going to get hurt. Love is discerning. Of course it has feelings and romantic love comes out of a true understanding of love, but love is discerning. It hates evil and it must – because as Paul says, it clings to what is good. One cannot cling to what is good and cling to what is evil. To cling to what is good is to hate evil.

That word "cling" is also a strong word. It has the idea of being glued to or cemented to something, and it speaks of an intimate union in which two people become one. So the Christian is to be devoted, glued to what is good and righteous and true. Love is positive. It's not negative. It is committed to other people's greatest welfare, to helping them. It is not, as one writer put it, directionless emotion or

something that can only be felt and not experienced. Love is not genuine if it leads a person to do something that's evil.

So to say that love is discerning also means that love is moral. It never becomes an excuse for sin, and if someone commits a sin or engages in something that's evil or harmful out of an emotion that they think is love, then they've misinterpreted that emotion.

Now, that is love in a general way. It is sincere and discerning, it is moral, it hates evil and promotes good. In the next verses, verses 10 through 13, Paul gives some specifics of how love functions. In verse 10, he explains how love operates in uniting Christians. Be devoted to one another, he says, in brotherly love. So true love, which is characterized by sincerity and clarity, is also characterized by commitment, and the commitment to one another is very strong. Paul uses words here that have to do with family affection, brotherly love.

We're familiar with the word that Paul uses here. It's the word "philadelphia." It was used by the pagan writers of natural brothers and sisters and their natural love for one another. But Paul takes that word and he applies it to the church with a sense of a family relationship and the word that's translated "devoted" is a combination of two Greek words for love and a word that was used of the love that relatives have for one another, the love that parents have for their children.

This is the kind of relationship that is to exist within the church, a family relationship. In fact, the spiritual tie that binds us together in a family is greater than the bond of blood in a natural relationship, a natural family. And so we are to show one another genuine concern and consistent concern. We are to have the affection for one another as brothers and sisters, a family kind of affection.

Paul's second exhortation is that we are to give preference to one another in honor. There's some question as to the exact force of Paul's instruction here. It may have the idea of considering others as better than ourselves and treating them with preference to ourselves,

holding them above ourselves. But it may also have the idea of competition, of taking the lead in showing honor to others, of actually outdoing one another in honoring other people. Either way, we are to show one another great respect, mutual respect, and we are to pursue that, we are to honor one another.

That exhortation is very important because that's not natural. It is not natural that we seek to honor other people. Generally, we seek to honor ourselves and we are jealous if we don't get that honor. And jealousy causes divisions and splits among people in churches. This is a problem that is dealt with in the New Testament in various places. It was a problem in Corinth, it was a problem in Philippi, and evidently this is what Paul was addressing in Philippians chapter 2, a problem within the church, a problem dealing with jealousy, and so Paul deals with that.

He seeks to forestall a split within that assembly in Philippians 2:3-4 by writing, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." Look out for the interests of others, he says. Put them ahead of your own. Love doesn't seek its own; it looks out for others. In fact, it promotes others and promotes their welfare. Just as family members are pleased by the elevation of other members of their family, so too Christians are to be pleased by the progress and the promotion and the elevation of other Christians.

In fact, we're not to resent that, we are to seek that and try to promote that, help others to develop and to rise, and give them praise when they do and give them the praise that is deserved, not false praise but good encouragement.

Well, in verse 11, Paul has three more exhortations about love. The first is a warning against being lazy. We are not to be lagging behind in diligence, he says. That might have struck a chord with the Romans. They were a people of action. They were world beaters and great builders. You can still see the roads and the walls and the buildings and aqueducts that they built. They were great builders but

what they built is in ruins today. They were like people today, diligent about the things that don't last.

Paul was urging the Roman Christians to be diligent about the things that last, to be diligent about eternal things, not lagging behind. It's similar to his instruction in Galatians 6:9: Let us not lose heart in doing good for in due time, we will reap if we do not grow weary. And it is easy to grow weary in doing good and to begin to lag behind in diligence because the Christian life is not an easy life. Often it is about unseen things. That makes it difficult. We live by faith, we don't live by sight.

It's a little easier, is it not, to see what's ahead of you, to be able to touch the reward or whatever it is that you're striving for, to know what it is and to have it in your hand? But what we have is the promise of the future. We're dealing with the unseen things, so that makes it somewhat difficult, but it's also a life that calls for effort, it calls for discipline. Love requires sacrifice. Love is active. But in being active and in making sacrifices, we meet with resistance and eventually there are moments of discouragement. That's inevitable. So Paul warns about becoming discouraged and disappointed and giving up, becoming inactive and lazy.

The second exhortation is the counterpart to that: Don't lag behind, he says. Instead be fervent in spirit. That may be an exhortation to maintain a fervent commitment to the Lord in our own spirits, the human spirit. But Paul is probably referring here to the Holy Spirit. That seems to have support from the next exhortation about serving the Lord, the two thoughts are parallel, so the Lord on the one hand, the Spirit would be the Holy Spirit on the other. Paul is urging them, he's urging us, to yield to the Holy Spirit's influence and His leading.

Now, that takes place in the human spirit but it is the Spirit that is the one who generates the kind of fervency that we are to have, and we are to allow Him to set us on fire, to open ourselves to His leading and power. That's the solution to spiritual laziness. As Calvin said, it

is the fervor of the Spirit alone which corrects our indolence, our laziness, our indifference. Our lives are to be characterized by zeal. We are to be like a pot that is boiling or bubbling over. That's the idea in the word that Paul uses here, to be fervent. It has the idea of to boil. We are to be yielded to the Holy Spirit and boiling over, zealous for the Lord and good works for deeds of love. That's to characterize our lives.

Now, spiritual fervor, spiritual zeal in the church has often been criticized by the world. The early Methodists back in the 18th century were mocked for their earnestness in the faith and they were called enthusiasts. So enthusiasm was the word that was used. It was the equivalent to being called a fanatic today, and that's how the critics of Whitfield and Wesley labeled them when they left the churches, they left those Anglican churches, and they went out into the fields to preach, and thousands of people came to hear them. Well, they were dismissed as enthusiasts and that was dismissed as enthusiasm.

One of those men who was a colleague and a preacher, an evangelist at that time, was a Welshman named Hal Harris, and his friends hoped that his studies at Oxford would cure him of his enthusiasm. They didn't. He became a great preacher and did a great work in Wales, and he described his condition this way: "My food and drink was praising my God. A fire was kindled in my soul and I was clothed with power and made altogether dead to earthly things." That sounds like Paul's problem. Told the Galatians, "The world has been crucified to me and I to the world." The world criticizes that, doesn't like that attitude, it doesn't like that approach.

It calls it enthusiasm, fanaticism. But it is what Paul commands here. We are to be fervent, boiling over. It was that divinely produced enthusiasm that set 18th century England on fire and literally changed the world. Now, Paul has told us that there is such a thing as a zeal that is not according to knowledge. The Jews had that, as he explained in chapter 10 and verse 2, and there have been cases in the church of unbridled enthusiasm when objective standards have

been neglected and people have been moved by emotion or excitement rather than truth.

That happened in Corinth with the abuse of spiritual gifts. That was a self-serving problem. That was an enthusiasm, so to speak, which was not according to knowledge. So Paul's third exhortation that we be serving the Lord is a correction to that. It regulates zeal because it indicates that what the Holy Spirit produces in us is for Christ and must be controlled by the standard of Christ, and He is our standard. And as we look at Christ, the model that we see is one of humble service. There's nothing self-serving in what Christ did. There is nothing of that nature at all. It is humble service.

That not only regulates zeal, that model and the fact that we are to be serving the Lord, it also corrects laziness and it stirs up diligence because we are servants of Christ. What a privilege that is when you consider who it is who is our master. Who do we serve? The Lord of lords, the King of kings. What a privilege that is, and so that stirs up diligence. It should make us serious about service and the service that Paul is speaking of here is service in all kinds of ways. We could spend a full hour on just what kind of service it is that we engage in in our service to the Lord.

So this third exhortation is broad in its application. It applies to every situation of life. It applies to our family life, to husbands loving wives and wives honoring and loving their husbands and helping their husbands, fathers leading their families. That takes diligence. Takes great effort. James Boice wrote: "Children will not raise themselves in godliness. Left to themselves, they will grow up like an untended garden, full of weeds and other wild things." They need guidance, they need tending to, they need the guidance of a father, the care of a father. They need the guidance and the care of a mother, and that is an act of love by parents.

Well, this applies also to our employment. We're to be diligent workers. That is service to the Lord. We may not think of it in those terms. It may seem mundane to go to work day after day, put in our

time, come home. But it's a ministry. It's ungodly to be lazy. Paul told the Thessalonians, some of whom were being indolent, were being lazy, that they needed to get to work. They needed to apply themselves to providing for their families. He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you."

That's the Christian life. It's that basic. It is an orderly life, a productive life, a helpful life. It is honoring to God and it blesses others. It blesses our employer, it blesses our families, and that is a good witness to the world. It is no witness before the world to be lazy and indolent. We're to be working and to be diligent. And of course serving the Lord applies to our spiritual life. We must be diligent in that. Paul told the Philippians, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." He told the Corinthians, "I run in such a way as not without aim. I box in such a way as not beating the air. I discipline my body and make it my slave." The Christian life calls for discipline, always.

It means being faithful to Bible study. It means that we are earnest in our prayer life and consistent in our prayer life. It means that we're to be in church and be fellowshiping with fellow believers. That is necessary for us and it's helpful for others. The author of Hebrews brings that out in chapter 10 verse 24 and 25 where he writes, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds." That's what we're to be doing. We are a body, we are a family, we are joined together. Each member is important and each member is to be helping the other. Considering, thinking about, and doing this work of stimulating one another to love and good deeds.

Then he says, "Not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some." It's always been the habit of some in every age to skip the meeting of the church, to take this day off. That's a bad habit, the author of Hebrews says. We need to be together for ourselves and for one another. If you love others, your Christian

brothers and sisters, you'll be here to help them and to stimulate them to love and good deeds.

In verse 12, there are three more exhortations given and they are all closely related to one another. We are to be rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer. Hope is in regard to the future and we must always be looking to the future. Our thinking should never be bounded and limited by this age, by this world, by time and what is seen. That's the way the world lives and we're tempted to live that way. But we're to be looking toward the future. We're to have the future in our minds. We have been saved for future glory and our confidence in this life is based on God's promise that we will enter into that future glory. That's a certainty.

The knowledge of that is the basis for joy. That's Paul's meaning here. Rejoicing in hope means the hope of our salvation is the basis or the cause for our joy. We can rejoice because we have hope, and so we are to be thinking of our hope. We are to understand it, we are to live in light of it and live confidently in the hope that God promises because life is full of sorrows. Paul recognizes that in the next exhortation that he gives, to be persevering in tribulations. Paul was well acquainted with affliction. He mentions the afflictions that he experienced in his ministry. He mentions it throughout his letters. Luke in the book of Acts explains the hardships that Paul and the other apostles went through.

Paul was a realist. He understood what the Christian life was like. He knew from his own experience how hard it could be and he never tries to paint a rosy picture of the Christian life. We will suffer in this life. He wrote about that in chapter 8 and verse 35 when he spoke of tribulation and distress and persecution and other kinds of hardships that we will go through. And so we must be ready to endure that to persevere under it, and hope helps us to do that. We couldn't persevere in tribulation if we didn't have hope. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, if there's no future for us, if there is no resurrection to come, then we Christians are of all people most to be pitied.

But there is a future, a glorious one, and that hope helps us to persevere in trials and tribulations – and if we love, we will have tribulations. Loved ones die, and that brings sorrow. In his confessions, Augustine writes about the death of his best friend when he was young and the great loss that it was to him. He said, "Whatever I looked upon was death." He concludes that everything in this world, everything human, passes away, and if our happiness depends on that, on what we see, if it depends on other people, then we will lose that happiness. And so our love is to be in the Lord who never passes away.

That is true. But the reality is if we are like Christ, then we will love and we will love those who pass away, and we will suffer sorrow. There's no escaping that. C. S. Lewis writes of that in his book, *The Four Loves*, and how love exposes us to pain. "Love anything," he writes, "and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to 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, become hard."

Well, that may be safe, but that's not being truly human. A genuine human being is a redeemed person. We are made whole in Christ, and the person who is in Christ is like Christ and becoming increasingly like Christ, and Christ loved the perishing, as no man has ever loved, with unbounded love. Love doesn't protect itself, it goes outside of itself, it reaches out to others. That's what Christ did. And because He loved others, His heart was wrung with sorrow. He wept over Jerusalem, He wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. And so if we are like Him, then we will love much and suffer sorrow because those who love will someday fail us. Those we love, many of them will die before we do, and there'll be great sorrow.

But as God's people, we can rejoice in our sorrow and we can endure tribulations because we have hope of the glory to come, and we know that within our community, our Christian community within the church, we will see one another again. Our separation is just temporary. There is reunion. That's what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. That's what he encourages the Philippians with. That is what our Lord encouraged the disciples with in John 14:1-3 where He speaks of His Father's house having many dwelling places and we'll be there together. The hope we have gives us relief from the tragedy and enables us to rejoice.

In fact, we're told that when we enter into the promise to come, when we enter into heaven and in the age to come that God is going to wipe away every tear from our eyes. That's our future; that's our hope. Hope gives us joy in the midst of sorrow and enables us to endure hardship whether that hardship is due to loss or due to persecution, so we are to hope and we are to pray. That is the third exhortation, be devoted to prayer. Prayer is the means that God has given us for securing His grace for strength and endurance, and God's grace is sufficient for every situation.

And so we are to be diligent in prayer. That's what the Bible encourages. Pray without ceasing, Paul told the Thessalonians. Jesus said ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you. That's what we're to do. So why don't we do that? Why don't we pray more? Maybe I'm being autobiographical here, maybe this is myself as I examine myself, but I have to ask myself, why am I not consistent in my prayer life? Why is it so difficult to do that? Why am I so irregular about that?

I suppose we all have a problem with that, and I think that the reason is because we don't believe in it. We don't believe that things are that urgent that we need to be constantly praying. We don't think we need prayer or we think that we're sufficient to fix the problems ourselves. It takes time and effort to pray and pray consistently, and we don't want to put out the effort. But it is necessary. God hears us

when we pray. He desires to hear us pray. And He answers us when we pray. So we need to make prayer a pattern of our lives.

There are two other things that Paul says that we need to do. In verse 13 he writes that we are to be contributing to the needs of the saints and practicing hospitality. It is a call for Christians to put love into practice in very practical ways. The word "contributing" is the word for fellowship. Paul was asking the congregation to have fellowship with the needs of the saints, to participate in their needs in a tangible way. They were material needs that people had, those of food and clothing and shelter, and so we are to share our material goods with those who are in need of them.

Paul was very keen on that. He made a big effort to help the poor saints in Jerusalem at a very difficult time, and he did that by taking up a collection from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Greece and taking it to Jerusalem and giving it to the apostles. Paul saw that as very important. There's more to the Christian life than the spiritual aspect. That's fundamental to it. There's also the practical aspect of caring for the material needs of others.

Love takes care of the needs of others, and one important way that is done is by showing hospitality, the last exhortation Paul gives here. That was particularly important in Paul's day because there were very few inns and often the inns were unsafe and unpleasant places, so it was necessary for Christians to open their homes to travelers. Paul says practice this, and that's a very strong word that he uses. It means "pursue" and we are to be aggressive in showing hospitality. In fact, that can characterize everything that Paul has said, every virtue, every aspect of love that Paul has said can be seen in that light. We're to pursue it. We're to be aggressive about it.

True love exists in attitude and action. It is discerning, moral, it is devoted, it is committed to Christians. It is warm, it's zealous, it's joyful, it's encouraging, it's helpful. And it's to be seen in us by those around us. In John 13:35, the Lord said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." Love is the mark

of the Christian. And the world should see it manifested in the church. It is a witness to God's grace, it is a revelation of His nature. God is love. And the world, it seems, is in love with love. It writes about it, it talks about it, it sings about it – but really knows little about it. It should learn about true love by observing it in us.

There have been times when it has. In the late 2nd century, Tertullian reported that pagans would comment, "See how these Christians love one another?" That was one of the main reasons for Christians' success, Christian charity. It should characterize our lives because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts. An abundance of love has been poured out in the hearts of God's people. That is true for every believer in Jesus Christ. God's love is within us and is to be shown.

If you're here this morning without Christ, if you've not believed in Him and you want to know the love of God – true love – then look to the cross where it was revealed in the sacrifice of God's Son. That is the greatest display of love. He died for sinners and He died for them so that all who believe in Him might be saved.

If you desire the forgiveness of sin, if you desire life that's everlasting, then look to Christ. All who do are saved. All who believe in Him are forgiven of their sins. And all who are forgiven of their sins are filled with the love of God and enabled to love others. May God help you to do that and help all of us who've put our faith in Christ to exhibit that great love to the world around us and begin by showing it to those in the church itself. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this great text of Scripture that reminds us of the kind of people we are to be. It comes after many chapters of Paul's instruction or his explanation of your love, which is an unconditional love, an unfailing love, and a love that was demonstrated in the cross, that great act of sacrifice on our part, sinners, rebels against you, should be the motivation for us to love one another and to love those around us, inside and outside the church.

Father, stir us up to be that kind of people, to do the things that Paul has mentioned here, that we might be faithful witnesses to you and to your grace and be helpful to one another. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.