

# How the Gospel Makes Us a Community of Love

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] The scripture reading comes from Romans chapter 12. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible.

Starting in verse 1, we read, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

Which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Then in verse 9, we read, Let love be genuine, abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor, do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Joyce, for reading to us this morning. And good morning, everybody. It's great to see you all today.

[ 1 : 4 1 ] Thank you. I think nobody really knew what to say there, right? You were like, do we say something? Do we not say something? Well, if you're new, my name is Kevin, and it's great to have you with us today.

Now, for those of you who aren't new, you'll know we are working through the book of Romans, chapter 12. And Romans 12 is this amazing passage in the Bible. It starts off with these very famous words, by the mercies of God.

And it comes off the back of 11 chapters of amazing gospel teaching. 11 chapters where Paul has just been explaining the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and what it means, and the good news of Jesus, and the hope of Jesus, and the profound love of Jesus, and the fact that God saves people like us.

And then he starts off, chapter 12, with these words, in view of God's mercies, or by the mercies of God. But the problem is, Christianity is not just meant to be doctrine that we believe in our head.

Christianity, or being a Christian, is not just about believing certain propositional truths. It's about actually having the life, and the nature, and the character of God so shape and change our lives, that we become a different kind of people.

[ 3 : 0 0 ] Okay? So I want to show you a photo. Let's see if we can get this photo up on the screen. There should be a photo. There we go. This photo is devastating. It's a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan, which, if you don't know what the Ku Klux Klan is, it was an ultra-right-wing, extremist, very evil kind of brotherhood in America, in the American South in 1920s to about the 1960s or so.

And so this is a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan, but do you notice the sign that's behind him? What does it say? Jesus saves. Jesus saves.

Now, that is great gospel doctrine. Jesus saves sinners, right? That is the truth. That's what this church is built upon. Jesus saves.

Jesus saves. But what this photo shows us is that you can believe great gospel doctrine and not have it penetrate your life or shape your life at all.

You can believe gospel doctrine in your head and still live out the values of hell rather than the glories of heaven. And what Romans 12 is trying to show us is that it's one thing to believe the wonderful doctrine, that Jesus saves.

[ 4 : 17 ] Jesus died on the cross. All the great stuff we were singing about earlier. But what Romans 12 wants to show us is how that actually shapes and transforms our lives and our relationships so that we start to look like Jesus rather than live out the values of hell.

And so one way to think about Romans 12 is that it actually describes how the gospel shapes our various relationships. And so in verse 1 and 2 describes how the gospel shapes our relationship with God.

It says, Therefore, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. This is your spiritual act of worship. Don't be conformed to the ways of this world, but be transformed into the image of Christ.

And then in verse 3 to 8, Chris explained this last week, it shows how the gospel shapes our relationship to ourselves. It says, In view of God's mercy, don't think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment.

Right? Consider yourself a team member with gifts of grace to contribute to the team. And then in verses 9 to 16, Paul shows how the gospel shapes our relationships to the church family, to the way we relate to one another.

[ 5 : 28 ] And then in verse 17 to 21, Paul's going to show how the gospel shapes our relationship to our enemies, to those who persecute us or cause life to be difficult. And then in chapter 13, Paul's going to show how the gospel shapes our relationship to the government and to the state.

Okay? So that's kind of, chapter 12 shows how the gospel shapes all these areas and relationships in our lives. Now today, we're going to focus on the middle one. How the gospel shapes our relationships to the church family.

And today, we're going to look at just three verses, verses 9 to 11, and then next week, we're going to pick up 12 and 13. And so, look at what Paul says here. In verse 9 to 11, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, verse 9, let love be genuine, abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good, and love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. We live in an age where we as a world and a society are very confused about the nature of love.

Everywhere we go, we are bombarded with words and images and messages about love. Whether it's on the MTR line, whether it's an advert that you see, a song that you listen to, images, words, songs, everything is bombarding us and appealing to a certain nature or notion of what love is.

[ 7 : 02 ] And it's a kind of love which essentially is based on two things. It's based on feelings, how I feel about something, and it's orientated towards the self. And so that's why people say, I know that I love you because of how you make me feel.

Right? And we hear people talking about things, saying like, I guess I've fallen out of love or we're no longer compatible or it's not working for me anymore.

But the Bible's going to tell us that our relationships, both romantic but also platonic, are to be shaped by a kind of love that is far more robust and far more profound than that.

That's a very superficial and a very fragile understanding of relationships and of love and of commitment. And so despite the flood of imagery and the songs and the memes and the messages and all the stuff that's going on, like undernourished kids in a candy store, we as modern society, although we are bombarded with love all around us, we are actually deeply starved of the kind of robust, radical, transformative love that God designed us to both experience and also to demonstrate towards others.

I think we've got a picture, another picture up here. Okay, do you know what this is? This looks like a cake, but it's not actually a cake. Actually, this is a picture of heaven on earth.

[ 8 : 32 ] Okay? Not really, but this is amazing, right? This looks like Kathy Tom has been in the kitchen at work.

This is not just one layer of chocolate, not just two layers, this is five layers of chocolate awesomeness. Okay? For bakers, when Jesus says, maybe on heaven as it is, maybe on earth as it is in heaven, this is something like what he was thinking about.

Okay? Five layers of chocolate cake. In the passage we're going to look at today, Paul is going to give us 12 layers of what a community that is shaped by the love of God looks like.

And jokes aside, what the passage we're going to look at is in some ways a small picture of what heaven on earth is really meant to look like. When Jesus said, pray like this, let your kingdom come that you will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jokes aside, he wasn't talking about Kathy Tom's chocolate cookies. He was talking about a community of people that are so shaped by love that earth looks like or the church would look like an outpost of heaven.

[ 9 : 49 ] And so that's what we're going to look at today in our passage. And what you're going to see is that the love that Christ talks about is not feelings based, it's not orientated towards the self.

It is sincere, it's principled, it's others focused, it's family, it's a picture of heaven on earth. And so look at how Paul starts off with this.

He says this, let love be genuine. And that's the big idea for today's passage. The big idea of today's passage and today's message is this, that in view of God's radical, robust, transformative love and mercy, let us become a kind of church that is radically and generously loving too.

Okay, that's what the passage is going to call us to today. So let's look at how he starts. Verse 9, Paul says this, let love be genuine. Let love be genuine.

The Greek word here for genuine is the word *alipokritos*. A meaning without, *nipokritos* from where we get the word hypocrisy, without hypocrisy.

[ 10 : 59 ] Now I'm sure most of us know this, in the ancient world to call somebody a hypocrite, or the word hypocrite wasn't a derogatory term, it wasn't offensive. A hypocrite was the name for the Greek actors who acted on stage by wearing a mask, right?

So they'd go on stage, they'd wear a mask and play a certain character, kind of think of like Beijing opera, right? You put on a mask, you play your character, at the end of the show, you put your mask down and you go home, your genuine self.

And the actors that played this character were called the hypocrites. And it was a word that then became a moral word and took on the nature that we use it as today. Paul is saying, his point here is that because of God's grace to people like you and I, the church should be a place where we no longer wear masks, we don't come to church for two hours on a Sunday, say our Christian lines, play the game, and then go home and be our genuine self.

Actually, because of God's love for us, the church should be a place where we remove our masks and where we can love one another and receive love as our genuine self, who we genuinely are.

Now, of course, that's scary and of course that's messy because what that means is that if I come with my genuine self, you're going to have to experience the real me, not the Instagram version of me, okay?

[ 12 : 22 ] And that might be complicated and that might be messy, but it's also beautiful. Now, here's the one challenge, right? No church is going to have a big sign outside saying, we don't love people, we don't care about you, we just want to use and abuse you, take advantage of you, come and join this church, okay?

If you ever find a church that says that, here's some free advice, you might want to look for another church, okay? That's not a healthy church. But here's the thing, no church is going to say that, but that church might be better than the kind of church that says, welcome, we will love you and accept you like a family and then when you're on the inside, you find there's backbiting, there's backstabbing, people come on Sunday and they wear their Christian smile, but inside they're harboring bitterness and resentment.

Maybe it's better to find a church that's honest about how unloving it is than a church that is playing the hypocrite. And so what Paul is saying is, by the mercies of God, because of God's great love for us, the church community should be one that can genuinely be authentic and sincere and love authentically.

So what does it look like, let's look at the contrast, to be insincere? What does an insincere church look like? Well, on the one hand, insincerity is obviously projecting an image that the outside of you doesn't look like the inside of you, right?

So you come to church and someone says, how are you? And you say, yeah, I'm good, I'm good, doing well, thanks. But actually inside you are dying. Or it's talking to somebody and saying, hey, how are you doing?

[ 14 : 05 ] Hey, I'm really sorry to hear that. I'm going to be praying for you. And actually you have no intention of praying for them at all, right? Or maybe it's coming to church and we sing the songs and we take communion, but our hearts are actually really hard towards God.

And so what's going on there? All of that is a form of wearing a mask. It's a form of self-love and not an authentic love. But there's actually another kind of hypocrisy.

Do you remember Jesus' famous words in Matthew 7 where he says, do not look at the speck or do not say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when you've got a log in your own eye.

He says, you hypocrite. First take the log out of your own eye rather than taking the speck out of your brother's eye. And what Jesus is saying there is that there's a kind of hypocrisy, there's a kind of self-love that minimizes my own faults or covers over my own faults and magnifies the faults of others.

So let's say, for instance, one day Chris comes to me in the office and he says, hey, Kev, the way you responded in that staff meeting was a bit strange. Are you okay? Or hey, we've spoken that that's not the culture we want to set here.

[ 15 : 13 ] And you responded like this. Can we talk about that? And I say, what do you mean? Didn't you do the same thing last week? Or Jeremy? Jeremy did the same thing last week. Well, what am I doing?

I'm minimizing my own faults, magnifying someone else's to reflect the attention on me. What am I doing? I'm wearing a mask. It's self-love. It's self-love. And so, Jesus says that Jesus calls us to become the community that loves one another without masks, genuinely, sincerely.

Jesus says, by this will all people know that you are my disciples if you have love, genuine love for one another. And that's an amazing thing because if you think about it, every church has unique characteristics about it, right?

You go to a church like us and maybe we're a little low-key and not particularly fancy and, you know, we do our thing. And then you go to another church down the road and you find the pastor is very cool and he knows how to talk cool and dress cool and you think, wow, this is a great church and the music's like this.

And maybe you go to a third church and they're more contemplative and meditative and high liturgy. and Jesus says that actually all those things are not that important.

[ 16 : 29 ] If you want to go to church where the music is phenomenal and there's smoke machines and lights and buzzing stuff, that's okay. If you want to go to church where there's more hymns and it's traditional and liturgical, that's okay.

But the defining feature of the church is Jesus, is not the music or the dress code or how you speak, it is their genuine love for one another. By the mercies of God, let your love be genuine, sincere.

Now, of course, that's the first thing, okay. Now, we mustn't confuse genuineness or sincere love with just niceness or politeness, okay.

The kind of loving community Jesus envisaged is not one that's simply sweet and just nice all the time but one that's robust because look at what Paul says next.

Look at verse, is it still verse 9? Still verse 9, I think. He says, abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. Now, the word abhor means to loathe something, to detest something, kind of like to hate something.

[ 17 : 40 ] Paul, and the word to hold fast is actually the word used elsewhere in the New Testament for sexual intimacy, for marriage, to be united to one another. And so Paul says, in view of God's mercy, be genuinely loving, hating what is evil and holding fast, uniting yourself to that which is good.

But in the Greek language, this is actually all one sentence. There's one train of thought here. So he's saying, let your love be genuine by detesting what's evil and holding fast to what's good.

There's a connection there. And think about it this way. What Paul is saying here is that a community that's genuinely loving will also hate that which is evil and destructive and detrimental to the well-being of the community.

So think about it this way, right? How many of us here, if your sister or your mother or your wife or your daughter is threatened, how many of us would say, oh, that's a pity.

I hope that doesn't happen again. If there isn't something inside of you that gets riled when somebody threatens a family member, we'd question how much you love them.

[ 18 : 52 ] Or let's say your mother is diagnosed with cancer or your child is diagnosed with cancer. It is not something inside of us that gets angry at that. Well, we'd question how much we genuinely love our family members.

And Paul's saying the same thing. Because of our love for one another, when there's something that threatens the well-being of the community, there should be something inside of us that responds to that.

It says, no, that's not right. We need to talk about that. In fact, one commentator says it's not just this inward feeling. He said it's an intense inward rejection of all that is wrong.

It's a repudiation. So it's not just this passive saying, oh, that's really not good. That really, I hope that doesn't happen. It's actually a rejection of the evil that's threatening the well-being of the church family.

In other words, the gospel doesn't confuse robust love with gentle tolerance. Does that make sense? So in our culture, we tend to think that we live in a culture that says love is all feeling-based.

[ 19 : 59 ] But the New Testament actually says that the kind of love which causes community to flourish is robust. So think about it this way. Imagine you are, you go camping with a friend and you see a snake slithering towards your tense friend, your friend's tent, okay?

Your tense friend, right? You see a snake slithering towards him. You don't say, oh, well, I guess it's none of my business. Oh, you pick up a stick, you scream, and you shout, and you maybe even risk a little bit of danger.

You do some crazy things that you wouldn't normally do. You've got to get that snake away, right? In the same way, when we see danger moving towards our church community, we don't just say, oh, well, I guess it's none of my business.

Because of our genuine love for one another, we move towards each other and say, hey, this might be a difficult conversation, but I love you so much. Can we talk about this? A few years ago, I have a very, very dear friend of mine, very, very close friend.

And I, for some reason, this friend of mine is married, he's got kids, and there's another family that are good friends of theirs. And they used to do a lot together and go on holidays together and that kind of stuff.

[ 21 : 22 ] And I, for some reason, I don't know why, just felt like the guy, my friend, his relationship with the wife and this family, something just felt not, I was feeling uncomfortable about it.

Just felt like they were too close. And for months, I was wrestling with this. And one day, I plucked up every ounce of courage I could find in my being.

And I've got to tell you, it was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life. And I said, hey, bro, this is going to be a difficult conversation. But do you mind if we talk about this? I feel awkward and uncomfortable when I see you relating to this lady.

Can I ask you just to be very aware of that? And he was very gracious and he just said, hey, thank you. And that was all.

And it was all fine. And I honestly thought that relationship might come to an end. I thought he might hate me and never want to see me again. And I didn't want to do that. And I didn't want to have that conversation. But because I love him and I love his family and I remember thinking to myself, imagine in five years time this guy comes to me and says, hey, my marriage is over.

[ 22 : 31 ] I'm leaving my wife and kids. I would, I don't know what I'd do to myself. Friends, Jesus says that genuine love means we abhor, we loathe when we see the cancer of sin moving towards our community.

We pluck up the courage and out of gentleness and humility we say, can I have a conversation? Can we talk about this? And the truth is maybe there was nothing there. I don't really know.

And maybe one day I'll get to heaven and I didn't need to have that conversation. But maybe I did. Genuine love moves towards one another like that. And so, what this means is that contrary to popular notions of love, the kind of love that God calls the community to exhibit is principled, not just feelings based.

It's not just based on personal preferences. You know someone loves you when they're willing to go against personal preferences for the sake of what's good and right and wholesome. And so, just by the way, for those of us that are single here, if your boyfriend or your girlfriend ever says, hey, if you love me you'll sleep with me or if you love me you'll go away with me or you'll move in with me, they don't love you.

They're putting personal preferences above what's good and right and good for you and your relationship. genuine love puts principle above just personal preferences. Okay?

[ 23 : 53 ] Above what is evil, hold fast, fight for what is good. Now, some of us might think, oh my goodness, all this talk makes me nervous, right? Because now, if I join a church like this, everyone's going to be analyzing my life and scrutinizing my life and everyone's going to be coming and pointing out all sorts of things in my life.

And that's not the case at all. Remember Jesus' words? First, let's look at our own hearts. We don't want to become a community where everyone's pointing the finger at everyone else. That's not the kind of community we are.

And here's why. Because Paul says we're a family. We're a family. Look at his words in verse 10. He says, love one another with brotherly affection.

Now, Paul actually uses two words here that are in Roman context, Greek culture, were deeply family related. The first one where he says love one another is actually the word that describes a parent's love for their child.

It's that deep delight that a parent takes in their child. You know, if you have young children, if Fiona and Chris, you guys are at the stage or there's a whole bunch of others, Chris and Justin at the back there, your kids can just have a terrible day.

[ 25 : 07 ] They're screaming and they're grumpy and they're fighting with you. And then they go to sleep and they're asleep in their crib and you look at them and you think, oh, aren't they so beautiful?

Right? And you think, can you just, did you forget what just happened an hour ago? It's that parental deep delight that you have in your kids. Paul says, delight in one another, love one another like the parents love for their children.

And then he uses this other word, oh, by the way, family is messy, right? It is grumpiness and there's tiredness and there's challenges. Every family is messy.

But parents still love their children despite that. Friends, you know the church is messy. There's grumpiness and there's tiredness and there's challenges and there's temper tantrums in the church.

But Paul says, we're a family. Delight in one another nevertheless. And then he uses another word, the word Philadelphia for brotherly affection. And literally just the word that siblings, the love that siblings have for each other that is forged over a long period of time of going through all sorts of battles and life together.

[ 26 : 19 ] You know that if you've got a sibling and you've grown up, your sibling is the kind of person that you can just go to their house, you don't need to say anything, you can just flop down on the couch, you can go to their fridge and just open up their fridge and they know how you feel even without using words.

Do you know what I mean? Paul says that's the kind of relationships that the church should have that are forged over a long period of time of working through challenges together so that actually you're so natural, you're so just yourself with each other that you don't need to put on a pretense.

It's the kind of family relationships where you delight each other naturally. You know, some families, you need to have a bunch of rules on the wall, right? So in this family we talk kindly to each other, we make our bed, we take the plates through to the kitchen afterwards, we don't put feet on the couch, all those sorts of rules.

But actually a great family is one that doesn't have to have those rules on the wall, they just know how to love each other naturally. Paul's saying, delight in one another with that kind of brotherly affection so that we don't come to church and say, rule 7.3 of the Watermark Constitution says, you will arrive at church at 10.30, right?

Actually just out of love for one another we know how to behave. Okay, that's the third thing. Fourth layer of our cake is this, and actually this is going to be the last one, is this.

[ 27 : 46 ] Paul says, a church that's shaped by the gospel is selfless or self-forgetful. Look at what he says here. He says, outdo one another in showing honor.

Now, this is one of those phrases that you read over in your Bible very quickly, especially in a list of 12 commands. Okay, there's 12 commands in this passage. You read the list of 12 commands.

Love one another genuinely, abhor this, love this, do this, outdo one another in showing honor, be fervent, blah, blah, blah, and you read over it and it just goes straight over your head.

But just think about that for a second. Imagine a church community that is committed to outdoing one another in honoring each other all the time.

And what that means is prefer to honor one another than being honored. Come to church with a mindset that says, how can I serve and esteem somebody else?

[ 28 : 44 ] How can I lift somebody else up rather than how can I be esteemed? How can I be lifted up? It's the kind of community where you're putting time and effort and energy into thinking, how can I lift up somebody and encourage somebody else rather than always looking to be encouraged and built up yourself?

Outside of the gospel, we've all got to fight for every bit of honor and recognition that we can get. But that kind of culture necessarily excludes one another.

It tramples people. It abuses people and it hurts people. How many of us in the workplace, there's a culture of a dog-eat-dog culture. You've got to get on top of people. It's super competitive.

And if you're not on top, you're getting left behind. But how many of us have felt marginalized, used and abused, trampled on and excluded? Paul's saying, what would it look like for the church that is shaped by the radical love of Christ to be a church community that so honors one another that we're lifting and building one another up rather than seeking to be honored?

Paul says that in the gospel, Jesus Christ bestows on us an honor and an identity that is so securing, so undeserved, so reassuring, it leads to what Tim Keller calls a kind of self-forgetfulness where you just naturally, it transforms us from being honor seekers to being honor givers.

[ 30 : 12 ] And notice here that the honor that Paul calls us to give is not based on giftedness or personality or position in the church or position in society, it's an honor that's given based on the fact that we are blood bought by Christ, that Christ is the head of the church and the head of our family.

And so friends, imagine each church, each Sunday we arrived at church thinking, how can I honor, how can I esteem, how can I encourage somebody today? Imagine throughout the week there's a myriad of text messages that are going across Hong Kong, messages, scriptures, prayers, as we seek to honor and encourage one another.

What a beautiful church and picture to be part of. And Paul goes on here and he says, do not be slothful or lazy in zeal, but be fervent in the spirit, serving the Lord.

And Dallas Willow said this, he said, the opposite of love is not hate, but laziness. Think about that for a second. The opposite of love is not hate, but laziness.

And that's so true. And so Paul says, don't be lazy in the way that you serve one another because actually that's selfishness. And so practically that might mean coming to church or CG even when you don't feel like it because you know, hey, this isn't about me, this is about serving the family.

[ 31 : 36 ] Friends, this is the kind of church that the gospel creates where the mercies of God form a gospel community. Now, one last thing before we close.

It is possible, it's possible, Chris actually reminded me of this week. It's possible for us to know all this kind of behavior and to try and manufacture a counterfeit version of all these characteristics.

So it's easy to think, hey, Christians, I know we should be loving and so we act loving. Christians should be genuine so we act genuine. It's easy to try and act out these characteristics without having a gospel shaped transformed life.



And so what that means is that the church will be formed but will look like this but in a counterfeit version. And we all know a counterfeit version just sucks, right? If you ever try to take a bite of a counterfeit piece of cake, foam cake, it's not going to satisfy, right?

There, there, there is, I was thinking about this last night, have you ever gone to Madame Two Swords and you see Ed Sheeran or someone, have you ever tried a relationship with that person?

[ 32 : 50 ] They might look good from a distance but it's not going to really, you're not going to have much of a relationship with them. So how do we become the kind of community? Let me explain what I mean by that.

We can come to church and you can just be harsh and judgmental and arrogant and then we say, hey I'm just speaking the truth and love. I don't want to wear a mask, I want to be real.

I see the cancer in your life, I see the snake slithering towards your door and because I love you, I want to tell you as it is. So we just become this harsh judgmental community, right? It's a counterfeit version.

Or maybe we go around just puffing everybody up and encouraging people all the time, bless you brother, you are so wonderful and we just become this kind of cheesy, superficial, mutually affirming community that doesn't need to actually know how to speak the truth and love.

Or maybe we come to church and we're all just grumpy and lazy and moaning and we say, I just want to be genuine. I don't want to wear a mask, I don't feel like being here, I don't like you, this is who I am, just deal with it, right?

[ 33 : 54 ] And so we put on this counterfeit version of being genuine. So how do we become the kind of community that's genuine and authentic, sincere, without hypocrisy, which has the courage to call sin what it is, and yet at the same time is still full of brotherly affection, honor, and genuine love?

How do we become that kind of community? And the answer is that we've got to be formed, on the biblical language, rooted and grounded in the immeasurably awesome, robust, transformative love of God for us.

you've got to be so shaped and rooted and grounded in God's profound love for us that it transforms us from the kind of people that are self-focused towards those that are others focused.

It transforms us from the kind of people that are always looking towards ourselves to the kind of people that are willing to give genuine love away. Paul starts off and he says, by the mercies of God, by Christ's profound love on the cross for us, be this kind of community.

And so, remember this famous verse in 1 John chapter 4? John writes this, he says, we love because God first loved us.

[ 35 : 18 ] Oscar, you might need to help Elliot there. this is parental love, brotherly affection. Shame.

I don't know what to say. Paul says this, Paul says, we love because God first loved us.

Now, I always thought that that meant we love God because he first loved us. And that is true in a way, but actually what this verse is talking about, we love one another because God's profound love has been poured into our hearts.

Because John goes on to say, we love because God first loved us, therefore no one can say, I love God and hate his brother. How can you say, I love God whom you haven't seen, if you dislike and hate your brothers and sisters whom you can't see?

So John is saying, we love one another because God's love has first been poured into our hearts. The apostle Paul says it like this in Ephesians, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgives us.

[ 36 : 31 ] Therefore, walk in love as Christ has loved us and gave himself up for us on the cross. Friends, when the depths of Christ's profound, robust, transformative love grips and shapes my heart, it will cause a kind of self-forgetfulness which enables me and empowers me to love those around me and those in the community.

And so what this means is unless our hearts are constantly shaped and melted and informed by God's love for us, our relationships with each other will always tend towards the self.

And if you think about that, that's why the gospel needs to constantly be informing our hearts, week in and week out. We can't just say, you know, once upon time in 1989, I heard the gospel, it was amazing, my heart was broken and I became a Christian.

Well, 1989 is wonderful but what about 2021? This week, my life needs to be shaped by the mercies of God so that this week I am able to love those that sometimes I find it hard to love.

Friends, when the love of God shapes our hearts, it causes us to become this kind of community. And so the key to loving genuinely is to be so secure in Christ's radical, robust, transforming love, it frees us to become these kind of people.

[ 37 : 55 ] And so friends, do you find yourself needing to be honored? You find yourself always thinking, how can I look good in front of others? Friends, the irony is the more you look to be honored, you will never be satisfied.

The answer is you've got to look to Jesus, the one who became so dishonored and so shamed on the cross in order to give you a name and an identity and an honor that will never be taken from you.

Friends, look to Jesus. Friends, do you find it hard to love and delight members of the church family? Do you find it's hard to cross the barrier across cultures, socioeconomic groups, sometimes easier just to be aloof or to stay within your friends or your preferences?

Friends, you've got to look to the one who though he was God, he left the comforts of heaven, crossed the ultimate divide, came to earth, took on humanity, took on our servanthood and went to the cross for us that we could be included in his family.

Friends, do you sometimes find it easier to tolerate just sin and wickedness to keep the peace rather than to graciously go to a brother or sister and say, hey, can we talk about this?

[ 39 : 09 ] Friends, you've got to come to Jesus, the one who took upon himself all the evil, all that is disgusting, all that is abhorrent in the world, all that is broken in our lives in order that God would hold fast to us and never let us go.

Come to Jesus. Friends, when people in church let you down or disappoint you, when people overlook you, when you've served and you've served and you've served and no one says thank you and you feel like that's it, I'm done, what do you do?

Friends, you come to Jesus, the one who loved you to the end, the one who literally loved you to death, the one who loved you so deeply and has poured his love into you even when you were his enemy and we come to him and say, Christ, help me to love others like you have loved me.

Paul says, by the mercies of God, because of Christ's profound love for us, that even when we were his enemies, he went to the cross for us, by the mercies of God, love one another genuinely, abhor what is evil, hold fast to what is good, delight in one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another with honor, be fervent in the spirit, not lazy in zeal, serving the Lord and one another.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we come to you this morning deeply challenged by this passage, God.

[ 40 : 38 ] If we look at our own lives and our hearts, we acknowledge and confess, Lord, that it's so hard for us to love like this. God, by nature, our hearts are turned in on ourselves and we tend to love selfishly.

But Jesus, we know and are convinced and many of us have experienced the profound, transformative love of Jesus. And so God, we ask this morning that you pour the gospel into our hearts, that you shape us by the gospel once again.

That God, we will be a church community that doesn't just have a banner that says Jesus saves, but actually in the depth of our hearts, we are so rooted and grounded in your love that God actually makes us the kind of community that expresses and demonstrates this love one to another.

And so Christ, we pray by your spirit, won't you come and help us? Won't you shape us? Won't you change us? Won't you form us? In your awesome and your tender and your gracious name we pray.

Amen.